

E-WRITERS AND ARABIC: NEW GENRES AND LINGUISTIC RENEWAL

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New means of communication and the development of digital writing are significantly changing the way people use Arabic in its written form. Electronic communication through the Internet combines features of oral expression with those of writing, thus blurring the distinction between the two forms of language production. Indeed, the emergence of the Internet has encouraged new genres, such as digital literature and cyber-literature, as well as the creation of new platforms that host both traditional and innovative ways of writing literary texts. These genres have favored creative developments both in terms of textual structure and the topics covered. This article provides an overview of these new literary tendencies, and analyzes the use of the dialectal forms over Standard Arabic, a phenomenon that is a major feature of such texts.

1. Introduction

The development of IT technologies has radically changed many aspects of individual and community life. Technology has become the most popular means of new forms of art that rely on new methodologies and use the Web as a platform in a way that was unthinkable some years ago. Social networks now represent new spaces of communication and interaction between people.

The Arab world plays an important role in this transitional era towards new cultural and social models, and literature, as in many other parts of the world, is involved in this change. The emergence of the Internet has encouraged new literary products and the creation of new platforms that host traditional and innovative ways of writing literary texts. New genres such as digital literature and cyber-literature have appeared, introducing creative developments both in terms of textual structure and the topics covered. Some authors, like Muḥammad Sanāğlah, have gone further, introducing into contemporary Arabic literature interactive literature (*adab tafā'ulī*)¹, a genre that found success in the United States in the 1980s and has since been

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¹ Muḥammad Sanāğlah is a Jordanian writer. He was the pioneer of digital fiction and was the first to use hypertext and IT technologies for literary purposes.

revitalized by advances in IT. It is well known among the younger generation in the Arab world, and interactive texts of poetry and fiction (*al-ši'r al-tafā'ulī* and *al-riwāyah al-tafā'uliyah*) are fairly widespread on the Internet. Conventional literature, in paper form, must also take into consideration these new types of literature that have found new spaces of accessibility. In the Arabic blogosphere several websites have become places for encounters between writers, for literary experimentation and the publication of novels and poetry.

Arabic is obviously involved in the search for new forms of expression required by the new literary genres. Of the main characteristics of the texts published on the Internet, the most important regard brevity and increased intelligibility; this is not based on a more easily comprehensible content, but the use of a more familiar language. This aspect has favored syntactical simplification and language choices imbued with colloquialisms and English loanwords, many of them IT terms relating to the computer and the Internet.

The introduction of dialectal varieties is not a new phenomenon in the history of Arabic literature: since the 1990s, Egyptian Arabic has become the second literary language in the country thanks to its adoption in many novels. This phenomenon, which continues to encounter the opposition of intellectuals and academics, has become a model for other arabophone countries, such as the Gulf states.

E-novels like *Banāt al-Riyād* (Girls of Riyadh)² by Raġā' al-Šāni' and *Āyza atgawwiz* (I want to get married) by Ġādah 'Abd al-'Āl³ started as blogs and later became best sellers that have been translated into various foreign languages. Written both in *'āmmiyah* and *fushḥā*, these novels show how complicated it is to define this literary genre on the basis of univocal analytical and traditional criteria. The linguistic variety used, the style and the content are not sufficient to define this genre because now, more than in the past, there is an osmotic relationship between the various genres, while the writing tools and the publication platform have become part of the literary product.

In the history of Arabic literature, various authors of prose or drama have provided significant and innovative input for linguistic renewal. In contrast, poetry has often been characterized by a more conservative reaction to linguistic change, safeguarding Classical Arabic which has been always considered the most appropriate means for the dissemination of a poetic message. However, the influence of digital writings and the widespread use of the Internet as a literary platform have made poetry more open to dialectal words and colloquialisms than in the past. Authors understand that they are not addressing their message to a restricted elite, which can be a hindrance to

² Raġā' al-Šāni', *Banāt al-Riyād*, Dār al-Sāqī, Bayrūt 2007.

