CHAPTER 6

Adab sākhir (Satirical Literature) and the Use of Egyptian Vernacular

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There were few, if any, bookstores in Cairo that did not, in 2013, have a section designated to a category of books labelled adab sākhir. Their titles play on humor and familiar Egyptian references; they are often in the vernacular – āmmīyya – and sometimes repeated in ‘Franco-Arabic’. In 2014, I was told that adab sākhir was a popular genre in the years leading up to the 2011 revolution, and right after it, but that there seemed to be a growing interest for different types of novels.¹ The new wave of adab sākhir in Egypt did perhaps reach a ‘peak’ a few years ago, as Jacquemond (2016:356) reports that it meets competition from other “genres of ‘popular’ literature” such as romance and horror.

Nonetheless, the (re)emergence of this genre and the tendency for it being written entirely or partly in the vernacular is worth some focus. In this chapter, I will present some ways in which the Egyptian vernacular (āmmīyya) and Standard Arabic (fuṣḥā) are used in adab sākhir, based on 21 books published between 2011 and 2014, as well as some motivations for using āmmīyya, as presented by writers. First, we will take a look at what lies in the label which these books have been given.

Al-adab al-sākhir

The notion adab sākhir appears to have come in use relatively recently, although Jacquemond argues that this type of literature has “ancient roots” (2008:155). He translates adab sākhir with ‘satirical’ (2008) or ‘satiric’ literature (2016), whereas Woidich (2010:81) uses the translation “satirische” or “sarkastische Literatur”. In his article about medieval satire in Arabic literature, van Gelder (1998:693), says that “[t]here is no exact equivalent in Arabic for ‘satire’” and “[t]o some extent, therefore, speaking of satire in Arabic literature is to

¹ Muṣṭafā al-Faramāwī, Purchasing Manager of Shorouk Bookstores, personal interview, April 2014, Cairo.
impose a Western concept on a tradition that has its own system of modes and genres”. Van Gelder speaks of *sukhriyya* as “derision”, and that *sukhriyya* and *tahakkum* “may be found as the nearest term for ‘irony’”, although he points out that there is no equivalent for irony in Arabic literature either. This being said, van Gelder (1998:693) does say that “there is a considerable body of classical Arabic texts that may be called satirical.”

Until recently, *adab sākhir* has not received much attention from scholars or critics. According to Jacquemond (2008:155), this is because it is “too hybridized to interest the folklorists and too ‘low’ to retain the interest of the legitimate criticism”. He describes it as a kind of literature that “has an uncertain status somewhere between fiction and nonfiction, journalism and literature, and writing and orality” (Jacquemond 2008:155).

The Egyptian scholar Nabil Rāghib (2000) explains *sukhriyya* as follows (2000:13):

*Sukhriyya* in literature is the element that contains a dramatic mixture of criticism (تَقَنَّ), derision (الهجاء), allusion (التَّلْبِيح), insinuation (الدِّعَاء), mockery (التَّهْكِم) and funmaking (ةبَاعِد), for the purpose of exposing a person, concept, idea or whatever, and laying it bare by throwing light on its cracks (ثَغَرَات) and its negative and deficit aspects. Thus, the primary goal of *adab sākhir* is correctional (تصحيحي), either on the moral (أخلاقي) or aesthetic (جمالي) level, and it differs in tone and manner from all other ways of expression that aim to reject, condemn or belittle the subject targeted by the writer or speaker.

The definition of ‘Satire’ provided by Britannica Online Encyclopædia (Elliott 2007) does not differ substantially from the one provided by Rāghib:

Satire, artistic form, chiefly literary and dramatic, in which human or individual vices, follies, abuses, or shortcomings are held up to censure by means of ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, parody, caricature, or other methods, sometimes with an intent to inspire social reform.

Rāghib (2000) explains that there is a difference concerning the notion *adab sākhir* as a comprehensive notion (كُمْفهُومُ شاملٌ), and *sukhriyya* as a literary device. He claims that “when *sukhriyya* becomes the fundamental element in the content, the spine for the events and scenes, then the work joins under
the banner of *adab sākhīr*” (Rāghib 2000:9). He goes through the centuries and dynasties in which satirical poets have used *sukhriyya* in poetry, and the blooming of the ‘satirical press’ that started in the end of the 19th century, with Yaʿqūb Šannū’ (1839–1912) and ‘Abdallāh al-Nadīm (1845–1898) playing important roles. After the 1952 revolution, however, satirical writing almost disappeared in Egypt, due to a climate where criticism of the leader was much less tolerated (Rāghib 2000:37):

*sukhriyya* disappeared, or almost, from the pages of the newspapers and magazines. It became limited and directed at those people whom the leader (َْ) attacked in his speeches, or in his guidelines (ِِ) to the media leadership. The satire no longer came from the thoughts and conscience of the writer, but rather became state-directed (ِِْْْْ), as any other political or commercial activity, so it lost its brilliance, sharpness and cheerfulness. The writers knew very well that whoever makes his satire cross fixed and drawn borders, in front of him is nothing but prison, expulsion or at the best prohibition from writing. The space for satire faded out (ِِْ) from the pages of the newspapers and magazines until only scattered fragments from Maḥmūd al-Saʿdānī, Aḥmad Bahgat and Aḥmad Ragab was left.

