# Arabic as an International Language

***Mohamed Enani****

***Foreword by Loubna Youssef*****

*On 28th-30th December 2013, The Departments of Arabic and English, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University and The Cairo University Arabic Language and Culture Center held the International Symposium on Internationalizing the Arabic Language at the Faculty of Arts, Cairo University. The prominent professor of literature, dramatist and translator Mohamed Enani (1934-2023) devoted his life to Arabic and English translation to bridge the many gaps between both languages and cultures. In the 1990s, Enani started writing books on comparative literature and translation theory. His* The Comparative Tone, The Art of Translation, Literary Translation, Modern Translation Theory, On Translating Style, On Translating Shakespeare *are bestsellers that are read in and out of lecture halls. Another bestseller produced by Enani is* Modern Literary Terms *(1996), a dictionary of the most current terms – in Arabic. This is a thoughtful literary reformulation of terms borrowed from the sister disciplines of philosophy, sociology, politics, and linguistics. Enani's translations of Milton's* Paradise Lost *and* Paradise Regained *and 21 Shakespearean plays include introductions that constitute around two thousand pages of literary criticism, covering English critical theory from the 17th century until the two decades of the 21st century. Clearly, he was well read in translation theory, historicism, feminist criticism, deconstruction, postmodernism, etc. Although Enani wrote for the theatre, his love of poetry is evident in his many volumes of verse and in the many selections of poems by 25 Arab poets that he translated for publication in the Family Library Series. In 2003, he published* Angry Voices *in the USA which included the translations of contemporary Arabic poetry into English.*

*The paper included in this volume is Enani's keynote speech entitled "Arabic as an International Language." By identifying the different Arabics used and defining them, and by defining the term "international," Enani persuasively argues that Arabic is indeed an international language. He*

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* Keynote speech delivered in the conference and published in the book entitled *Internationalizing the Arabic Language*, eds. Loubna A. Youssef and Awad Alghobary, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University (2015), pp. 7-19.

** Professor of English Literature and Children's Literature in the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Cairo University.

*succeeded in setting the tone for what the organizing committee agreed is the focus of the Symposium.*

*The interface between Arabic and English covers many areas of interest to scholars in both languages. Language as human social behavior connects individuals within a community, groups, and populations across geographical boundaries and generations across eras and epochs of history. Revisiting the findings of major Arab grammarians and language critics (Ibn Jinni and others) with a view to the reformulation of these findings in terms of modern linguistics, and undertaking comparative studies of the findings of major Arab insights into language and literature as twin activities (Abdul Qahir El-Jurjani), will be invaluable. Without language (and translation), we would by definition be living on isolated islands. Translation today is an essential branch of applied linguistics. Research by linguists in this field has created insight into the nature and practice of translation and has come up with what we may call "Translation Theory". To become a translator, one can acquire this skill via adequate knowledge of contemporary theory. Besides, the idea of transplanting the research findings of English linguistics to the teaching of Arabic language and culture has been the dream of many linguists in Egypt. The mechanism for regenerating the teaching of Arabic as L1 and L2 involves, among other things, knowledge and application of modern linguistic theories.*

**Arabic as an International Language**
**Mohamed Enani (2015)**

Unfortunately, the central terms in my title are polemical: you may ask 'which Arabic' (as there are admittedly varieties of Arabic) and you may wonder what I mean by 'international.' However, as a translator, I have long accepted, perhaps more implicitly than explicitly, that Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is often enough what is meant by the term. As such, one could be talking about the language used in the Arabic press, in the media generally, in books written or translated into Arabic, and in all official documents throughout the Arab homeland. Should we then ignore the local varieties, whether regarded as dialects, pejoratively referred to as the vernaculars, or raised to levels of recognition, undreamt of in our tradition, by modern linguists? Certainly not; no one should, or indeed can. Inasmuch as each variety (Egyptian, Iraqi, Moroccan … etc) is pervasive at many levels in the thinking and on the tongues of living Arabs, each should be recognized as a living language. In other words, each performs the functions of a living language, but only up to a point. Local varieties, I shall argue, depend on MSA for all or most abstractions used in philosophic and scientific discourse, as well as the expression of complex thought. The real test of a living and complete

