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THE USE OF THE EGYPTIAN DIALECT IN THE SATIRICAL NEWSPAPER *ABU NAḌḌĀRA ZAR`A*

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1. Introduction

The Egyptian dialect of the second half of the nineteenth century is very well documented. Indeed, there are many textbooks and works of grammar on the subject, such as those by Spitta-Bey (1880), Nallino (1900), Willmore (1901), Vollers (1890) and Burkitt & Vollers (1895), as well as dictionaries (Spiro 1895 and 1897) and collections of stories (Spitta-Bey 1883). Yet another great source of information about the Egyptian colloquial is found in the satirical periodicals that became popular in that period. One of these is *al-`Ustāḏ* by `Abd Allāh al-Nadīm (1843-96), which ran between 1892 and 1893¹. Another is the newspaper *Abu Naḏḏāra Zar`a*², which was the first of its kind to appear in Egypt and was published for more than three decades (1878-1910). This article will discuss the use of this newspaper for improving our knowledge of the Egyptian Arabic of that period, along with some of the other Arabic dialects.

2. The life and works of Abu Naḏḏāra

Abu Naḏḏāra, “the man with the glasses”, was the nickname of the Jewish Egyptian journalist and playwright Ya`qūb b. Rafā`īl Ṣanū`, also known as James Sanua. He was born in Cairo in 1839 during the reign of Muḥammad `Alī (1806-1848). Ya`qūb Ṣanū`’s father, Rafā`īl, was a Jewish merchant who moved from Livorno in Italy to Cairo at some point in the nineteenth century, while his mother, Sara, was a Cairene by birth. Rafā`īl Ṣanū` enjoyed protégé status as an Italian, and worked as the adviser to Aḥmad Pasha Yagan, the nephew of Muḥammad `Alī, and therefore had access to court circles³.

There is an interesting story to be told about Ya`qūb Ṣanū`’s birth. His mother had lost four children and, in order to guarantee the health of her unborn son, she consulted the imam of the al-Ṣa`rānī mosque. He ordered her to dedicate the baby to Islam and to let the child defend the faith. Both mother and child fulfilled their vows: Ṣanū` learned the Qur`ān as well as the Mishnah and the Talmud⁴.

* I thank Manfred Woidich for his valuable comments on an earlier version of this article. Of course, any errors remain my sole responsibility.

¹ See Sadgrove (2011) and the literature mentioned therein for more information about `Abd Allāh al-Nadīm. Doss (1997) discusses some aspects of the Egyptian Arabic colloquial as found in *al-`Ustāḏ*.

² Since this newspaper was written in colloquial Egyptian Arabic, I also transcribe its title in this paper according to Egyptian Arabic pronunciation.

³ See Genzler (1966:17).

⁴ See Genzler (1966:15) and `Abduh (1955:13-14).

By the time he was 12, Ṣanū‘ knew five languages; he had learned Italian and Turkish at home, Hebrew, Arabic and English at school, and later mastered another seven, including French⁵. He apparently also developed a talent for writing literature as a child, since he began to write Arabic poetry at a very early age⁶. Aḥmad Pasha Yagan subsidized Ya‘qūb during the course of a three year period of learning in Livorno, where he studied political economy, international law, natural science and the fine arts⁷. Soon after his return to Cairo, at the age of 16, both his patron, Aḥmad Pasha Yagan, and his father died, forcing him to find work as a teacher⁸.