Referring to the ‘big’ writers within *adab sākhīr* in Egypt, the names that generally come up are precisely Aḥmad Ragab (1928–2014), Maḥmūd al-Saʿdānī (1928–2010) and Aḥmad Bahgat (1932–2011), as well as Galāl ‘Āmīr (1952–2012), Muḥammad ‘Afīfī (1922–1981) and ‘Abbās al-Aswānī (1925–1977). The term *adab sākhīr* was perhaps coined during their period of writing: the earliest use of the term that I have across, is by Luwīs ‘Awaḍ in his foreword to Aḥmad Bahgat’s (2009) *مذكرات زوج* (Memoirs of a husband), which was probably published in its first edition in the beginning of the 1980s.² Here, ‘Awaḍ claims that *al-adab al-sākhīr* is the ‘legitimate son’ of *adab al-hijāʾ*,³ and the ‘cousin’ of *al-adab al-fukāhī* (humorous literature) (Bahgat 2009:6). The first direct labelling (on the cover) of a publication as *adab sākhīr* that I have found is a 1997 edition of the book *تحمس ٠٠٤ِ بِسْرَة* (Thutmose 400 with a hyphen)⁴, also by Aḥmad Bahgat.

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² The 2009 edition informs that the third edition was published in 1986.
³ Invective or satirical poetry.
⁴ From the bus-system in Egypt where a stroke (شَرْتَا) through the bus number indicates a variation in the route (see Badawi and Hinds 1986, ش رط).
Adad sākhir and the Vernacular

Some of the early works that Rāghib mentions have been written at least partly in the vernacular, such as زهه النفوس ومضحك العموس (The Pastime of Souls, Bringing a Laugh to a Scowling Face) by Ibn Sūdūn and Yūsuf al-Shirbīnī’s هز التحروف في شرح قصيد أبي شادوف (Brains Confounded by the Ode of Abū Shādūf Expounded). Big parts of the satirical newspapers were also written in the vernacular, although not without controversy. According to Fahmy (2011:34), “almost all the colloquial content of these newspapers was satirical or humorous, primarily because the everyday vernacular was more suited to comedy and satire than Fuṣḥā”. Fuṣḥā was “considered too serious for effective satire” (Fahmy 2011:81). However, ‘Abdallāh al-Nadīm was not an advocate of introducing ʿāmmīyya for written purposes, but was rather concerned with education and political agitation (Woidich 2010).

From a look at a small sample of 6 adab sākhīr publications from 1980s and 90s, two by Ahmad Bahgat, two by Ahmad Ragab and two by Maḥmūd al-Saʿdanī, I have not found any noteworthy use of ʿāmmīyya in the narrative parts, only in dialogues and proverbs. (However, in Rosenbaum’s (2000) article about the Fuṣḥāammīyya style, he gives an example from the writings by al-Saʿdanī). A closer look at these satirical writers’ language is necessary to understand better the relationship between satirical writing and use of ʿāmmīyya.

Adab sākhir Today – Satire or Pure Humour?

The adab sākhīr books in my study focus on different aspects of Egyptian society: as several were published not long after the 25th of January revolution, it is an important subject, or at least receives some attention, in several of the publications. Another popular issue is the relationship between man and woman, and challenges with regard to finding a suitable match, and after finding it, spending everyday life with him or her, and perhaps adding another wife to the family.

In one way or another, all these books address challenges or peculiarities of the Egyptian society in a humorous way. Some of the issues raised are sensitive, and perhaps even taboo, and referred to as difficult or unsuitable to discuss in

5 See Davies (1981, 2000, 2005) and (Doss and Davies 2013).
6 See Zack (2014) for a description of use of the vernacular in Abu Naḍḍāra Zarʾa.
'serious writing' (kitāba gādda). Authors then choose to take to adab sākhir, where they can, as the ‘satirical writer’ Īhāb Mu‘awwaḍ puts it, “wrap the serious subject in some nice paper and humour (damm khafīf)” (Mu‘awwaḍ 02.09.2014).

Although adab sākhir has become the established label, some prefer kitāba sākhira, (satirical writing), rejecting it having the status of adab (literature). As Woidich (2010:83) mentions, there appears to be a common point of view among critics and publishers that much of what is published now is not ‘real’ adab sākhir. In an article in the magazine Rūz al-Yūsuf (Lu’ay 18.10.2009), several persons from the literary field comment on the blooming of adab sākhir literature, making statements such as the following by Muḥammad ‘Iliwa:

The books that are published now, and on whose covers they write ‘adab sākhir’, most of them do not belong to the adab sākhir at all, but are rather an insult to it (إساءة إ) (Eisāa ʾi).

The critic Aḥmad Darwīsh says that “real satirical writing is a kind of good literature that people need in certain periods in history, as a kind of safe opposition”. He also calls adab sākhir “a refined and legitimate literary genre”. At the same time, Darwīsh says that “what we see now, is false (زائفة) satirical writing”. Authors and publishers are accused of taking advantage of the renewed popularity of the genre, and for using the label for texts that do not qualify for it. Darwīsh’s perception of adab sākhir being a type of literature that is needed in certain periods seems to be shared by several in the literary sphere of Cairo;7 it is claimed that the recent social and political situation in Egypt has created a need for light and humorous literature where criticism can be expressed in a somewhat disguised manner.