³ Ġādah 'Abd al-'Āl, *Āyza atgawwiz*, Dār al-Šurūq, al-Qāhirah 2008.

creative development, but to a new and wider audience. Thus, the recourse to dialectal forms and to completely new lexical material is the symptom of a greater awareness of the need to be in line with the times and of a changing author-reader relationship.

This article analyzes this new relationship in terms of linguistic choice: Arab e-writers now have at their disposal a wide range of new words, codes and symbols thanks to the new means of communication. For this purpose, I have selected some interesting examples of poetry and fiction, highlighting three principal linguistic features that can be summarized as: the use of the dialectal forms, specific IT terminology and English borrowings. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) theory provides the theoretical point of reference for this research, CMC studies demonstrating just how strongly the means of communication influences language use. As Ramsay⁴ maintains: «Blogging is often an expression of a personal vision, thoughts, opinions and local interests and calls to mind a more relaxed presentation than that which we would expect in a piece of Arabic writing which traditionally requires Modern Standard Arabic». The present research examines the kind of Arabic that is used in these texts and the new vocabulary that is involved in this change. An analysis of the data is preceded by an introduction (sections 2 and 2.1) in which it is argued that the traditional approach to the coexistence of the two varieties, with regard to code-switching between *fushà* and *'āmmiyyah*, is not an adequate theoretical framework for this textual typology. Section (3) provides a brief overview of the different typologies of website that host literary works and of the most widespread new genres, while section (4) presents the most significant passages of poetry and fiction, highlighting the most important linguistic features. Authors have been chosen who publish exclusively on the Web and whose works have a notable number of followers.

2. *Mixing Varieties: A New Perspective for Analysis*

The theory of diglossia in the Arabic world, as formulated by Ferguson⁵, presents the Arabic situation as a sharp distinction between a High Variety (*fushà*) and a Low Variety (*'āmmiyyah*). The use of the two linguistic levels is limited to specific situational contexts: the *fushà* is employed in formal/written contexts, whereas the vernaculars are used in informal/oral situations. Such a rigid representation does not, however, reflect the complexity of the Arabic linguistic situation, especially in recent times: written texts are open to colloquial influences and Classical Arabic is no longer the only choice for writers.

⁴ G. Ramsay, *What Kind of Arabic and Why. Language in Egyptian Blogs*, in "Orientalia Suecana", 61 (Suppl.), 2012, p. 50.

⁵ C. Ferguson, *Diglossia*, in "Word", vol. 15, 1959, pp. 325-340.

Indeed, this traditional position has also been re-evaluated by various theories that have suggested the idea of a diglossic *continuum*. This new approach has been accepted by the majority of Arabists as that which reflects the linguistic realities of Arabic language communities today. Nevertheless, various models of this *continuum*⁶ have been suggested, most of them operating with a hierarchy of “levels” which have been defined structurally and functionally. The functional dimension is generally taken to be the degree of formality of the context; we thus have linguistically intermediate varieties or levels characterized to a greater or lesser extent by the presence of H and L features.

The debate regarding the coexistence of the two varieties was previously restricted to scholars and intellectuals who concentrated their attention on the mechanisms of code-switching in oral communication. Examination of the mixing of varieties in written texts was of secondary interest until the development of online communication and, consequently, the emergence of literary texts that used colloquial varieties alongside the standard language. Political events, the so-called Arab Springs, and the spread of social networks have created new spaces of communication in which users share opinions with a potentially extremely large audience. This aspect prompts the question of which variety of Arabic they should use, a choice that involves social and cultural identity issues. As Bassiouney⁷ argues: «The media created sites for negotiation of identities by bringing public content into the privacy of the home and taking private content to the public view to both local and global audience». Blogging is often an expression of personal opinions and the use of a specific language is a conscious choice. The mixing of varieties is a linguistic device that can have the maximum effect on an audience. Some bloggers use the spoken variety as an act of resistance against Classical Arabic, the language of the elite. They feel they belong to an ideal community and they want to evoke the same feelings in the reader.

