

MADIHA DOSS

(Cairo University)

SOME REMARKS ON THE ORAL FACTOR IN ARABIC LINGUISTICS

Linguistic studies dealing with orality are concerned with written as well as oral productions. In the latter "the linguistic specificity of vocal communication"¹ is put under observation. Written productions interest the linguist inasmuch as they reveal the presence of oral strategies of speech involved (JOHNSTONE, pp. 216-217).

In this paper I will deal with oral features appearing in written productions of Arabic. This paper has four parts. First, I present the characteristics of orality as they appear in the general literature. Next, I summarize the opinions of linguists who tackled the question of orality in Arabic. Thirdly, I discuss my findings on the written Arabic language of an Egyptian manuscript dating back to the 17th century, the analysis of which reveals features of orality. Finally, I briefly present some preliminary remarks on various aspects of linguistic productions which would seem to reveal a speech-like "mentality". These observations will certainly need further substantiation in the future, they are presently no more than intuitive remarks.

1. Studies on Orality: definition of its main characteristics

The characteristics of oral thought and expression have been described by ONG among other authors.² It should be kept in mind that ONG was more concerned with the "mentality" of the oral culture and its difference from the written one than with purely linguistic matters. It is important to note furthermore that when dealing with matters of orality one is almost necessarily driven to define the culture of the written.

Among the characteristics recognized by ONG to distinguish oral culture are the following:

a) Oral style is more additive than subordinative. An oral text (or a text emanating from an orally minded culture) will exhibit a larger number of coordinative elements (as 'and' or *wa* in Arabic or Hebrew) than subordinative elements (as 'then', 'when', 'while'). The justification for this remark is that in writing, the style is more elaborate and less dependent on the "existential context" than in oral communication. Coordination requires less organization than subordination.

b) Oral style is described by ONG, among others, as more aggregative than analytic.

¹ Paul ZUMTHOR 1983, p. 31.

² Walter J. ONG 1982, pp. 36-50.

Closer to the style of formulas, oral discourse exhibits a higher use of epithets and formulaic expressions than does written language.³

c) When following an oral text, there are no means for the listener to recover information which has been missed (either because the listener was distracted or for any other reason). The reader can always re-read the written material to recover what he has missed. Thus oral communication is usually more redundant than written. The feature of repetitiveness and redundancy has been observed by most authors dealing with the oral phenomenon.⁴

d) Another divergence between oral and written production is the need in the latter for a greater explicitness in communicating the information which shows in the more frequent contextualization found in writing.

Other characteristics of orality have been described in the literature, but for the purpose of this study I will limit myself to the features mentioned above.

2. Research on Orality in Arabic

Studies concerned with orality in Arabic linguistics seem to deal principally with Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) rather than with the dialects whether spoken or written.

First let us mention the work of JOHNSTONE (1990). In considering the style of an Arab essayist of this century, Sāṭi' al-Ḥuṣrī, JOHNSTONE observes features such as repetition, parataxis and formulaicity, which have been recognized in the literature as typical features of orality or of a style marked by a high residue of orality. However, after submitting one of the author's texts to a thorough analysis, JOHNSTONE concluded that the characteristics mentioned above are not the result of "unplannedness"⁵, since the text observed appears as being quite elaborate and carefully planned. Rather than attributing the features of repetition, parataxis and formulaicity to spokenness, JOHNSTONE (1990, p. 226) suggests that the oral character of this text and more generally of MSA is "a hold-over in writing, of earlier oral norms and requirements". According to JOHNSTONE, there is "a historical link between contemporary prose and older spoken discourse forms" and it is especially the case for the rhetorical style. Moreover linguistic and sociolinguistic factors contribute to give an appearance of spoken-like features to the texts considered (1990, p. 226 to 229). Concerning the linguistic factor, the author demonstrates that the syntax of MSA is by definition paratactic, and that there are actually very few ways of making real subordinate clauses. As for the sociolinguistic factor, JOHNSTONE draws our attention towards the fact that in their use of the language in formal situations, Arabs pay as much attention to the form as to the content. Language is made "poetic" by such means as repetitions, parataxis, and formulas.

Another author who takes orality into account as an explanation of certain features in Arabic writing is SA'ADEDDINE (1987a, 1987b, more particularly 1989, and 1992).

