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DIGLOSSIA AND TRANSLATION:
EGYPTIAN LITERATURE IN HEBREW AND ENGLISH[*]

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Two plays by Egyptian playwrights, The Oedipus Comedy *by 'Alῑ Sālim and* Crazy Saʿdūn *by Lenin al-Ramlῑ, have recently been published in Hebrew translation. I translated the former play myself and edited and annotated the latter, which I translated jointly with my colleague, Abraham Hakim. These plays represent two generations of Egyptian drama, that known as* gῑl al-sittῑnāt - *"the generation of the sixties," and the younger generation of today. As in the majority of plays written in Egypt by members of these two generations, the two plays are written mostly in* 'Āmmiyya, *colloquial Egyptian Arabic. Translations from Arabic into Hebrew are unfortunately not very common, and the publication of these two plays gives us an opportunity to raise and discuss some of the problems of translating Egyptian literature into other languages.*

INTRODUCTION

The act of translation, and literary translation in particular, has always been considered a difficult intellectual endeavor,[1] and many in fact believe that the goal of a "good and accurate" translation is nearly unattainable. The well-known phrase *traduttori tradittori* – "translators are traitors," reflects this opinion. Some problems of translation are universal: every translator has experienced them, and every researcher in the field of translation is familiar with them. However, in my opinion, modern Egyptian literature presents a unique difficulty for translators. I would like to focus here on a description of this difficulty and the problems it raises.

Egyptian society, along with other Arabic-speaking societies, is in a state of diglossia (the accepted Arabic term for this is *'izdiwāj luġawῑ*); its two varieties are *Fuṣḥā*, the prestigious standard language used in literature and official communication, and *'Āmmiyya*, the language of personal and unofficial communication.[2] Standard literature in the Arabic-speaking world has traditionally been written in *Fuṣḥā*. However, many contemporary Egyptian authors writing in various genres use *'Āmmiyya* in addition to *Fuṣḥā* as a literary language. In drama, *'Āmmiyya* has become the main language in dialogue, and its use has become the prevailing norm.[3]

Some writers of modern Egyptian prose write dialogues in *'Āmmiyya*, while others write them in *Fuṣḥā*. The penetration of *'Āmmiyya* into the language of narrative prose is slower, but quite a few writers today often use elements of *'Āmmiyya* in the narrative. This results in literary texts

that are in fact written in two languages; writers exploit the state of diglossia, which puts both *Fuṣḥā* and *ʿĀmmiyya* at their disposal, in order to create styles of writing that combine the two. As we shall see, this creates a problem for translators of Egyptian literature.

TYPICAL PROBLEMS IN THE TRANSLATION OF MODERN EGYPTIAN TEXTS

In addition to the array of problems facing any translator and the decisions that he or she must make, and in addition to the need to fit the translation to the changing norms of the target language's literary system,[4] translators of modern Egyptian texts written in the two languages, *Fuṣḥā* and *ʿĀmmiyya*, also face the difficulty of identifying the elements of *ʿĀmmiyya* in the text, particularly when these are integrated within *Fuṣḥā*. The task of identification is made more difficult by the fact that both languages utilize the same alphabetical signs, some of which have different functions in the two languages. A translator (and a reader as well!) who is proficient in Egyptian *ʿĀmmiyya* will usually distinguish these elements without any trouble. But one who is not, even one whose native language is another dialect of Arabic, may experience difficulties in understanding the text.[5]

In this paper I shall focus on the main translation problem created directly by the state of diglossia, namely, the difficulty of identifying elements of *ʿĀmmiyya* within a source text written in the two languages, *Fuṣḥā* and *ʿĀmmiyya*. A secondary problem is that of determining the specific meanings and connotations of *ʿĀmmiyya* words and phrases after they have been identified as such. Before treating these issues in detail,

however, I would like to touch briefly on two other problems that are encountered by translators of Egyptian dramatic and prose texts: the determination of the cultural contexts of verbal elements and the difficulty of identifying short vowels that are not marked in the text.

The problem of identifying cultural contexts is a universal one, but in Egyptian literary texts it is especially acute because of the state of diglossia. The use of two languages within a single text may result in two cultures existing in the background of one and the same text. A translator who is unfamiliar with the cultural background to which a given word or phrase of *ʿĀmmiyya* alludes may fail to identify it, or may misunderstand it. For example, the play *Crazy Saʿdūn* is replete with such allusions. The way that I chose to resolve this problem was to add 115 footnotes explaining contexts that are self-evident to the Egyptian reader but usually unknown to the Israeli (or Western) reader.

