
STUDIES ON ARABIC DIALECTOLOGY AND SOCIOLINGUISTICS

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TŪNIS FĪ 'INAYYA BY NIZĀR AL-ŠA'ARĪ: AL-DĀRIĠA AL-TŪNISĪYYA BETWEEN RESISTANCE AND HYPERTEXTUALITY

Cristina LA ROSA

Abstract: *Tūnis fī 'inayya* by Nizār al-Ša'arī is a novel written in Tunisian Arabic for the 'ǧīl al-qādim' (al-Ša'arī 2017). Al-Ša'arī defines it as a manifesto for active citizenship, dedicated to youngsters. In the book, the *dāriġa* intermingles and dialogues with audiovisual codes as well as with other linguistic varieties like French and *Fuṣṣḥā*. This dialogue starts inside the novel and develops also outside it. Nizār al-Ša'arī, infact, inserts links, relating to other online written and audiovisual texts, in every chapter and frequently uses code-mixing *dāriġa*/French (Janoussi 1986; Belazi 1992; Baccouche 1994; Lawson, Itesh 2000; Sayahi 2014; Dallaji 2017) during the narration. The author's linguistic choices, aiming at emphasizing the multilingualism and pluriglossia that characterise Tunisian Arabic, fit well with the usage of hypertextuality (Yaktine 2004, 2008) and generate a novel which aspires both to reflect the current situation of Tunisians' language and culture and to convey a new idea of modern reading.

The aim of this paper is to analyze Nizār al-Ša'arī's linguistic choices and particularly the functions he provides to *dāriġa* as a means of resistance both to the stereotyped image of the young Tunisians, portrayed as indolent and lazy, and to the injustice that characterises Tunisian society. Moreover, attention will be devoted to some spelling issues, concerning the author's usage of different scripts (Arabic and Latin), which reveal the difficulties of transliterating an oral variety like Tunisian Arabic.

Keywords: Tunisian Arabic; Features and functions of dialect; Spelling; Code-mixing; Hypertextuality.

Introduction

This paper is part of wider research on contemporary Tunisian literary production in Tunisian Arabic fostered by some intellectuals who, after the Jasmine Revolution, began to use the Tunisian dialect as a means of resistance against political oppression and social injustice. My project concerns an examination of the sociolinguistic functions of contemporary Tunisian Arabic in some texts to which due attention has not been paid yet.¹

The present contribution focuses on the novel *Tūnis fī 'inayya* by the journalist Nizār al-Ša'arī (commonly known as Nizar Chaari), published in 2017 and entirely written in Tunisian slang,

¹ I presented the very first results of my research at the 14th SeSaMO Conference (Turin 31/01-02/02/2019) in the framework of the panel *Language(s) of Resistance in the Arab World*. My paper, titled *Resisting Through Languages: Dāriġah and Caricature in Contemporary Tunisia*, focused on satirical literature, the favourite genre of Tunisian intellectuals after the Arab Springs: Mohamed Doggui's *Khalti Khadhra* 1, (Tunis: Arabesques 2017) and some cartoons taken from Doggui and Anis Mahrsi's personal Facebook pages. It has been published in a special issue of *La rivista di Arablit* (20, 2020), edited by Alba Rosa Suriano (University of Catania) and me.

as the author has declared in his numerous interviews.² My aim is to analyze al-Ša‘arī’s linguistic choices which made of this book a ‘manifesto’ promoting Tunisian Arabic as a real language of culture (Mercier, Ghaibeh 2018: 11).

Besides, through his novel, the author seeks to convey a different idea of Tunisian youngsters, often represented as lazy and without any interests. In a broader sense, what is happening in the Arab world today is what Hoigilt (2019: 127-128) defines “the marginalization of youth”, since “millions of young people with higher education are unable to find jobs and feel suspended in a limbo as they grow older without being able to marry and establish themselves - a situation of ‘waithood’ forced upon them by the social system.”

