

## **A study on the importance of linguistic and Arabic context**

**Moklesur Rehman, Dr. Athar Ali**

Research Scholar, Maharishi University of Information Technology, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, India.

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### **Abstract**

The term Arabic is not quite unequivocal. Some scholars use it to mark the vernacular elements which penetrated mediaeval Arabic texts, others to denote the combination of Standard Arabic and vernacular elements characteristic of these texts. Some even use it without differentiation in both senses.

Therefore, it has been proposed to use and to denote the vernacular elements in mediaeval texts, and to designate the language of these texts, including Standard Arabic and vernacular, and to dub the vernacular elements the Middle Arabic layer of Neo-Arabic. It seems, however, more expedient to reserve the use of the term Middle Arabic for the mixed language of mediaeval texts, containing Standard Arabic, Neo-Arabic, and, as we shall see later, pseudo-correct features, and to call the vernacular component of Middle Arabic Neo-Arabic or, more exactly, the early layer of Neo-Arabic, its later layer being the language of the modern Arabic dialects.

**Keywords:** Arabic Context, Linguistic, Neo-Arabic

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### **Introduction**

The importance of the linguistic study of Middle Arabic is that its Neo-Arabic component, which, as a matter of fact, contains all the features characteristic of modern Arabic dialects, enables us to reconstruct the beginnings of Neo-Arabic and thus to retrieve the missing link between Classical Arabic and the modern dialects.

The ratio of Neo-Arabic in Middle Arabic texts varies greatly<sup>8</sup>. The language of the various Middle Arabic texts constitutes a whole range of styles with infinitely varied mixtures of Classical and Neo-Arabic elements. Alongside of texts reflecting Classical Arabic with only slight Neo-Arabic admixture, others are written in some kind of slightly classified as Neo-Arabic, and between these two extremes all the possible varieties of mixture occur<sup>[1]</sup>.

As a rule, the writers wanted to write in the language of prestige, viz. in Classical Arabic, yet, because of their inability to master its complex grammar, elements of their spoken language, viz. Neo-Arabic, penetrated their writings. Yet in the course of time, a certain mixture of Classical and Neo-Arabic elements came to be thought of as a literary language in its own rights, employed even by authors who were well able to write in a language'.

So some authors employed classical language when they addressed higher layers of their audience, but a more vernacular style when writing for lower strata. The author of a commentary to the Sayings of the Fathers, attributed to Maimonides's grandson", written in a class-sized Neo-Arabic, had no doubt a much better knowledge of Classical Arabic than reflected by his writing; this is borne out by the fact that he uses the pronominal suffixes of the third person generally in accordance with the rules of Classical, Arabic, thus presupposing the knowledge of vowel changes in declensions This proves that he wanted to write in Middle, rather than in Classical Arabic. As a rule, however, the writers' purpose was to write in the language of prestige, viz. Classical Arabic. This is clearly demonstrated by the existence of a third set of

features, alongside with Classical and Neo Arabic elements, viz. pseudo-correct features (including hypercorrections, half-corrections and malapropisms)<sup>[2]</sup>.

In their desire to use Classical Arabic, of which, however, they were not conversant enough, Middle Arabic authors often applied? (Classical?) forms wrongly. So replete are Middle Arabic texts with pseudo-corrections that a new theory of these features can be based on Middle Arabic texts, and, as a matter of fact, the term? (pseudo-correction?) itself was coined in connection with Middle Arabic.

It is the coexistence of three sets of features, viz. of Classical Arabic, Neo-Arabic, and pseudo-corrections that makes the linguistic interpretation of Middle Arabic texts so precarious. Deviations from Classical Arabic need not reflect genuine Neo-Arabic. They may not only be, in some restricted cases, to be sure, obsolete Neo-Arabic features, retained as characteristic of a Middle Arabic literary standard but they may very often exhibit pseudo-corrections, which even may become productive

### **Research Study**

Generally speaking, one must analyze the features of every text or group of texts, before one can draw distinctions between genuine Neo Arabic and pseudo-correct forms. Only if a feature appears more or less consistently in a text or a group of texts, may it be regarded as a reflection of living Neo-Arabic, and even then the danger of pseudo corrections that have become productive (or of an obsolete Neo-Arabic feature that has become a part of Middle Arabic literary standard) looms large. Constant and careful comparison with late Neo-Arabic, viz. modern dialects, may be of great help<sup>[3]</sup>. The oldest documents in Middle Arabic are early papyri, as a rule reflecting Classical Arabic with not too conspicuous Neo-Arabic elements, which however suffice to reconstruct early Neo-Arabic.