SA'ADEDDINE's main argument, whose approach remains very close to concerns of

³ Albert B. LORD 1960, p. 30.

⁴ Denise FRANÇOIS 1977, p. 39; Barbara JOHNSTONE 1990, pp. 215-219.

⁵ Term coined by Elinor OCHS (1979), "Planned and unplanned discourse". In: *Discourse and Syntax*, ed. by Talmy GIVON. New York, pp. 51-80, cited by B. Johnstone (see ref. 4 above).

language acquisition, is to show that the Arabic language has often been described in deprecatory terms by scholars because they compared it to a different linguistic system which does not make use of the same elements as Arabic for text development. In particular the author refers to the comparison between Arabic and English. In their comparison, translators as well as scholars have not been aware of the fact that English makes use of a “visual mode” of development whereas Arabic is based on an aural⁶ one. By this SA'ADEDDINE (1989, p. 38) means that an Arabic text whose author chooses to develop it *aurally*, will bear “markers of orality as repetition in the channel; recurrent and plain lexis; overemphasis; exaggeration; the repetition of specific syntactic structures; discreteness; loose packaging of information; an abundance of floor- and attention-holding expressions; a lack of apparent coherence; an abundance of improvisatory elements (including 'repair'); rhetorical organizers and face-to-face interactants; development by addition and accumulation; lack of self-awareness in the writing process, and a simplicity of thematic structure. But if the producer opts to develop his text *visually*, all markers of orality will be pruned...”

Oral features preserved in writing are thus considered a mode of expression proper to Arabic language users. This is a mode of communication in which a primary need is the preservation of “warmth” (my term). This includes the participation of the reader or what SA'ADEDDINE calls the need to “establish a relation of informality and solidarity with the receivers of the text”.

Although this is not the appropriate context to analyze SA'ADEDDINE's ideas, it seems to me that there are at least two arguments one should bear in mind while considering them. The first is whether, in its evolution, Arabic does not necessarily evolve in the same sense as the Western languages in adopting the visual rather than the aural mode of writing. The second argument, related to the first, is to discover in what measure translations affect Arabic writing by subjecting it to the influence of the linear characteristics of writing.

3. Dialectal versus oral features

Diglossia, or the presence of two registers of language use has long been recognized as a determinant factor in Arabic linguistics. Since FERGUSON used this term in reference to Arabic in 1959, the concept has been enlarged and I am more inclined to adopt the term of pluriglossia as does DICHY (1993) who defines it as the presence of two or more “varieties” or glosses in the context of one and the same language. The new concept presents the advantage of accounting for a higher degree of linguistic diversity in the Arabic speaking communities.

Although a large variety of degrees do exist between the literary and the dialect, one can retain for the purpose of this paper, the presence of the two registers mentioned.

Arabic dialects have been the object of numerous descriptions, but the distinction between dialect and orality is rarely recognized. The terms oral and orality are most often

⁶ This term is defined by Akram SA'ADEDDINE (1989, p. 38) as “implying extratemporaneously” development; on the other hand, the term aural is used by W. ONG as referring to sound both produced and perceived.

used to refer to the use of the dialect as opposed to the literary language, rather than referring to any specific feature of vocal communication. It is necessary as for any other language production to make the difference between oral and dialect features, be it for the study of the oral or the written varieties. Linguistic factors such as intonation for instance, are related to orality whereas the study of the verbal system of a given dialect is to be part of its dialectal system. Orality is part of the dialectal production but features of orality can be detected in written occurrences as well. To put it in other words, we can quote MESCHONNIC (1982, p. 18): "Il y a des écritures orales, et des discours parlés sans oralité." In view of these reservations, let me make the following remarks concerning Arabic:

a) Orality is not a synonym for dialect. In describing a dialect one can omit the oral characteristics of the spoken language. The extreme case of such a study would be the establishment of the ideal grammar of spoken Sa‘idi or Damascene, in which the various aspects of the dialect are indeed described but from which the actual features of "talking voices" (such as repetition, ambiguity, ellipsis) are absent. Features of orality are not to be confused with the different aspects of the spoken language. This point of view has not been adopted in any study of the Arabic language but we must start to do so.

b) As for the written representation of the dialect,⁷ oral features are not necessarily nor exclusively to be found in it. An author can proceed to write the dialect while adopting the constraints of writing and using its code, he can do so by making his text explicit (for instance, in choosing to use explicit pronouns, and to express the junction between the phrases by means of the explicit conjunctions), non-redundant and far from improvisation, or well planned.

c) The literary language or usage of MSA can exhibit features of orality as has been observed by JOHNSTONE and SA‘ADEDDINE.