What emerges from a socio-linguistic analysis of *Tūnis fī ‘inayya* is that not only is *al-dāriġa* a cultural and political instrument of resistance, but it also ‘resists’ against the centripetal force of the *fushā*, even if the dialect is increasingly preferred and chosen by authors and artists (Langone 2014).

The 2011 Revolution, infact, stimulated Tunisian literature production since it removed the mediation between the writer and the public, encouraged self-publishing, opening up to new genres of literature and creating some space for new authors.³ Emblematic of this change is the novel *Kalb ben Kalb* (Dog, Son of Dog, 2013), written in Tunisian dialect by the journalist and writer Taoufik Ben Brik.⁴ As a consequence of the Revolution, there has been a sort of “democratisation of register”, since language was no longer controlled by the authorities, but was chosen and promoted from below. There has been an increasing number of published novels since 2011 and also poetry, which has rapidly followed on from sudden changes due to the events of the Revolution, has undergone a certain development and has flourished. Infact, poetry accompanied the initial phases of the Revolution in Tunisia whose national poet, Abū l-Qāsim al-Šābbī (d. 1934) has had some of his verses used as slogans during the Arab Spring in the country and abroad. Eight years after the Revolution, people read less and write more and are more and more attracted by audio-visual media (Mohamed-Salah Omri 2018).⁵

This might be the reason why Nizār al-Ša‘arī has chosen to write a short novel in which hypertextuality and audiovisual contribution are fundamental. By hypertextuality I mean here that the novel is organized through a main text and other texts, different in nature, interconnected like a network through links making them immediately accessible. Hypertext is not meant here in the more strictly literary sense that sees a hypotext, or an original text, in relation with a hypertext (Yaktine 2004, 2008).⁶ The reader, in fact, cannot choose his or her own reading path, but can eventually expand it with audiovisual and articles in *dāriġa*, in *fushā* or in French, the idioms that Tunisians use in their everyday life. In order to contrast the low attraction that young people feel towards reading, al-Ša‘arī adopts the strategy of using videos from YouTube and social media, online articles and images, accessible through a QR code. Therefore, youngsters can be informed of all the cultural activities carried out during the last

² See <https://Nizār al-Ša‘arī .com/121/jai-choisi-le-dialecte-tunisien-parce-que-cest-la-langue-de-tous-les-tunisiens/> consulted 02/10/2019.

³ Mohamed-Salah Omri ‘s article *Literature Unchained: The Literary Scene in Tunisia post 2011* (2018) is available at <https://arablit.org/2018/01/02/literature-unchained-the-literary-scene-in-tunisia-post-2011/> consulted 03/10/2019.

⁴ Ben Brick, Taoufik. 2013. *Kalb bin kalb*, Apollonia: Tunis. See Mzoughi 2015.

⁵ See also the dossier on Tunisia available at <https://www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/meil/recent-issues/file127086.pdf>.

⁶ As van der Weel and Mangen (2015: 1) claim, hypertext novels, born in 1990, have had little success and have remained marginal in literature around the world.

few years in Tunisia. The innovative aspect of the book lies then in a modern concept of reading. al-Ša‘arī stated that *Tūnis fī ‘inayya* has a simple meaning, it is written in a simple *dāriġa* and aims at having Tunisians read in their own language, in everyday life through their mobile telephone.

The multilingualism characterizing the repertoire of the country's speakers emerges in the book: even if al-Ša‘arī presents himself as a sort of ‘purist’ of the *dāriġa*, who wants to promote it through the novel, he does not disdain using elements belonging to other linguistic varieties.