The publisher and novelist Makkāwī Sa‘īd, on the other hand, although not in favour of publishing adab sākhir, sees one bright spot with the new trend. He thinks that as long as it is popular and encourages people to start reading, it can serve the role as the first step on a reading ladder.

On the website بطولة وطن (See and look) (14.11.2010), four contemporary writers referred to as ‘satirical writers’ are interviewed: Bilāl Faḍl, ‘Umar Ṭāhir, Muṣṭafā Shuhayb, and Tāmir Aḥmad. Faḍl and Ṭāhir say that they are not in favour of labelling literature as sākhir or not sākhir. According to Ṭāhir, the

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7 As was discussed in a seminar entitled الأدب الساخر .. موجات الخسار و صعود (Satirical literature .. waves of decline and rise) at Cairo International Book Fair 2015.
readers have constructed a ‘trap’ (خف), by expressing that sākhīr is what they want, making writers twist their arms to produce what the readers ask for. Shuhayb and Ahmad see that there are two types or schools within satirical writing: “laugh(ter) (ضحك) for the purpose of laughter, and laughter in order to achieve a goal (الضحك لتحقيق هدف), and that is the difference, whether laugh is the goal or the means”. Muṣṭafā Shuhayb’s comment is in line with Tāmir Āḥmad’s: “[...] one school that deals with societal issues and uses satire (سخرية) as a tool to discuss phenomena and problems, and another school that uses satire just for the satire. I think it depends on the humor (الإلهام) more than subject, and that its goal is entertainment”.

It appears that the notion adab sākhīr today is used to describe humorous texts, whether satirizing and moralizing with a correctional goal, or simply ‘lighter’ humour, where the goal is solely entertainment, unlike earlier, when negative aspects of society were always the target of satire. Guth (forthcoming 2017) suggests that “the most adequate rendering of the emerging generic term ’adab sākhīr is perhaps ‘carnivalesque literature’ or ‘subversive literature’”. Jacquemond suggests a “more nuanced reading”, as “oscillating between reformism and subversion” (2016:359).

The Material

Through a larger research in progress where I analyse language pattern choices in a comprehensive, but random sample of books published between the years 2011 and 2014 by Egyptian authors, it is clear that the books classified as adab sākhīr distinguish themselves from novels and short story collections in containing larger amounts of āmmiyya.

The classification of the books as adab sākhīr in this study is based on ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ labelling of the books: The books that are ‘directly’ labelled have the label sākhīr, maqālātsākhira (satirical articles) or (min) (al-)adabsākhīr on the cover, colophon or title page.8 The books that are ‘indirectly’ labelled may be described as kitāb sākhīr on the back cover text.9 They can also be indirectly labelled in the text itself, such as in (Buy from me), where a hypothetical person asks Duʿāʾ Fārūq (2012:10):

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Why do you get yourself into books and *adab sākhīr* and those things?

Or such as by Shādī Aḥmād (2013:27) in *مَصر لَامَوْاَذَّهُ*، in his list of advice on what to do when bored or sad:

Get hold of satirical books … by the writer Shādī Ahmad, and that in particular will make you very happy, and make the writer happy, and he will pray for you and let his mother pray for you (give, and you will receive).

Some books are not labelled *adab sākhīr* neither in the text or paratext; they may, however, be featured or referred to as such, e.g. on the book-site Goodreads, in author interviews, on Facebook or other arenas where the book is promoted. It should also be noted that some of the authors of these books try to avoid categorization, as *adab sākhīr* or as anything else, and that they may not agree to the label their book is given.

When it comes to text types, the *adab sākhīr* books of this decade do not represent one specific text type. They are hybrid and diffuse, reminiscent of Elsadda’s (2010:328) description of literary blogs: they defy generic classification: they are invariably a mélange of diaries, memoirs, autobiographical stories, to-do shopping lists, political manifestos, reflections, epistolary narratives, short stories and novels.

The *adab sākhīr* publications in the corpus also contain articles (*maqālāt*), and poetry, as well as graphic elements such as caricatures and photographs. For an analysis of the forewords (*muqaddimāt*) of some of these books, see Guth (2017 Forthcoming).