4. Oral-residue in writing reconsidered

Here we can begin to go beyond JOHNSTONE and SA‘ADEDDINE, who both consider the oral features of the texts they studied not as marks of "unplannedness" or neglect in the writing process, but rather as elements constituting characteristics of the linguistic requirement of the text (JOHNSTONE) or of a characteristic of the Arabic language as a whole (SA‘ADEDDINE).

In what follows, I shall be considering oral features appearing in a historical text, in order to show that the oral residue appearing in writing can be the result of different factors. Specifically I wish to propose the sociolinguistic factor.

4.1. Historical data: *Waqāyi‘ Miṣr al-Qāhira*

The text I shall first consider is a still unedited version of a manuscript which goes back to the second half of the 17th century. *Waqāyi‘ Miṣr al-Qāhira* is not the title of the text, which actually does not have one, but simply the words with which it begins:

⁷ Written representations of the dialectal register have existed for a long time. Al-Širbīnī's *Hazz al-Quḥūf* (in the middle of the seventeenth century) is the most famous text exhibiting long passages of colloquial material. In the modern period the use of dialect in writing is not limited to drama or to poetry but extends to novels as well.

*hadā maǧmū‘ laṭīf yaštamil ‘ala waqāyi‘ miṣr al-qāhira min 1100 ila 1150*⁸

“This is a pleasant assemblage recalling the events which occurred in *Miṣr al-Qāhira* from 1100 to 1150 [Hijrī]”

This period in the late seventeenth century is actually that of the overall decline in authority of the Ottoman Pashas sent to Egypt from Istanbul, and the take-over of power by the Mamluk élite. The militias (or *ojaqs*) originally intended to protect the Pasha, launched endless wars against each other. Although official history fails to recall this fact, the country was then divided into two factions the Faqārīs and the Qāsimīs.⁹ It was a period of great turmoil since the whole country followed one or the other of these two factions, internal wars affected not just the centre of power, *Miṣr al-Qāhira*, but the provinces as well, where the warfare was continued by interposed Bedouin tribes.

A fact worth mentioning, not just for scholarly reasons, but for the argument of this paper is the fact that the manuscript is known through five copies dating from different periods and in no way identical to each other. I shall return to this point later.

The author of the text, Muṣṭafā ibn al-Ḥāgg Ibrāhīm AL-QINĀLI, is not mentioned by any of the biographical sources of the period. His name just appears in all of the versions of the manuscript where he introduces himself as *al-‘abd al-faqīr al-muqīr bi-ḍ-ḍanb wa-t-taqṣīr* “The humble slave I am, who recognizes his faults and shortcomings”. Although claiming impartiality, he shows a clear leaning towards the party of the Qāsimīs, and all through his text, often in a confusing way, relates the daily events happening around the Citadel, centre of power, and of the effects of the warfare on the population, merchants, artisans and ordinary people of Cairo, *Miṣr al-Qāhira*. The minute details he gives of the battles leads one to think that he was himself, if not a regular soldier in one of the militias, then at least a clerk or someone whose function brought him into close contact with military activities.

4.2. The language of the text

After introducing the text, let us come back to what interests us, the language in which it was written. For the historian ĞABARTI, who used AL-QINĀLI's text as well as other sources for the period preceding the time he has witnessed, these texts are no more than “papers of soldiers of popular origin, written in a bad style, lacking organization and presenting numerous deficiencies in the narration of the events” (AL-ĞABARTI, vol. I, p. 6).

The language thus described by the official historian ĞABARTI is a variety of substandard literary language, mixed with numerous elements of the dialect.

⁸ The transcription I have followed in this paper is not a very precise one. For a text of the seventeenth century it is wiser to avoid transcribing the vowels since only the consonantal structure of the roots is explicit in the original text. However, to facilitate the reading of the examples, I have decided to adopt a “free” transcription.