Tūnis fī ‘inayya is a very simple pocket-sized book of a hundred of pages, in which the author declares that he wants to describe Tunisia and its youngsters from his own personal perspective. Actually, the book is very autobiographical and narrates Nizār al-Ša‘arī’s personal and professional story. The author introduces some interesting parts of the recent history of Tunisia, such as the outbreak of the Revolution, the homicide of Chokri Bel‘ayd, the arrest of some journalists and rappers and offers an interesting and critical potrait of young Tunisians.⁷

Functions and features of Tunisian Arabic in the book

al-Ša‘arī, in the preface of the book, states that Tunisian is the only language that can express the breadth of the cultures present in the country (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 11). It is well known that the linguistic situation in Tunisia is characterized by several dialectal varieties (see i.e. Gibson 2009, Mion 2014, 2015, 2018, Ritt-Benmimoun 2008, 2014). Since Nizār al-Ša‘arī is from Sfax, I verified the eventual presence of Sfaxi elements in the book to try to identify the variety of Tunisian Arabic used in the novel. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that the relationship between orality and written language raises several problems. Firstly, written texts are not able to record all the linguistic features affecting an oral variety. Consequently, a phenomenon not attested in written texts is not necessarily absent in the oral language. The written level, for example, might conceal phonological features. Similar issues, related to the transcription of an oral language, arise every time an author decides to write in *dāriġa*.

However, there seem not to be in the book any Sfaxi Arabic elements. The book is written in the Tunisian ‘Standard’ Arabic of Tunis, the prestigious variety of the capital, as can be observed in the following examples.

At a phonological level, we have no information about the treatment of brief vowels in open syllable and of diphthongs, nor about phenomena like *imāla* or *tafḥīm* (Sellami 2019: 255-256) because the text is not vocalized. As for consonantism, there is no evidence of the pronunciation /g/ of /q/ in minimal pairs (Lajmi 2009: 136; Herin, Zammit 2017: 138, 142-143), typical of the Sfaxi variety of Arabic.

Concerning morphology, the Sfaxi forms of demonstrative adjectives and pronouns in al-Ša‘arī’s text are not attested; we only find ‘Standard’ Tunisian forms. Lajmi (2009: 138), in fact, distinguished between the two forms as indicated in the table below taken from his contribution:

⁷ See for instance p. 57.

Forme standard	Forme Sfaxienne
[hɛ:ðɛ]: ceci, celui-ci	[hɛ:ðɛ]: ceci, celui-ci
[hɛ:ðɛkɛ]: cela, celui-là	[hɛ:kɛ]: cela, celui-là
[hɛðɛ:kum] : ceux-là, celles-là	[hɛ:kuma]:ceux-là, celles-là

Likewise, the Sfaxi possessive pronouns, like *lili*, ‘mine’, *lilu* ‘his’⁸ and so on, are absent in al-Ša‘arī’s book. These forms have been described by Lajmi (2009: 138):

Le pronom possessif	Forme standard	Forme Sfaxienne
le mien	[lijjɛ]	[lili]
le tien	[li:k]	[li:lɛk]
le sien	[li:h]	[li:lu]
le vôtre	[li:kum]	[li:lukum]
le nôtre	[li:nɛ]	[li:linɛ]
le leur	[li:hum]	[li:luhum]

There is no evidence in the text of the Sfaxi *hitou* ‘parce qu’il’ (Lajmi 2009: 139), but خاطر and على خاطر are preferred (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 39, 47) and alternate with لأنو (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 47).

There is no oscillation between the verb *šāf* and *rā* (Sellami 2019: 258); the former is preferred to the latter (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 37, 39, 43). As a consequence, the imperative *ara* is not used instead of *šūf*.

Other Sfaxi elements, according to Lajmi (2009: 139-140), are the frequent use of the diminutive and some Sfaxi lexical items which are not attested in al-Ša‘arī’s novel. For instance, the verb [*g.d.s*] ‘to sit’ and its Sfaxi variants are absent and [*q.‘d*] is preferred and *šayn* ‘thing’ as a fixed form is not attested (Sellami 2019: 260-261).

At a syntactic level, in Sfaxi Arabic, the use of the dual seems not to be limited to the double parts of the body (Sellami 2019:257); in al-Ša‘arī’s book it is often substituted by *zūz* + plural like in الزوز المنشطين (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 27). A case concerning the double parts of the body is عيونها الخضر المزيتين ‘her beautiful green eyes’ (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 43).