The problem of identifying short vowels is typical of texts written in Arabic, because they usually are not marked, and many words can thus be read in a variety of ways.[6] A typical example appears in *The Oedipus Comedy*. In the play's final scene (which is written in *Fuṣḥā*), one of the characters says of Oedipus: "ʿaṣbaḥa [...] MLKA liš-šuʿarā'" – "He has become [...] a MLKA of the poets" (Sālim, *Ūdʾ b*, p. 124). The word *MLKA* here can be read either as *malikan* or as *milkan*; in the former case, the phrase means "king of the poets," while in the latter it means "property of the poets." When I first translated this phrase I automatically chose the former option, but it seemed illogical, and I therefore retranslated it in the second way (Sālim, *Ūdʾ b*-Heb, p. 95), a choice that was confirmed upon

consultation with the playwright himself. I later found that I was not alone in having difficulty with this phrase, as can be seen from two different recently published translations of this play into English, each of which chose a different option:

> He has become [...] a King of poets. (Sālim, *Oedipus*-a, p. 386)

> [...] he belongs now to the poets. (Sālim, *Oedipus*-b, p. 94)

The problem becomes more acute in texts that utilize both languages, for then the number of possible realizations of short vowels increases.

DIGLOSSIA AS A TRANSLATION PROBLEM

To return to our main problem of identifying elements of *ʿĀmmiyya* within Egyptian dramatic and prose texts and how it is reflected in translations, I should like to draw some illustrations from texts that have been translated into Hebrew and English in recent decades. The reader should bear in mind that this paper is descriptive, and not a critique of translations; rather, its purpose is to identify and describe problems of translation that derive from a typical and common style of writing in modern Egypt.

Unambiguously ʿĀmmiyya Elements in Dialogue

The acuteness of the problem varies with the location of the *ʿĀmmiyya* elements in the text. Any extended string of *ʿĀmmiyya* text (all the dialogues in a given text, for example) will usually present no problem of identification, but the secondary problem of determining *ʿĀmmiyya*

meanings and connotations still remains. Often, the result is a literal translation that does not take the figurative meaning of the ʿĀmmiyya expression into consideration. An example of this kind of problem is the following text, taken from a dialogue in the novel *Yaḥduʃu fʾ Miṣr al'ān* by Yūsuf al-Qaʿʿ d:

ابعته وحا اوريه ان عين الحكومة حمرا .
(Qaʿʿ d, *Yaḥduʃu,* 18)
"שלח אותו ואני כבר אראה לו את העיניים
האדומות של הממשלה."

LTE**: Send him and I'll really *show him the red eyes* of the government. (Qaʿʿ d, *Yaḥduʃu*-Heb, p. 12).

The expression *warrā luh il-ʿēn il-ḥamra* - lit. "showed him the red-eye" is an unambiguous Egyptian colloquial one and means "showed him anger, treated him sternly." Although the translator must have recognized this phrase as ʿĀmmiyya, he failed to identify it as an idiom and therefore translated it literally. This is a rather common occurrence. The same expression also caused a problem in a translation of a historical narrative written in *Fuṣḥā*, in which the author invented a phrase in Arabic, *'iḥmirār al-'aʿyun* – lit.: "reddening of the eyes." This phrase, which appeared in the sentence *fa-ḥʾ na naẓara al-malik qiyāmahum hāḍā al-'aẓʾ m ... wa-iḥmirār aʿyunihim xāfa xawfan*, was translated into German as follows: "als der König ihre gewaltige Erhebung ... und ihre roten Augen sah, fürchtete er sich sehr" – lit.: "when the king saw their violent revolt ... and their red eyes, he was very afraid."[7] The translator did not identify the invented *Fuṣḥā* phrase as one based on ʿĀmmiyya and translated it literally, instead of rendering it as "their anger" or "their tough behavior."

The Influence of Another Arabic Dialect on the Translator

Further difficulties may result from the influence of another Arabic dialect on the translator. An Arabic-speaking translator whose mother tongue is a non-Egyptian dialect may translate an element of Egyptian ʿĀmmiyya according to its meaning in that dialect. An example is the word *ṣāgāt* that appears in the story *Mārš al-ġurūb* by Yūsuf Idrʾ s, which was translated into Hebrew by a translator whose native language is a non-Egyptian dialect of Arabic. In Egyptian colloquial Arabic, and in other dialects as well, the word *ṣāgāt* (in the plural form) means "baking tins" in the shape of platters. In Egyptian Arabic it also designates metal cymbals used to produce sounds and provide a rhythm for dancing (similarly to Spanish *castañetas*; there are smaller cymbals for women and larger ones for men, with a lower sound). *Ṣāgāt* can also take a shape similar to small bowls placed one inside another, so that one can produce sounds by striking them with one hand. This is the kind of *ṣāgāt* used in Egypt by sellers of *sūs*, a licorice drink, to announce their merchandise. The hero of Idrʾ s's story is just such a seller of *sūs*, and throughout the entire story he keeps on striking the *ṣāgāt* with one hand. However, the translator, harking back to his own non-Egyptian dialect, rendered the word as "platters." This translation shift[8] creates an image in the mind of the reader which is different from the one that the author had in mind. Here is one example:

وكانت يدا الرجل مدلاتين خلفه ويده اليمنى لا
تكف عن دق الصاجات .
(Idrʾ s, *Mārš*, p. 72)
וידי האיש היו שמוטות לאחור, כשיד ימין אינה
פוסקת מלהקיש בטסים.