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10 al-Barbārī (2012) is directly labelled *كتَاب كُومِيْدِيْ تَأْثِر* (Comical rebellious book).
11 See interview from *بص وطل* (See and look) referred to above.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author and year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Translation of title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Du‘āʾ Fārūq (2012)</td>
<td>يشتري مني</td>
<td>Buy from me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muḥammad Nāgī (2013)</td>
<td>أشيك واد في شبرا</td>
<td>The chicest guy in Shabra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahmad al-ʿIsīlī (2011)</td>
<td>الكتاب الثاني</td>
<td>The second book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muḥammad Galāl (2013)</td>
<td>الكتاب الأصفر</td>
<td>The yellow book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jihād al-Tābiʿī (2012)</td>
<td>الحب في زمن البوتوكس</td>
<td>Love in the time of Botox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Abīr ʿAbdal-Wahhāb (2012)</td>
<td>الحب في زمن الكارينا</td>
<td>Love in the time of Carina&lt;sup&gt;12&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Īhāb Muʿawwaḍ (2012)</td>
<td>الرجال من بولاوق والنساء من اول فيصل</td>
<td>Men are from Būlāq and women from the beginning of Fayṣal street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shādī Aḥmad (2012b)</td>
<td>العريس: في رحلة البحث عن عروسة</td>
<td>The groom: on the journey to find a bride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Amr al-Inkishārī (2012)</td>
<td>أنا حقا أعتيرض</td>
<td>I certainly object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maḥmūd Ḥasīb (2012)</td>
<td>بات مان</td>
<td>Bat Man&lt;sup&gt;14&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muḥammad Hasan (2011)</td>
<td>تيبتت</td>
<td>Bleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muṣṭafā Shuhayb (2013)</td>
<td>خيمة 8</td>
<td>Tent no. 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tāmir Aḥmad (2012c)</td>
<td>دراج مرسى</td>
<td>Mursi’s arm&lt;sup&gt;15&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muṣṭafā al-Barbarī (2012)</td>
<td>سكرىرة</td>
<td>Sugar on the side</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<sup>12</sup> Carina (كارينا) is an Egyptian bodywear brand for women, and has become a proprietary eponym referring to any type of bodywear for women (especially long sleeves and tights covering the skin).

<sup>13</sup> The abbreviation of this title makes the swear-word أاحا، which is used frequently in the text with reference to the title, but as أاح.

<sup>14</sup> The title is also a play on the word بات (armpit) instead of باتت الباط (under the armpit) which is the common way of transcribing “Batman”. The expression تحت الباط (under the armpit) is often used in the meaning “to control”.

<sup>15</sup> From the play مدرسة المشاغبين (The School of Troublemakers).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author and year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Translation of title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Abīr ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (2013)</td>
<td>تنبةقاوس: أب الّي تعلّكوا السوافة</td>
<td>Girls’ driving: damn (father of) the one who taught you how to drive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rihām Magdī (2013)</td>
<td>شعب آخر 25 حاجة كان وكان</td>
<td>A very 25th people, again and again16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lubnā Imbārik (2013)</td>
<td>طاجين تركي بالثومة</td>
<td>Stew with meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yūsuf Ma’āṭī (2013)</td>
<td>لقد وقنا في الفخ</td>
<td>We fell into the trap17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shādī Aḥmad (2013)</td>
<td>مصر لمؤخزة</td>
<td>Pardon me, Egypt18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaymā’ Ḥabīb (2013)</td>
<td>المعجم الوجيز في لغة الباليزي</td>
<td>The concise dictionary of excerpting the essence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dīnā ʿĀdil (2012)</td>
<td>ولاد البطاء السودا</td>
<td>Children of the black duck</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Language Choices**

العربية والفصحي هما إيد واحدة، حبة عالمية عشان دي اللغة اللي يحس بياها، وحبة فصحي عشان أنت بتفهم، ولا إنه؟

‘āmmiyā and fuṣāḥa are here one hand, a bit of ‘āmmiyā because that is the language that we feel in, and a bit of fuṣāḥa because you understand, right?

AL-ṬĀBI’Ī 2012:6

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16 ākhir ḥāga, lit. transl. "last thing" is used as an intensifier carrying a strong meaning of "very". 25 refers to the January 25th revolution, whereas "again and again" refers to that this is the second volume.
17 From the film(The embassy is in the building).
18 la muʾākhza translates "excuse me" or "pardon me", but has numerous usages, amongst them is in combination with, or instead of, a curse or something inappropriate.
19 The title plays on the dictionary published by the Language Academy, and perhaps تلخيص الإبري في لغة الباليزي (A Paris Profile) by Rifāʾa al-Ṭaḥṭāwī.
The play on the slogan from the 2011 uprisings signals that the reader should expect to find both varieties in the book. Except for three books that contain very little fuṣḥā,20 this is the case for most of the books. However, use of both varieties is done in different ways and with different amounts of the two varieties. Some are written predominately in one of the varieties, the other variety being inserted only a few places as lexical items, clauses or paragraphs.

‘Base’ Varieties

In some of these publications, the ‘base’ variety is ‘āmmīyya, and fuṣḥā occurs only occasionally.21 Al-‘Isīlī (2011:23) explains that maybe one third of his words are fuṣḥā, when he writes and perhaps also when he speaks:

> When I use “ فقط” (only) instead of “بس” (only), this does not mean that I have saved (أنتصدت) the Arabic language, nor that I am more cultured (أكثر ثقافة), or anything else but that “فقط” is, for me, a better word on that occasion (وضع), in that context ... or I use “بس” because, for me, it is a richer (أغنى) word, it has wider usage, and its sound is dearer to me (صوتها). There is no quarrel (قانخ) between the two words, they are both mine, and it is my right to use them both.

