



Dialectological and sociolinguistic analysis of the unpublished manuscript of al-Ālātī :Set of proverbs written in dialect by the late Sheik Hassan al-Ālātī

Samar Chenouda¹

¹ Doctorat en langue et littérature arabes, Membre associé au laboratoire de recherches CERMOM-INALCO
 Domaine de recherches : Langue et littérature dialectales égyptiennes
 Merci beaucoup, E-mail: samar.chenouda@gmail.com

Abstract

*This study of the inedit manuscript of Sheikh Hassan al-Ālātī aims to shed light on the erotic dialect and enrich a field little explored by research on contemporary Arabic dialectology. Our aim is to study the locutions and writing processes in this manuscript, which differs from Ālātī's first book *Tarwīḥ al-nufūs wa moḍḥek al-'abūs* (The appeasement of the spirits that makes the most worried people laugh) in which he excels at varying the terms and situations of humour, but does not approach it using erotic insult terms. In this study, the emphasis is on analysing the semantic connotations of the vocabularies and placing them in the Egyptian historical context. It proposes to establish a dialectological and sociolinguistic reading of this manuscript that deserves to be explored since Ālātī is considered among the precursors of humour in Egypt.*

Keywords: Eroticism, Dialectology, Sociology, Humour, Writing processes, Sociolinguistic analysis.

The choice of subject

This study about the unpublished manuscript of Sheikh Hassan al- Ālātīⁱ is the first of its kind since it is not yet known to scholars of Arabic and Egyptian literature. Indeed, there is a book by this author, published in three parts in Egypt towards the end of the 19th century, entitled *Tarwīḥ al-nufūs wa moḍḥek al-'abūs* (The appeasement of the spirits that makes the most worried people laughⁱⁱ).

This unpublished manuscript is full of erotic insults and sexual terms. Thus, the aim of our study is to establish a dialectological and sociolinguistic reading that deserves to be explored since Ālātī is considered among the precursors of humor in Egypt. In his *Dictionary of Egyptian Customs, Traditions, and Expressions*, Ahmad Amīn mentions that Ālātī spent his time in a cafe in the al-Sayyida district of Cairo, which he named *Al-Maḍḥakḥāna al-kubrā* (The Great House of Laughter). Amīn said, "Sheikh Ālātī presided over the meeting in this cafe: the men started the discussion, going from one topic to another until midnight, in the meantime, they sang Zajal, told stories, etc.". » (Ahmad Amin, 2012, p. 22).

Moreover, this study can shed light on the field of this literary genre of erotic dialect and enrich a field little explored by research on contemporary Arabic dialectology. It should be pointed out that this manuscript differs from Ālātī's first book in which he excelled in varying the terms and situations of humor, but does not approach it using erotic insult terms. Hence the importance of analyzing its semantic connotations and placing it in the Egyptian historical context.

Presentation

The analysis of Ālātī's manuscriptⁱⁱⁱ allows us to easily decree that his writing is focused on eroticism, insults, sexism, inspired by the virile society in Egypt. The image of this blind man whose humor is so disturbing opens the way to a multitude of expressions more complex than we think. He says, "It is a collection of proverbs written in dialect by the late Sheik Hassan al- Ālātī," a remarkable oxymoron in which the adjective "deceased" contradicts the fact that he is alive and tells these proverbs.

So there are humorous passages that make us laugh, it is about good humor because the one that makes us laugh imposes a brief reflection on us. Faced with the text of Ālātī that leaves us speechless or awakens our anger sometimes: should we reject it or try to decipher its meaning? Some will be satisfied with the fat and vulgar

laughter that this text can provoke, others will find humor that provokes curiosity and proves the author's audacity during the end of the 19th century in Egypt.

The manuscript of *Ālātī* is an obscene text of the first degree, one can assimilate it with literary porn so much it is dehumanized: it describes only sexes and especially the male predator. The woman undergoes, she is chosified, and at this level, one begins to understand that he wanted to denounce, to shock in order to awaken perverted consciences.

Ālātī frees himself from the yoke of religion and opens the floodgates of his erotic imagination. He is a truculent, radiant, generous character who dares to say everything, in short, he is a free being! This pudgy and funny being, who makes the reader happy, did not seem to have any problems with the Egyptian society of the time and that seems surprising. There are so many processes to be delved into in his text again to explain, to nuance, to move forward. One can consider *Ālātī* as an avant-gardist who dares to decipher Egyptian society by these erotic remarks.