⁹ Very little is known about the factors of conflict between the two opposing factions. As the historian André RAYMOND (1966, pp. 98-99) puts it: “ce que nous connaissons de l'origine des partis qāsimite et fiqārīte est en partie du domaine de la légende.” For historical information on this period, see P. M. HOLT (1961 and 1963).

4.2.1. Features of the dialect

The main features of the dialectal use appearing in the text can be summarized as follows:

a) the use of the particle *b-* attached to the imperfect of the verb, usually recognized as the most obvious feature of the dialect. This feature occurs several times in all of the versions of the text, as in the example:

wa-kānu byaklu ʔūl il-nahār lam dāqū zād

“and they were eating since all day long they had not tasted a thing”

As appears in this example, one of the functions of the *b-* attached to the verb is to give the value of the progressive¹⁰;

b) forms of the pronoun:

inti “you” (feminine form)

intu “you” (plural form), both showing through the written form, the use of the dialect;

c) forms of the demonstrative *da, di* as they occur in a slogan of the text:

bāšā ya bāšā ya ‘ayn al-qamla

ayš qallak ‘aqlak ta ‘mal di l- ‘amla

bāšā ya bāšā ya ‘ayn al-šīr

ayš allak ‘aqlak tidabbir da t-tadbīr

“Pasha! Oh pasha, you eye of louse

What hit your mind to do what you did?”

“Pasha! Oh pasha, you eye of the fish

What hit your mind to behave like you did?”;

d) a few cases of the use of the relative pronoun *illi* with the prevalence of the literary form *alladi* and more rarely its plural variant:

atā ‘and al-madfa ‘ally mawḏū ‘fawq Bāb al-Zāwiya

“he came up to the canon which is set on the top of Bab al-Zawiya”.

4.2.2. Substandard use of literary Arabic

• Although the relative pronoun appears in the form *alladi* and its plural derivative more frequently than in its dialectal counterpart *illi*, this literary form does not obey the rules of agreement, as the following examples show:

yangami ‘u al-nās alladi fī Miṣr

“the people who were in Cairo”

hāt al-warāqa alladi ‘indak

“bring over the paper which you have”

(in this example, the feminine agreement of the pronoun is disregarded).

• Among all the negatives employed, it is the particle *lam* which appears most frequently, however, here again its use does not correspond to the norm, as can be observed in the following examples:

¹⁰ The function of the particle *b-* has been dealt with in several studies, for its use in another text of the same period, see Humphrey DAVIES (1981, p. 203).

in lam yakūn

“if he is not” (the verb appears in the indicative rather than the jussive form)

ḥādīhi al-madāfi‘ w-al-banādiq lam biya‘milū ‘amal

“these canons and rifles are of no effect”

(in this example *lam* accompanies a dialectal form)

ana lam arsalt lakum amārah

“I did not send you a signal”

(*lam* here accompanies the perfect form in complete disagreement with the rules of its usage).

These are only a few of the dialectal and substandard features appearing in the language of the text which belongs to what MEISELS (1979) has coined informal written Arabic (IWA) and which he defines as follows: “extemporaneous writing, the social circumstances around the production of which do not pressure the writer to strictly observe the language quality of his writing, such as in ordinary interpersonal correspondance, personal records, drafts, and the like.”

However, what renders this text of particular interest, in the context of IWA and of what has generally been coined Middle Arabic, are its oral characteristics which are found at two levels:

- the text as a whole and the conditions of its production,
- the linguistic features of orality which the text exhibits.

4.3. *Waqāyi‘ Miṣr al-Qāhira*: a planned text or an *aide-mémoire* to oral representation?

As I mentioned above, in 4.1., the manuscript is represented by five different copies, spread (or scattered) through various libraries of the world.¹¹ Besides, it is worth adding that another text of the same period *Kitāb al-durra al-muṣāna fī aḥbār al-kināna* by al-Amīr Aḥmad AL-DIMURDĀŠI, shows more than a passing similarity with the *Waqāyi‘* in that it recounts the same events. Both texts cover the same period and are written in very much the same linguistic register. The resemblance between the two chronicles extends as far as both authors mentioning themselves as having witnessed the same historical event, which is related in these lines of verse:

QINĀLI:

qal mu'allif ḥādīhi al-waqāyi' wa huwa wāqif bi-al-dīwān sa'atha

bi-dīwān qal'at al-ḡabal isma'iliyyīn nālu al-'aṭab

Ġarkas Muḥammad al-kabīr li-al-tariḥ qad ḡalab

“The author of these *Waqāyi‘* said, while standing at that moment in the Diwan:

In the Diwan of the Citadel Ismailis witnessed defeat

The Circassian Muḥammad the Great To his time came out glorious”

DIMURDĀŠI:

kan al-'abd al-ḥaqīr sā'atha [wāqif] fī al-dīwān miṭl ḡayrī min al-nās wa-īda bī qult:

¹¹ For details on the existent copies of the manuscript, see DOSS (1991, pp. 14-17).

bi-dīwān qal ʿat al-ğabal *isma ʿiliyyīn nālū al- ʿaṭab*
Ġarkas Muḥammad fī ʿaṣrih *li-tariḥih qad ġalāb*

“The poor slave [I am] was then standing in the Diwan, as others like me, and so I said:

In the Diwan of the Citadel Ismailis witnessed defeat
 The Circassian Muḥammad in his time Came out victorious.”

Returning to QINĀLI's chronicle, observation of the aforementioned extant five copies, permits me to classify them into two families or two groups. The first includes four copies; the second is constituted by a single one. The differences between the two groups are not limited, as is often the case in versions of the same manuscript, to mere orthographic variations but involve a totally divergent order in accounting for the events. This dissimilarity also appears in the dates as well as in the interpretation of some events. However the language of the two groups of manuscripts belongs to the same register and exhibits a similar degree of mixture of dialectal and substandard literary Arabic elements.

From the foregoing, it seems plausible to hypothesize an oral origin for the chronicles mentioned. Very much in the same manner as for written texts traced back to an oral transmission, the series of chronicles considered share the same content, while varying in form. The reason for this would be that the text was for a time transmitted orally, and then later written down (by different scribes), the transliteration was performed more in the spirit of keeping an *aide-mémoire*, than in that of an organized and premeditated text. The content of the chronicle may well have constituted an interesting topic for the soldiers of that period who enjoyed listening to stories involving their kin and masters. Only later did the need appear to have these stories recorded for posterity.

4.4. The oral features of the text

The hypothesis of an oral origin of the chronicle is enhanced because the texts exhibit various features of orality which I will try to set forth in this section.

a) Pronoun ambiguity:

Some passages of the text are hard to understand because of the ambiguity of pronominal reference. The following examples are but a few among many in which it is almost impossible to understand the passage out of context:

wa-nirga ʿila ʿUṭmān beyk Ḍulfaqār aḥad iqḷīm al-Manṣūra wa-arsal lahā Ṣāliḥ Kāšif min taḥt yadih awwal sana wa-fī al-ṯāniya tazawwağ bihānim bint ʿIwāḍ beyk

“To come back to ʿUṭmān Bey Ḍulfaqār, he took over the region of al-Manṣūra and sent Ṣāliḥ Kāšif to represent him during the first year and in the second he married the daughter of ʿIwāḍ Bey.”

Without reading the following pages, it is unclear whether the master or follower got married. The context as well as the proper intonation accompanying would probably have removed the ambiguity from these written sentences.

In another example the referent of the pronoun is absent from the text; only common knowledge of the political and historical situation could provide the absent information:

nirga ʿ li-firqat al-qāsimiyya, tafarragū ʿala ḏālik al-mawkib, naḍarū fih, lam

wağadū aḥad minhum, li-kawnih lam ʿarrafa aḥad minhum, li-kawn anna marādih yiḏhir al-faqāriyya ila ahl Miṣr

“Coming back to the Qāsimī's, they saw this procession, they watched it, and found none of them [of their own clan] among its ranks, since **he** had informed none of them, since **his** will was to parade the power of the Faqārī's.”

Although the name of the person to whom **he** and **his** is not explicitly revealed, it should have been clear to anyone that it was Zayn al-Faqār, the leader of the victorious Faqārī faction.

