

SIMPLIFIED ARABIC OR BILINGUALISM? Academic Discourse Confronted with Literary Evidence.*

Ladislav DROZDÍK
Institute of Oriental Studies, Slovak Academy of Sciences,
Klemensova 19, 813 64 Bratislava, Slovakia
kaorladi@savba.sk

Simplification of Standard Arabic is one of the most hopeful reform strategies proposed to make communication in the recent Arabophone space more efficient. The overwhelming impact of the Arab cultural tradition with the Classical Arabic of the early Arab grammarians as its linguistic ideal removes nearly all language reform activities to the realm of theory. The reality of a prestigious substandard, identified in native terms with *luġa wuṣṭā* or *luġa mutawassīfa*, still unrecognized as an autonomous and fully-qualified linguistic entity, is confronted with the idea of bilingualism that has to end the era of diglossia.

Key words: diglossia, bilingualism, cultural tradition, Standard / Intermediate / Colloquial Arabic, simplification of Arabic, case and verbal mood inflection (*iʿrāb*)

1. Simplification of Arabic (*taysīr al-luġa*, lit. 'making the /acquisition and use of/ the language easier'), or more specifically, simplification of Arabic grammar (*taysīr an-naḥw*),¹ mostly combined with a call for the simplification of Arabic script (*taysīr al-kitāba*), has been one of the chief goals of the Arab reform movement since the last third of the 19th century. The frustrating results of endless discussions and the huge amount of ineffective published material have not silenced the call for reform and the generally recognized need for

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¹ *taysīr an-naḥw* - DAYF, Šawqī: *Taysīr an-naḥw wa-l-kitāba*. In: *Maġmaʿ al-luġa al-ʿarabiya fī ḥamsīn ʿāman.*, pp. 169-188; *tabṣīṭ al-luġa* - ṬAYMŪR, Maḥmūd: *Muṣkilāt al-luġa al-ʿarabiya*, pp. 11-24; less commonly, *tashīl* 'facilitation' - Georges al-ḤŪRĪ al-Maqdisī: *al-ʿArabīya wa-tashīl qawāʿidihā*. In: *al-Muqtaṭaf* 29 (1904), and even *taḥsīn* 'improvement' - YĀFĪT: *Naġāḥ al-ʿarab bi-taḥsīn luġatihim*. In: *al-Muqtaṭaf* 12 (1887).

change has not ceased to mobilize the efforts of the Arab reformers up to our days. They may be found among journalists and members of the Arab academies, educators and politicians, scholars and men of letters alike. From the enormous mass of published sources only a few authoritative texts will be highlighted in this paper. Priority will be given to sources reflecting representative attitudes of the Arab Academies and institutions compatible with them: monographs, scholarly articles, published lectures and conference reports. Published opinions of leading journalists and men of letters will be taken into account too.

With few exceptions, the selection will be restricted to Arabic sources from the beginning of the 20th century onward. The latter restriction has mostly been motivated by the aim to account as widely as possible for the strong impact of the Arab cultural and quite particularly Islamic tradition the Arab authors are subject to. Western approaches to the study of the Arab language reform movement will be reduced to an unavoidable minimum. Arabic as the discussed subject of reform proposals is identified with Standard Arabic (*al-fuṣṣḥā*), a cumulative designation of Modern Written Arabic and its ancestor, Classical Arabic of the Koran and the whole cultural heritage.

From the most frequently discussed thematic pair *taysīr al-luġa/an-naḥw* and *taysīr al-kitāba*, only simplification of the linguistic structure of Standard Arabic will be taken into account. Reform proposals targeting the script will only be paid attention when treated by their authors as alternatives to or substitutes for a true restructuring of the synthetic grammar of Standard Arabic (see e.g. Maḥmūd Taymūr further on). Simplification, in the view of the most enlightened reformers, is conceived as a process of introducing some evolutionary features, represented in modern Arabic vernaculars, into the conservative linguistic system of Standard Arabic. The case and verbal mood inflection, known as *iʿrāb* in the Arab grammatical tradition, is the core of this conservative synthetic system. Simplification, as understood by radical reformers, means restructuration of the predominantly synthetic Arabic and its shift towards linguistic analytism. Nevertheless, only a part of the synthetic inflection is directly aimed at by the reformers as that to be eliminated, namely the markers of the vowel-based inflection (*al-iʿrāb bi-l-ḥarakāt*), while the other part of the latter, relying on markers composed of both consonants and vowels or on markers consisting of a unique *ḥarf*-featured long vowel, should be maintained, partly reduced and functionally redefined.