Al-Inkishārī (2012) also writes mainly in ‘āmmīyya, but he uses fuṣḥā when presenting different types of lists, such as lists of hypotethetical newspaper headlines and list of ‘advice and wisdom’. The opposite distribution is also found: basically writing in fuṣḥā, but switching to ‘āmmīyya at some occasions.22 In Ma‘āṭī (2013), one finds ‘āmmīyya in dialogues, but also occasionally in form of lexical items (or longer paragraphs of ‘āmmīyya in an otherwise fuṣḥā based text). Two recurring ‘āmmīyya discourse markers in this book are بهأ (so, then, however) and برضه (also, too).

In several parts of his book, Hasan (2011) uses fuṣḥā as the base variety, as well as some ‘unflagged’ use of ‘āmmīyya. There is, however, frequent use of ‘flagged’ (in parentheses) ‘āmmīyya, for example in an explanatory comment, such as the code-switching in the following example (Hasan 2011:40):

20 Nāgī (2013), Aḥmad (2012b) and Ḥabīb (2013).
22 Aḥmad (2012c), Ma‘āṭī (2013).
It gives you more awe, dignity and volume (no one will try to fight with you)

Most of Shuhayb’s (2013) book consists of narrations about the happenings on January 25th 2011 and the following days. These narratives are mostly in fuṣḥā, but there is occasional occurrence of an unambiguous EA item, e.g.:

I thought about the girl of my dreams, whom I have not met yet

SHUHAYB 2013:43

Code-Switching

‘Inter-sentential’ or ‘alternational code-switching’ i.e. “switching between stretches of speech belonging to one and the other code/language/variety” (Mejdell 2006:414) occurs in several of the analyzed books. Rosenbaum (2012:299) describes a literary device where switching between the varieties “reflect the characters’ speech or thoughts in their own language and style”. He refers to this device as “changing the point of view through the use of CEA”. In the examples Rosenbaum gives, ‘āmmiyya represents the speech and thoughts of characters or protagonist narrators. This type of switching is found frequently in my corpus. However, in the following examples of code-switching, ‘āmmiyya does not represent a specific character’s thoughts, but switching between the varieties appear to be a stylistic device emphasizing a sarcastic comment. In the first example, fuṣḥā (bold) mirrors a ‘common saying’ or advice, whereas ‘āmmiyya (red) represents the author’s sarcastic comment:

Don’t let your mother watch cooking channels ... because she will only cook what she knows anyways

GALĀL 2013:90

In the following example, fuṣḥā mirrors a ‘common wisdom’, which is interrupted and completed by the author’s sarcastic comment in ‘āmmiyya:
There are three things that have no limits ... the universe, human stupidity, and people who post that sentence ...

Galāl 2013:94

The following example is from another book, and comes in a short chapter called “a call for understanding Egyptian ʿāmmiyya”, where some words and expressions in ʿāmmiyya are explained. The following is an example of a situation that can describe the word حرام (diversion) where the passage in fuṣḥā evokes the style of a lexical entry explanation, followed by a switch to ʿāmmiyya which again represents a sarcastic comment:

الشيء ما يفعله الرجل ليلة كل يوم خميس عشت بدلاً خبيثه، ويَنام بعد ما يلزمه على أي سبب مش منطق وخلاص!!

It is also what the man does every Thursday to hide his failure, and go to sleep after picking a fight about anything without logic!!

Al-Ṭābiʿī 2012:16

Fuṣḥāmmiyya

Rosenbaum (2000) proposes the name Fuṣḥāmmiyya for an “alternating style” found in Egyptian prose texts where the fuṣḥā and ʿāmmiyya varieties are used in an alternating manner. Fuṣḥāmmiyya, is, according to Rosenbaum (2000:71) “the result of the intention of a certain writer to create a style whose constituents are taken from the two stocks, that of Fuṣḥā and that of ʿĀmmiyya, but is neither; rather, it is something else.” According to Rosenbaum (2000:83), the fuṣḥā and ʿāmmiyya elements enjoy equal status, and the use of ʿāmmiyya is not “restricted to single words, mainly for naming realia”. He claims that one of the aims of writing in such a style is to create humour (Rosenbaum 2000:81). The Fuṣḥāmmiyya style as described by Rosenbaum can be found in some of the books in my study. The two varieties appear to be of equal importance in the text, as opposed to a base variety with insertions or borrowings from the other variety. It is also the clear intention of the writer, e.g.:23

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23 Bold represents unambiguous fuṣḥā, whereas red represents unambiguous ʿāmmiyya.
The mirror is the most wasted product in the make-up world, because in every make-up container, there is a mirror, no matter if it is powder, eye shadow or rouge, in addition to the mirror that comes with the make-up bag, even though girls rarely look in these mirrors. Because they usually have a mirror in their purse, right, it would be old, stayed in there for a hundred years, broken and messed up, but they never let go of it and it stays in their purses until it is totally crunched!

‘abd al-wahhāb 2012:60

The style in this example is not a rarity in this book, but rather an example of the style in big parts of it, and it certainly contributes to leaving the boundaries between the varieties ‘blurred’ or ‘fuzzy’ (see Mejdell 2014, Mejdell Forthcoming-a, Mejdell Forthcoming-b).