language should first combine its ability to perform the daily jobs of expression and communication, for practical purposes, among people of whatever degree of education, and secondly the capacity for abstract thought, which is the hallmark of real learning, real progress, and the truly enquiring mind born in 17th-century Europe. For this, each local variety makes use of MSA whose influence on modern thought has given birth to whatever abstractions were formed, as well as the freshly coined ones. This tendency to make use of the achievements of MSA in abstract thought in each local variety has led Badawi to conceive of a certain brand of the Egyptian local variety as a high level of Egyptian Arabic, which, he decides, contains two more lower levels. All three levels of Egyptian Arabic represent together a category of Arabic regarded as the last, chronologically and perhaps hierarchically, in another triad of Arabic – archaic Arabic (which we call 'classical' for convenience) and Modern Standard Arabic being the first two.

As the highest 'level' of the local variety, the brand Badawi calls (المثقفين عامية) differs from MSA in certain formal features (lexical, syntactical and phonological) which it shares with the other two lower 'levels'. Because of its infusion with the abstract thought of MSA, it is to be regarded as a popular variety of it; whereas the lowest seems totally divorced from the standard definition of Arabic, being only an instrumental symbolic system confined to fulfilling the tasks of expression and communication of the uneducated and mostly illiterate masses. According to Badawi, therefore, the intellectuals' vernacular may be regarded as MSA liberated from classical grammar and distinctive syntactical features; whereas at the so-called lowest level we have an almost different language, albeit using Arabic letters and ideas, and helping people in their daily traffickings. Obviously it cannot be regarded as an alternative to MSA, though it is indeed a language in its own right, satisfying the formal prerequisites of any living language, and being rich in its own rhetorical and aesthetic features. It is, however, MSA that we have in mind when we talk about Arabic being an international language.

Looking at it from two contrasting angles, I regard Arabic as an international language. MSA is international in the sense that it is recognized at the UN as such, together with the old colonial languages (English, French and Spanish) as well as Russian and Chinese. This means that debates at the UN may be conducted in Arabic, with the UN obliged to provide interpretation and translation. Documents may be issued originally in Arabic, hence to be translated into the working languages of the organization. (By the UN I mean the UN system منظومة الأمم المتحدة, that is, all the specialized agencies and organizations affiliated to the UN). The other meaning of international may come as a surprise to some of my listeners, as it is a novel meaning adopted from both Translation Studies and Critical Discourse Analysis, namely that of a lingua franca. As is well known, the term usually refers to a common

language spoken by people who have different native languages; while the original older meaning was a hybrid language, or indeed something of the order of pidgin English. Historically, Arabic was an element of the lingua franca spoken at many Mediterranean ports, and it certainly contributed to the development of Swahili and other East African dialects alive even today. But that is not what I have in mind; the new sense adopted from the new disciplines mentioned above, refers to a language used in communication among groups of people who speak dialects of a mother language known to them as the language of learning, studied at school or, in the case of Arabic, in the process of learning about Islam and the Quran. These groups of people may comprise whole nations, or may be geographically though not necessarily historically isolated; they call themselves Arabs, insofar as their cultural matrix is Arabic; and some are members of the Arab League, (The League of Arab States). The differences between their native dialects and classical Arabic may be great indeed, but the differences among the varieties of their local dialects are insuperable. When two persons belonging to geographically distant parts of the Arab homeland meet, the chances are they will opt for classical Arabic as a lingua franca. Blatant examples will be found when Moroccans meet Egyptians, Syrians or worse still, Iraqis. I have had a chance to visit many parts of the Arab world and Africa during my work as an interpreter/translator and have found that classical Arabic was indeed used as a lingua franca.

Obviously, the case here is different from having an Indian, from the State of Gujarat, speaking Gujarati which is an Indo-Aryan dialect, speaking in English with a native of Mumbai, speaking pure Hindi, which is also Indo-Aryan and regarded today as the official language of India. Here, the interlocutors choose English as a lingua franca because the differences between their native dialects (or languages) have political and historical implications which they prefer to steer clear of. On the contrary, when an Indian Southerner has to deal with an Indian Northerner (say, from Peshawar, now in Pakistan) their only available lingua franca would be English. During my translation of Kipling's prose and poetry a few years ago, I came to study the role of English as such a lingua franca, especially enriched with Indian vocabularies and concepts. And amidst all that I found those traces of classical Arabic which managed to dominate important aspects of the life of Indian Muslims, eventually leading to the birth of Urdu, the hybrid language par excellence.