In 1863, the khedive Ismā‘īl ascended to the throne. Ismā‘īl wanted to modernize Egypt and thus started a number of projects, such as the construction of canals, railroads and telegraph lines. In 1869, the Suez Canal was completed and opened with a series of extravagant celebrations, leading to an increase in Egypt’s already heavy debt burden. Droughts and floods aggravated the problems, and Egypt’s foreign debts eventually led to the British occupation of the country in 1882. This is the background of the country in which Ṣanū‘ grew up and set out on his literary career. He became a follower of the great thinker, Ġamāl al-Dīn al-Afġānī (1839-1907)⁹, while the khedive Ismā‘īl became his sponsor¹⁰. Al-Afġānī encouraged him to apply his literary skills to the cause of reform, and suggested using the theatre as an instrument of public education. Ismā‘īl had opened two theatres in Cairo and Alexandria in 1869, on the occasion of the Suez Canal celebrations. The type of drama that he encouraged was the translation and adaptation of European plays. Ṣanū‘ duly translated some of these works, but he also wrote others in both colloquial and Classical Arabic, setting them in Egyptian society¹¹. In this way, he was an important figure in the birth of Egyptian drama, and became known as the “Molière of Egypt”¹². At first, Ṣanū‘ was invited to perform his plays at the royal palace. However, since they contained satirical portrayals of Egyptian society and criticisms of government officials, khedive Ismā‘īl withdrew his support in 1872. Ṣanū‘’s plays were accordingly banned, and his career as a dramatist came to an end¹³. In 1877, Ṣanū‘ published the first issue of his satirical newspaper *Abu Naḍḍāra Zar’a*¹⁴. The title refers to his own dark glasses. When

⁵ Gendzier (1966:16-17).

⁶ Moosa (1974:402).

⁷ Gendzier (1966:16-17).

⁸ Ibid. p. 19.

⁹ Ibid. p. 29.

¹⁰ Ibid. p. 31.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 33. Seven of Ṣanū‘’s plays have been published by Naġm (1963). For more information about Ṣanū‘ as a playwright, see Gunaym (1966) and ‘Abduh (1953).

¹² Gendzier (1966:31).

¹³ Ibid. p. 38.

¹⁴ No copies of the first issues of *Abu Naḍḍāra Zar’a*, which were published in Egypt, have survived. See ‘Abduh (1955:35).

Ismā'īl came to power in 1863, Ṣanū' had admired him. However, by the time he founded his newspaper, his opinion had changed quite considerably, and he became a firm criticizer of Ismā'īl's policies. Yet he never mentioned the khedive's name in his newspapers; he referred to him as *šēx il-ḥāra*, "the Chief man of the Quarter"¹⁵. Other well-known public figures were given different names as well, e.g. Ismā'īl's prime minister, Nūbār Pasha, was called Ġūbār. In this way, Ṣanū' could vent his criticisms of the regime, without mentioning the names of those he was attacking. Ṣanū' himself also made an appearance in his newspaper, where he was known as *Abu Naḍḍāra*.

The publication *Abu Naḍḍāra Zar'a* was, for the large part, written in colloquial Egyptian Arabic¹⁶. This meant that it could be read aloud to the illiterate to educate them about the political situation in the country, while the use of the colloquial also contributed to the liveliness of the texts and their satirical effect. The newspaper was comprised of imaginary dialogues and letters, sketches, fictitious minutes of meetings and dreams¹⁷. It was also the first newspaper to use cartoons. Since it was handwritten, it had a rather home-made appearance. The newspaper was incredibly popular with its Egyptian audience, both the upper and lower classes alike. Ṣanū' was, nevertheless, banned from Egypt in 1878 after he had produced only 15 issues, because of his criticism of the regime. He consequently settled in Paris, but continued to publish the newspaper under a different name, *Riḥlat Abī Naḍḍāra* "the travel of Abu Naḍḍāra", and arranged for it to be smuggled into Egypt. Every time the newspaper was banned, he simply published it under another name. Accordingly, there are issues entitled *Al-Naḍḍārāt al-miṣriyya*, *Abu Ṣuffāra*, *Abu Zummāra*, *al-Ḥāwī*, and *al-Waṭanī al-Miṣrī*, among others¹⁸. For clarity's sake, however, I will always refer to the newspaper as *Abu Naḍḍāra Zar'a*. The inclusion of French sections in the paper¹⁹ increased Ṣanū' 's popularity in Paris and led to a successful career as a lecturer throughout France²⁰. The final issue appeared in December 1910²¹, which means that it ran for three decades. Ṣanū' remained in France for the rest of his life, even when changed political circumstances would have allowed him to return to Egypt. He died in Paris in 1912.

¹⁵ Moose (1974:403-404).