2. Before embarking on details, some preliminary notes might help to avoid misinterpretation of the notion of *taysīr an-naḥw*. In some treatises with an academic background, the term tends to denote simplification which takes place at the metalinguistic (instead of linguistic) level. In the latter sense, *taysīr* aims at simplifying the theory and interpretation of the extant

grammar instead of simplifying the grammar itself that is with no or at least no substantial changes in the grammatical system of the Arabic to be 'simplified'. Annulment of what Dayf calls virtual and substitutive inflection (*ilğāʾ al-iʿrābayn at-taqdīrī wa-l-maḥallī*) may illustrate the point:

al-iʿrāb at-taqdīrī, e.g.:

al-fatā 'the youth' (*virtual, hypothetical status: *al-fatay-u*, -i, -a),

or:

al-qāḍī 'the judge' (* *al-qāḍiy-u*, -i);

al-iʿrāb al-maḥallī, e.g.:

hādā hudan 'this is the right guidance' where *hādā*, as an uninflected word, ends in *sukūn*, which is substituted for *rafʿ*, that is -u, compatible with the syntactic position of the subject (*mubtadaʾ*).²

The latter conception of *taysīr*, adopted by Šawqī Dayf, member of the Cairo Academy of the Arabic language, literary historian, in the field of language studies known for his writings dealing with the simplification of grammar,³ will be given no further attention.

3. In the 1920s, after the First World War, a remarkable revival of the language reform took place. Among voices calling for the simplification of Arabic (*taysīr al-luġa*) were those of Ġibrān Ḥalīl Ġibrān, Miḥāʾil Nuʿayma, Salāma Mūsā, and others.⁴

Unfortunately, however, the fact of acknowledging the urgent need for language reform did not mean an actual readiness to take necessary measures to act. The general ineffectiveness of language reform programs, substantially no matter whether in Arab Academies, Universities or various other institutions dealing with diglossia-induced communication problems, can hardly be explained by the lack of their awareness. Even those, concerned with the language policy, who do not or dare not advance any constructive measures to implant some of the language reform ideas, are well aware of the general linguistic situation. Muḥammad Farīd Abū Ḥadīd (1893-1967), member of Cairo Academy of the Arabic language, as one example out of many, describes the recent state of affairs in the following terms: "Those who are responsible for language matters have to choose one of the two strategies:

Either they choose the way to develop their language, to remove it from its original form and to cancel the whole system of *iʿrāb*. As a result, the Arabic

² DAYF, Šawqī: *Ṭaysīr an-naḥw*. In *Fī uṣūl al-luġa*, vol. iii, Muṣṭafā Ḥiġāzī & Ḍāḥī ʿAbdalbāqī (Editors/), Cairo, Maġmaʿ al-luġa al-ʿarabīya, 1983, pp. 197-277, loc. cit., p. 258.

³ Ibid. For a shorter version of this study see DAYF: *Ṭaysīr an-naḥw wa-l-kitāba* in DAYF, Šawqī: *Maġmaʿ al-luġa al-ʿarabīya fī ḥamsīn ʿāman 1934-1984*, Cairo Maġmaʿ al-luġa al-ʿarabīya, 1984, pp. 169-188.

⁴ STETKEVYCH, J. *The modern Arabic literary language*, p. 79.

language will become a language of daily intercourse and its development will rashly proceed to its final goal. Finally, this will inevitably lead to the constitution of a greatly different new language.

Or they choose the fact of fossilization of their language and the preservation of its (original) shape, the devotion to its study and its improvement, and the safeguarding of all its properties. Thus, they will maintain the unity and continuity of its culture though the ages.

And, with an amazing enthusiasm, they chose the second strategy..."⁵

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1889-1973, CAAL member from 1940), in his lecture 'The problem of desinential inflection' (*Muškilat al-i'rāb*), held at the CAAL public session in 1955, betrays the typical attitudes of the reform-minded Arab scholarly and cultural elite:

"Do not suppose the intellect of the 20th century men to be the same as that of the people living in the 9th or 10th century AD. That means that the grammar must have undergone changes. The call for changing the grammar is as old as that for reforming the Arabic script. The chief problem, however, comes from those who are learning and teaching Arabic because these tend to monopolize it. All these venerable monopolizers have frozen and stiffened and so have their language and their grammar alike. ... These monopolizers of the grammar as well as those who are monopolizing the Arabic language came, one day, to the conclusion that grammar reform might deteriorate the language of the Koran, and that doing harm to the grammar is the same as doing harm to the Holy Book...." No doubt, it is indispensable to simplify the grammar or, if you prefer, to create a new grammar to put down precise rules of the language without, however, touching its intrinsic nature.⁶

Unfortunately, however, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn failed to explain how to create a new grammar, conform to the reform slogans of simplification, without thereby modifying structural fundamentals of the language.

Another example of a reform program with challenging titles and promising perspectives which shows its sterility at the first contact with reality, may be taken from the scholarly workshop of Maḥmūd Taymūr (1894-1973, CAAL membership from 1949), a prominent Egyptian writer and dramatist. In Taymūr's view, a bilaterally fruitful interaction between Standard and Colloquial Arabic has to be based on:

enriching the lexicon (*tazwīd al-luġa*),
simplifying the language (*tabsīṭ al-luġa*),
simplifying the grammar (*taysīr an-naḥw*), and

⁵ ABŪ ḤADĪD, Muḥammad Farīd: *Mawqif al-luġa al-ʿarabīya al-ʿāmmīya min al-luġa al-ʿarabīya al-fuṣṣḥā*. In: *Maġallat Maġmaʿ al-luġa al-ʿarabīya*, pp. 205-218, loc. cit., p. 206.