Many blogs, particularly personal blogs, have become famous novels where the language mirrors that of the blog, thus initiating a new genre. The relationship between these literary texts and online communication has thus made diglossia and code-switching theoretical approaches obsolete, while a CMC approach seems more appropriate. In fact S.C. Herring and J.C. Paolillo⁸ claim that the analysis of linguistic variation in these texts must be

⁶ Muḥammad Badawī, *Mustawayāt al-‘arabiyyah al-mu‘āširah fī Miṣr*, Dār al-Ma‘ārif, al-Qāhirah 1973; G. Mejdell, *Mixed Styles in Spoken Arabic in Egypt: Somewhere between Order and Chaos*, Brill, Leiden 2006.

⁷ R. Bassiouney, *Arabic Sociolinguistics*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2009, p. 104.

⁸ S.C. Herring, J.C. Paolillo, *Gender and Genre Variation in Weblogs*, in “Journal of Sociolinguistics”, vol. 10, pp. 439-459. See also S.C. Herring, *Computer-Mediated Communication*, Benjamins, Amsterdam 1996.

complemented by the study of CMC and IRC (Internet Relay Chat) mechanisms: linguistic features, including the use of colloquialisms, speech peculiarities, and emoticons, are strongly linked to the typology of the website and the blog in which they appear. Electronic communication through the Internet combines features of oral expression with those of writing, thus blurring the borderline between speech and writing in Arabic. Not surprisingly, many Arab bloggers tend to write in their own spoken varieties or to mix dialect with Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Their choice is closely related to the means of communication, while the stylistic and literary aspect is considered marginal. Indeed, many authors, such as Gādah ‘Abd al-‘Āl, affirm that the use of the colloquial is not driven by stylistic reasons, but by a wish to create a relationship with a new generation of readers, particularly the less educated. The Web origin of these texts evidences that the writer is driven by a new vision of the author-reader relationship and this motivates their use of everyday language. Moreover, social networks have created new forms of relationships: users meet on the Internet, become “friends”, and share opinions and discuss events in their lives. This revolutionary way of belonging to a community has caused the emergence of new literary *tōpoi* and the creation of lexical items that reflect new concepts and forms of communication.

2.1 Mixing Varieties: A Stylistic and Ideological Issue

The presence of dialectal words is, however, not something completely new in the history of Arabic literature. Although the use of the colloquial variety was sufficient to exclude a work from what was defined *Adab*, some novels started inserting dialectal words in dialogue and in “stream of consciousness” passages from the 19th century on⁹. The cultural and scientific impulses of those times, mainly in Egypt, led to a linguistic renewal, but it was one that generally focused on lexical enrichment and syntactical simplification that did not involve the introduction of dialect or a re-examination of its role in written texts.

Since then, the tendency to use colloquialisms in prose texts has become widespread in Egypt, where new literary forms began emerging in the second half of the 20th century. Writing drama in the vernacular became the norm, and choosing it for dialogue was largely accepted. As Rosenbaum stated¹⁰, Egyptian Arabic can now be considered as the second literary language in Egypt alongside the more prestigious Classical Arabic. This has

⁹ P.J.E. Cachia, *The use of the colloquial in Modern Arabic Literature*, in “Journal of the American Oriental Society”, Vol. 87, no. 1, 1967, pp. 12-22.

¹⁰ G. Rosenbaum, *The Rise and Expansion of Colloquial Egyptian Arabic as a Literary Language*, in R. Sela-Sheffy & G. Toury (Eds.), *Culture Contacts and the Making of Cultures*, Unit of Culture, Tel Aviv 2011, pp. 323-343.

made the linguistic situation more complex as far as writing is concerned, as there are now sub-varieties and mixed styles.

The spread of online communication accelerated the proliferation of texts written in dialect and consolidated its use in the written form, starting a process of orthographical standardization. Writing in *'āmmiyyah* on the Web is very common and, as mentioned above, some blogs have become printed books and best sellers, arousing contrasting reactions as regards their use of dialect.

In the article entitled *Fuṣḥāmmiyya: Alternating Style in Egyptian Prose*, Rosenbaum highlights that the author who chooses to write a novel in a colloquial style feels free to mix both varieties, and thus creates a unique style defined as *Fuṣḥāmmiyyah*¹¹, which consists of the alternation of the Classical and the colloquial. The alternation of the two codes, studied until now in terms of code-switching in oral communication, is now a phenomenon that needs to be examined on a literary level. The unique style described by Rosenbaum is the result of a linguistic reasoning, of a specific and conscious recourse to a mixing of varieties that leads to the construction of a text that is neither casual nor improvised.

