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## THE USE OF SLANG AND COARSE WORDS IN MODERN EGYPTIAN WRITING<sup>1</sup>

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### Introduction

Colloquial Egyptian Arabic (*šĀmmiyya*) has become a second literary and written language in Egypt, in addition to Standard Literary Arabic (*Fuṣṣḥā*). Many literary and semi-literary texts are now being composed and published in Colloquial Egyptian Arabic, mostly Cairene but sometimes also in other Egyptian dialects<sup>2</sup>. This phenomenon is unique in Arabic-speaking societies, marking a change in prevailing literary norms.

*šĀmmiyya* cannot be regarded as “slang”. It is a language variety shared by millions of speakers in Cairo and elsewhere in Egypt from all strata of society, used for all purposes of oral communication, and now also for written ones. Slang, besides, is a difficult term to define:

There is no good definition of slang available in the literature. The linguist Paul Roberts said that slang was ‘one of those things that everybody can recognize and nobody can define’. (Andersson and Trudgil, *Bad Language*, 69).

This difficulty may be reflected in definitions of slang:

The word [slang] is widely used without precision, especially to include informal usage and technical jargon, and the social and psychological complexities captured in slang vocabulary make the term difficult to define. (McArthur, *Oxford Companion*, 940).

There have been many attempts to define “slang”; it may be regarded as “a set of informal and colloquial words and phrases used within particular social groups and that are not part of the ‘mainstream’ language” (Swann et al, *Dictionary-Socio-linguistics*, 281); according to another definition slang is:

Informal language, which might include words and meanings which are not polite and which might stay in use only for a short time. It is used by particular groups of people who know each other, and is

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<sup>2</sup> On Egyptian Arabic as a written language see Rosenbaum, *Egyptian Arabic*; see also Farnawany, *Ägyptisch-Arabisch*.

usually spoken rather than written. (Procter et al, *Cambridge International Dictionary*, 1349)<sup>3</sup>.

*Fuṣḥā* has not developed a slang of its own since it is not a language used for daily oral communication<sup>4</sup>. *ʿĀmmiyya*, on the other hand, has developed its own slang. But while Egyptian *ʿĀmmiyya* has become a written language employed by many writers, slang elements have generally not been used extensively in written texts. From a conservative point of view slang is considered “inappropriate” or “impolite”; some of its vocabulary is often regarded as coarse and “taboo”. Partridge notes that “*slang* has, from about 1850, been the accepted term for ‘illegitimate’ colloquial speech”<sup>5</sup>. Such “illegitimate” speech does not easily find its way into written literature<sup>6</sup>. However, the use of the colloquial as a written language sometimes does lead to the use of slang elements in both literary and semi-literary texts. In this study I demonstrate the use of such elements in modern Egyptian writing.

#### Criticizing the “language of the era” and talking about slang

Several studies of the language of Egyptian youth, have been done from a socio-linguistic point of view; these include descriptions of some of the new slang vocabulary<sup>7</sup>. There are also lexicons which contain older and newer slang<sup>8</sup>. Egyptian slang is also discussed in the Egyptian press; many such contributions, occasionally in the form of letters to the editor, criticize the use of slang and often refer to it in derogatory terms.

The best-known word in the new vocabulary of contemporary Egyptian slang is *riwiš* - “cool”, which has become an adjective in very common use, often followed by an invariable qualifier *ṭaḥn* - “very”. The phrase *riwiš ṭaḥn* (“very cool”) has become a collocation which often appears in written texts, sometimes in titles<sup>9</sup>. The noun and verbal noun derived from *riwiš* is *rawšana* - “cool behaviour, cool attitude, cool life; being *riwiš*, behaving in a cool manner”; both terms are extensively used in newspaper articles dealing with new slang, often conveying a negative connotation.

Other slang words and expressions also appear in current newspaper articles. Many of these criticize slang and its usage, but as they often quote examples they may

<sup>3</sup> Andersson and Trudgill, instead of looking for a definition, decided to try to “characterize slang by stating what it is and what it is not” (Andersson and Trudgill, *Bad Language*, 69; see the chapter on slang, *ibid*, 67-89).

<sup>4</sup> But it contains taboo words some of which may reflect old slang - see below.

<sup>5</sup> Partridge, *Slang*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> Note that the term “slang” as an entry is still absent from some lexicons of literary terms published in the West, thus ignoring its function as a vehicle for literary expression.

<sup>7</sup> See Alam, *Youngsters*; Gād Allāh, *Aṭar*; Peterson, *Cairene Youth Terminology*.

<sup>8</sup> See Farag, *Muṣṭamr*; ʿIzzat, *Luḡat al-šārīf*; Ḥimāya, *Qāmūs riwiš* 1 and 2. Several articles and commentaries have been published on Ḥimāya’s Dictionaries and his ideas; see, e.g., Abū al-Suʿūd, *Naḥnu gī!*; S. ʿ., *Taʿammulāt*; Wādī, *Qāmūs*.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., the following titles in the bibliography below: Fawzī, *Šabāb*; Ḥimāya, *Qāmūs riwiš* 1 and 2; Ibrāhīm, *Šaʿīdī*; Nabil, *Rasāʾil*; Yūsuf, *Muʿalliq*.

be contributing to its spread. These comments may contain merely one or two slang words, but some mention dozens<sup>10</sup>.