⁶ ḤUSAYN, Ṭāhā: *Muškilat al-i'rāb*. In *Maġallat Maġmaʿ al-luġa al-ʿarabīya* 11, 1959, pp. 89-100.

making the vowelised orthography universal (*taʿmīm aḍ-ḍabḥ*).⁷

Taymūr's two simplification proposals seem to touch our theme of simplification, though only verbally. The simplification of language, in Taymūrian context, should be rather understood as a restriction to current and familiar expressions, both in the lexicon and phraseology, as excellence in speech is no longer measured by the ability to speak in riddles and the hunt for the strange and unusual (*al-ilgāz fī-t-taʿbīr wa-taṣayyud al-ḡarīb al-ḥūṣūl*).⁸

Not less deceptive is Taymūr's simplification of grammar. Since the latter is identified here with its own core, the *iʿrāb*, Taymūr's appeal not to resign from the grammar (*lā sabīla lanā ilā-t-taḥallī ʿan an-naḥw*) is actually a call for maintaining the synthetic linguistic system of Standard Arabic intact. The whole problem of grammar, Taymūr asserts, will be solved by the adoption of a vowelised orthography which is the last step of his reform vision.⁹ Taymūr's view that the set of problems, caused by the incompatibility of the persisting synthetic grammar with Oral Arabic, should be solved by reforming the Arabic script is shared by several other reform-minded contemporaries of Taymūr. Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (1898-1987, CAAL membership from 1954), a prominent Egyptian novelist and playwright, himself an earlier advocate of the Latin alphabet as a substitute for the Arabic script, comments on ʿAbdalʿazīz Fahmī's (1870-1951) belief that problems called forth by the traditional classical grammar have to be settled primarily by reforming the script, namely by adopting the Latin alphabet, and not by a reform of grammar. The following quotation may elucidate Fahmī's view of the language reform:

"Let us listen to ʿAbdalʿazīz Fahmī speaking about the language innovation and modernization: The graphic of Arabic script is a catastrophe which accompanies us with our language. It is a script which does not allow, even the most educated readers, to read fluently and properly... The first task of all those concerned with the language matters is to devise a system how to write this language in an exact and unequivocal way... It is dangerous to suppose, as some of our colleagues do, that the problem should be solved as a problem of *iʿrāb* and not as that of the script."¹⁰

Nevertheless, the priority of solving the script problem is only a part of Fahmī's reform initiative. Fahmī does not doubt that a true evolution of

⁷ TAYMŪR, Maḥmūd: *Muṣkilāt al-luġa al-ʿarabiya*, Cairo 1956, pp. 11-24.

⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

¹⁰ Radd al-ustād Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm (Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's reply to the inauguration speech of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn on the occasion of Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm's nomination as a member of the Cairo Academy of the Arabic language). In: *Mağallat Mağmaʿ al-luġa al-ʿarabiya*, 10, 1958, pp. 185-188; see also ʿALLĀM, Muḥammad Maḥdī: ʿAbdalʿazīz Fahmī. In *Mağmaʿ al-luġa al-ʿarabiya fī ṭalātīn ʿāman*. Cairo 1966, pp. 102-104.

Standard Arabic, frozen up for more than fifteen centuries, is imminent. "This evolution, in my opinion, is just going to start and it will be favourably accepted. Standard Arabic (*al-fuṣṣḥā*) will maintain the best it has, borrowing the best from Colloquial Arabic (*al-ʿāmmīya*). The most valuable feature of Colloquial Arabic is its harmony with the logic of living languages in the civilized countries: the logic of economy, simplicity and availability, in brief, with the logic of modern times. Colloquial Arabic will free Standard Arabic from its word-final vocalic inflection so that it will do, in most cases, with the pause and *sukūn*." ¹¹

Tawfiq al-Ḥakīm's appreciation of Fahmī's reform philosophy resounds in his retrospective comments: "I do not wish to embark on the problem which is difficult to solve, that is, the problem of (deciding between) the Arabic and Latin alphabets. At any rate, when necessary, I am ready to support the claim which is ultimately the simplest: it involves simplification of language and its grammatical rules to a point enabling the reader or the speaker to read and speak without difficulty and premeditation. For the tragic problem of (our) language recalls a sort of chess game...where the speaker or reader has to meditate over the position of words in utterances before pronouncing them, and has to take into account the grammar and *iʿrāb*, the same as the chess player, before he moves, has to speculate over the position of the chess pieces." ¹²

4. The first 20th century voice calling for the elimination of *iʿrāb* ¹³ seems to be that of Georges al-Ḥūrī al-Maqdisī, a Lebanese Christian. In 1904, he published in the Cairene *al-Muqtaṭaf* 29 (1904) the article *al-ʿArabīya wa-tashīl qawāʿidihā* ('Arabic and the facilitation of its grammar') where *tashīl* has essential structural implications: the annulment of *iʿrāb* and a few other structural short-cuts according to the model of modern vernaculars should help to simplify the paradigmatic system of Arabic. ¹⁴

The Lebanese scholar Anīs Frayḥa, formerly affiliated with the American University in Beirut, active participant in the diglossia discourse, believes that the disastrous educational, cultural and social impact of diglossia might be cured by the adoption of a 'common dialect of the educated' (*lahḡa muwaḥḥada hiya lahḡat al-mutaʿaddibīn*). ¹⁵ This intermediate variety of Arabic is currently known as *luḡa mutawassīfa*, *luḡa*

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *iʿrāb*, in the 20th century language-reform debate, has to be understood as *al-iʿrāb bi-l-ḥarakāt* 'vowel-based inflection', mostly introduced as *ilḡāʾ al-iʿrāb* ('cancellation of *iʿrāb*') or *al-istīḡnāʾ* 'an *al-iʿrāb* ('getting by without *iʿrāb*'), and the like.