It is unquestionably a conscious choice to mix the two codes, but this is not merely a case of stylistic preference. It is symptomatic of a new relationship between author and reader, especially in the new literary genres that are spreading throughout the Internet. These will be discussed in the next section.

3. *New Literary Spaces*

In recent years we have witnessed the proliferation of websites dedicated to Arabic literature¹². Essentially these can be classified as: websites that host various publications such as poetry, novels, drama, essays; websites dedicated to specific literary genres; cultural forums (*muntadayāt*) in which authors can publish their works, but that are dedicated to topics of general culture; literary online journals; and blogs, both generic and personal, in which authors publish their works and even enter into discussion with readers¹³.

¹¹ G. Rosenbaum, *Fuṣḥāmmiyya: Alternating Style in Egyptian Prose*, in "Zeitschrift für Arabische Linguistik", 38, 2000, pp. 68-86. The term was used for the first time in an essay by 'Abd al-Wāḥid Wāfī in 1983, but with a different meaning. He refers to those authors who do not use dialect in their works because of its inherent deficiencies and, consequently, have to write in Classical Arabic.

¹² Many blogs and websites have also disappeared in these years. The websites quoted here are just few among many and they were last visited in April 2017.

¹³ Among the most visited are: www.arab-ewriters.com, www.jehat.com, www.abyat.com, www.trables.com, www.al-mouazeen.com, www.diwanalarab.com,

Literature websites and blogs are becoming the most popular spaces for experimentation: it is no coincidence that the first examples of collective poetry (*al-šir al-ġam'ī*) were published online, as was the case with *Aḥḍiyah* (Shoes)¹⁴, written by five authors and published in the journal “Aṣḍā” (Echoes) in 2008. This journal, now defunct, was part of the *Maṣna‘ al-ši‘r* (Poetry Factory) that was a collective poetry-writing project with a dual aim: to free poetry from the affliction of ownership in order to make it a pure creative product, and to stimulate readers by rousing them from their passivity. These experimentations evidence the profound changes that have occurred in modern literature: the text and the space of publication are closely related. This has led some scholars¹⁵ to distinguish between different kinds of literature: conventional literature, digital literature and cyber-literature. Conventional literature differs from the others since it is published in paper form, whereas digital literature replaces paper with electronic devices, such as e-readers, CD-Roms, and applications for tablets and iPhones. Cyber-literature is published only on the Internet. All of these formats are exchangeable, meaning that a literary text created in one form can be exported to another. The success of these texts is due to various factors such as their easy availability, the absence of quality filters (editors) and their brevity. The changing circumstances of citizens, grappling with a frenetic modern lifestyle, have also created the right conditions for the spread of such micro-stories. Although micro-fiction had always existed, the birth of the Internet fostered a renewal of this kind of literature, which has been characterized by a new relationship with readers who want a more active role. The very shortness of the narrative text has been analyzed in depth by Ibrahim Taha¹⁶, in a discussion of the link between this specific form and the scientific developments that have taken place in recent decades. The state of openness and fluidity, and the blurring of borders between information, culture and art appear to have contributed greatly to the interaction between the different genres. The main characteristics that Taha underlines are the brevity of the story, its similarity to poetry and the reader’s active role. The first seems fundamentally linked to the quantitative aspect of the text, but Taha discusses it not in numerical terms, but on the basis of the techniques adopted in constructing the text¹⁷. The similarity to poetry is most clearly exemplified in the novel by the Iraqi writer Ġamāl al-Sā’ih, *Ṣadīqī muġram bi-zawġatī*, published in 2009 on *Ittiḥād kuttāb al-intirnūt al-‘arab*

www.anhaar.com; <http://hams-rroh.blogspot.com>, <http://hams-rroh.blogspot.com>.

¹⁴ <http://archive.li/wNWsG>.