In al-Ša‘arī’s book, passive sentences are rare, there are no passive Sfaxi forms with *t-* and *n-* (Sellami 2019: 257).

There is no evidence, in *Tūnis fi inayya*, of the *yo-* prefix of the imperfect because of the lack of vowels in the text (Sellami 2019: 258).

There is no opposition between the two particles of the future *mēš* or *māšī* and *bāš* (Sellami 2019: 259). Only the latter is preferred by al-Ša‘arī who graphically distinguishes between باش which expresses the future and باش introducing a final clause. The author also uses *taw* for a near future: *taw yišūf* ‘he will see’ (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 43; see Mion 2017: 210).

The numerous loanwords present in the novel will not be analyzed here;⁹ they generally belong to the fields of the lexicon of everyday life, like ماتش ‘match’ (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 49), and of

⁸ See Taine-Cheikh’s contribution in this volume.

⁹ It is not possible to mention here all the contributions focused on Tunisian lexis. Refer, for instance, to Behenstedt 2017 and to Mzoughi (2015). Behenstedt (2017: 103), in particular, highlights the need for further studies on the Tunisian lexicon. However, it seems that some young researchers are trying to fill this gap. During the First Study Day on Maghribi Dialectology, organized by Giuliano Mion (Cagliari, 16/05/2019) Elisa Gugliotta, Livia Panasci (Università di Roma La Sapienza) and Alessia D’Accordio

technology, like the word هاكلت in the sentence هاكلت بروفيل ‘has hacked the profile of...’ (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 49) from the English ‘to hack’.

al-Ša‘arī (2017: 51) uses some ‘classicisms’ like متعود instead of the tunisian مستحسن ‘used to’ or the expression كما ترون (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 63). This is the only case in which we find *rā* instead of *šāf*. Notice that in this passage of the novel, the verbs in –ūn alternate with those in –ū.¹⁰

To sum up, al-Ša‘arī uses a ‘Standardized’ Tunisian Arabic typical of the capital region. The only sentence which reveals the author’s origin is: *al-wālid ḥayyāt ašhar min nār ‘alā ‘ilm gādī tqūlū intum al-‘umda fī ḥumt-u w-bu-h Sī Mḥammad ya ‘nī ma ‘allim al-binā kīf mā nqūlū fī Sfax* (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 17) “my father is the best tailor over there [in Sfax], as you say “the mayor in the neighborhood” and his father, *Sī Mḥammad*, was a bricklayer as we say in Sfax.”

Tunisian Arabic, in this book as in much contemporary literature, is employed as a means of resistance against *fushā*, perceived as an artificial language, to narrate some episodes of social and political resistance from Tunisian youngsters’ against unemployment, censorship and lack of freedom of thought. Two emblematic examples are addressed in the book: the first one concerns the journalists Zied el-Heni (Essahafa) and Haythem el-Mekki, (Mosaique FM and Attasaa TV), arrested and put on trial because of their work and inquiries in 2013 and 2015 (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 47-51). The second involves the renowned Sfaxi rapper, El Général, whose real name is Hamada Ben Amor, accused because of a song, *Rayīs le-blād*, addressed to the President Bin ‘Alī, in which he talks to him explicitly criticizing his regime and the conditions of corruption affecting Tunisian society (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 45). El Général was arrested, then released, but his song in Tunisian dialect became viral and a symbol of the revolution in Tunisia and across almost the whole Arab world (Khosrokhavar 2012: 238-239). al-Ša‘arī speaks to some students, during a lecture, and uses El Général’s words to convey a social message; he adopts the strategy of using a language loved by young Tunisians, like rap in Tunisian Arabic.¹¹

Spelling features and linguistic choices

Nizār al-Ša‘arī spells the text in Arabic, but treats French loanwords at his discretion by spelling them in Arabic or in Latin script.

As for code-switching, the elements contained in *Tūnis fī ‘inayya* confirm previous studies’ assessments (e.i. Sayahi 2014). The more switched elements, infact, are single singular nouns and noun phrases. The nouns generally belong to common everyday life vocabulary, which sometimes do not have any correspondent in Tunisian Arabic, and to the semantic field of technology. Besides, very frequent are the switch of the Arabic article *al-* followed by a French singular noun and the use of French adverbs and connectives.