These documents, datable to the first three Islamic centuries, the earliest ones being from A.H., as far as they deviate from

Classical Arabic, unmistakably deviate in the direction of Neo-Arabic. Their language, therefore, lies fully in the mainstream of Middle Arabic and thus establishes the early roots of Neo-Arabic. To these unlitary papyri, including many official documents, one may add some literary papyri belonging to the literature, including the Jami of Wahb from the second Islamic century.

It seems probable that, owing to the disdain of orthodox circles for secular subjects, including grammar, literature was composed in a language not free from Neo Arabic elements.

#### **Among Texts of Muslim Authorship Written In Middle**

Arabic, Usama Munqidh's memoirs, written in rather vulgar language, has to be mentioned, rising the problem of why the author, known as writer of book composed in irreproachable Classical Arabic, produced a work replete with Neo-Arabic elements.

A. Spitaler published studies of certain constructions in Middle Arabic literature, and also stressed the importance of profane scholarly popular literature for the study of Middle Arabic. Profane scholarly literature often remained beyond the pale of 'arabiyya, especially scientific literature, often composed by non-Muslim authors.

One of the earliest studies of scholarly Middle Arabic is A. Muller's study of Ibn Abl Usaybi'a's (13<sup>th</sup> century) history of physicians; despite having been written almost one hundred years ago, it still contains important material for those interested in the development of Arabic in general and Middle Arabic in particular<sup>[4]</sup>.

Muller has clearly understood the problems of Middle Arabic, which is the more to be stressed, since even modern editors sometimes are not aware of the linguistic character of Middle Arabic texts and also added an important glossary of words and expressions not to be found in current dictionaries.

Late historiographic works are also composed in Middle Arabic: W. M. Brinner analysed the language of a chronicle from the 14<sup>th</sup> century from Damascus and K. V. Zettersteen wrote an extensive introduction to his edition of historiographers from the Mamluk period.

Under the supervision of H. Blanc from the Hebrew University, T. Hason extensively analyzed the language of an Egyptian historiographer from the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In the field of geography, F. Wiistenfeld's linguistic notes to his edition of Y'aquit are not of special importance. For the language of scientific translation one may consult M. Simon's introduction to his edition of Galen as well as G. Bergstrdsser 's structures who, however, went, in our opinion, too far in his criticism of Simon.

#### **Significance of the Study**

As to the Middle Arabic of popular literature, H. L. Fleischer, the highest authority in Arabic philology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, published as early as 1836 important notes to the language of the Arabian Nights. Fleischer may, indeed, be considered the founder of the scholarly treatment of Middle Arabic, the more so since he recognized the cultural importance of Middle Arabic as early as 1854, described in a masterly way some Christian-Arabic from Sinai and published between 1863-8439 his erudite notes on de Sacy's Gramm airearabe, which are a veritable storehouse of Middle Arabic phenomena<sup>[5]</sup>.

H. Wehr carefully described the linguistic characteristic of a 14<sup>th</sup> century containing popular stories. In this context also R.

Paret's study' of the story of 'Umar an-Nu'man may be mentioned.

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7. V. BANETH (N 101), passim; cf. especially the late texts enumerated ibid., pp. 144-45, and BANETH'S conclusion, p. 153, that this phenomenon in late texts reflects traditional orthography.
8. Later published in his Kleinere Schriften (N 37), III, pp. 425-39. For other JudaeoArabic Maghrebine poems cf. e.g. E. MAINZ, Quelques poesies judeo-arabes du Manuscrit 411 de la bibliotheque du Vatican, in Journal Asiatique 1949; 237:51-83.
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