Resorting to classical Arabic as a lingua franca between an Egyptian and a Moroccan, say, or an Algerian, will, however, support the view that classical Arabic, in its modernized form, is international in a strangely ironic sense: it is used in communication among Arabs where native vernaculars fail. I regard myself as fortunate enough to be able to speak classical Arabic, albeit of the ultramodern variety, and so to communicate with other Arabs. But think of an

Egyptian butcher trying to conclude a deal with a cattle merchant from Tunisia: the conversation will inevitably be conducted in their native dialects, and the outcome of the deal may not be so assured. I have had similar experiences with other North African Arab sisters and brothers and know how hazardous it is not to speak this latter-day lingua franca, i.e. classical Arabic.

Translation Studies scholars have noted that a conversation in any lingua franca involves a degree of rendering parts of the local expressions and concepts into those of the lingua franca, hence its continual change and inevitable hybridity. Insofar as the Arabic lingua franca is mainly an adapted form of MSA, the classical sources used in producing those translations will vary from one place in the Arab homeland to another: some come from our distant past, others are adapted from translations of certain European languages into words and expressions borrowed from the particular vernacular of each region. The resulting lingua franca would thus be a spurious MSA: When a Tunisian friend wanted to tell me that he wanted to rent a house or a flat for his family he said (أريد أن أكتري ثلاثة بيوت) by which he meant a 3-bedroom house; in referring to the breakfast he had, he said, (طبخت عظمة) i.e. I boiled an egg; and in referring to raising the level of awareness of his country's peasants he said (نريد حملة تحسيس للفلاحين) a strange translation of 'Sensitizing'. I needn't give more examples of the strange complexion which such a lingua franca as a form of an international medium has come to acquire within the Arab homeland.

This, however, is only part of the picture. Modern Standard Arabic has proved more of a problematization than a solution to the diglossia or polyglossia of the Arab homeland. The crux is, of course, the apparent sense of 'standard': a surface and immediate meaning would be unified, or better still 'uniform' (موحدة). But this is immediately discovered to be an illusion: compare any modern, even ultramodern, bilingual dictionary made by a Levantine Arab and an Egyptian, and the differences will be manifest. Such differences may be attributable to the influence of both classical Arabic and the vernacular, which seem to be perpetually in conflict. Doniach, helped by Fouad Megally, the Egyptian Oxonian Scholar, tried in his Oxford English-Arabic Dictionary to balance the influence of the Egyptian against other Arab dialects, but the language came out predominantly Egyptian. And, I am sorry to say, the dictionary's fortunes declined. On the contrary, al-Karmi's Dictionary tipped the balance too much in favour of classical Arabic, emulating the early lexicographers in the 1930s who wanted to revive, even resurrect, obsolete words, and make use of them, even by giving them new meanings. This dictionary didn't do better either.

So much for the sense of 'uniform' implied in 'standard'; could the term mean 'received', that is, commonly accepted, as in 'received pronunciation'? This is no doubt a tempting interpretation, and is, more or less, close enough

to reality. Thus interpreted, 'standard', may be opposed to 'sub-standard' and similar concepts insofar as 'standard' could approach the Arabic (معيارية) or (قياسية), both implying 'correctness' and a measure of having established rules.

Egyptian Arabic succeeds, as Badawi has shown, because at its highest level it relies on the learned discourse of MSA. To illustrate: consider the following idea, common to most of us, namely that neo-colonialism has replaced old colonialism merely by substituting economic hegemony for military domination and the use of brute force. Given in MSA, the idea is easy to grasp as it is implicitly addressed to the literate section of the population, who are familiar, or supposed to be familiar, with the main ideas, and, more importantly, the main concepts herein expressed. Now try to convey the same idea in Egyptian Arabic and you'll have no option but to use the same MSA vocabulary, complete with their original significations. You could depart from MSA, however, only in syntax and grammar, (and, of course, phonology). Indeed, some words will keep their original phonological state, as no alternative ones in Egyptian Arabic could be found, such as (القوة الغاشمة). Needless to say, most of the lexical items will sound closer to MSA, however pronounced, than to any Egyptian Arabic equivalents – e.g. السيطرة or الهيمنة and the key term (اقتصاد) where the Qaf will be given its classical sound rather than that of the glottal stop (الهمزة).