LTE: And the man's hands dangled behind him, while his right hand did not stop beating *the platters*. (Idrʾ s, *Mārš*-Heb, p. 129).

ʿĀmmiyya *within* Fuṣḥā - *In Narrative and Dialogue*

The main problem of identifying ʿĀmmiyya within *Fuṣḥā* arises when an ʿĀmmiyya element appears within a text that is written mainly in *Fuṣḥā*. The difficulties can take several forms.

(1) The ʿĀmmiyya element belongs uniquely to ʿĀmmiyya
An element unique to ʿĀmmiyya can usually be identified relatively easily, as it will not be found in *Fuṣḥā* dictionaries, and so the translator, even if he or she is unfamiliar with it, will usually conclude that it belongs to ʿĀmmiyya. However, this is not always the case.

In the following example, *baladiyyātʾ* is an ʿĀmmiyya word meaning "someone who comes from my neighborhood, village or town." However, the translator, failing to recognize it, thought that it was the name of an officer mentioned in the text:

حضرة الضابط بلدياتي قال لي ان منزله ومكتبه
مفتوحان لي في اي وقت .
(Qaʿʿ d, *.arb*, p. 211)
כבוד הקצין בלדיאתי אמר לי שביתו ומשרדו
פתוחים לפני בכל עת.

LTE: The honorable officer *Baladiyyātʾ* told me that his house and office were both open to me at any time. (Qaʿʿ d, *.arb*-Heb, p. 22)

The phrase *fūl sūdāni* (lit. "Sudanese broad beans") means "peanuts" in Egyptian ʿĀmmiyya (occasionally the word *sūdāni* is used by itself with this meaning). Nevertheless, several

translations of Egyptian literary works into Hebrew render it literally:

«عـم مـتـولـي»، بـائـع الـلـب والـفـول الـسـودانـي والـحـلـوى .
(Taymūr, '*Amm Mitwallī*', p. 129)
ה״דוד מתואלי״, מוכר גרעינים, פול סודאני ומיני-מתיקה.
LTE: "Uncle Mitwallī' " sells edible seeds, Sudanese broad beans and sweets. (Taymūr, 'Amm Mitwallī-Heb, p. 186. See also Maḥfūẓ, *Bayna al-Qaṣrayn*, p. 45 / Maḥfūẓ, *Bayna al-Qaṣrayn*-Heb, p. 39; Idrīs, *Mišwār*, p. 135 / Idrīs, *Mišwār*-Heb, p. 60).

(2) The element is common to '*Āmmiyya* and *Fuṣḥā* in form but not in meaning
In some cases, elements of '*Āmmiyya* may be identical to *Fuṣḥā* forms, but their meaning is different. Particularly when the translator assumes that the entire text in question is in *Fuṣḥā*, he may take the '*Āmmiyya* element to be *Fuṣḥā* as well. The translation shift caused by this kind of assumption is very common indeed. Some examples are given below.

The word *garbūʿ* in *Fuṣḥā* means "jerboa," a mouse-like rodent. In '*Āmmiyya* the word is used pejoratively, meaning "a worthless person." In the example below, the word appears within a sentence that consists of three insults. However, the translator did not realize that its meaning here is that of the '*Āmmiyya* usage, and he translated it according to its meaning in *Fuṣḥā*. The Hebrew word for jerboa has none of the connotations that *garbūʿ* has in Egyptian '*Āmmiyya* (for some readers it may have no connotations at all, since it is not a very common word):

– الجربوع اللئيم الجبان .
(Maḥfūẓ, *Awlād*, p. 422)
"היירבוע בן הבליעל מוג הלב."

LTE: "That vile and cowardly jerboa." (Maḥfūẓ, *Awlād*-Heb, p. 327; see below on the use of '*Āmmiyya* by Nagīb Maḥfūẓ).

The word *al-'awwal* in *Fuṣḥā* means "the first," and that is its meaning in '*Āmmiyya* as well (although it is usually pronounced with a different vowel after the *w*: *il-'awwil*). In '*Āmmiyya* it is also commonly used to indicate the first gear in a car, and the same is true of the following ordinal numbers (here: *it-tānī*, *it-tālit* – "the second, the third"). In the next example, the translator into Hebrew identified these words as belonging to '*Āmmiyya*, while the English translator did not.