Some examples will be presented below. Note the alternation between Latin and Arabic scripts.

The first category includes proper names like Généralال (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 63) and كلاي, also spelled Klay (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 63).

Berlinguer (Università di Napoli L’Orientale) presented three different projects focused on Tunisian Arabic lexical corpora.

¹⁰ al-Ša‘arī is narrating of a lecture to the students of the University of Tunis requiring a formal language.

¹¹ See Dallaji’s (2017: 117) lexical and semantic study of the male language used in some songs Tunisian songs like *Rayīs le-blād*, *Sīdī rayīs* and *Tūnis blādna* by El Général. See also De Blasio 2016 and Guerrero 2019.

The second category is social media and technology: *mot d'ordre* ال “password” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 47), blog “blog” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 47), بروفايل “profile” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 49), *avant garde* “avant-garde” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 45), Anonymous متاع *Opération Tunisia* ل “the Operation Tunisia by Anonymous” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 49), بادج “badge” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 51), *régie* في “in the control room” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 53), برومو “promo” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 55), buzz “and a buzz” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 55), *des brevets* “brevets” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 61), *site* “site” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 45), موقع “site” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 45), موديراتور “moderator” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 45), *porte parole* “spokesman” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 45). Many words are in Latin spelling and others alternate in the two scripts.

The third category, radio/tv programmes and acronyms, is generally spelled in French, with some exceptions: Tunivisions, Tedx Carthage, Tunivisions/Live, موزايك افم “Mosaique FM” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: *passim*).

School and professions: ليسي *des garçons* “male high school” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 23, 73), *inventaire* “inventory” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 25), باك “baccalaureate” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 25), *Lettres* “Humanities” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 29), كستينغ “casting” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 29), رپورتاجات “reportage” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 29), بيرو “office” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 19), boss “boss” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 47), *ingénieur* “engineer” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 27), البولسية “police” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 51), FBI ال “the FBI” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 51). The terms of this fourth category, derived from French, are spelled in both alphabets.

In the last category, I have included various common words, like connectives and adjectives, and expressions: زوز *unités* بركا “only two units” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 39), *bon*/باهي “well” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: *passim*), *d’ailleurs* “moreover” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 39), *en plus* “besides” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 73), *ceci dit* “this being said” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 49), لوزير “leisures” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 31), ستوديو “studio apartment” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 27), *des préjugés* “some prejudices” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 33), *frustrations* “frustrations” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 33), ميزيرية “misery” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 39), تران “train” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 41), *bien lu* “read carefully” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 47), ماتش “match” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 49), *positif* اعلام “positive signal” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 55), سيستم “system” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 61), *les Think tank* “the Think tank” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 75), *coup de foudre* “love at first sight” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 27).

Other examples in the book are ‘mixed sentences’ like انا منيش متعود بالحكايات هذي *donc c’était impressionnant quand même* “I am not used to this kind of situations; so, it was very impressive” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 51); ؟ *majorité silencieuse* أش قتلك “what did the silent majority say to you?” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 57); *civile* 3 لابسين “three [people] dressed in civilian clothes” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 49).

al-Ša‘arī sometimes feels the need to use the two languages, as in the case of the aims of his project *Tunivisions Universities Tour*: عمل تجديد مشاركة *travail, innovation, partage* “work, innovation, share” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 57).

Quotations in *fushā*

Poetry

Quotations in *fushā* have the function of attracting the readers' attention and emphasizing some concepts. In these cases, the text is vocalized. al-Ša'arī draws on the Arabic historical heritage shared by everybody, namely the religious sources and the poems of the Tunisian Abū l-Qāsim al-Šābbī: الحياة لم تنتظره الحياة فمن نام في سبيل الحياة فمن نام لم تنتظره الحياة "Then wake up and walk towards life! Because life does not wait for the sleeper" (al-Ša'arī 2017: 57). al-Ša'arī uses this line by the poet al-Šābbī regarding the already mentioned "*majorité silencieuse*" who sleep and do not care about the decadence that is plaguing Tunisia nowadays.