¹⁴ DIEM, W.: *Hochsprache und Dialekt im Arabischen*, p. 139.

¹⁵ FRAYḤA, Anīs: *al-ʿĀmmīya wa-l-fuṣṣḥā*. In *al-Muqtaṭaf* 93, 1938, pp. 292-298.

wuṣṭā or *luġat al-muṭaqqafīn*.¹⁶ Two decades later, this idea received a more elaborate shape in Frayḥa's monograph *Naḥwa ʿarabiya muyassara* ('Towards a simplified Arabic'), Beirut 1955. This time, the simplified Arabic is presented as 'a common oral Arabic dialect' (*al-lahġa al-ʿarabiya al-maḥkīya al-muṣṭaraka*). Frayḥa's Arabic is *iʿrāb*-less, free from feminine plural forms of the 2P and 3P in all verbal and pronominal paradigms, and it should use a simplified syntax of numerals. The primary source of its lexicon will be Standard Arabic and the lexicon will be open to all types of colloquialisms except, however, excessively region-specific items. The long discussed problem of the Arabic script should be settled by the adoption of the Latin alphabet.¹⁷

Frayḥa's enthusiasm and resolution revived the interest of Sāṭiʿ al-Ḥuṣrī in the project of simplification, as is evident from his Introduction to Frayḥa's book *al-Lahaġāt wa-uslūb dirāsatiḥā*, Cairo 1955. Earlier, al-Ḥuṣrī, seems to have been primarily concerned with the reform of grammatical theory and the revision of traditional methodologies. In the thirties, the main target of his criticism was the official grammar textbook *Kitāb qawāʿid al-luġa al-ʿarabiya*, compiled by prominent Egyptian philologists and educators and designed for the use in Egyptian public schools.¹⁸

Frayḥa's vision of a simplified Arabic did not receive any institutionalized form. Under the pressure of his conservative critics Frayḥa renounced his challenging rhetoric and focussed his attention on the modernization of teaching methods.

Gradually, however, over the following decades, Frayḥa's *arabiya muyassara* found its place in the public awareness as a medium with diffuse contours, oscillating between the high and low poles of diglossia. In spite of the steadily growing awareness of its existence as a real and communicatively active linguistic medium, its identity has never been officially recognized and no attempt has been made to define its basic structural features and adopt a norm to sanction them. At the time and, as it seems from our time's perspective for the foreseeable future, any norm-giving act would be qualified as a cultural and religious sacrilege.

¹⁶ VERSTEEGH, K.: *The Arabic language*, 185, 191. Cf. also al-MŪSĀ, Nihād at *izdiwāġīya* symposium held in Jordan 1987, where the latter variety reappears as *al-ʿarabiya al-wuṣṭāʿ* or *arabiyat al-mutaʿallimīn al-maḥkīya*, the latter closely recalling Mitchell's Educated Spoken Arabic. See al-MŪSĀ, Nihād: *al-izdiwāġīya fī l-ʿarabiya*, mā kān, mā huwa kāʾin wa-mā yanbaġī an yakūn. In: *Nadwat al-izdiwāġīya fī l-luġa al-ʿarabiya*. University of Jordan and Jordanian Academy of the Arabic language 1988, pp. 83-105, loc. cit., p. 89.

¹⁷ DIEM, W., op. cit., p. 141. Cf. also STETKEVYCH, J., op. cit., p. 82, n. 7; al-MŪSĀ, Nihād: *ʿal-izdiwāġīya fī l-ʿarabiya*, in: *Nadwat al-izdiwāġīya fī l-luġa al-ʿarabiya*, 1988, pp. 83-105.

¹⁸ al-ḤUṢRĪ, Sāṭiʿ: *Ārā wa-aḥādīṯ fī l-luġa wa-l-adab*, Beirut 1958, pp. 83-111, in STETKEVYCH, op. cit., pp. 80-81.

With its profusion of tentative names, this medium is actually anonymous. Apart from Frayḥa's own coinages mentioned above, *ʿarabīya muyassara*, transferred to an Egyptian context, seems to run across two levels in Badawī's five-level hierarchy, each of them bearing a name of its own: level 3 - *ʿāmmīyat al-muṭaqqafīn* 'colloquial of the educated', used in formal communication without recourse to written text, and level 4 *ʿāmmīyat al-mutanawwīrīn* 'colloquial of the enlightened', used in the everyday needs of the educated interlocutors¹⁹ Not less interesting are calques from the Orientalists' terminology: *ʿarabīyat al-mutaʿallimīn al-maḥkīya* 'Spoken Arabic of the Educated'.²⁰ This level (*al-muṣṭawā*), in Nihād al-Mūsā's reasoning, resulted from the interaction between the colloquial whose knowledge is gained (as a mother tongue) and Standard Arabic, acquired by study (*ṭamra li-tafāʿul al-ʿāmmīya al-muktasaba wa-l-fuṣḥā al-mutaʿallama*).²¹ The more widely used *luḡa wuṣṭā*, recalling Ferguson's 'in-between language' is less author-specific and is freely used in the *izdiwāḡīya* discourse.²² Referring to ESA, Mitchell uses the term 'mixed' Arabic.²³ In a similar context, the term reappears in Hary's *mesolect*.²⁴