¹⁶ Some parts are in Classical Arabic, for instance the fictional letters written to the editor. From 1882 onwards, Ṣanū' started to include brief French sections in the newspaper, the number of which increased until it was bilingual (Arabic and French). See *Abu Naḍḍāra Zar'a* from year 6, no. 8, 21 April 1882.

¹⁷ Landau (1952:35).

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 36 and Gendzier (1966:69).

¹⁹ See footnote 16.

²⁰ See Fahmy (2008:172).

²¹ Therefore, Gendzier's (199:138) claim that "Without formally taking leave of his readers, the *Abu Naddara* and *L'Univers Musulman* abruptly ended in November 1907" is incorrect.

3. The use of Egyptian-Arabic in *Abu Naḍḍāra Zar'a*

This newspaper, which contains a few thousand pages of colloquial Arabic, is a huge and very interesting source for our knowledge of Egyptian Arabic in the nineteenth century. Ṣanū' himself was both very fond and proud of his Egyptian dialect; he expressed it as follows²²:

(...) بلغتنا الاهلية * اعني بلهجة مصر الطريفة * ام الالفاظ الجميلة والمعاني اللطيفة
 “(...) in our national language, I mean the delightful dialect of Egypt, the mother of all beautiful expressions and charming meanings”

As has been mentioned before²³, Ṣanū' knew many languages, but those he spoke with his parents were Italian and Turkish. The dialect of the Jews of Cairo differed slightly from that of the Muslims. The most striking characteristic of the dialect of the Jews was the *niktib – niktibu* paradigm²⁴. This meant that they used the prefix *ni-* for the 1st person singular in the imperfect and the prefix *ni-* and the suffix *-u* for the first person plural, e.g. *ana niktib* and *iḥna niktibu*, while in the Muslim dialect this would be *aktib – niktib*. The *niktib – niktibu* paradigm is typical of North-African dialects and some dialects in Egypt, including in the past in Alexandria, but not Cairo. However, there is no trace of this paradigm in Ṣanū'’s writings, and it is thus safe to say that he did not use the Jewish variety of Cairene Arabic. The explanation for this could be that he did not grow up within the Jewish community, but rather in the court circles where his father worked, and he learned Arabic at school rather than from his parents.

The cartoons that follow will give an impression of the language that Ṣanū' used in his newspapers. The first of these²⁵ depicts *šēx ilḥāra* riding a donkey labelled الفلاح “the peasant”. He beats the donkey with a stick labelled العوايد والفرده “the property taxes²⁶ and the artisans’ taxes²⁷”. The donkey is carrying two sacks labelled دين مصر “the dept of Egypt” and بعبوص “a dirty trick”²⁸. An Englishman and a Frenchman, representing the two European countries, are ready to take hold of the donkey. The caption reads:

شيخ الحاره – (يقول للمستر والموسيو) وسعوا السكه وابعدوا عني لان الحمار ده ما حدش يعرف يركبه
 غيري والعصايه دي اللي في يدي هي التي تسوقه

“*šēx ilḥāra*: (says to the Mister and the Monsieur) Make room, get away from me, because nobody but me knows how to ride this donkey, and the stick which is in my hand is the one that drives it.”

²² *Abu Naḍḍāra Zar'a* year 29, no. 5, p. 15, May 1905.

²³ In §2.

²⁴ See Blanc (1974) and Rosenbaum (2002:37).

²⁵ *Riḥlat Abī Naẓẓāra Zarqā* year 3, no. 6, p. 21, 25 April 1879.

²⁶ Badawi and Hinds (1986:608) “*awāyid* rates, taxes assessed on property for local purposes”.

²⁷ Spiro (1897:449) “*firda*, license, tax on artisans”.

²⁸ Or, “goosing, putting one’s finger between someone’s buttocks”, see Badawi and Hinds (1986:85).

The text is pure Egyptian Arabic save for the last four words, which are in Classical Arabic, probably because Ṣanū' wanted the khedive to sound pompous.