المارش والفتيس والأول . . العربة تنطلق . الثاني . . غادرنا الشارع . الثالث . . نلف حول الميدان .
(Idrīs, *Riḥla*, p. 67)
התנועה ושילוב הילוך ראשון. המכונית מזנקת. הילוך שני... יוצאים מהרחוב. הילוך שלישי... נוסעים מסביב לכיכר.
LTE: Starting and shifting to first gear. The car takes off. Second gear, we leave the street. Third gear, we go around the square. (Idrīs, *Riḥla*-Heb, p. 144).
PTE[**]: The engine starts, then into gear. *Phase one*, the car moves off, *phase two*, we leave the street behind, *phase three*, we go round the square. (Idrīs, "Journey," p. 128).

The following example is taken from another story by Yūsuf Idrīs, in which he makes sophisticated use of the option of using the two languages in one text. In the story *Mišwār*, the policeman al-Šabrāwī accompanies the mad Zubēda on a train to Cairo. Idrīs uses the following words to describe Zubēda's confrontation with al-Šabrāwī: *wahiya taqtaribu BXLQTHA min waghih* – "while bringing her mug close to his face." The word *wagh*,

"face," is a *Fuṣḥā* word, while *xilqa* (pronounced *xilʿa*),[9] "mug, face," is an '*Āmmiyya* one. The '*Āmmiyya* cognate of the *Fuṣḥā* word *wagh* is *wišš*, but Idrīs prefers to designate the face of Zubēda as *xilqa* (*xilʿa*), which in '*Āmmiyya* has purely negative connotations (for example: *ma twarrīnīš xilʿitak* – lit. "Don't show me your mug," i.e., "I don't want to see you"). By using the word *wagh* for al-Šabrāwī's face, he indicates that the mad Zubēda is not the equal of the sane al-Šabrāwī. The word *xilqa*, which undoubtedly describes Zubēda's face from al-Šabrāwī's point of view, thus has an emotive component here. However, the translator into Hebrew did not identify it as belonging to '*Āmmiyya* and translated it according to one of its meanings in *Fuṣḥā*:

ونظر الشبراوي اليها في جزع حقيقي وهي تقترب بخلقها من وجهه .
(Idrīs, *Mišwār*, p. 135)
אלשבראוי הסתכל בה בפחד של ממש, בעוד היא מקרבת את גופה לפניו.
LTE: Al-Šabrāwī looked at her in real fear as she brought *her body* close to his face. (Idrīs, *Mišwār*-Heb, p. 59)

(3) The '*Āmmiyya* element looks like *Fuṣḥā*
Egyptian writers often modify '*Āmmiyya* words and phrases in order to make them compatible with the rules of *Fuṣḥā* grammar and syntax. Often such a camouflaged element has no meaning in *Fuṣḥā*. When not identified as belonging to '*Āmmiyya*, the element will perforce be translated literally, and its figurative meaning will not be conveyed to the target language.

The next example is again taken from the story *Mišwār*. Before the events recounted in the text given below, al-Šabrāwī had intended to

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עלי סאלם

קומדית אדיפוס: אתה
הוא שהרגת את המפלצת

גמיר

Cover of the Hebrew edition of *The Oedipus Comedy* by ʻAlīˊ Sālim, translated into Hebrew by the author.

eat the food he brought from home on the train, but Zubēda's wild behavior forced him to return his meal to the kerchief in which it was wrapped. The ʻĀmmiyya expression used here is ġayyar rīˊqu (rīˊˊu) – lit. "changed his spittle," meaning "ate the first meal of the day" (usually

breakfast). Thus, the sentence in which it appears, taking into account the ʻĀmmiyya element, should be translated along the following lines: "He put out his hand and folded the kerchief he had previously opened in order to eat his (first) meal (of the day). Then he tied it again." Idrˊs here

integrates an element of ʻĀmmiyya into a narrative text, applying the rules of Fuṣḥā to it. The translators, both into Hebrew and into English, did not suspect the existence of an ʻĀmmiyya element, and they give literal renderings of the expression's constituents:

وعرق الشبراوي حتى نفذ العرق الى بدلته الصفراء
ومد يده ولم المنديل الذي كان قد فرده ليغير ريقه،
ثم عقده كما كان .

(Idrˊs, *Mišwār*, p. 134)

זיעתו הגוברת של אלשבראוי הרטיבה את מדיו הצהובים. הוא קיפל את המטפחת בה נגב קודם לכן את הרוק והחזירה למקום.