Now at the lowest level of Badawi's Egyptian vernacular (عامية) you may mark the beauties of the Egyptian imagination in the general uses of language, in the handling of matters pertaining to everyday life – you'll find the use of interesting and peculiar idioms, metaphors peculiar to Egyptian Arabic and proverbs, old or freshly coined. Consider the following extract from a modern play: (كانت الدنيا مولعة برة وهو نايم على ودانه، قعدوا يهللوا ويزعقوا وده ولا هو هنا).

The most important aspect here is, of course, the tone; translated into MSA, the tone will be destroyed even if you could actually spell out what is meant: Would 'feelings ran high' (i.e. (كانت المشاعر ملتهبة) be an acceptable equivalent to (الدنيا مولعة)? Can 'totally unaware', i.e. (غير واع بما يجري) be equivalent to (نايم على ودانه)? Then consider: (وده ولا هو هنا) that is 'as though he wasn't there at all' (i.e. كأنما لم يكن موجوداً). The classical version is so far from the original (though conveying the literal meaning) that one is forced to give the sense in a different formula (فكأنما لم يكن يدري بما يجري). Egyptian Arabic is most expressive, has a rhetoric of its own, and useful especially in works of art.

Let me turn in some detail to the relationship between MSA – whatever definition you prefer to choose for it – and classical Arabic, as I find in this still nebulous relationship the seeds of our troubles with MSA. Apart from nomenclature, the uses to which MSA is put today inevitably problematize it. We use it in writing literature, research papers, news stories and for many other purposes without losing sight of its connections with classical Arabic. Its ideals seem to be still those of the archaic language in almost all the features

of text production. From archaic Arabic it has borrowed something which I tend to ascribe to the Arabic bent of mind: sacrifice of precision for aesthetic effect. I shall begin by showing that this defect is so deeply-seated in the Arab mind that no 'level' of Arabic can hope to be safe from it. Paradoxically, the lowest of Badawi's levels of Arabic shares it with the oldest and most archaic, as well as with MSA, as I shall show.

Let me elaborate: low or high, Egyptian Arabic shares with MSA a quality that is more attributable to what I have described as the nature of the Arab mind – or the habits of thought acquired over centuries – than to language in itself, namely, imprecision. This is attributable, I believe, to the ingrained habit of all Arabs to regard our classical linguistic past as canonical: the discourse of our tradition is idealized. However, as the legacy of that past was primarily concerned with religious scholarship, as well as the poetry of the golden age, the second Abbasid period, the student was encouraged to learn things by heart, not only the Holy Quran (in most cases without knowing much about it) but also a great deal of spurious religious material. This business of learning by heart has meant, throughout, that learners repeat verbatim what they were taught, and in many cases adopt aesthetic values in judging language rather than analytical methods and logical criteria. Our tradition is rich and varied, but the dominant method of transmitting it seems to prefer the poetically worded (even if it means very little) to precise wording. Things have been repeated as given, without questioning, and few would stop to enquire what was actually meant. Hence the concept of Arabic as a 'poetical language' (اللغة الشاعرة as al-Aqqad titles one of his books). It is of course a credit to have such a long and colourful history, both in prose and poetry, but the habits of transmission mostly kept the critical mind at bay, and prevented any real refining of terms or the re-establishment of Arabic as a language of thought (which it once was).

Such association with poetry and the poetic has caused Arabic to sound vague to foreign learners. A recent incident will, I hope, illustrate this. Asked by Ahmed Heykal, son of the renowned Muhamed Husayn Heykal, to revise a translation into English of *Zeinab*, often regarded as the earliest Arabic novel, having been written on the eve of World War I, I nearly declined, for I knew the task to be onerous. I still remembered how I had struggled with it when I had to do it as part of my Arabic course as an undergraduate. How on earth, I wondered, could this ambitious Arabist turn such verbiage into an English text that sounded English? His solution, shocking as it was, was an eye-opener: the flowery language used in natural description, for pages on end, was removed. Every time the translator encountered what he thought was supererogative material hindering the smooth flow of the action, he simply dropped it. I thought this was a kind of betrayal, as Translation Studies as a discipline was still in its infancy, and could not account otherwise for the