The concept of *luḡa wuṣṭā*, or its possible equivalents in the Arab diglossia discourse, is viewed from two radically opposing angles. For Nihād Mūsā, *ʿarabīya wuṣṭā*, is the product of a levelling process progressing from two opposite directions toward the meeting point in the center.²⁵ In another interpretation, more closely adhering to the Arab linguistic tradition, the process is unidirectional, viewed as a successive promotion of Colloquial to Standard Arabic through a transitory intermediate stage, *luḡa* or *ʿarabīya wuṣṭā*.²⁶ The difference between the two interpretations may be visualized by the following diagram:

¹⁹ BADAWI, as-Saʿīd: *Mustawayāt al-ʿarabīya al-muʿāṣira fī miṣr*. Cairo 1973, p. 89.

²⁰ MITCHELL's Educated Spoken Arabic (ESA), in MITCHELL, T.F.: What is educated spoken Arabic. In *International Journal of the sociology of language*, 1986, pp. 7-32.

²¹ al-MUSĀ, Nihād, op. cit., p. 89.

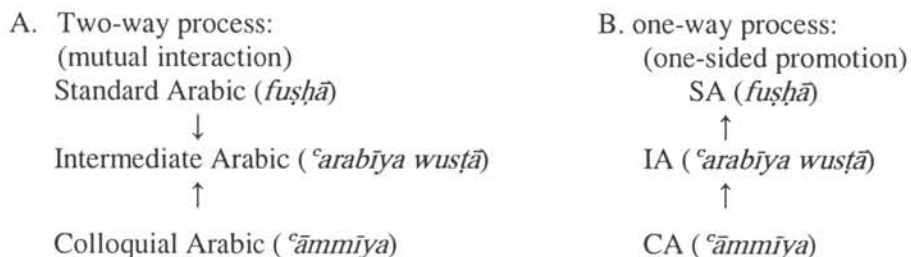
²² See e.g. BADAWI, op. cit., or articles in the symposium proceedings *Nadwat al-izdiwāḡīya fī l-luḡa al-ʿarabīya*, Jordan, 1988.

²³ MITCHELL, T.F, op.cit., ibid.

²⁴ HARY, B.: The importance of the language continuum in Arabic multiglossia. In: *Understanding Arabic. Essays in contemporary Arabic linguistics in honor of el-Saʿīd Badawī*. Cairo 1996, pp. 71-73.

²⁵ al-MUSĀ, Nihād, op. cit., ibid.

²⁶ ḤUSNĪ, Maḥmūd: Zāhirat al-izdiwāḡīya fī l-ʿarabīya bayn al-māḍī wa-l-hāḍir. In *Nadwat al-izdiwāḡīya fī l-luḡa al-ʿarabīya*, Maḡmaʿ al-luḡa al-ʿarabīya al-urdunnī / al-Ġāmiʿa al-urdunnīya, 1988, pp. 107-119.



An even more substantial difference resides in the attribute of stability: the A-featured IA, the target and final goal of some of the most enlightened *taysīr*-reformers, is a relatively stable linguistic medium, while the B-type IA is a relatively unstable linguistic entity on the way to reaching the SA level.

Inviolability of the fundamentals of grammar, namely its *iʿrāb*, opposes, by definition, any aspect of a genuine language reform. Only a few enlightened individuals had the courage to penetrate into this forbidden zone.

Ibrāhīm Anīs (1906-1977), a prominent Egyptian linguist and phonetician, closely associated with the CAAL, by discrediting the grammatical function of the vowel-based inflection (*al-ʿiʿrāb bi-l-ḥarakāt*), contributed more meaningfully to the project of simplification. His views show the attitude of some Arab scholars towards the fundamental synthetic indicators of Arabic, namely those of the vowel-based case and verbal mood inflection, which represent the essence of the synthetic grammar.

"It seems that providing the word ends with vowels was one of distinguishing marks of junction in the speech, both in poetry and in prose. Whenever a speaker makes a pause or concludes his sentence, he has no need of those vowels; he stops at the last word of his utterance with what is known as *sukūn*. It may be inferred from this premise that the basic rule for all inflective words is to end in this *sukūn* and the speaker has to resort to the vowelizing of words only in the case of a phonetic necessity called forth by the (word) junction... Therefore we suppose that the word-final vowels do not convey the grammatical meanings, such as subject, object or the like, attributed to them by the grammarians, and that they are called for by the system of syllables and their sequencing in continuous speech."²⁷

From the linguistic point of view, however, Anīs's statement is thoroughly mistaken, as the casual cluster-preventing effect of the grammatically conditioned word-final vowelizing is merely a prosodic by-product of the vowel-based inflection and has nothing to do with true epenthetic vowels in most varieties of caseless Colloquial Arabic and, marginally, even in Standard

²⁷ ANĪS, Ibrāhīm: Ra'y fī-l-iʿrāb bi-l-ḥarakāt. In *Mağallat Mağmaʿ al-luġa al-ʿarabiyya*, vol. 10, Cairo 1958, pp. 55-56.