LTE: Al-Shabrāwˊ's gathering sweat moistened his yellow uniform. *He folded the handkerchief with which he had wiped dry the spittle and put it back in its place.* (Idrˊs, *Mišwār*-Heb, p. 59)

PTE: El Shabrawi broke into a sweat that seeped through his khaki uniform. He felt like changing the bitter taste of his mouth so he opened his large handkerchief in order to spit in it but his throat was too dry and he folded it up again and put it back in his pocket. (Idrˊs, "Errand," p. 21)

The following excerpt, written in Fuṣḥā, contains two ʻĀmmiyya expressions. The first, mā yuʼaˊ ʼillā -š-šāˊir, "It is the clever one who fails," is altered in two minor ways: The negative particle mā is replaced by lā, and the word ʻādatan – "usually," is added, thus making it more difficult to identify the phrase as an idiom. The second expression, yilʻab bil-bēˊa wal-ḥagar – lit. "plays with an egg and a stone," i.e., "sharp, clever, always falls on his feet," has been conjugated according to the context in which it appears (first person singular) and is compatible with the rules of Fuṣḥā. The figurative meaning of the first expression hardly dif-

fers from the literal one. However, the second expression not only is incomprehensible when taken literally, but misreading it makes the following clause, which is logically dependent upon it, incomprehensible as well. The sentence contains a kind of logical formula, two of whose components are expressions in ʿĀmmiyya:

(1) Usually it is the clever one who fails.
(2) I am clever.
(3) The fact that I am clever makes it more likely that I will fail.

Ignorance of the figurative meaning of the expression "to play with an egg and a stone" makes it difficult to understand why this activity should increase the "player's" chances of failure:

في مثل هذه الايام ممكن حدوث اي شيء ولا يقع
عادة الا الشاطر ، وانا العب بالبيضة والحجر وهذا
يجعل احتمالات وقوعي أكثر .
(Qaʿʿd, .arb, p. 210)

בימים מעין אלה הכל עלול לקרות, וכרגיל נופל
רק הפיקח, ואני משחק בביצה ובאבן, מה שמגדיל
את סיכויי להכשל.

LTE: On days such as this anything can happen, and as usual only the clever one falls, *and I play with an egg and a stone,* which increases my chances of failing. (Qaʿʿ d, .arb-Heb, p. 21)

The dialogues in the novel *Yawmiyyāt nāʾibfʿ al-ʾaryāf* by Tawfʿ q al-.akʿm abound in ʿĀmmiyya elements which translators might not easily identify as such, since many of them are written in a *Fuṣḥā* that is very close to ʿĀmmiyya. For example, the expression *ana wiʾiʿt-i min is-sama wi-nta talaʾʾaftini – lit.* "I fell from the sky and you caught me," means "I was in deep trouble and you rescued me." Since most of the sentences in
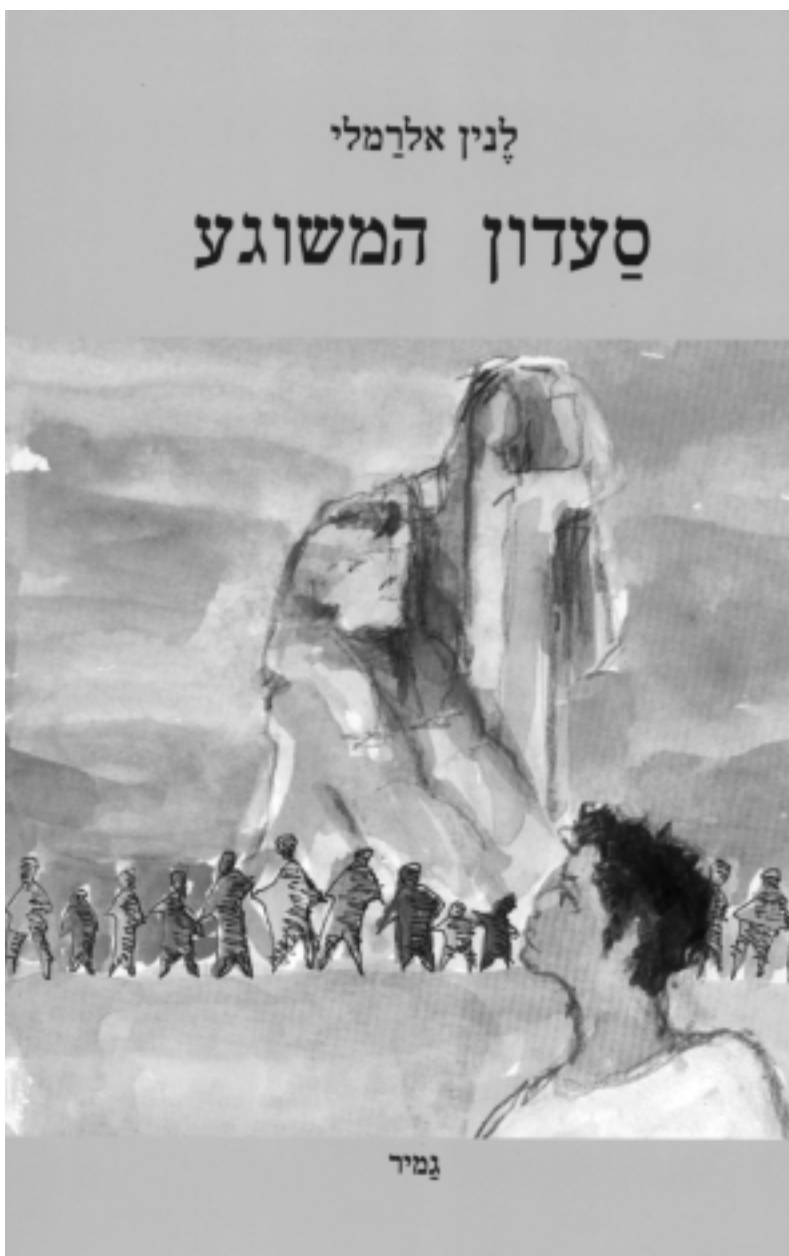
Cover of the Hebrew edition of *Crazy Sʿadūn* by Lenin al-Ramlʿ , translated into Hebrew by the author and Abraham Hakim