omissions, especially as the author had subtitled his work "Rural scenes and characters" {مناظر وأخلاق ريفية} ["characters" at the time corresponded to (أخلاق) as the list of Dramatis Personae in Shakespearean translations at the turn of the 20th century amply shows]. Now we know better: it is what we call adaptation as an acceptable line in translation: what the novel lost, in terms of poetic prose, was made up for in terms of a more taut structure and smooth narration. The literary character of the original was changed, but the purpose was noble: to enable English readers to enjoy an Arabic novel written at the dawn of our literary revival; and the practice was common in handling much of our literary tradition. This will be seen, I am sure, as at least controversial, if not altogether objectionable; but consider the translations of Omar Khayyam from Persian into English and into Arabic, and the translation from Urdu of Iqbal's famous (حديث الروح) "A Soul's Invocation", shown by Mohamed Abdel-Aatty to be a freer adaptation in Arabic by Rami than his adaptation of Al-Khayyam: the sacrifice of locution, again, was partly, made up for in major gains in illocution and perlocution.

The experience was an eye-opener, as I said, in another sense as well. It showed me that the MSA used by Haykal was an early version depicting the idealization of classical rhetoric, and that MSA had developed so much in the early decades of the 20th century as to have almost changed in nature. Tewfiq al-Hakim was a pioneer, and his 1928 *Return of the Spirit* was revolutionary in this sense, paving the way to the great Naguib Mahfouz whose experiments in the 1930s still showed signs of the old trend (cf. my essay on the development of his style in *Naguib Mahfouz: Egyptian Perspectives* (1989). But the burden of the poetical imprecision wasn't jettisoned for a long time to come.

A whole generation was brought up on the tradition of old rhetoric. As a child I would not dream of writing literature in a style as bare as that of Yusuf Idris: my Arabic arsenal had big guns which would not surrender easily to what my father used to call, disparagingly, journalistic Arabic. It didn't bother my father, God rest his soul, or my Arabic teacher that such classical rhetoric was imprecise, elliptical or even contradictory: what mattered was the beauty of the sound of the verse. The crunch came one day when, reading Ali Al-Garem's (البلاغة الواضحة) we came across a short poem by a mysterious fellow called (الشبلي) (unnamed by Al-Garem) which our teacher hailed as the supreme example of a perfectly structured poem. Citing the eulogy of Zaki Mubarak, the teacher thought that we, young as we were, should emulate it. The opening line will remind the older among you of the poem:

رب ورقاء هتوف في الضحى  ذات شجو صدحت في فنن

I wasn't 'revolutionary' or anything, far from it, but I still didn't like the wrong preposition in the second hemistich: "it should be 'on'," I said, "not 'in'!" The teacher smiled condescendingly at the indiscretion of a young boy, still

ignorant, but no imbecile, and let it pass. But I persisted, adding insult to injury, how could it be (في الضحى) that is (forenoon) when the poet speaks of insomnia? Surely, the time would be better if it were night

فبكائي ربما أرقها وبكاها ربما أرقني

Still smirking, the teacher told me that the lines should not be read together; this third line in the piece referred to another occasion when both poet and dove lay sleepless. "But consider Shawqi", I retorted, "listen to his (سلوا كؤوس الطلا) where the scene is at night, and both poet and dove are sleepless!"

مدت إلى الليل جيداً نافراً ورمت إليه أذناً وحارت فيه عيناها

As soon as I said that, all hell broke loose, as they say: I was given a lesson in the strangest terms possible in how to read Arabic. Noted for his tranquil disposition, our teacher (عباس القاضي) seemed for once to lose his temper: the mention of Shawqi, in particular, annoyed him, as his tirade against that 'upstart' showed. He accused Shawqi of aping the manner of the ancients without success, then said, when he had regained his composure, something to the effect that in Arabic verse you rely on your visceral response to the rhythm of the verse, surrender to the magical combinations of the long drawn vowels in the older piece and see how the symmetry in the first hemistich is reversed in the second (i.e. what we now call chiastic structure, a chiasmus) etc. He went on for quite a while and I was truly impressed. The entire class seemed overwhelmed, and the incident became the common talk of half the school for some time.