¹⁵ X. Frías Conde-A. López, *Cyber-Literature, micro-stories and their exploitation*, in “Ars Aeterna”, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2012, pp. 16-36.

¹⁶ Ibrahim Taha, *The modern Arabic very short story: a generic approach*, in “Journal of Arabic Literature”, Vol. 31, No. 1, 2000, pp. 59-84.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

(Arab E-Writers) and found today on *al-‘Arabī al-ḥurr*¹⁸. The novel has a structure identical to verse since the text does not arrive at the end of the line, making it similar to line of poetry:

Our marriage lasted nine years	مضت على زواجنا حدود التسع سنوات
The bond between us was really strong	كنا ولا زلنا يفهم احدنا الاخر جدا
She knew that life was made up of many temptations	كانت تعلم ان الحياة تشتمل على مغريات كثيرة
Capable of tempting even the most devoted and faithful of men	بحيث لها ان تغري اتقى الرجال واخلصهم
I too knew that life contains many, even stronger, temptations	وكننت انا الاخر اعلم ان الحياة تشتمل على اغراءات اكثر
Capable of tempting even the most devoted and faithful of women	بامكانها ان تغري ايضا اتقى النساء واخلصهن
But this did not affect our everyday life	لكن هذا لم يكن له اي اثر على حياتنا اليومية
Nor our relations with others	ولا حتى على احتكاكاتنا المختلفة مع الاخرين
Above all those which we shared	سيما منها التي كنا فيها معا
One beside the other	جنبنا الى جنب

The reader's more active role lies in the effort needed to interpret the text: techniques such as the open ending, leaving gaps in the narrative and posing a final question, activate the reader's input in the creation of textual meaning. Experiments like interactive literature (*al-adab al-tafā'ulī*) represent an extreme example of reader involvement: in this case the reader can write part of the text and can even change the ending¹⁹. Moreover, a more familiar language, often imbued with colloquialisms, makes this process easier, as we will see in the next section.

4. Arabic Language and E-literature: New Lexical Resources

E-writers have various sources at their disposal to enrich their vocabulary. These can be summarized as new lexical items inherent to the IT field, colloquial varieties and loanwords.

IT technologies have created new genres and new symbols, and draw upon new linguistic resources. For instance, in the poetry collection of the Egyptian writer Aḥmad Faḍl Šablūl entitled *Ṭaḡrīd al-ṭā'ir al-‘ālī* (The

¹⁸ <http://www.freearabi.com/جمال-السائح=رواية-قصيرة=بزوجتي-مغرم-صديقي/>

¹⁹ Īmān Yūnis, *Ta'īr al-Intirnit 'alā aškāl al-ibdā' wa 'l-talaqqī fī 'l-adab al-‘arabī*, 2011, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281543457_tathyr_alantrnt_ly_ashkal_alabda_waltlqy_fy_aladb_alrby_Internet_Impact_on_Patterns_of_Literary_Creation_and_its_Acception_in_Contemporary_Arabic_Literature. See chapter 2.

singing of the mechanical bird)²⁰ and in the following poem dedicated to Twitter, the literary *tōpoi* are closely related to the computer. The latter is the interlocutor, and IT technical terminology becomes a meaningful poetic device.

The poet closed all his windows	حبس الشاعر فوق نوافذه
He gave the command	أرسل كل أوامره
to the computer	للحاسوب
The computer gave a start, saying:	:ارتجف الحاسوب وقال
Oh holy God	يا اللطاف الله
How can I reach you, wretched as I am	كيف أجي إليك من الأفاق تعسينا
I will adorn my screen	وأكحل شاشاتي
With the tears of my files	بدموع ملفاتي
	(Aḥmad Faḍl Šablūl)

Always hold your head high, O Twitter, and	لا هنت يا تويتر ويسلم مغردك
God save those who tweet	
Show us the hidden things	تكشف لنا كل الأمور الخفيّه
Your presence has clarified the thoughts of	وضّحت تفكير البشر في تواجدك
men	
And has laid naked the evil spirits	وعزّيت كل أهل النفوس الرديّه
	(Ḥamad Hādī al-Murayḥī) ²¹

