

Foreword

Modern Arabic writing, whether literary, journalistic or academic, has developed specific stylistic patterns which differ quite considerably from Classical Arabic usage. They were shaped under the influence of modern Western writing but gained their own momentum once they were introduced into Arabic. But Western influence goes deeper than the stylistic level. It begins with the way in which the text is organized and divided into chapters and paragraphs. The introduction of the paragraph was a major innovation in Arabic writing which in turn triggered important stylistic developments. As the present study convincingly shows, it soon became customary to begin each paragraph with a special formula which was intended to link it to the preceding one but often developed into a meaningless paragraph filler.

The present study is an investigation into the corruption of style in Modern Arabic prose, studied from a single angle, namely the use of *rakā'iz* or paragraph fillers. The author starts by pointing out how well Classical Semitic languages, managed to produce a coherent text with the use of just a few cohesive ties. In modern style, however, we can observe an inflation of *rakā'iz* which are for most part meaningless and do not contribute significantly to a coherent text. The inflational use of this paragraph fillers is paralleled by an inflational coining of new expressions and variations of existing ones. It is amusing to follow up, as the present study enables us to do, the evolution of simple formulae to more and more tortuous constructions, like, e.g. *we note, we have to note, we cannot help noting, it is important to note* etc. It is the juxtaposition of this formulae which the present study undertakes that makes us realize just how tedious and devoid of content they are. One of the surprising findings of the book is the fact that most of the paragraph fillers are not listed in the current Arabic dictionaries or are listed only with their traditional meaning, without reference to their newly acquired stylistic function.

Dr. Moin Halloun, a Classical Arabist and Semitist by training, is also the author of a very successful series of textbooks of Spoken Palestinian Arabic. He has a fine ear for stylistic nuances and a gift for distinguishing between genuine and spurious language usage. His academic background enables him to view Modern Written Arabic from a distance, which makes his view all the more penetrating. His scathing critique of some stylistic developments in modern Arabic writing is not destructive but rather underscores his main objective, namely to plead for a style in Arabic academic writing, which combines greater simplicity with better logical cohesion of the text and thus serves the interest of both the writer and the reader better than the present "swollen" style so aptly described in the body of the book.

I congratulate Dr. Moin Halloun on this penetrating study and hope it will enjoy the wide diffusion and public attention it deserves.

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