the dialogues in question appear to be in *Fuṣḥā*, the translator did not identify this expression as an ʿĀmmiyya one and translated it literally:

– انا وقعت من السما وانت تلقفتني !
(.akʿ m, *Yawmiyyāt*, p. 138)

"הנה נפלתי משמים ואתה איכסנתני!"

LTE: "Indeed, I fell from the sky and you gave me accommodation!" (…akʿm, *Yawmiyyāt*-Heb, p. 140)

The following dialogue contains a one-word sentence, *ʾalʿan*, formed from the root *lʿn* ("to curse"). In

'*Āmmiyya* this word means "worse" or "worst" and is synonymous with several other words of the same form (such as '*anyal* and '*asxam*). The speaker refers to Abnūb, a remote place with a high crime rate. He expresses his opinion of the place but does not curse it, as the translators into both Hebrew and English thought:

فصادقت براسي على قوله ثم زدت :
– وأبنوب؟
– ألعن!
(…ak´ṃ *Yawmiyyāt*, p. 142)

ניענעתי בראשי לאות הסכמה ושאלתי:
"ואבנוב?"
"תהא לקללה!"

LTE: I nodded in agreement and asked:
- And Abnūb?
- A curse on it! (…ak´ṃ *Yawmiyyāt*-Heb, p. 142).
PTE: I nodded assent. "And what about Abnub?" I said.
"Damn Abnub!" (…ak´ṃ *Maze*, p. 129).

The greater the extent to which elements of '*Āmmiyya* are changed according to rules of *Fuṣḥā*, the more difficult it is for translators to identify them as such and the greater the likelihood that this will lead to translations that appear strange and incomprehensible in the target language, as is the case in the following example. The '*Āmmiyya* expression *rigl-i wara wirigl-i* '*uddām* – lit. "One foot back and one foot forward," means "hesitantly." In the following translation, the modifications made in the expression, in particular the use of *tanw´n fatḥa* to mark the accusative in the word *qadaman*, create the illusion that the language in which this expression is written is standard *Fuṣḥā*. This makes it difficult to identify its '*Āmmiyya* nature, resulting in the following literal translation:

بعد التسليم حضر الي الخفير النوبتجي . يقدم قدما
ويؤخر الأخرى، يبدو خائفا.
(Qa'' d, .*arb*, p. 188)
אחרי מסירת הנשק נכנס אליי הנוטר התורן, רגל
מקרבת ורגל מעכבת. הוא נראה נפחד.
LTE: After delivering the weapons the guard on duty came to me, *one foot advancing and one foot delaying.* He looked frightened. (Qa'' d, .*arb*-Heb, p. 7)

When elements of '*Āmmiyya* are "translated" into *Fuṣḥā*, they become even more difficult to identify. In the following two examples, the author modified the '*Āmmiyya* expression *il-'išāra* '*afalit* – lit. "the traffic light closed," meaning "the light turned red," by replacing the verb '*afalit* with its *Fuṣḥā* counterpart '*uġliqat* (in the passive voice), which does not exist in '*Āmmiyya*. In the first example, the translator identified the '*Āmmiyya* expression and translated it accordingly, while in the second example the expression was not recognized, resulting in a literal translation which is certainly not equivalent[10]:

a. يا خسارة! الاشارة أغلقت، النور أحمر، الحمرة
طالت، امتدت، اصبحت زمنا .
(Idr´ s, *Riḥla*, p. 68)
אוי, חבל! הרמזור התחלף, אדום. האור האדום
התארך, נמשך, הפך לפרק זמן.
LTE: Oh, no! The traffic light turned red. It stayed red. This lasted for some time. (Idr´ s, *Riḥla*-Heb, p. 144)

b. أغلقت الاشارة فحاصرته السيارات من كل
جهة في زحام شديد.
('Abd al-Mag´ d, *Ġar´ bān*, p. 61)
הרמזור נסגר לתנועה והמכוניות צרו עליו מכל
עבר בצפיפות רבה.
LTE: The traffic light was closed to traffic, and cars besieged it from every side very densely. ('Abd al-Mag´ d, *Ġar´ bān*-Heb, p. 16)