In the second cartoon²⁹ we see how the khedive is trying to sell the sphinx and the pyramids by auction. The caption reads as follows:

Pharaon après avoir vendu à l'avance les récoltes des sept années grasses, vend les Pyramides aux enchères:

فرعون يصيح قائلا: كأمثو مزاد يا سواحين يا محبين الانتيكات ابو الهول وأحجار الهرمات. البيع بالنقد والعمله جنيهات خليه من النحاس. ألا أونو ألا دوّه يا لله زدوا يا ناس!!!

“After having sold the harvest of the seven fat years in advance, Pharaoh sells the pyramids by auction. Pharaoh³⁰ shouts: “Come to the auction of the sphinx and the stones of the pyramids, travellers and lovers of antiques! The sale is in cash and the currency is pounds, pounds free of copper³¹. One, two, come on people, add some more!””

In the third cartoon³², there is a huge beer barrel representing مصر “the revenues of Egypt”. Standing by the tap is Sir Charles Rivers Wilson (1831–1916), who was Minister of Finance in Egypt from 1878-9³³. He is trying to draw out some beer (symbolizing Egypt's wealth) for the European bankers who are standing behind him. However, on the left, we can see the khedive, Ismā'īl, and his prime minister, Nūbār Pasha, who have already emptied the barrel. The moral is that the Egyptian people are being robbed both by their own rulers and foreign powers. The caption says:

البنكيريه والتجار – احنا ناس معتبرين ما يصحش انك تضحك على دقنا يا فلسن تقول لنا البرميل حنفيته في يدي ما حدش غيرك يشرب منه ولا نقطه لازم يكون الجندي بيمصه من وراك بدون ما بتحس

“The bankers and traders: We consider it not done that you are making fun of us, Wilson, and telling us: “the tap of the barrel is in my hands and nobody but you can drink even a drop from it.” The soldier³⁴ must be sucking it up behind your back without you noticing it.”

The Arabic rendition of فلسن of the name Wilson is comical, because it reminds the reader of the word *falsān* “bankrupt”.

4. Rendering different dialects

Ṣanū' was an expert in giving expression to all different kinds of dialects.

²⁹ *Abū Naḍḍāra Zar'a* year 3, no. 11, p. 41, 30 May 1879.

³⁰ Another epithet used to indicate the khedive, expressing both power and tyranny.

³¹ “One [way to falsify coinage] was to roll or hammer out blanks from base metal, usually copper, which was both common and close in weight to silver, then plate it within thin sheets of gold or silver, strike it into coin with official dies, mix the false pieces with the good and place the result in circulation.” Darley-Doran (2011).

³² *Rihlat Abī Naḍḍāra Zarqā'* year 2, no. 24, p. 93, 31 January 1879.

³³ Farnie (2006).

³⁴ Another nickname for the khedive.

Indeed, an array of people speaking various dialects make their appearance in his newspaper. Since *Abu Naḍḍāra Zar'a* was a humorous publication, it is unsurprising that one of its ways of creating comical situations was by introducing people with all kinds of different accents.

4.1. Rural dialects

The following paragraph will highlight some instances of how Ṣanū' dealt with the use of different Arabic dialects. The first example represents the speech of an Egyptian peasant. We see *šēx ilhāra* (the khedive) on his knees begging Abu Naḍḍāra to stop publishing his newspaper. On the right is the peasant, Abu-l-Ġulb ("Father of Hardship"). He says³⁵:

ما تشفجش يابو نظاره * الشفجه في الغاير حساره³⁶ * ده جتلنا من الظلم والجور * ونازل علينا زي ما
ينزل السواج عالطور * جبر يلمه * ويعتقنا من ظلمه

"Don't have pity, Abu Naḍḍāra * having pity on such a jealous person is a waste * he killed us with his tyranny and his wrongdoing * he descends on us like a driver on the ox * may a grave collect him * and free us from his tyranny."