Arabic. On the other hand, however, Anīs is certainly right in suggesting, though only indirectly, that the whole system of the vowel-based *iʿrāb* can easily be dispensed with.

Linguistically more consistent presentation of *iʿrāb*, as a system deprived of its original grammatical function, is due to Muḥammad Riḍā aš-Šabībī (1888-1965, CAAL membership from 1948). Aš-Šabībī not only identifies the fossilized nature of the Standard Arabic inflection as a major problem in diglossic communication, he goes even a step further by venturing a rather untraditional solution: "Yes, the difficulty with Standard Arabic comes from the side of *iʿrāb* which ceased to exist as it is no longer operative, in our times at the very least. We have to maintain the integrity of our Standard Arabic (*al-fuṣṣḥā*), to unify its dialects and to normalize the pronunciation thereof even at the price of a temporary rejection of *iʿrāb* - except, however, in reciting the Koran, and the like - leaving the final settlement of the *iʿrāb* problem in the hands of competent specialists. There is no doubt that the illustrious Book will warrant the survival of *iʿrāb*."²⁸

A nationally coloured language reform found its expression in what is known as *tamṣīr al-luġa*. The term joins together two distinct processes: simplifying (*taysīr*) and egyptianizing (*tamṣīr*). While *taysīr* implies the standard postulate of *ilġāʾ al-iʿrāb* 'elimination of *iʿrāb*', *tamṣīr* has to be understood as a simplification on the model of Cairo Arabic. The term was used by Muṣṭafā Šādiq ar-Rāfiʿī, an ultra-conservative opponent of all supporters of colloquial Arabic, in his article *Tamṣīr al-luġa* 'Egyptianization of the language'.²⁹ The idea of Egyptianizing Standard Arabic was positively accepted by Salāma Mūsā (1887-1958), a Coptic Egyptian and independent thinker, well-acquainted with the Western culture and frequently characterized as a rebel and revolutionary. The idea of *tamṣīr* was no more favourably accepted by the mass of current reformers than the vision of a regionally unspecified *taysīr al-luġa* and its impending danger resounds in various *izdiwāġīya* papers and symposia reports for decades thereafter: "It is really distressing that some eminent Arab personalities of our time, like Luṭfi as-Sayyid, Qāsim Amīn, Mārūn Ġuṣn and Salāma Mūsā are following the propaganda of the Westerners and are influenced by it so that they are calling, in Egypt, for the Egyptianization of

²⁸ aš-ŠABĪBĪ, M.R.: Bayn al-fuṣṣḥā wa-lahaġātiḥā. In *Maġallat Maġmaʿ al-luġa al-ʿarabiya*, vol. 9, 1957, pp. 70-77.

²⁹ *al-Bayān*, 1913; reprinted in ar-RĀFIʿĪ's book *Taḥt rāyat al-Qurʾān* 'Under the flag of the Koran', 1926. In: DIEM, W., op. cit., pp. 134-135.

Standard Arabic and for its regionalization, as well as for replacing inflectional markers by *sukūn* and for changing the way of writing.”³⁰

In contrast to some foreign advocates of the idea of promoting Egyptian Arabic to the position of the national literary language in Egypt (Lord Dufferin, W. Willcocks, J.S. Willmore, and others), the program of *tamṣīr* reformers was far more moderate. It was not meant to go beyond the Frayḥa-defined structural limits of the *taysīr* reform with the addition, however, of a number of unspecified Cairo Arabic phonetic, morphonological and lexical features.

Salāma Mūsā, in Anwar al-Ġundī's view, was one of the fiercest enemies of Standard Arabic and whenever he mentioned it, he called for its Egyptianization like a foreigner or even worse than that. He used to say: “I am attacking Standard Arabic only for two reasons: it is difficult to learn Standard Arabic, and it fails to fulfil its tasks as a literary and scholarly language. It is sufficient to say that we learn Standard Arabic as a foreign language and even our best men of letters make mistakes when using it... I believe that our cultural renaissance (*nahḍa*) cannot attain its goals unless we follow the views of Qāsim Amīn, Luḥfī Sayyid and Mr. Willcocks who called for creation of a sort of harmony between Egyptian Colloquial and Standard Arabic so that the latter adopts Egyptian features and in turn is imbued with the flavour of our country.”³¹

Salāma Mūsā's *tamṣīr* vision in al-Ġundī's interpretation involves the following features: cancellation of the dual marker *-ān* (replaced by the caseless *-ēn*); cancellation of the plural marker *-ūn* (replaced by the caseless *-īn*); the exclusive use of the plural marker *-āt* for all cases of plural other than *sound masculine plural*; cancellation of the (vowel-based) *i'rāb* and getting by with the word-final *sukūn* (*al-iktifāʾ bi-taskīn awāḥir al-kalimāt*), and the use of all colloquial expressions.³²

5. Nowadays, the rhetoric of language reformers is considerably more radical. Challenging voices, not rarely assuming the form of revolutionary slogans, are coming from inside, from the innermost parts of the Arab cultural homeland, and are addressed to their own incompetence and ineffectiveness. The latter, however, may appear in the guise of the most sacred cultural symbols, as in the following cases. Sībawayhi (d. 796), the reputed founder of

³⁰ al- ĠUNDĪ, Anwar: al-Luġa al-ʿarabīya bayn ḥumātihā wa-ḥuṣūmihā, p. 81, in ḤUSNĪ, Maḥmūd: Zāhirat al-izdiwāġiyya fi l-ʿarabīya bayn al-māḍī wa-l-ḥāḍir, in *Nadwat al-izdiwāġiyya fi l-luġa al-ʿarabīya*, pp. 107-119, loc. cit., p. 113.