A NOTE ON DIGLOSSIA AND THE STYLE OF NAGˋB MA.FŪZ

Nag´ b Maḥfūẓ belongs to those Egyptian writers who are opposed in principle to the use of '*Āmmiyya* in literary texts, whether in narrative or in dialogue; he favors writing only in *Fuṣḥā*. However, despite his declared position, he in fact makes frequent use of elements of '*Āmmiyya* (like *fūl sūdāni* in one of the preceding examples). While he does modify such elements whenever they violate the rules of *Fuṣḥā*, they still retain their '*Āmmiyya* meanings. Since Maḥfūẓ's opinion concerning the use of '*Āmmiyya* in literature is well known, translators of his works into foreign languages may proceed on the assumption, supported by the testimony of the author himself, that the text with which they are dealing is written in pure *Fuṣḥā*. They may thus not realize that the text contains '*Āmmiyya* elements that have been "converted" into *Fuṣḥā*. Below are two examples of this, taken from the novel *Zuqāq al-Midaqq*. The first one contains the '*Āmmiyya* expression *billaha wi-šrab mayyitha* – lit. "wet it and drink its water," meaning "this piece of paper (and what is written on it) is worthless, and I'll disregard it." In the following passage, the verbs appear in the feminine form, since the expression is used in a dialogue between two women. Maḥfūẓ has replaced the '*Āmmiyya* word *mayya*, "water," with the *Fuṣḥā* word *mā*', in order to make it compatible with the rules of *Fuṣḥā*. However, since the expression as such does not exist in *Fuṣḥā*, it can only be understood according to its meaning in '*Āmmiyya*. The translator into Hebrew did not recognize the underlying '*Āmmiyya* expression and thus came up with a literal translation, unlike the translator into English who did identify it and translated it accordingly:

فصاحت باستهانة :
– بليها واشربي ماءها!
(Maḥfūẓ, *Zuqāq*, p. 143)

צעקה בלזול: "השרי אותה ושתי מימיה!"

LTE: She shouted in scorn:
"Soak it and drink its water."
(Maḥfūẓ, *Zuqāq*-Heb, p. 128)

PTE: "I don't give a damn!"
(Maḥfūẓ, *Midaq Alley*, p. 146).

In the second example, the *ʿĀmmiyya* expression appears unchanged, because it can be read as if it were *Fuṣḥā*. *Ṣām wafa aṭ*[11] *ʿalā baṣala* – lit. "he fasted and broke his fast with an onion," is said of someone who suffers for a long time in the hope of attaining something of value but in the end must make do with a poor substitute. In our case the expression is used humorously by a young woman, who, in a conversation about marriage and prospective bridegrooms, speaks about the fate that awaits her. Her intended meaning is that she would reject proposals in order to make a good match, but in the end she will have to accept a bad one (her words can be read either as a statement or as a rhetorical question). Presumably many readers will be able to understand the sentence even in its literal translation, but it is doubtful that the translator realized that it is an *ʿĀmmiyya* expression:

– أصوم وافطر على بصلة!
(Maḥfūẓ, *Zuqāq*, p. 24)

"אצום ואסיים את הצום בבצל עלוב".

LTE: *I will fast and break the fast with a lousy onion.* (Maḥfūẓ, *Zuqāq*-Heb, p. 22)

It seems that the translator into English did recognize the expression as an *ʿĀmmiyya* one, placing it in quotation marks in order to let the reader know that its meaning is figurative:

PTE: "break a fast by eating an onion." (Maḥfūẓ, *Midaq Alley*, p. 22)

CONCLUSION

Modern Egyptian authors, working according to new norms of writing that have taken shape during the twentieth century, frequently take advantage of Egyptian society's state of diglossia and utilize both languages, *Fuṣḥā* and *ʿĀmmiyya*, within the same literary texts. This makes it difficult for translators to recognize the elements of *ʿĀmmiyya* contained within this literature. The examples that have been discussed here, in English and Hebrew, make it clear that the difficulty of recognizing *ʿĀmmiyya* elements within literary texts may result in translation problems, including literal translations of figurative expressions,[12] translation shifts[13] and non-equivalent translations.[14] The practical conclusion to be drawn from this is that anyone translating texts of modern Egyptian literature written in this style must bear in mind that they are actually written in two languages, and not treat them as if they were written in only one. Any available means – including dictionaries of both languages and informants who speak the relevant dialect – should be used to solve the problems posed by these texts. If the translator has the opportunity to consult the author directly, as I did when translating the two plays mentioned above, that is even better.