It was a useful lesson: especially when the rule is generalized. Now consider the line of verse that used to be engraved on the upper board of the Egyptian Uzbekia Theatre, home of the National Theatre.

وإنما الأمم الأخلاق ما بقيت فإن همو ذهبت أخلاقهم ذهبوا

It is a beautiful line of verse, and, responding viscerally as recommended by any old teacher, I would enjoy it without asking questions. But I have learnt since to put any Arabic writing to the test of translation; here the epigrammatic line proved verbose by translation standards. Supplying the ellipsis you could say: Nations can only survive as long as their high ethical codes (survive). That is

وإنما تبقى الأمم ما بقيت أخلاقها

The second hemistich, being tautological, goes overboard. But why have I said 'high ethical codes' as a translation of (الأخلاق)? I have already provided many possible meanings of (الأخلاق) in Arabic in the translation of 5 Prophetic traditions, producing at least 3 major meanings for the Arabic word. Think of morals or morality, manners, behavior, as well as ethics of course. Is it the same as being of 'good character', 'mellow benignity' or an even and balanced temper? Think of more contexts and more meanings will spring to mind. Isn't

it what Hafiz Ibrahim has in mind when he recommends the education of women:

الأم مدرسة إذا أعددتها  أعددت شعباً طيب الأعراق

Surely the poet did not have in mind the modern meaning of (أعراق) that is, ethnic origins (remember ethnic cleansing, rendered as التطهير العرقي?). If not, what did he mean? On the other hand, he does refer to a 'people', that is, to a whole nation, but somehow the question of ethnicity isn't easily spotted. If in the case of Shawqi's line, one needed only to remove the redundant hemistich, in the case of Hafiz one has to grapple with the problem of ethnicity. Not that Hafiz is free of redundancy; consider

إنني حرة كسرت قيودي  رغم رقبى العدا وقطعت قدي

The last two words repeat the meaning of the last two words in the first hemistich, and all use an alternative wording of "I am free'. The problem is (رغم رقبى العدا). Perhaps he doesn't mean 'observance', perhaps he means (against the wishes of), i.e. رغم أنف العدا. If you insist on 'observance', the line will lose in significance.

Now comes my argument, which is simplicity itself: our language (all varieties, but especially those used in thinking – more of this later) is difficult to deal with, to use, or to translate properly because of our ingrained habit of imprecision. An imprecise language is hardly fit to be used in scientific pursuits; and this is the reason why scientists prefer European languages in scientific studies. Our inveterate passion for metaphor, that is, figurative expression, has aggravated the problem inherited from our forefathers: whatever an Arab says to a foreigner as a literal translation of a thought process needs to be retranslated into clear and precise terms. Nor is this a temporary, casual or a contingent fashion: it is deeply rooted in the way we use language as social interaction, according to recent trends in critical discourse analysis. We have, uniquely in Arabic, semantically distorted formulae for expressing almost anything: the problem is, simply, words do not fit their meaning, that is, locution is perpetually at odds with illocution, with unhappy results for perlocution. Consider the commonest of all terms, nowadays, namely (الحجاب) invariably translated as the head scarf: but is it? What are the kinds of head gear, or head covers, or what have you, that are included in this fetish of the late 20th century? Have the words حجب and حجاب in Arabic changed their meanings? Well, the answer is that we wanted the best of both worlds: liberation of women, complete with an active role in public life and the veiling of women as practised even in the early 20th century in my hometown, which was called حجاب and had meant that as soon as a girl reached puberty, she was confined to her home, that is, not to be seen or heard by strange men [i.e. not members of her immediate family]. Ingeniously we reduced this sense to the covering of the hair, or the hair and neck, or the entire face as well in what we now call نقاب – ingenious, isn't it? Or consider the

dictum, whose provenance remains unknown though I am sure it has its origins in the belief that all religion is capitalist by nature – and capitalist in the most brutal sense of all – the expression being (التجارة شطارة). How do you put this into English or into clearer Arabic? Is (شطارة) a close equivalent of cleverness? Or perhaps 'an enterprising spirit', (enterprise being a catchword of the ruling 'Right' in the West). Or is it, perhaps, the ability to gain as much profit as you possibly can, that is to use whatever methods may be available to make money, and if some of the methods are unseemly, ugly, or downright illicit, well, try not to get caught? This amazing dictum has created filthy rich people who had empires used to manipulate politics and deceive the masses in a variety of ways.