In the first poem, the computer is the symbol of the defeat of technologies that cannot compete with human creativity. Several words here are associated with IT terminology – *nāfiḍah* (window), *šāšah* (desktop), *milaff* (file) and *muḡarrid* (tweet) – and they acquire a new symbolic value that requires no explanation since the reader shares the same cultural references. In the second, technologies unveil reality to humans. The worlds of the Internet and IT are a source of inspiration, and they become part of a new way of conceiving the relationship between the individual and the world. They also represent a key for modernity, as Ibrāhīm ‘Abd Allāh Ibrāhīm al-‘Ālī states in the poem *al-Ḥāsib* (Computer)²²:

This is a time of intense work	هذا زمن العمل الدائب
He who has scientific know-how is always on top	السابق في العلم الغالب
those who know nothing about computers	من لا يعرف علم الحاسب
are cut off from our times	فهو عن عالمنا غائب
so let's learn how to make the computer work	فلنتقن تفعيل الحاسب
turn the computer on and wait a few seconds	أقلع وتمهل لحظات
images and writings will appear	تظهر صور وكتابات
these are called icons	هذي تدعى: (الأيقونات)

²⁰ <http://www.wata.cc/forums/showthread.php?2817>.

²¹ https://twitter.com/abyat_vip.

²² http://ebrahemalali.blogspot.it/2016/04/blog-post_72.html.

the icons... the icons

الأيقونات.. الأيقونات

Another repertoire that e-writers draw upon in order to enrich their vocabulary and vary their style is dialect. Colloquialisms can establish an intimacy with the reader and this new relationship is created by the use of a more familiar language. Writers and their readers can share symbols, cultural references and linguistic codes since the latter are accustomed to chatting and writing in dialect.

Dialectal words and colloquial locutions are very common in the story ‘*Āyza atgawwiz*’²³, from the blog *Wanna-b-a-bride*²⁴. It deals with the importance of marriage in Egyptian society, and it has renewed the debate on this subject. Indeed, its publication had an exceptionally strong impact and it became a model for many other novels. Among these are *Itgawwiznī... šukr^{an}* (Marry me... thanks, 2010) by Umniyyah Fawzī, *Miš ‘ayz atgawwiz* (I do not want to get married, 2010) by Ġamāl Ḥālid and *Barḍu ḥatgawwiz tāni* (Still I’ll get married again, 2010) by Īhāb Mu‘awwad, which all appeared just a few years after the publication of ‘Abd al-‘Āl’s 2008 novel. The conscious use of the colloquial emerges in some meta-linguistic remarks²⁵:

واقعد أسرح بالليل وأنا فاتحة الشباك ونور القمر مدلق على كل حاجة في الأوضة (حلوة مدلق دي...رومانسية مش كده)

Then I would stay contemplating at night after having opened the window, while the moonlight is being poured on everything in the room (it is beautiful this idea of being poured... it is romantic, isn’t it?).

Poetry is also rich in colloquialisms despite a traditional reluctance to use the vernacular: dialectal influence is evident in the choice of lexical elements and idiomatic expressions, and in the orthographical attempts to convey pronunciation. The poems selected here have been published online and posted on Twitter by the authors themselves²⁶. In the following passages, the dialectal words/expressions are between asterisks:

²³ G. Rosenbaum, ‘*I want to write in the Colloquial*’: an Example of the Language of Contemporary Egyptian Prose, in “*Folia Orientalia*”, vol. XLVII, 2010, pp. 71-90.

²⁴ The novel has also been adapted into a television series with the same title *I Want to Get Married*.

²⁵ Various examples of metalinguistic remarks are in G. Rosenbaum, ‘*I want to write in the Colloquial*’: an Example of the Language of Contemporary Egyptian Prose, cit., p. 83.

²⁶ https://twitter.com/abyat_vip.