It can be assumed that for the listener or the reader of the account during this period, the references were clear since the text is part of a living situation.

b) Asyndetic constructions have been observed to be a factor common to Middle and colloquial Arabic (HOPKINS 1984, pp. 228-236), but this feature has not been linked to the factor of orality. In what follows, I shall be more concerned with studying the asyndetic relation which can be observed in the junction between phrases, as well as the ellipsis of argumentative elements.

i) ellipsis of the junction between phrases:

aqāmū ḥaṭṭūh fi-l-siġn, ḥallas minhu al-muta ʿaḥḥir w-al-mut ʿa ṭalāq al-qādirīn

“They put him in prison, he extorted from him the arrears and the compensation¹² as is practiced by the rich in their divorce.”

The original text, unlike the translation, does not exhibit a link between the two elements of the phrase, the comparison is not expressed explicitly by the preposition **as**. One is to believe that the intonation, of which any written text is necessarily deprived, originally expressed the semantics of the comparison.

ii) ellipsis of argumentative elements:

naḥnu kayfa namluk al-bab min al-qāsimiyya? Aḥmad Baġdadli bašodabāši wa-Ġalab Ḥalīl kathoda l-waqt wa-Murād Ġawīš bayt al-māl, wa-l-bakġiyya min tarafihim?

“How can we take over the military corps from the Qāsimiyya **if** Aḥmad Baġdadli is *bašodabāši* (chief of a military corps company), **if** Ġalab Ḥalīl is *kathoda* (lieutenant), **if** Murad Ġawīš is in charge of tax collection, and **if** the chief of the guard is on their side.”¹³

The last example of asyndesis I shall give is, I believe, a very good illustration of the ambiguity which can result from a text closer to the code of speech than to the code of writing. Indeed vocal communication relies on intonation as a vital element in the production of meaning; punctuation compensates only to a small degree for the role of intonation. The text of QINĀLI does not, of course, even bear the marks of punctuation. In some cases, the intelligibility of the text depends on restoring the intonation which we

¹² *Muta ʿaḥḥir* is the term used to designate the sum of money to be paid to the woman in the case of an eventual divorce; *mut ʿa* designates the sum of money payed to the divorcee in compensation of the pleasure one has had with her.

¹³ In the conflict between the Qāsimī and the Faqārī clans, the latter are plotting to take over the Janissary military corps but an obstacle remains: the main officers of the Janissaries are from the opposite clan.

suppose accompanied the phrase, as is the case in the following example:

kanat ahl Miṣr min qadīm al-zamān firqatayn ‘askar wa-ra‘iyya rāya bayḍa wa-rāya ḥamra

“The people of Egypt, military as well as civilian, have been divided since early times into two factions, the white flag and the red flag”.

In the original Arabic text, *‘askar wa-ra‘iyya* can be interpreted not as an intermediate group of words defining more precisely the constitution of the people of Egypt, but as the two factions dividing the country. In the translation, the meaning is obtained by means of the punctuation marks.

c) Word order can also be a sign of orality in a written text. In the following examples, focus is no doubt one of the factors justifying the word order used. I have intentionally preserved the word order of the original text in the translation of these sentences:

aḥad al-ṣandūq ṣāhibuh wa-tawaḡah

“He took the chest his owner and left”

rattab al-ḥarrāba ‘Iwāḍ beyk

“He prepared the battle ‘Iwāḍ Bey”

fataḥu bāb al-ḥadīd al-saqqāyīn

“They opened the al-Ḥadīd Gate, the water-sellers”.

In all of the preceding examples the same word-order is followed, that is V-O-S. It is as if the sentences had been composed first as verbal phrases formed of a verb and an object, with the subject appended as an afterthought responding to a need for further precision. This structure is reminiscent of oral behaviour in which information adds up as one talks, in some cases, by the addition of details while the utterance takes place.

d) In some cases, the notion of “sentence” is impossible to apply to the utterances of the *Waqāyi‘*, as is often the case in oral productions:

naḥnu qāṣidīn al-ṣulḥ ‘ala kul ḥal aḥyar min al-šarr yatawallad minhu al-fasād

“We ask for reconciliation, in any case better than evil, it engenders corruption”.

The phrases which constitute this utterance come as a series of successive elements, each dependent upon the previous. The notion of sentence is impossible to apply to it.

After having reviewed the linguistic features supporting the hypothesis of the oral origin of the chronicle, I would like to underline a few more general aspects of the text which increase its resemblance to an oral account.

To begin with, the chronicle does not bear a title, which is often the case in orally transmitted accounts.