Now for the jumble in our heads. When I taught writing at our department on my return from England, I soon discovered that the students could not write clearly, in English or in Arabic, because the means of thinking at their disposal was unfit for thought. I often asked my students, never mind what you've written; what do you want to say? Say it to me in any language, preferably in Egyptian Arabic if that is the language you use in thinking. Only in very few cases could I get any answers at all: the majority (and I mean 4th year students) had not been taught to think clearly or critically. Also, the linguistic machinery in their heads consisted mostly of collections of words from Egyptian Arabic, MSA, and English. To put together an idea that is comprehensible required an effort in translation they had not been trained to do – and I mean translation not in English, not even into MSA, but even into Egyptian Arabic. The key to make them think clearly and I daresay coherently, lay in acquiring the habit of using language precisely. Most of them, the so-called English school graduates, had not mastered enough English to help them formulate ideas; the rest had been deprived of a real Arabic education which would have helped them put thoughts together in a meaningful way, thereafter perhaps to translate the ideas into English if they had to.

The advantages of learning good Arabic early enough in life are immense: in the scientific Arabic of our forefathers, from الجاحظ to إخوان الصفا وخلان الوفا to Ibn Rushd, children should learn all about abstractions, the categories, the way the world is ordered etc. Teaching science in Arabic should help; then the student will learn to use literal language with precise meanings, shun the bombastic utterances and pompous language of some poets, and above all imprecise language. Thus trained we should have speakers of Arabic that are capable of carrying the most abstruse thought, of dealing with the intricacies of most disciplines (and especially the new ones). We should witness the rebirth and growth of the language of science which had dazzled the eyes of Europe in the Middle Ages, from Ibn an-Nafees ابن النفيس to Al-Hasan Ibn Al-Haytham الحسن بن الهيثم. Thus could we contribute to science, and I mean modern science, in Arabic; and our contributions would be translated

(Assisted by the Computer) into other living languages. A dream? Not at all, Japan has been doing it for years; and advances in Translation Studies in Chinese have been translated into English, cited, quoted, discussed, and recently done into Arabic.

This international Arabic may not have its place in the computer for a while, but it should eventually compete with the other languages. Then, and only then, can we be certain that teaching literature (especially classical Arabic literature) will not disturb the thinking processes of scientifically raised Arabs. Time, isn't it, to free our language from the quality of being only a poetical language! By the way, I have translated Ash-Shibly's poem into English and appended it to the script of this address (together with the original Arabic).

## Appendix

**Sh-Shibly**

It was a cooing dove that sang sweetly
One forenoon on a branch, wistfully;
Remembering her mate and the good times gone
She cried in sorrow, kindling mine.
Was it my crying that kept her awake
Or hers that kept me awake?
She may 'complain' but I understand her not;
I may too, but she can't grasp my complaint.
But agony makes me know her well,
And agony makes her know me still.
Can she 'be fond' of crying her heart up?
Or her unrequited love has filled my cup?

**أبيات الشِّبْلي**

رُبَّ وَرْقَاءَ هَتُوفٍ في الضُّحَى
ذاتِ شَجْوٍ صَدَحَتْ في فَنَنِ
ذَكَرتْ إلْفاً وعَـهْداً سَالِفاً
فَبَكَتْ حُزْناً وهَاجَتْ حَزَنـي
فَبُكَائــي رُبَّمــا أَرَّقَهــا
وبُكَاهَـا رُبَّمـا أَرَّقَنـــي
ولَقَدْ تَشْكُو فـمَا أَفْهَمُـهَا
ولَقَدْ أَشْكُو فَمَا تَفْهَمُنـي
غَيْـرَ أَنِّـي بالجَـوَى أَعْرِفُها
وهْيَ أَيْضاً بالجَوَى تَعْرِفُني
أَتُــراهَا بالبُـكَا مُولَعَـةً
أَمْ سَقَاهَا البَيْنُ ما جَرَّعَنـي