Word-Lists

A phenomenon that is found in more than one of the adab sākhir books is a section where the author provides the readers with a list of words and expressions that are frequently used at the time the book is written. They are often neologisms and slang, sometimes belonging to the so-called ‘youth language’ (see Rizk 2007) or ‘youth speech’ (see Hassanein 2011).

‘Abd al-Wahhāb (2012) says that her book is meant for the future generations. She explains present day phenomena that she thinks are likely to have changed or be outdated in 2050, such as electronic devices and social network sites that were frequently used in 2012. The book also contains a section entitled “the dictionary”. The author explains that “this dictionary is not only in order to log the most current words of our time, but in order for the new

I do not mark what can be read as either fiṣḥā or ʿāmmīyya (bivalent), or what is identical in both varieties (shared).
generations to be able to read the book written in the language of our time”
(‘Abd al-Wahhāb 2012:34). The ‘dictionary’ is in alphabetical order and contains
altogether 83 entries. They are stereotype descriptions of ‘personalities’, expres-
sion and lexical items with ‘new meanings’. She provides examples of contexts
in which they can occur, and it also contains explanations of short forms of
prepositions and abbreviations typically used in computer mediated commun-
ication.

‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s second book (2013) has a “dictionary of insults” (قاموس
المضايقات), or more accurately, expressions that are frequent in the Cairo traffic.
She divides the ‘insults’ into two groups; those girls hear while driving, most
often from men, and those they might say themselves. Some examples from
the first group are:

If you don’t know how to drive, why
do you ride a car?
I don’t want to insult you because you
are a woman

And from the second group:

You are the one making a mistake, by the way
Are you crazy?

Aḥmad (2013) has a chapter called humorously
قاموس مصري فرنسي (كلنا
بالهجايس) (Egyptian-French dictionary (brag to us)). The explanations of the
words are not actually in French, but mostly in ‘āmmiyya as well as some fushā.
He lists 18 words used by the Egyptian youth and gives a humorous explanation
each of them, some examples are: قلشة (quick funny comment); قلاش (someone who uses a
lot of the previous).

In a book whose title is on the list of explained words above, namely
تيبت (Bleep), Hasan (2011:107–124) explains different ‘personalities’ that have been
named in the Egyptian ‘āmmiyya. He provides the ‘etymology’ of the words,

24 Replaces a swearword or insult.
and their current meaning. Some examples are: “Thug”, from Turkish; “Lazy”, from Coptic; “Impressing”, from Coptic; “Pushy, intrusive”, from French; “Arrogant”, from Coptic; “Girl or attractive girl”, from mezze).

Although the explanations of lexical items and expressions in the above mentioned books are interesting, the etymological explanations are not necessarily explanations that linguists would confirm. For example, Woidich (2006:95) notes that the word muzza derives from mazmazēl.

Motivations for Use of ‘āmmiyya or Mixing

I just had a point of view if you would allow me to express it – you greatest among men – without any one of you getting angry or collapsing, and concerning the maaany men who get angry with my writing in ‘āmmiyya and my style that offends their morals and wounds their sophisticated Arabic language, I deeply apologize [...]

FĀRŪQ 2012:76

For texts written completely or partly in ‘āmmiyya, the linguistic choice is often mentioned and explained, or even apologized for in the introduction or elsewhere in the text (see Woidich 2010). These metalinguistic comments, together with statements made in interviews on television or other, provide some insight as to what motivates the authors’ linguistic choices. In the following I present some of the motivations expressed by authors of adab sākhīr books.

Shaymā’ Ḥabīb’s book (2013) is written completely in ‘āmmiyya, and she brings up her language choice in the very beginning of it. She sincerely admits that fushā is not her strongest side, and that she chose what appears to be an easier means for her to express herself (Ḥabīb 2013:77):

This book is the first real experience for me, and to be honest, I was confused about which language to write in, so I decided that I will write the way I speak, or feel. In order to convey (أَوْصَلُ) what I want to
in an easy and uncomplicated manner without lies ... I am not that good in *fuṣḥā*

In a television interview, Ḥabīb (13.12.2013) expresses that she writes in ‘āmmiyya because she thinks in ‘āmmiyya, and she wants the readers to feel that she is talking directly to them, to delete the distance between reader and writer, so that the reader gets the sense of a conversation with a friend. As for the target group, the book was meant for university students as herself at the time the book was written. The fact that the book is written in ‘āmmiyya was, according to Ḥabīb, criticized by literary advisors (*mustashirīn fī l-adab*), but they would let it pass since this was her first writing experience. However, it would be preferable for her to write in *fuṣḥā* in her next publication. From readers however, the feedback on her linguistic choice was very positive. Asked whether she had the impression that ‘āmmiyya makes the book easier to understand, she replies that in general, not only with regard to language, the simpler (*absat*) the easier (*ashal*).

Ahmad al-ʿIsīlī is perhaps one of the stronger contemporary defenders of writing in ‘āmmiyya. In all three books he has published so far, he introduces the text by commenting on his choice of writing in ‘āmmiyya. The following excerpt is from *كتاب الثاني* (al-ʿIsīlī 2011:22):

> Firstly, I am more than fond of Egyptian ‘āmmiyya because it is my mother language/tongue (*أمي* (*أمي*)), and secondly for its amazing richness, and thirdly, my emotional connection and complete control (*تحكُّمي الكامل*) of it. And maybe more important than all of that: because I feel that it is mine ... and after all of that as well, because I feel it is more related than *fuṣḥā*, to this era of Egyptian writing and the type of writing (*النوع من الكتابة*) that I write, and to those who read me. And I want to be close to those who read me and listen to me, I want to reach them ...