Nowadays, can we imagine an author like *Ālātī*, blind and who expresses himself with such freedom on the vices of our society? In this day and age, he could be part of Charlie Hebdo's gang and their way of twisting reality. He might not have had such a rich life that *Ālātī* shared with so many people, even in our time since he participated in enriching the pop music of Egypt, the current generation owes him a lot; his insolence and humor inspire so many ideas to dare to free himself from the constraints of society. If Freud had read his texts, he could have devoted a special study to the freedom of erotic and libertine expression.

Sociolinguistic study of erotic terms in the manuscript of *Ālātī*

Eroticism in Egypt is a taboo theme and, paradoxically, one that is much adored by readers who seek to know the tales of love and sensuality recounted in classical Arabic writings. This manuscript by Hassan al-*Ālātī* is a continuation of this popular tradition which draws up a kind of erotic, delirious and joyful vocabulary. Our analysis of erotic vocabularies is based on a sociolinguistic point of view, while grouping together those taboo terms that concern the intimate parts of women and the sensual act of making love.

In this sense, the words that designate the female genital organ are framed in semantic correlations. They appear in the titles of the paragraphs and enter in the construction of the interjective locutions:

Luġz al-kus (An enigma of the pussy)

Iḥḍar nek al-marāh al- 'aġūz (Be careful when you fuck the old lady)

The terms of the female organ are used in the syntactic reconstruction, for example: *kus* (pussy), *nek* (fuck), etc. We notice that *Ālātī*'s erotic terms are pronounced by men and are in harmony with the male meetings he held in the café *Al-Madḥakḥāna al-kubrā* (The Great House of Laughter) with his friends and clients who were lovers of popular and anecdotal literature. They exchanged erotic and sexual words with each other, giving these meetings a humorous aspect.

Phrase studies

In the manuscript of *Ālātī*, one notices the use of the neologism, of certain fixed expressions, of popular words relating to the male eroticism of the time. These terms highlight the mode of expression of a group of men, namely *Ālātī* and his companions, who live on the bangs of society and who exchange erotic vocabulary. We observe the list of nominal, verbal, adjectival and adverbial phrases in his manuscript:

Nominal phrases:

ṣuram (dirty shoes)

Sabwa (Fatal woman)

kusāhā niḍīf (Her pussy is clean)

Verbal phrases :

I'etl al-kus bi-al-zubr (Kill the pussy with the penis)

Iḥḍar nek al-marāh al- 'ġūz (Be careful when you fuck the old woman)

Adjectival phrases :

al-ḥašīš kurbāġ al-kus (Drugs are the whip of the pussy)

a 'āġīb al-nek (The wonders of fucking)

ḍabat al-kus (The pussy's latch)

Adverbial Locutions :

Yā wulād al-'aḥba (Son of bitch)
Yā wulād al-ṣarma (Sons of dirty shoes)

Pronominal phrases :

Bent al-'arbi 'in dāt laḥm wa ṣaḥm (A forty-year-old is in the flesh)
Sukrā li-zubruḥ (the drunkenness of his penis)

Method of writing in the manuscript of Ālātī

In the light of our work in the previous chapter, we will study the writing processes of the manuscript of Ālātī. Our objective consists in dissecting this manuscript in order to elaborate the elements that constitute the erotic words, built on a formal skeleton, and fragmented according to an alphabetical order from *Alif to Yā'* (from A to Z). A certain linguistic derision dominates the whole of this manuscript which sows a panicky, disordered speech, uttered in the urgency to insult with coarse words. One notes essentially the fluidity of the speech thrown as when one throws pebbles on a board.

For example, the absence of punctuation in the manuscript of Ālātī testifies to the desire to render the flow of speech with cuts that do not respect syntactic rules. Ālātī's writing thus recreates the rhythm and spontaneity of the spoken word. Punctuation hinders the flow of rhythms and images. The text not punctuated by the author leaves the oral punctuation free, so it is read freely by each reader, for example :

A wanderer took the lead with a young man in the middle of the night.
 And when he undressed wanting to enter the sleeper
 A scorpion pricked the glans of his penis (Manuscript of Ālātī, Letter Dāl)

By the absence of punctuation, the manuscript of Ālātī invents another language with a logorrheic or laconic speech. One reads a supple writing, erotically reinvented, reimpulsed, breathed and received differently by the reader.

Ālātī takes the reader back to an imaginary elsewhere that pleases men, to a linguistic adventure that overflows with erotic words, multiplies negations, breaks the order of grammar.