The second quotation from al-Šābbī's poetry is *ومن لا يحب صعود الجبل يعيش أبداً الدهر بين الحفر* "Whoever shrinks from scaling the mountain Lives out his life in potholes" (al-Ša'arī 2017: 63).

The author also quotes a line by the *Mu'allaqa* of 'Amrū b. Kulthūm (d. 584): *ألا لا يجهلن أحد علينا فنجهل فوق جهل الجاهليين* "Beware! No one should express his rashness in front of us, Otherwise we would be forced to be rasher than the rash" (al-Ša'arī 2017: 49).

Religious sources

The first quotation is from a *Ḥadīth*: *ما رضا الله إلا برضاء الوالدين* "God will be pleased with you if your parents are pleased with you" (al-Ša'arī 2017: 55). al-Ša'arī refers to Tunivisions which, like a parent, understood him and accepted him in a very difficult moment.

The second quotation is taken from the Sura 13 of the *Qur'ān*, verse 11: *ما بقوم حتى يعجزوا ما بأنفسهم* "God will not change the good condition of a people as long as they do not change their state of goodness themselves." al-Ša'arī (2017: 61) quotes it in *fushā*, but then explains it in *dāriġa*: *تحبو الدنيا تتبدل؟ بدلو رواحكم يزيو من الانتظارات* "Do you want the world to change? Change yourselves and stop waiting." This is representative of how al-Ša'arī considers the Tunisian dialect as the language of real understanding and feelings. This sentence is a *motto* of resistance exhorting Tunisian citizens against idleness, inertia and indolence.

Other quotations

During a lecture to some Tunisian students, al-Ša'arī reports a quotation by the a song of the Algerian singer Su'ād Māssī to exhort them to be active: *سأعيش رغم الداء والأعداء كالنسر فوق القمة* 'I will live despite the disease and the enemies, Similar to the eagle on the highest peak' (al-Ša'arī 2017: 63).

Then, the author quotes Mandela's famous expression in *fushā*: *أنا لا أفشل البتة أنا أنجح أو أتعلم* (al-Ša'arī 2017: 75) "I never loose. I either succeed or learn." al-Ša'arī states that this is an important expression for youngsters because, in Tunisian culture, failing is considered intolerable. The author reminds the reader that to learn to walk one needs at first to learn to fall and get up.

Proverbs are also used to reinforce an idea: *إذا لم اجد طريقاً صنعت واحداً* "if i do not find a way, I will create one" (al-Ša'arī 2017: 63).

Tunisian songs of resistance in *dāriġa*

Even if al-Ša‘arī mentions El Général’s rap songs (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 48),¹² he does not report any quotation from them. He prefers, indeed, quoting from BB Klay’s song *Ġudwa hīr* “Tomorrow it will be better.” BB Klay is another young Tunisian rapper who became politically and socially engaged after the 2011 Revolution. He was also sentenced to several years of detention which he did not serve. The quotation is *مع الناس أذوما ، لازمك جروما* “with this people you must be a bad boy” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 61). Then, al-Ša‘arī explains it by stating *أنتج يا حوما ، خلي مخاخم فيك* “Get productive my friends, let them question themselves how you made it” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 61).

English slogans

English is not ignored by the author in some slogans: “Dream Big, Work Hard and Think Tunivisions”, “Think globally, act locally” and “Future is now” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 59, 67, 61).

Spelling

The spelling of Tunsian dialect in Arabic and Latin script has not been deeply investigated,¹³ unlike the case of Moroccan Arabic.¹⁴ However, some tendencies can be identified.

* Oscillation in the transcription of /ʔ/: final *hamza* is frequently absent: *ضو* “light” and *جا* “he came” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: *passim*). Exceptions: *لقاء* “meeting”, *اسماء* “names” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 29). Initial *hamza* is spelled: *الأرض* “the earth”, *إنو* “that it” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: *passim*).