(1)

We disapprove, we condemn, we are offended
and we get furious
But in the end our nature makes us satisfied
and we accept
Our story is full of useless messages
And nobody even took it on themselves to
reply to us

نشجب ونستنكر ونزعل و*نعتاض*
ومن كيفنا نرضا *ليا من* سلينا
سجلنا *بزود* البيانات فياض
ولأحد تكلف *دز* رده علينا

(Ḥamad Hādī al-Murayhī)²⁷

(2)

O destiny, that no one has ever met or seen
When things go well it is praised, but if
things go badly, excuses are made saying
“that’s the way things are”

يااا حظ *من لا عرف منهو ولا شيف*
إن طاب يحمد ... وإن تردى ب* كيفه*

(Badr Bin ‘Abd al-Muḥsin)²⁸

(3)

My God, give me a little of Job’s
patience
Little of my patience remains, it is
running out

يارب عطني من صبر ائوبك *شوية* صبر
باقي *شوي* وينتهي صبري وأموت من الحنين

(Fahd al-‘Ibānī)²⁹

(4)

Forgive me, and if I am tired, then you can
bear my worries
Ignore the mistakes in which I am lost

سامحيني وإن تعبت *شوي* شيلي همي
وطوفيلي كل غلطة كنت *ضايح* فيها
(Su‘ūd al-Ṭāṭūb)³⁰

(5)

Like the trembling of a twig moved by a
breath of wind
My heart leaps every time that I think of
you
I don’t know if this is called love, and I
don’t know what its name is
The hardest feeling is the one that cannot

مثل ارتعاشة عصن من نفح نسمة
يفز قلبي كل *ماجيت* في البال
مدري هوأسمه حب *والا وش* أسمه
أصعب شعور *اللي* من الصعب ينقال

²⁷ *Ibid.*²⁸ These verses are quoted by a user. The poem of the Amīr Badr Bin ‘Abd al-Muḥsin is available at <http://adab.com/folk/modules.php?name=Sh3er&doWhat=shqas&qid=6727&r=&rc=4> and <http://www.almouazeen.com/showthread.php?t=37324>.²⁹ https://twitter.com/abyat_vip.³⁰ *Ibid.*

be mentioned.

(Fahd al-Musā'id)³¹

(6)

If you want to build a relationship, build it on solid foundations	*إلياً* بنيت ابن العلاقه على *ساس*
Be satisfied with the people that love you and that you love	وأرض النفوس *اللي تبيك وتبيها*
The friendship of someone who honours you will make you happy	يسرك اللي حوته ترفع *الراس*
While that of the person who is in your debt will disappear	و يبور *منهو* حوته لك عليها

(Sa'd Šāliḥ al-Miṭirfī)³²

One obvious characteristic is the lack of orthographical precision due, on one hand, to the traditional importance of the oral aspect of recitation, and, on the other, to the incomplete process of orthographical standardization. The *hamzah* is replaced by a long vowel or is omitted. The unstable writing of the *hamzah* is a very common feature (it was, as instance, a typical feature of Middle-Arabic texts). The loss of the glottal stop is often due to the influence of the pronunciation of the word مدري (> ما أري) with the contraction of the two words and the consequent loss of *hamzah*; > الرديّه Sa'd Šāliḥ al-Miṭirfī³³ is an interesting case as he writes the phrase "I do not say" in three different ways in his poem:

I do not say that you were not a star that shone in my life	*ماقول* ما كنت نجم في حياتي سطعت
I do not say I hate you, but after you I understood that love has shoots that withered in your hands	*وما أقول* كارهك / لكّي بعدك إقتنعت إنّ المحبّة لها أعصاب / من إيدك ذوت
I do not say that I was not in anguish, but after you I was able to tame the wolves of anguish	*وما قول* ماضقت / لكّي بعدك إستطعت أروض ذيابة الضيقة

Besides orthographical deviations from the norm, there are many colloquialisms, and expressions like من لا عرف منهو ولا شيف, نفوس اللي تبيها provide a clear-cut example of the radical choice that has been made to use a familiar language that readers can easily interpret.

We should also consider English borrowings among the phenomena regarding the influence of speech on written language. Many terms are used

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² https://twitter.com/saad_sale7/status/506890805294796800.