On the other hand, in one of the versions of the manuscript, the name of the author is accompanied by the qualification of *al-maddāḥ* or panegyrist, a detail which could lead us to think that the role of QINĀLI was that of relating the deeds and adventures of eminent people, and more particularly of the military élite of his time, as he does in the chronicle.

As is the case of texts in the oral tradition, the characters of the *Waqāyi‘* are often mentioned with the same “stock epithets” or “epic clichés” (as they were coined by LORD 1960) attached to them, such as *fā‘il al-ḥayrāt* “the benefactor”, or *ḍāḥik al-sinn* “the smiling-one”, or *qālib sukkar saḡīr al-sinn kabīr al-miqdār* “a small piece of sugar,

young in age, high in quality", all these positive qualifications always serving one and the same character of the chronicle: Ismā'īl ibn 'Iwaḍ.

If the hypothesis of an orally based text is correct, one could imagine that at some point during its transmission, the reciters of the account decided to put it down on paper to ensure its proper transmission even if orally.

5. Conclusion: Oral residues in writing and new perspectives on the study of Middle Arabic

In my opinion, the study of QINĀLI's chronicle responds to two concerns in Arabic dialectology.

The first, constituting the main subject of this article, is the analysis of the oral factor as it appears in a written text. The features of orality I have pointed out do indeed appear elsewhere (in contemporary written texts) and it is my intent to develop the research of this phenomenon in a coming study. We would expect the interference of oral behaviour in the writing process where a low percentage of literacy and a very widespread network of audiovisual medias coexist. Literacy itself should be redefined, since it is not sufficient to be simply able to decode (read) or to code (write) a language in order to be fully literate. This is even more true for a language such as Arabic, where the presence of diglossia or pluriglossia is an important factor to be taken into account in the process of acquiring the competences of reading and writing. For, as long as the norms and standards of the modern literary language have not been clearly set and taught at the school level of education, one should, on the one hand, expect the uses of written Arabic to show a wide degree of variation and, on the other hand, for it to exhibit features of orality. It has been shown (ACHARD 1988) that the difference between oral and written productions is not so much linguistic as discursive. A literate who is competent in both reading and writing can still ignore certain rules of writing (such as the necessity to be explicit through the use of pronouns, the use of syndesis or of proper punctuation). This was probably the case with QINĀLI, neither a historian nor a writer, who wrote using whatever means he had at his disposal. The result is a text which, as we have seen, exhibits features of the dialect, a high residue of spoken-like features as well as an approximate knowledge of literary Arabic.

This variety of writing can still be observed today. One case I have been able to analyze are the letters produced by some public writers in Cairo (DOSS 1993). The linguistic analysis of some of the letters shows that the public writers, whom people address in order to have documents drafted, use a register close to the spoken and even to the vocal language (use of *wa*, additiveness, etc.). Features of orality appearing in writing are not just limited to handwritten material; in some cases printed data as well exhibits features which seem due to an oral approach to writing. The language of the newspapers can be an example, particularly in the use of punctuation, as well as in the manner spoken discourse is rendered in writing.¹⁴ One can hardly say of a newspaper

¹⁴ For instance, it is very common in the language of the Egyptian press to find indirect speech utterances turning abruptly into direct speech quotations. I have explained such constructions appearing in the *Waqāyi'* as features of orality (DOSS 1991, pp. 265-266).

editor that he is only on the edge of literacy, however, the writing of certain journalists is marked by aspects possibly revealing an oral mentality.

If oral-residue in writing is a recent concern in Arabic linguistics, the question of Middle Arabic has long been a subject of description and analysis. We owe most of our knowledge on Middle Arabic to the numerous and valuable works of Joshua BLAU. However, the notion of Middle Arabic should be extended to include the linguistic productions of various periods of history and not just that of the beginnings of Arabization. It should also include the linguistic productions of various social groups, and not just the writings of non-Muslims, who being more distant from the norms and ideals of classical Arabic, were more free to express themselves in a variety close to the spoken language. The notion of Middle Arabic can serve to designate a number of varieties of written Arabic sharing certain features, such as a substandard use of literary Arabic as well as a closeness to the dialect. According to this broader definition, QINĀLI's text is part of the Middle Arabic data. The analysis of more texts of this variety can be of a great usefulness to the understanding of the history of Arabic and also of its present day social uses.

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