In this manuscript, we ask ourselves: who is speaking? Who is in front of the word? Who is behind the word? It is a torrent of speech that crosses the mind of the reader, overturning all the classic criteria of manuscript writing. This word is in full motion, signifies and deconstructs meaning, it is a word jubilated by a blind man and addressed to ears sensitive and familiar with his writings.

At the end of this launch, the address of the word is identified, it is launched for the sole reason of being listened to by the listeners of Ālātī who empty this discharge of speech through the tangle of erotic insults. In his manuscript, to discharge the rolling word like a torrent, a word that is recognized by its abnormality. The shredded and disjointed language gives this manuscript perpetual jumps, "zapping". In other words, the fragmentation of the word invites the reader to produce an intermediate fictional fabric - or a very particular tension of this text. In Ālātī's manuscript, the dynamic of the deconstruction of language is achieved by the abolition of all fiction, since speech breaks the foundations by which we ask for meaning to a temporality, preventing the constitution of a "story".

We give examples of the writing processes in the manuscript of Ālātī :

Invented words (neologism)

Maḍḥakhāna (The house of laughter)

Direct and indirect style

Wa bi'snād ilayhā riwāyit, 'inhā 'ālit
 (According to an account she recalls, she said)

Dream writing

Wa minhum man tuḍīf al-ṣuḥr wa al-rahaz wa al-ṣaḥā'a wa al-farfaša
 (And there are those that add clapping, moaning, chuckling of pleasure, laughter).

Brief dialogic exchange

'*ulnā* : *yā ġidinā narġūk min faḍlik ta 'īnā al-ġrāb*

'*āl*: *lulā al-ḍurīa fīh lā ħir fīh*

(He was told: O Grandfather, please give us the bag

He said that if he has no descendants, there is nothing good in him).

Linguistic fantasy

Antum naḡārīt

(You are scoundrels)

ḡalām al-kus mā unḡur ilā al-zīb

(The darkness of the pussy only looks at the penis)

The repetition

Salāma fī ħir wa ħir fī salāma

Salālim bitkum malban

salem al-taslīm (The security is in good condition and the good condition is safe.

The ladders in your house are mouthful

The ladder of salvation)

The contradiction

Maġmū'a mabsūḡa min mutafariġāt min mu'ġam al-'amṡāl al-'āmīa alatī dabaġahā al-marḡūm al-sheik Hassan al-Ālātī

(Set of proverbs written in dialect by the defunct Sheikh Hassan al-Alati)

The enumeration

Arba fī ḡamsa 'adad 'iṡrīn wa sita fī 'aṡarah 'adad sitīn

(Four times five equals twenty and six times ten equals sixty)

Short sentences

ġuhanam wa- l-barāṡīs

ġuz al-mara maṡhara

(Hell and shoes

The lady's husband is a weakling)

Sociological approach to the manuscript

From the beginning of Ālātī's manuscript, we read a humorous presentation that announces a writing purely centered on erotic insults since he describes his text as hallucinations and denunciations : "It is a set of proverbs written in dialect by the defunct Sheik Hassan al- Ālātī, referenced and embroidered by hallucinations and denunciations, gallops of a stubborn, lazy gentleman al- Maḡhakḡāna (The home of laughter), the stubborn idiot Sheik, Ramaḡān the handsome one, he ate the good pastry of Bughāša and Baḡlāwah".

At first glance, Maḡhakḡāna poses as a judge of egyptian society, he is violent to such an extent that on the first reading of his manuscript the reader retains this violence to the point of qualifying his text as "pornographic", this view does not exclude the surprise of the reader who feels slapped, harassed by the manipulation of the author. Then, he discovers its richness as he reads it. Ālātī is mischievous: humor is present in the description of couples in their caricatured diversity. As for laughter, it can only happen if we humans dare to recognize it in our capacity to be ridiculous at times.

This manuscript can be seen as a glossary of eroticism: it has an effect on the european reader who is unfamiliar with egyptian society, because eroticism is done with two consenting parties, which the reader does not perceive in Ālātī's manuscript. The manuscript confirms the primacy of clichés in a country where machismo is dominant and women are submissive, being only objects of desire for men.

In the text, there is also the exception of the woman who rebels because the man assaults her "stinks from the mouth", she orders him to turn around but does not refuse the act. Thus, we read in the manuscript, the letter

Ṣād : "A man came into a woman's house, His mouth stank, she beat him on his neck and said to him: 'O man, turn your neck and do not speak to me anymore. Surely you have eaten your stool.

These abounding erotic vocabularies can be seen as a call for freedom of expression because moral constraints and dogmas are nothing but a unification of thought, the consequence of which is the domination of peoples by the religious and political powers that make up a society.