³³ https://twitter.com/saad_sale7/status/650374896124428288.

which have a particular significance in the jargon of the younger generation. These words do not only belong to IT terminology but deal with everyday life. Many young authors do not even transcribe the English terms into Arabic, but use the Latin alphabet:

فضلت الشلة بتاعتنا male free زي ما كنا مسمينها نتجة النصايح الست الوالدة
Our group has stayed “male free”, as we called it on the advice of our lady mother

فجأة تخبطك الحقيقة على دماغك....حالة panic attack على حبة ضربات قلب سريعة وضيق تنفس
Suddenly the truth hits you, you have a panic attack, your heart rate increases and you are breathless

(‘Āyza atgawwiz)

كانت تصرفاته دائما تدل ذكائه العاطفي. كان emotionally intelligent وكان الشخصية استشارة
لعملها intellectual stimulating بشخصية الجذابة وثقافته الواسعة
His behavior demonstrated his emotional intelligence. He was emotionally intelligent and he had a personality, that more than for other people, was based on rational acts, intellectual stimulating because of his fascinating personality and cultural knowledge

إذا ضغطت على القلب تنبعث أغنية ياري مانلو you know I can't smile بصوت مضحك بعض
الشيء

If you click on the heart you'll get the Barry Manilow song “you know I can't smile”, with that voice that almost makes you laugh

(Banāt al-Riyād)

In Ṭāhā ‘Adnān’s *I love you*, email addresses become verses in the poem:

christian@yahoo.fr
و jamal@maktoob.com
و dai-ping@nirvanet.net
كل تفاضيل حياتك

The assimilation of loanwords in the morphological Arabic system has been a common mechanism of word-formation in the history of Arabic. The arabization of English terms is extremely widespread on the Internet and in the speech of the younger generation. Some examples are:

قال لما مرة إنه يحلم بأن يتزوج بفتاة تكون البيست فريند
He told her once that he dreamed of marrying a girl who was his “best friend”

فماذا ستقولون عني بعد قراءة الإيميلات القادمة؟!
What will you say of me after reading the following emails

where “best friend” is determined by the article and the plural of “mail” is obtained by the plural feminine suffix.

The use of English terms and expressions is a very common feature of online communication. For many young people it is a symbol of their social status, conveying the fact that they are modern and well-educated. This phenomenon does not extend to the need to coin new words, but there is a tendency to emulate a dominant group and to create a special jargon in closed groups³⁴ that authors then reproduce in their works.

Conclusion

The Arabic language has undergone various phases of radical transformation: the Abbasid translation movement and the Western scientific and cultural impact on the Arab world during the *Nahḍah* are two fundamental stages in the renewal of Arabic. The development of IT and its spread throughout the Arab world has had an even stronger impact for it has changed the way in which people communicate, it has produced new writing tools and it has increased exponentially the possibilities for writers to gain extremely large audiences. The digital writing of social networks has changed the way users conceive their relationship with Arabic: in writing, they do not feel obliged to use the Standard version, and they generally have a more relaxed relationship with their language. This means that writers feel free to use their mother tongue, the vernacular, without any restrictions. Arabic literature is playing a fundamental role in this era of change: novels, poems and short stories published on the Internet take inspiration from IT technologies, and the language used is closely related to that of CMC, which is strongly imbued with dialect. This aspect represents one of the main characteristics of e-texts, together with the introduction of a new lexicon from IT terminology and an input of English loanwords.

Linguistic variation has been mostly studied in terms of code-switching and mixing varieties. This paper has attempted to illustrate the inadequacies of this theoretical approach; indeed, CMC theory seems more appropriate from the perspective of the present analysis. Many studies have focused their attention on linguistic change in digital writing, but few scholars have concentrated on Arabic in particular. This present study is intended to be a starting point, an attempt to highlight a unique process of linguistic change that involves language, literature and the history of ideas. New genres are emerging and traditional literature is coming to terms with the development

³⁴ J. Rosenhouse, R. Kowner, *Globally Speaking: Motives for Adopting English Vocabulary in Other Languages*, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon 2008, p. 12.

of IT technologies: this is a phenomenon that still needs to be systematically and exhaustively studied. The texts selected here represent a small sample of the huge quantity of online literary texts, for which I have suggested an analytical perspective favoring this new linguistic material as well as the new relationships between author/language and author/reader.

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