³¹ al-Ġundī, op. cit., p. 81.

³² Ibid. Cf. also Frayḥa's ʿarabīya *muyassara* in § 4 above.

the Arabic grammar³³ and the highest symbol of the Arab grammatical tradition, is discredited and his name desecrated.

In 2002, Zakareya Ouzon, a Syrian writer, published a book bearing a title in rhymed prose: *Ġināyat Sībawayhi: ar-raḥ at-tāmm limā fī n-naḥw min awhām* ('Sībawayhi's crime: Total rejection of the delusions of grammar'). The book is dedicated "to those who respect and appreciate reason (*ʿaql*); to those who resort to reason in evaluating transmitted knowledge (*naql*); to those who light the candle of creativity to dispell the darkness of blind imitation and uncritical adherence to established knowledge (*tābiʿiyya*)..."

A provocative summary on the book's back cover presents its mission: "This book sets out to show in a simple, brief and critical manner that the rules of Arabic grammar are a form without /useful/ content, that learning these rules is a waste of time and a dissipation of mental energy, and that these rules are confused 'givens' (*muʿṭayāt*) full of delusions and redundancy. For these reasons, the majority of Arabs has not learnt and will not learn these rules for use in their daily-lives, whether for practical or scientific purposes. The Arab nation will not develop intellectually or achieve precision /in what it says and does/, which is the hallmark of the /modern/ age, without re-assessing its position on many issues pertaining to Arabic, starting with the dominant rules of grammar."³⁴

Ouzon's strong words addressed to Sībawayhi who symbolizes here the grammar of synthetic Arabic, namely its core, the *iʿrāb*, are evidently misplaced. It is certainly not Sībawayhi who deserves 'criminalization', to use Ouzon's terms, but rather those blind adherents to 'established knowledge' who force Sībawayhi to work with an instrument devised for a totally different job.

Sībawayhi remained the target of another vicious attack coming, this time, from Egypt.

In 2004, the deputy minister of culture, Šarīf aš-Šūbašī, published a new book on the Arabic language reform under the highly provocative title *Li-taḥyā al-luġa al-ʿarabiyya: Yasquṭ Sībawayhi* ('Long live the Arabic language: Down with Sībawayhi'). Unlike Ouzon's book whose appearance passed almost unnoticed, Šūbašī's vehement attack on this cultural symbol acted like a shock to the Arab cultural scene and provoked a long excited debate between the defenders and oponents of the language reform. Suleiman seems to be right to

³³ When putting aside the semi-mythical figure of Abū l-Aswad ad-Duʿalī, the credited founder of the grammatical school of Bašra, who did not cease to appear both in popular and academic sources.

³⁴ SULEIMAN, Y. Arabic language reforms, language ideology and the criminalization of Sībawayhi. In *Grammar as a window onto Arabic humanism. A collection of articles in Honour of Michael G. Carter*. (Edited by L. Edzard and J. Watson), pp. 66-83, loc. quot., pp. 66-67.

attribute the shock-effect of Šūbaši's book to its tone and rhetoric which 'is at least as important as its conceptual content.'³⁵

The unjustified transfer of one's own responsibility to something or someone else, remote in space and time, is a phenomenon not altogether rare. Sībawayhi had to cure the troubled mind of inactive language reformers more than once. Half a century ago, Muḥammad Kāmil Ḥusayn (1901-1961), writer, physician and researcher, known for his interest in language and language policy, member of the Cairo Academy of the Arabic language, did not hesitate to shift off the sin for the preservation of *i'rāb*-motivated diglossy on to Sībawayhi, the founding father of the *i'rāb*-grammar: "When we say that Sībawayhi's *Kitāb* equals in merit Aristotle's teaching on natural sciences and Galen's books on medicine... this does not prevent us claiming that Sībawayhi's *Kitāb* has hampered the evolution of the Arabic language the same way as Aristotle has impeded that of natural sciences, the same as Galen's and Avicenna's writings have hindered the scientific maturation of medicine."³⁶ That grammar, in this context, primarily identified with *i'rāb*, results from Ḥusayn's definition of grammar as a 'scholarly discipline restricted to knowledge of how the word-final vowel (markers) have to function, and nothing else should be required from it'.³⁷