The letter *ḡim* has a double function here: it represents the *g* with which the Egyptian peasants pronounce the *qāf* in *ma-tiṣṣfaḡš*, *gatalna* and *sawwāg*, which would be *ma-tiṣṣfa's*, *'atalna* and *sawwā'* in Cairo. It also has the function of the *ḡ*, which in the Egyptian countryside would be pronounced with *ḡ* or *ž* like in *ilḡōr*, but would be *ilgōr* in Cairo. The letter *qāf* in *yi'tiqna* is not pronounced as *g* here, but *q*, because it is a loanword from Standard Arabic.

4.2. Foreigner talk

Also interesting are the imitations of "foreigner talk", by which I mean the language of the foreigners who only master the Arabic language to a certain extent.

When *šēx ilhāra* is ill, he is attended by the doctor, Abu Naḍḍāra, who has definitely not mastered the Arabic tongue, as we can see from the following speeches:

الطبيب – امبارح سخونه كان في بطنك بتاع هو لكن النهارده اطلعو من بطنك بتاع هو والخراره راح
في راسك بتاع هو واحنا يكافوا كتير على راسك بتاع هو.³⁷

The doctor - "Yesterday the fever was in his belly, but today it went up from his belly to his head, and the fever went into his head. We are very worried about his head."

بقي شيخ حاره ما نمتوش امبارح ليله³⁸

"So *šēx ilhāra* did not sleep last night."

هس هو اصحينو هو فتحتو عينك بتاع هو³⁹

³⁵ *Rihlat Abī Naḍḍāra Zarqā'*, no. 1, p. 1, 7 August 1878.

³⁶ Read: خساره.

³⁷ *Rihlat Abī Naḍḍāra Zar'a* no. 4, p. 14, 30 August 1878.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

“Hush, you woke him up, he opened his eyes.”

راسك بتاع انت دوخانيين⁴⁰

“Your head is dizzy.”

The language is comical because of its complete ungrammaticality, such as the mistakes in the conjugation of the verbs, the possessive suffixes and the use of *bitā*, all of which are insurmountable problems for the poor doctor. The sound *ḥā* is problematic for the doctor, because he pronounces it once with a *x* in *ḥā* (يخافوا = يخافوا), while the *x* is pronounced as *k* in *ḥā* (الحراره = الخاره).

A similar kind of language is used by a Turkish princess (*hānim afandī*) who is hitting Abu Naḍḍāra's portrait with a stick, while her ladies-in-waiting stand by her side in tears:

خنزير كافر لعنت اولسون⁴¹ انا اضربيكى يا أم نضاره لما لخبطتو وشك بتاع اتنى يا ادبسىز⁴²

“Infidel pig, he be cursed! I beat you, Umm Naḍḍāra, until I mess up your face, you shameless person!”

Abu Naḍḍāra is addressed here in the feminine form, to the point that he is called Umm Naḍḍāra, “the lady with the glasses”. The incorrect use of the masculine and feminine in Arabic by native speakers of Turkish is caused by the absence of grammatical gender in their mother tongue⁴³.

There is another interesting passage of foreigner talk in a conversation between three individuals, which portrays how characters from different Arab countries, talking different dialects, interact. It is a conversation between a member of the foreign tribunal, seignor Felissini, the Levantine trader, Luqū, and the *xawāga*, Yūsuf Ramla⁴⁴. Their different accents when discussing Abu Naḍḍāra's journey to France are reflected in the text:

لقو – يا صباح الخير يا جماعه اشحال كيفك الشريف يا خواجا (...)
فليسيني – يا كساره بابو نظاره هو رجاله جدعائين كبتان وكواجات ومدامات وناس من جزاير واينات بلد
لما شافو هو فرحتو كثير هما سافرتو سوا سوا مع هو في بحر.
لقو – هيكه شافله حبايب بالفابور؟

يوسف – دول اول ما قلناهم وصايتنا عندكم محب مصر ابو نظاره زرقا اخذوه بالاحضان.

Luqū: “Good morning people, how are you, how is your exalted person, *xawāga*?”

Felissini: “What a pity for Abu Naḍḍāra, he is a fine man. The captain, the foreigners, the ladies, the people from the islands and the girls from the country, when they all saw him they were very happy. They travel together with him on the sea.”

Luqū: “Did he find himself any friends on the boat?”