Finally, even after the translator has solved all the problems presented by the source text and has identified all the elements of *ʿĀmmiyya*, he or she will have to cope with a series of questions that emanate both from the state of diglossia

as reflected in the source text and from the linguistic situation in the target language. Should the linguistic differentiation in the source text be reflected at all in the translation, and if so, by what means? Does the target language also function within a state of diglossia, or does the translator have but one language at his disposal? In the former case, are the two languages equivalent to those of the source language, and if so, do the literary norms or the norms of translation permit the use of both languages? I believe that the answers in this case are more numerous than the questions, and they deserve a separate discussion.

Notes

*   This paper reports research whose initial stages are described in my article, "Diglossia and Translation: Yūsuf Idr´ s in Hebrew", in Sasson Somekh (ed.), *Translation as a Challenge: Papers on Translation of Arabic Literature into Hebrew,* Tel-Aviv 1998, pp. 69–82 (in Hebrew). A comprehensive, detailed version is in preparation. I wish to thank Prof. Manfred Woidich, who read a draft of this paper, for his useful comments.

** As an aid to readers who do not know Hebrew, I have added literal translations into English (marked LTE) of all the translations of Arabic texts into Hebrew, with the problematic elements printed in italics. Published translations into English are marked PTE. The ending "Heb" appended to a reference indicates a published Hebrew translation.

1. Much has been written on this issue. See, for example, Eugene E. Nida, *Language Structure and Translation,* selected and introduced by Anwar S. Dil, Stanford, Ca., 1975.

2. There are several intermediate varieties between these two extremes. See, for example, Haim Blanc, "Stylistic

Variations in Spoken Arabic: A Sample of Interdialectal Educated Conversation," in Charles A. Ferguson (ed.), *Contributions to Arabic Linguistics,* Cambridge, Mass., 1964, pp. 79–156; and Al-Saʿʿ d Muḥammad Badawʿ , *Mustawayāt al-ʿarabiyya al-muʿāṣira fʿ miṣr* ("Levels of Contemporary Arabic in Egypt"), Cairo 1973.

3. On the transformation of colloquial Egyptian Arabic into a written language alongside *Fuṣḥā*, in addition to being a spoken one, and on the change in the norms of modern Egyptian drama, see Gabriel M. Rosenbaum, *The Language of Dialogue in Modern Egyptian Drama (Mainly Since 1952),* Tel-Aviv University, 1994 (Ph.D. Thesis, in Hebrew; English abstract: pp. vii–xx; English version in preparation).

4. On norms of translation see, for example, Itamar Even-Zohar, "Decisions in Translating Poetry," *Hasifrut,* 21 (October 1975), pp. 32–45 (in Hebrew; English summary on p. ii); Gideon Toury, *Translational Norms and Literary Translation into Hebrew,* 1930–1945, Tel-Aviv 1977 (in Hebrew); and idem, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond,* Amsterdam–Philadelphia 1995.

5. I often encounter such difficulties in the courses I teach at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, which are attended by native speakers of Hebrew and of various local dialects of Palestinian Arabic.

6. This problem exists in Hebrew as well. Readers in Arabic and Hebrew often discover as they go along that they have wrongly identified the vowels in a certain word and correct their reading accordingly.

7. Helga Rebhan, *Geschichte und Funktion einiger politischer Termini im Arabischen des 19. Jahrhunderts (1798–1882),* Wiesbaden 1986, p. 113. I wish to thank Prof. Manfred Woidich for supplying me with this reference.

8. J.C. Catford, in *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (Oxford, etc., 1978 [first published 1965]), defines translation shifts as "departures from formal correspondence in the process of going from the SL [= source language] to the TL [= target language]," p. 73; "formal correspondence", according to Catford, is "any TL category which may be said to occupy, as nearly as possible, the 'same' place in the economy of the TL as the given SL category occupies in the SL" (*ibid.*, p. 72); on translation shifts see *ibid.*, pp. 73–82.

9. The consonant *q* is nearly always pronounced in colloquial Cairene Arabic as a glottal stop, but it is usually written as in *Fuṣḥā* (with the convention that it is to be pronounced as a glottal stop).

10. A textual equivalent is "any TL form (text or portion of text) which is observed to be the equivalent of a given SL form (text or portion of text)" (Catford, *Linguistic Theory* [above, note 6], p. 27). See also note 14 below.

11. In colloquial Cairene Arabic this word is pronounced *fi ir.*

12. On literal translations see Catford, *Linguistic Theory* (above, note 6), pp. 25–26.

13. See above, note 8.

14. On equivalence in translation see, for example, Catford, *Linguistic Theory* (above, note 6), pp. 27–31, 49–55; and see also above, note 10.

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