Al-ʿIsīlī’s texts stand out from the others in that they have more vocalized words. He does not provide his readers with possible bivalent readings of the words, but signals clearly that e.g. صغير (small) should be read *ṣughayyar* and not *ṣaghīr*. He thinks that his writing style, using both ‘āmmiyya and *fuṣḥā*, although easier to write, may be challenging to read (al-ʿIsīlī 2009:13). He encourages his readers to read according to the vocalization, “to read it like it is written, or in reality as it is ‘said’” (al-ʿIsīlī 2011:9). In his latest book, he takes it a step further, saying that the book is an “audiobook,” and advices...
his readers to read it out loud, and it will be like hearing his voice (al-ʿIsīlī 2015). This unusual request for the readers may be explained by al-ʿIsīlī profession as a television and radio presenter, and a wish to approach his reading ‘audience’ in the same language style that he approaches his tv and radio audience: his natural way of speaking.

Both Ḥabīb and al-ʿIsīlī express that the use of ʿāmmiyāiya lets them reach their readers more easily; it is a more direct means of communication, and it removes a distance between the writer and the readers. The same point is brought up by Muḥammad Nāḡī, author of the all-ʿāmmiyāiya (The chicest guy in Shubra), a book that is explicitly directed at readers in the age ranging from 17 to 30. He says in a television interview that for him, it was more important for the message to reach out than to write the book in “al-luḥṭa al-ʿarabīyya al-muʿaqqada” (the complex Arabic language) (Nāḡī 07.02.2014). There is in other words a perception among the writers that the fushā variety does not reach the readers the same way as ʿāmmiyāiya does, due to its complexity.

The ‘complexity’ of fushā may also be indexical of authority, something with which these writers do not want to be associated. They wish to speak to their peers in a familiar style indicating that they are on the same level, not in a style indexing them taking on an authoritarian role. Al-Ṭābiʿī is interviewed concerning another of her books, also from the adab sāḥīr genre, and explains that she writes in ʿāmmiyāiya (mixed with English expressions) because she wants to write in the language that is used, not to raise herself to the status of someone giving a lecture, debating or giving advice (al-Ṭābiʿī 16.06.2014).

Shādī Aḥmad also discusses his writing in ʿāmmiyāiya in a television interview, and points to the same motivations for writing in ʿāmmiyāiya as seen above: it reaches the young readers, for whom the book is meant, in a simpler manner. The hosts put Aḥmad on the spot, claiming that he is against fushā, to which Aḥmad responds that it is not a matter of being against, but a matter of a community that the youth has created to distinguish themselves from the parent-generation, and to which they have their own manner of speaking (lahqa) and expressions (Aḥmad 16.10.2013).

The perception among authors that when using ʿāmmiyāiya, the message conveyed reaches the readers more easily is not unjustified; The survey “Language Change in Egypt: Social and Cultural Indicators Survey” (Kebede, Kindt and Høigilt 2013) reports that 76% of the respondents replied that they find it easier to understand things written in ʿāmmiyāiya. Lubnā Imbārik (2013) is obvi-
ously of the same impression, and raises the issue of people’s lack of interest in reading in general. To increase people’s interest in reading, she encourages the use of simple language (though not explicitly ‘āmmīyya). She addresses those who set up school curriculums, requesting them to make it easier so that reading will be easier for the pupils, and not a matter of torment (تعذيب). Imbārik stresses the importance of reading and encourages parents to let their children be accustomed to reading from early age, and she asks the ‘great’ authors (الكتاب العظماء) to write books that are simple and easy (سيلة وبسيطة) (2013:24).

To sum up, by their own admission authors choose to write their adab sākhir in ‘āmmīyya or a mix between ‘āmmīyya and fuṣḥā because they conceive of it as more familiar, easier to understand and better suited to reach the readers, who are predominately from the younger generation, in a more direct manner. They do not want to give the impression of being all-knowing and giving advice, and wish to avoid the authoritative index of fuṣḥā.

**The 1st Person Narrative Mode**

Another common feature of the adab sākhir texts is that they are written from a first-person narrative perspective. This is the case for 20 out of the 21 adab sākhir books in my study: they are written either completely in the first-person narrative mode, or what appears to be switching between the first and third person. (It is however difficult to establish whether each instance of switching should in fact be regarded as switching or not, since first-person narration “almost invariably includes third-person narration” (Abbott 2008:71)). The one book that is written from a third-person narrative perspective, بات مان (Bat Man) (Hasib 2012), follows the same language pattern as many of the novels and short stories, namely narratives in fuṣḥā and dialogues both in ‘āmmīyya and in fuṣḥā. The genre of this book is also otherwise closer to that of the novel, in that it consists of one long fictional story.