* Oscillation in the transcription of /a/ and /ā/: *بركا* and *بركة* “only” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 43), *برشى* and *برشا* “much, many” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 11, 13). The oscillation does not occur in the case of words with a morphological value: *بش* expressing the future tense and *باش* introducing a final clause are always graphically distinguished by al-Ša‘arī (2017: *passim*).

* French /g/ is transcribed with Arabic *غ*: *كستينغ* “casting” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 29).

* *ما إنجمش* “I cannot” is spelled without *šadda* and with *alif* (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 47), whereas *ما نَجْمَش* is more frequent in literary texts.¹⁵

* *Alif otiosum* can be spelled or not: *ينساوا* “they forget”, *نلقاوا* “we find”, *تعداوا* “they passed” and *بداوا* “they started”, *يمشيووا* “they go” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 33, 39, 49; Aguadé 2006: 265).

* Assimilation of consonants is not marked: *عندنا* “we have” (al-Ša‘arī 2017: 25, see Michalski 2016: 387).

These examples show the difficulty of coping with the transcription of an oral language, which cannot easily be standardized and remains, therefore, susceptible to the author’s choices.

Conclusions

¹² al-Ša‘arī provides the link to the video of this song at page 44.

¹³ It is among the tasks of the Association Derja which aims at standardizing Tunisian Arabic, promoting its use in daily life, literature and science, and to get an official recognition of it as a language. See <http://www.bettounsi.com> (consulted 01/10/2019). Some interesting outputs of the preliminary researches on this subject are found in Zribi et al. 2013, 2015 and McNeil 2019.

¹⁴ See among others Aguadé 2006, Caubet 2012, Michalski 2016, 2017 and the relative references.

¹⁵ Aguadé 2006: 257, Michalski 2016: 387 for “redundant *alif*” in Moroccan Arabic.

After the Arab Springs, informal literature provoked a change in language practices and broke a cultural taboo, making the use of Arabic dialects in written texts more accepted (Mejdell 2017; Hoigilt 2019: 175, 177). Tunisian Arabic in al-Ša‘arī’s book has to be considered within this context. Accessibility and understandability of *dāriġa* plays a fundamental role in the author’s choice (Hoigilt 2019: 162, 170). Besides, the use of a dialect and of an informal language gives voice to the young Arabs in unofficial contexts and allows both the author and the reader to strengthen their identity through their mother tongue (Hoigilt 2019: 170-171, Suleiman 2003, Mazraani 2009, Bassiouney 2012). The Tunisian Arabic in this book allows youngsters to gain a voice and to be aware of their identity.

The symbolic value of the dialect as a means of resistance, is never caricatured, which is something typical of satirical literature, neither is it dreamlike nor lyrical. Tunisian Arabic in *Tūnis fī ‘inayya* has youthful slang tones and a sort of neo-realist aspect representing the everyday language of the people. al-Ša‘arī, on the other hand, tries to ennoble the text by using some *fušḥā* elements. Moreover, it is clear that the three main varieties of the country, dialect, *fušḥā* and French, are complementary. English is also involved in semantic fields related to technology and in slogans. Reading *Tūnis fī ‘inayya*, people feel at ease and free to wander from one variety to another, without being obliged to employ Modern Standard Arabic (see Hoigilt 2019: 71). In the novel, however, the variety of the capital exerts a centripetal force as a prestigious idiom.

Tunisians have recently shown their love for multilingualism since, in January 2019, they have strongly defended the maintenance of French on the shop and road signs after the introduction of a new law proposing to keep only Arabic scripts. al-Ša‘arī’s book reflects Tunisia’s multilingualism and is an expression of the contemporary Pan-Arab tendency to write in dialectal Arabic in a period when *fušḥā* and *dāriġa* are both vital and have acquired different expressive functions with the latter being more and more popular in informal written domains (Hoigilt 2019: 187).

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