6. Neither do the literary sources appear insensitive to the persistent problems of communication and, quite particularly, to those of literary expression and its medium, Standard Arabic. This medium is not able to adequately reflect the intimate feelings of living creatures in their everyday setting, as well as immediate reactions to an infinite number of emotional impulses flowing in a steadily changing variety from in- and outside of human existence. Leila Ahmed (born 1940, a Muslim and Egyptian, recently professor of Women's Studies in Religion at Harvard Divinity School, during her short professional activity in the Gulf region, confronting the linguistic and cultural situation in Egypt with that in the Arab emirates, reflects upon issues of language, culture and nationality (the latter category still in the hands of politicians and ideologists): "...the Arabic culture of literacy, a culture whose language nobody, no living community, ordinarily speaks, clearly was not the product, as oral cultures are, of people living their lives and creatively and continuously interacting with their environment and heritage... Nobody in the

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ ḤUSAYN, Muḥammad Kāmil: Uṣūl 'ulūm al-luġa [Fundamentals of linguistic sciences]. In *Maġmū'at al-buḥūṭ wa-l-muḥāḍarāt* (Mu'tamar Maġma' al-luġa al-'arabiya 1959-1960, Cairo 1960), pp. 145-179, loc. cit., p. 146.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 176: *an-naḥwu lā yurādu minhu illā ma'rifatu mā yaġību an takūna 'alayhi l-ḥarakātu l-wāqi'atu 'alā awāḥiri l-kalimāt, wa-lā yaġūzu an yurāda bihi ġayru dālik.*

world – except maybe academics and textbook writers – sits around the fireside telling stories in standard Arabic, no one working in a field anywhere in the Arab world speaks that language, and no children anywhere play word games and tell riddles and proverbs in standard Arabic. But if this language and its culture are not the language and culture of a living community, whose culture is it that is being disseminated through the culture of literacy that Arab governments are zealously imposing on their populations through schools and universities throughout the Arab world? Rooted in no particular place and in no living culture, from whom does this culture emanate and whose values do its texts embody? Presumably they are the values and worldviews of government bureaucrats and textbook writers and of the literate elites of today, along with those of the Arabic textual heritage through the ages on which textbooks and the contemporary culture of literacy continue to draw.”³⁸

Unfortunately, no traces of *luġa wuṣṭā*, the proper subject of our inquiry, were found in the literary texts examined. Leila Ahmed, surprisingly enough, instead of current *taysīr*-type solutions comes to propose an innovative and truly untraditional perspective of the Arab diglossic or rather bilingual communication. The latter has to rely on a parallel coexistence of two communicative systems based upon two fully autonomous linguistic entities, each of them supported by a norm of its own: Standard Arabic (*al-fuṣḥā*), with its extant synthetic norm, undisturbed by any *taysīr*-motivated modifications, on the one hand, and Colloquial Arabic (*al-‘āmmīya*), tending towards structural analytism, with its newly created linguistic norm, on the other: “...I realized that, just as Gulf Arabic and Gulf culture were different from standard Arabic and the Arab culture of literacy, so also were the language and culture in which I grew up, Cairene Egyptian culture and language. For me too, then, this language of standard Arabic was not my mother tongue and the values purveyed by the Arabic texts that we read were not those of my mother culture. The characteristic, defining flavour of that culture, my native Cairene culture, was perhaps above all that it so richly and easily blended into its unique Cairo brew a wealth of traditions and provenances and ways and histories and memories... There is a very high price to pay for having a written language that is only a language of literature and that has only a distant, attenuated connection to the living language.”³⁹

In spite of Leila Ahmed’s conviction that ‘there is no linguistic reason why Egyptian Arabic could not be a written language, only political reasons’, she seems to be foresighted enough not to forward it at the price of the extant written standard. As against traditional alternative proposals, either Standard or

³⁸ AHMED, L. *A Border Passage*. Penguin Books Ltd, 1999, pp. 280-281.

³⁹ AHMED, L., op. cit., pp. 282-283.

Colloquial Arabic, in its particular regional featuring, Standard Arabic receives its due in Leila Ahmed's vision of the problem: "I am not, I should say, implicitly arguing that we should do away with or stop teaching standard Arabic, for of course I recognize its usefulness as a lingua franca... So I am certainly not arguing against our continuing to teach, study and learn literary Arabic. I am, however, making a plea for recognition of the enormous linguistic and cultural diversity that makes up the Arab world. And I am arguing for our developing a creative approach that, instead of silencing and erasing the tremendous wealth that this diversity represents, would foster the development, on at least an equal footing with standard Arabic, of Moroccan, Gulf, Egyptian, Iraqi, Palestinian, and other Arabics, and also of the non-Arabic living languages of the region, such as Nubian and Berber."⁴⁰

Although coming from an untraditional sphere, fictional rather than utterly scholarly, Leila's proposal is an entirely new voice in the Arab diglossia discourse. The bilingual (rather than diglossic) perspective advanced strikes by its novelty and though looking unrealistic at first glance, it cannot be denied its rational core. The chief advantage of the bilingual approach seems to reside in its respect for the inviolability of Standard Arabic which is in harmony with the most fundamental principles of the Arab cultural tradition. The vision of promoting *ʿāmmīya* to equal *fuṣṣḥā* in its linguistic setting, once brought to life, might break the ancient cultural barriers and start an entirely new era of communication in the Arab world.

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⁴⁰ AHMED, L., op. cit., pp. 283-284.

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