Yūsuf: “As soon as we told them our instruction: “the beloved of Egypt, Abu Naḍḍāra Zar'a, is with you”, they embraced him.”

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Turkish, imperative 3rd p. of *olmak* “to become”.

⁴² Turkish *edepsiz*.

⁴³ Some native speakers of Armenian and Nubian make the same kind of mistakes when they speak Arabic, for the same reason.

⁴⁴ *Rihlat Abī Naḍḍāra* no. 5, p. 18-19, 8 September 1878.

The Italian makes the same kind of mistakes as the doctor and the Turkish princess that we have discussed before: he cannot pronounce the *x*, and therefore pronounces it as a *k* (e.g. كساره), and the conjugation of the verbs is also incorrect. The Šāmī merchant uses typical Šāmī vocabulary, such as *kēfak*, *išhālak* “how are you” and *hēke* “that way”.

4.3. Maltese

Ya ‘qūb Ṣanū‘ also gives us a taste of Maltese. His boat made a stop in the port of Malta on the way to France. He is addressed by a boy working in the port, who says to him:

سانيور ارا الباركة تيعي الباركة تيعي صبيحه حفنا هيا ميعي توريك مالطه مالطه حانينا فيور متاع
الموندو⁴⁵

Ṣanū‘ then translates this into Egyptian Arabic for his readers’ sake:

يعني يا سيدي شوف مركبي مركب حلوه تعال معي افركك على مالطه مالطه زهرة الدنيا.⁴⁶

The Maltese seems to be relatively correct. It is again set out below as it is represented by Ṣanū‘. Underneath it is the word-for-word translation into modern Maltese and English, along with the English translation.

سانيور ارا الباركة تيعي الباركة تيعي صبيحه حفنا هيا ميعي توريك مالطه مالطه حانينا فيور متاع
الموندو

Sinjur⁴⁷ ara⁴⁸ bark⁴⁹ tiegħi⁵⁰ bark tiegħi sabiħa⁵¹ ħafna⁵² ejja⁵³ miegħi⁵⁴ turik⁵⁵ Malta
Malta ħanina⁵⁶ fjur⁵⁷ ta’⁵⁸ mondo⁵⁹.

“Sir, look barque mine barque mine beautiful very come with me I will show you Malta.
Malta beloved flower of world”.

“Sir, look at my boat, my boat is very beautiful, come with me, I’ll show you Malta.
Beloved Malta is the flower of the world”.

The only thing that is incorrect in Ṣanū‘’s text is the verb, which should not start with a *t* for the second person, but with an *n* for the first person singular.

⁴⁵ *Rihlat Abī Naḍḍāra* no. 8, p. 31, 30 September 1878.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Aquilina (1987-1990: II 1320) “old fashioned title of respect”.

⁴⁸ Aquilina (1987-1990: I 38).

⁴⁹ “Barque, three-masted vessel”. “barka. Blessing” is obviously not meant here.
Aquilina (1987-1990: I 80).

⁵⁰ Aquilina (1987-1990: II 1440).

⁵¹ Ibid. II 1248.

⁵² Ibid. I 475: “ħafna. A graspful. Much, many”.

⁵³ Aquilina (1987-1990: I 272).

⁵⁴ Ibid. II 780.

⁵⁵ *wera, juri* “to show”, form IV of *ra*, see Aquilina (1987-1990: II 1167).

⁵⁶ Aquilina (1987-1990: I 538).

⁵⁷ Ibid. I 348.

⁵⁸ Ibid. II 1395. “When attached to pron. suffixes, it becomes tiegħ”.

⁵⁹ Not in Aquilina; of course, from the Italian *mondo*.

However, this could be a typo since the difference is only in the number of dots. There are many other examples of different Arabic dialects to be found in these texts. It is difficult to tell to what extent these representations give an accurate picture of the dialects of the time, or are only used to create an amusing effect by utilizing stereotypical imitations thereof. This is an interesting point, and requires further investigation.