As is claimed by Zack (2001) and (Woidich 2010), the first-person narrative, or the direct speech function, is found in most cases where the vernacular variety has been used in writing in Egypt. This goes for the vernacular in the early satirical newspapers that appeared in the forms of dialogues, the mudhakkirāt (Memoirs) literature that were written as monologues, and most novels that have been written in ‘āmmīyya.

The phenomenon is, not surprisingly, not unique to the diglossic Arabic situation, but appears to be common in standard-with-dialects situations as well. Pointing to examples of use of Black English dialect in literature, Traugott
(1981) shows that the dialect is only used in first person narrative. She claims that “[f]irst person narrative allows for a more subtle distinction between the narrative and the dialog because of the traditional connection between first person and colloquial style” (1981:312).

If a dialect or variety moves from being only used in direct speech in literature to be used in narratives from a third person narratives as well as non-literary writing, it may become a new standard (Traugott 1981:313). Egyptian ‘āmmiyya certainly has the potential of becoming a new standard juxtaposed to fuṣḥā (see Woidich 2010), although there are strong forces to prevent that from happening. Rosenbaum argues that the Egyptian ‘āmmiyya has come a long way on its path to becoming a literary language, and states (Rosenbaum 2011:338):

The rise and expansion of Egyptian Arabic as a literary language is a first case of its kind and a revolutionary change in the history of Arabic literature and culture in general, and in Egyptian culture in particular, a change which is still taking place right now.

**Genre Divide**

In my comparison of language pattern choices, the majority of the novels and short story collections are, as according to the norm, written in fuṣḥā in the narrative parts. The books classified as adab sākhir stand out, in that all except one contain ‘āmmiyya in narrative sections. Interestingly, several of the authors who have written adab sākhir completely or partially in ‘āmmiyya, have subsequently written novels (riwāyāt) where the narratives are in fuṣḥā only. For instance, Shādī Aḥmad has written two other sākhir books in addition to the two already mentioned. They all contain great amounts of ‘āmmiyya, and have similar language style. However, in his novel (Calcio) (2015), Aḥmad sticks to the dichotomy of fuṣḥā for the narrative sections and ‘āmmiyya only in dialogues. According to Aḥmad, “a novel has a different way of being written than satirical articles, something every writer has to respect”. This attitude is reflected in Kebede, Kindt and Høigilt (2013), where 55% of the respondents considered ‘āmmiyya ‘not suitable’ for novels.

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26 Personal communication with the author on Facebook.
The same change from writing in ʿāmmiyya or a mix between ʿāmmiyya and fuṣḥā in narratives in adab sākhir to narratives in fuṣḥā in a novel is seen with Muḥammad Nāgīʿ Abdallāh 27 (2016), and Jihād al-Tābīʿī (2016). Given that these writers first published adab sākhir and then turned to writing novels, one might read that the language reflects a development for them as creative writers. It may also be linked to the narrative mode and direct speech aspect: when writing adab sākhir in the first narrative mode, they address the readers directly, and they wish to do that in their ‘personal’ language which is closer to everyday language which is not associated with pedantry. Furthermore, the humour that is expected to be found in adab sākhir appears to be more easily expressed when the writer can use both varieties. However, the norm for language variety in the novel genre, and the writer’s wish to become an ‘acknowledged’ writer is likely to play a role.

Concluding Remarks

Although adab sākhir has become a popular genre during the last ten years or more, and has received its own sections in bookstores, the genre is not new. The term adab sākhir was perhaps not coined until the 1980s, but although not labelled adab sākhir, satirical elements have a long history in Egyptian literature. Some of the adab sākhir of today does however receive criticism for not representing ‘real’ satire, with a ‘correctional goal’, solely focusing on humour for the purpose of entertaining, and there should perhaps be a different label for these.

Leading up to the 2011 revolution, adab sākhir was an arena where writers could direct criticism in a safe manner. Humour has always been characteristic of the Egyptian character, and jokes about former president Mubarak were composed and circulated during his thirty years in power. During the uprisings against his rule, however, humour in Egypt moved from the private to the public sphere, and from being “covert or indirect” to “direct and confrontational” (Anagondahalli and Khamis 2014:12). It took new forms and was seen everywhere: in slogans, songs, poetry, caricatures, picture manipulations, memes, graffiti etc., and was shared online in no time.

Use of ʿāmmiyya is not a precondition for adab sākhir, but the genre does, however, seem to carry higher acceptance for use of ʿāmmiyya or a mixed variety, as it is a genre that has extensive use of humorous elements such as irony, sarcasm and parody.

27 The writer only uses Muḥammad Nāgī in his first publication.
The Arabic language is spoken in various dialects, each with its unique characteristics and historical significance. These dialects reflect the diverse social, economic, and political contexts in which they are used. For instance, the Ammòyya dialect is not only a dialect but also a blend of heritage and history, intertwined with hard circumstances and the Egyptians’ struggles, including poverty and illness, accompanied by some sweat and crowdedness. Drink up,28 boss!!

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ʿĀmmiyya is not only a dialect, no, it is the juice of heritage and history blended with hard circumstances and the Egyptians' problems, poverty and illness, along with some sweat and crowdedness. Drink up, boss!!

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This expression also means “handle it.”

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