But could criticism alone change a society? Apparently Ālātī does not believe in it, he prefers to free his language and the expression of each one. When he says "I gather these proverbs, these tasty anecdotes, these jokes and these traits of the spirit of my father's memoirs", it is a tradition of erotic anecdotes and a writing that challenges the taboos of the religious society of the time: Ālātī dares, provokes, brings to light the hidden face, what one would not dare to see of the relations between men and women in a word "sexuality".

This manuscript presents a double image of women, which creates a paradox in Ālātī's discourse, sometimes he speaks of rape, sometimes of coquettish women. The first submissive woman is not opposed to the rape she undergoes, she is often raped. The army of men arrive and "fuck" only seeking their pleasure since, for them, the woman is only an object of desire at their disposal. We also have the woman who is pampered by her man, because the latter is called the woman of coquetry, she is precisely the prostitute who is the object of desire of the man. Women also have desires that some men ignore. So they "pamper" them, provoke the weaknesses of the "male" and thus express their revenge by humiliating them in turn.

Ālātī's manuscript resembles a surrealist text that liberates the mind and invites its reader to imagine erotic practices, but does not necessarily invite him to make these erotic practices of such violence coming from the pure imagination of a man who indirectly passes on a message: sexuality is essential to life without which we would not exist. It can liberate minds from religious, social and political constraints, and can also liberate through its provocative expression and lead to a shared and non-violent eroticism.

Conclusion

The subjects of sexual writings are considered taboo in the arab world and it is forbidden to discuss them at the publishing level. Otherwise, their authors will be accused of direct influence of Western culture which is so far away from Arab customs. In our study, we were able to show that the erotic side illustrated by Ālātī is the expression of an author freed from the constraints of the virile society, he tells his anecdotes and stories in a particular context that is on the fringe of society and the official institution.

In short, Ālātī's manuscript reads and gives itself to be heard like a funny and attractive vertiginous polyphony, like a particularly erotic space where all the insults mix in an uninterrupted babbling. This manuscript functions as if on a principle of circulation and linking disparate and fragmented elements in the twenty-eight letters of the arabic language.

The study of Ālātī's manuscript invites us to apply it to other manuscripts of the classical arabic repertoire, especially those written in dialectal egyptian. Indeed, our proposal is not unique, it aims at dissecting the text of the manuscript through the observation of the state of speech. However, within this analytical approach to dialectology, what interests us in the future is to understand the textual elements of the manuscript as it was written by its author and then reflect on a comparative study with other manuscripts written in the same period and on similar themes.

The textual analysis of this manuscript can be completed by a semantic, lexical analysis in order to grasp the entire phraseological composition. It would also be important to continue our study in an interlinguistic perspective that will dissect the structure of Ālātī's manuscript.

A parallel study of the speaking and oral side of the manuscript is already possible; these two axes are essential to confirm that the manuscript recycles in a few written pages, not yet studied, the oral social customs of an Egyptian society where the use of the spoken word has long predominated over the written word.

Concretely, the exploration of an unpublished manuscript opens the way to multiple research methods, including the study of the sung side of this text. That is to say, by focusing on the turns of words that can be envisaged during an evening hosted by Ālātī and his listeners in his cafe. This observation could constitute the object of a new study on the dimension and role of singing in manuscripts, and could show, in this sense, the importance of the manuscript as such a valuable documentation tool.

End Notes

ⁱSheikh Hassan al-Ālāṭī was of Turkish origin, his mother worked in the Palace Sultan Ottoman. He grew up in Egypt in the Sayyida Sukayna district near Darb al- Akrād (Husayn Mazlūm, 1936: 10). From a young age, he began studying in al-Azhar Mosque and later turned to studying literature. At the end of his life, he practiced singing and wrote the Zajal (the ditty). He composed so many poems and songs that he earned the nickname Ālāṭī. (Shawqī Dayf, 2012, p. 99).

ⁱⁱThis book is considered one of the rarest books in the history of Egypt. It is a three-part encyclopedia that brings together all the jokes and anecdotes, said at the time by Sheik Hassan al-Ālāṭī. The book shows the nature of the social, political, and cultural situation of Egyptian society where Ālāṭī mixes irony, criticism, and metaphor.

ⁱⁱⁱThis manuscript exists in the library of James Heyworth-Dunne who was a British orientalist born in 1904. Its cover bears a label on which is mentioned the name of its owner and its number in the Hoover archives: Ex Libris, J. Heyworth-Dunne, D. Lit. (London), N.° 4951

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