5. Cairene Arabic

The largest part of *Abu Naḍḍāra Zar'a* is written in Cairene Arabic. In this paragraph, a few lexical items, as well as a syntactic item, will be discussed. This will give the reader an impression of the kind of information about the dialect of Cairo in the 19th century that can be retrieved from these newspapers.

5.1. Syntax: the future tense

In modern Cairene Arabic, the future tense is expressed by the prefixes *ḥa-* or *ha-*, for instance *ḥasāfir* or *hasāfir* “I will travel”. The origin of this particle is the verb *rāḥ* “to go”⁶⁰. In *Abu Naḍḍāra Zar'a*, the prefix *ḥa-* does not occur, but we do find an earlier version, which is the active participle *rāyih*, fem. *rayha*, pl. *rayhīn*. There are plenty of examples, for instance: رايحين يدوروا الشغل “they will get the work going”⁶¹, فلا شك ان كدا رايح يحصل “there is no doubt that this will happen”,⁶² يا هل ترى رايحين يعملوا فيها رسومات؟ “are they going to make drawings in it?”⁶³

When we look at an earlier work, the *Traité de la langue arabe vulgaire* by Muḥammad 'Ayyād al-Ṭanṭawī from the year 1848, we see that he does not use a special prefix or even the word *rāḥ* to indicate the future tense, but simply expresses it with the imperfect, e.g. “nous passerons la nuit ici هنا تقضى الليلة”, “ils parleront tous ensemble يسافروا كلهم سوا”⁶⁴. A later Egyptian Arabic grammar by Nallino from the year 1900, does not refer to a prefix for the future tense either, but simply mentions “presente-futuro” followed by the conjugation of the simple imperfect, *a-ḍrab*, *ti-ḍrab* etc⁶⁵. He then continues by referring to the prefix *bi-* to indicate that an action is happening at that moment in time⁶⁶, but no mention is made of a prefix with which to indicate the future. The grammar by Vollers and Burkitt (1895) provides a similar explanation: “The Imperfect expresses an incompleted action, whether past, present or future. It thus

⁶⁰ Woidich (2006:280).

⁶¹ *Riḥlat Abī Naḍḍāra* no. 1, p. 3, 7 August 1878.

⁶² *Riḥlat Abī Naḍḍāra* no. 2, p. 5, 14 August 1878.

⁶³ *Al-Naḍḍārāt al-Miṣriyya* no. 1, p. 16, 16 September 1879.

⁶⁴ Both examples from Ṭanṭawī (1848:17).

⁶⁵ Nallino (1900:50).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 51.

corresponds with our Future tense⁶⁷. This work then mentions the example “Will you depart on your travels? *tesâfir?*”⁶⁸. Spitta’s *Grammatik des arabischen Vulgärdialektes von Aegypten* (1880) does not mention a future particle either, and translates *aktib* with “ich werde schreiben”⁶⁹.

However, in *The spoken Arabic of Egypt* (1901), Willmore refers to several prefixes for the future tense: the participle *rāyih* with the shortened versions *rayh* and *rāh*, and the particle *ha*⁷⁰. He gives some examples: *ana rāh arūh* “I will go”, *ḥatīgi bukra?* “Shall you come tomorrow?”⁷¹.

If we relied on the information contained in some of these textbooks, we might have got the impression that there was no future particle in use in the 2nd half of the 19th century. However, the information we get from *Abu Naddāra Zar’a* is that such a particle existed, but only in the form of an active participle, which was conjugated for the masculine, feminine and plural. Willmore’s work, however, proves that in 1901 not only the active participle *rāyih* was used, but also the shortened forms. The question is: why do some of the grammars not mention a future particle? The reason could be that the simple imperfect also indicates a future event, but it indicates that it is unsure whether it will happen. The example of *Ṭanṭāwī* يسافروا كلهم سوا could therefore also be translated with “they want to travel all together”, or “they intend to travel together”. The information given in these works is therefore not incorrect, but merely incomplete.

Ṣanū’ published the last issue of his journal in December 1910. It would be interesting to see if, in these 30 years, he would have switched to the use of *rāh* or *ha*. He did not, however, do so in his newspaper, as we can see from this example from 1905, which was written when he was 66 years old⁷²:

هذا موضع روايتى الفرنساوية * اللى نشرتها هنا ورايح الخصها لكم بلغتنا الاهلية

“This is the place of my French story, which I published here and which I will summarize in our national language”.

We should perhaps take into consideration the fact that Ṣanū’ remained in exile in France for the rest of his life, and was therefore not influenced by any language changes that might have taken place in his home country.

5.2. Lexicon

As may be expected, some of the vocabulary used in the 19th century has since become obsolete. This paragraph will discuss a few expressions that no longer exist in modern Cairo Arabic, or which have undergone a change of meaning. In

⁶⁷ Burkitt-Vollers (1895:149).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Spitta (1880:203).

⁷⁰ Willmore (1901:286 §486).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² *Abu Naddāra Zar’a*, year 29, no. 4, p. 15, April 1905.

one of the cartoons in the newspaper, *šēx ilhāra* is playing the tambourine while some girls dance around him. He is having a party because Abu Naḍḍāra has left the country, and the caption reads:

قولوا على شيخ الحاره صبح مشقرق يا اخواني راح في داهيه ابو نظاره ما عنه يرجع بالتاني
 “Say about *šēx ilhāra*: it is a wonderful morning, my brothers! Abu Naḍḍāra has left and good riddance! I don’t care if he comes back again or not!”

First of all, the word *miša'ra'*, translated by Spiro (1897:318) as “gay” or “hilarious”, has fallen out of use in Cairo today. Likewise, the expression *bi-ttāni* “again” sounds archaic and would now be *min tāni* or simply *tāni*. The expression *ma 'annu* can be found in Spiro (1897:415): “*ma 'annak gēt*, or *لا عنك جيت* *la 'annak gēt*, I don’t care whether you come or not!” Badawi and Hinds (1986:604) mention this expression as well, but with a reversed word order: “*'an(nu) ma-*.. who the hell cares if (he) does not ..., as in *'annak maruht* who the hell cares if you don’t go?”.

Of course, there are many more obsolete lexical items to be found. An interesting one is *išha* in the sense of “be careful not to”; nowadays *iw'a* is used for this purpose: *اصحى تخطي مصر*⁷³ “be careful not to cross into Egypt”. This meaning of *išha* is mentioned by Spiro (1897:334): “*išha tiḍayya ' ilkitāb*, you must not lose the book!”, but it is neither used, nor understood, in Cairo these days. The usual way to say this now would be: *iw'a tiḍayya ' ilkitāb*, while *išha* only means “wake up!” or “pay attention!”

There are also some loanwords, which are now considered obsolete. These have been replaced by their Arabic counterparts, such as *جرائد* “journalist”⁷⁴, which is now *ṣuhufi*, while *gurnalgi* is used pejoratively, or *تياترو* “theatre”⁷⁵, which is now *masrah*. Although everyone understands these words, they are no longer in use. The same is true of an Arabic word like *عياش* “bread seller”.

6. Conclusion

The Egyptian dialect of the 19th century is well-documented in works of grammar, dictionaries and textbooks. However, the biggest corpus of texts in colloquial Arabic from this period is the collection of newspapers known by the title of *Abu Naḍḍāra Zar'a*, written by the Egyptian playwright and journalist, Ya'qūb Ṣanū'. These texts are a very rich source of morphological, syntactic and lexical information. Although the main part of these texts is written in the Egyptian dialect, the newspaper also gives us examples of foreigner talk and various other dialects and languages, such as Levantine Arabic and Maltese. How far these are accurate, or are only used to create a comical effect by adopting stereotypical imitations of these dialects, is a subject for further study.

⁷³ *Abu Naḍḍāra Zar'a*, year 3, no. 18, p. 69, 22 July 1879.

⁷⁴ *Abu Naḍḍāra Zar'a*, year 29, no. 1&2, p. 8, February 1905.

⁷⁵ *Al-Nazzārāt al-Miṣriyya* no. 2, p. 24, 14 October 1879.

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Appendix



Cartoon I