Writers of newspaper articles, as well as readers in letters to the editor, sometimes criticize the use of certain words. The author of the following discussion of the term *šabaḥ* (a nickname for a Mercedes car; lit.: ghost - see below) pretends not to understand its meaning and concludes by mockingly applying it to old-fashioned and cheap means of transportation:

بإله عليكم ما هي السيارة الشبح؟  
عندما قرأت تعبير السيارة الشبح لم انجح اطلاقا في تخمين ما يقصد بها. هل هي  
مثلا سيارة سبور انيقة؟ هل هي سيارة سريعة جدا؟ هل هي سيارة لا يلتقطها  
الرادار بسبب طلاء خاص؟ ام هي سيارة تظهر في الليل وتختفي بالنهار؟ كل ما  
اعرفه عن طريق ما يكتب عنها هي انها سيارة مرتفعة الثمن جدا ويتباهى  
بامتلاكها البعض في مجتمع ينز تحت وطأة المشاكل الاقتصادية والاجتماعية. كان  
الله في عون اصحاب البسكليتات الشبح والكارو الشبح.

By God, what is the *šabaḥ*?

When I read the phrase “a *šabaḥ* (ghost) car” I was completely unable to guess what it could mean. Is it for example an elegant sports car? Is it a very fast car? Is it a car with a special coating that makes it undetectable by radar? Or is it a car that can be seen at night and becomes invisible during the day? All I know from what has been written about it is that it is a very expensive car, and that some people in a society with many financial and social problems are the proud possessors of one. May God help the owners of *šabaḥ* bicycles and *šabaḥ* carts. (*Bil-lāhi ṣalaykum*).

The text is accompanied by an illustration of a “regular” small car which looks in fear at a big “ghost-car” representing the *šabaḥ* (“ghost”).

Modern slang and the language used by young people are often referred to as *Luġat al-ṣaṣr* - “the language of the era, the language of our time”, a phrase which often carries a negative connotation. In the following dialogue between Gōhari and Saḥīd, taken from a comedy by al-Maʿaddāwī, Gōhari uses a slang expression. When Saḥīd is puzzled, Gōhari answers with other slang expressions. Saḥīd reprimands him, and Gōhari responds by saying that this is “the language of our time”:

الاول: سلم لي على المترو.  
سعيد: حتى انت يا استاذ جوهرى بتقول كلام اليومين دول.  
الاول: يا استاذ سعيد يا رمضان انت عايش في عالم مش موجود.. عاوز الدنيا  
تبقى لونها بمبي وهي بصراحة كحلي.. خليك فرسكا يا راجل وخليها تعوم.  
سعيد: هو ايه اللي بيحصل.. ايه التعبيرات الهابطة دي يا استاذ.  
الثاني: (يضحك ساخرًا..) لغة العصر يا عسل.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., ṢAbd al-Ḥamīd, *Luġa*; ṢAbd al-Munʿim, *Aġānī*; Darwīš, *Mulāḥẓāt*; Ḥasan, *Šillit il-gāmīša*; *Luġa šabābiyya*; Suwaidān, *Qāmūs*; Yusuf, *Man al-masʿūt*; Zakī, *Luġa*.

The first one :Forget about it (lit.: give my regards to the metro<sup>11</sup>).

Saʿīd :Even you, mister Gōhari, say the words of these days.

The first one :Oh mister Saʿīd Ramaḍān, you live in a world which does not exist. You want the world to have a pink colour<sup>12</sup>, while its colour is in fact dark blue. “Be cool”, man, and “go with the stream”.

Saʿīd :What’s happening? What are these base expressions, sir?

The second one :(Laughs mockingly) The language of the era, sweet-heart. (Maʿaddāwī, *Fī baytina*, 109-110).

The term *Luġat al-ḡaṣr*, with its derogatory connotation, may appear in the Egyptian press as a headline under which some examples of that language are given. The following headline and terms appeared in a letter to the editor; the structure “say... and don’t say” is a phrase used when instructing people to use correct *Fuṣṣḥā* (for example, in radio programmes):

لغة العصر!  
 ما هذه اللغة الجديدة.. التي ظهرت بين طوائف الشعب المختلفة؟ واي منطق واي  
 مسميات هذه حتى اصبح جائزا ان نقول:  
 قل.. "فيل" .. ولا تقل مائة مليون جنيه  
 قل.. "ارنب" ولا تقل مليون جنيه  
 قل.. "استك" او "باكو" ولا تقل الف جنيه  
 قل.. "بريزة" ولا تقل عشرة جنيهات  
 قل.. "ثلن" ولا تقل خمسة جنيهات  
 قل "الحلوح" ولا تقل جنيها  
 قل.. "الاخضر" ولا تقل دولارا!  
 قل "الاحمر" ولا تقل الاسترليني  
 واخيرا.. قل "زلمكة" ولا تقل مرسيدس!  
 ولا تعليق ايها السادة سوى ارحمونا.. يرحمكم من في السماء.

The language of the era!

What is this new language which has appeared among the various classes of people? What is this logic and what are these meanings that made it possible for us to say:

Say “*fīl*” (elephant) and don’t say one hundred million pounds

Say “*ʿarnab*” (rabbit) and don’t say one million pounds

Say “*ʿastik*” (rubber band) or “*bāku*” (packet) and don’t say one thousand pounds

Say “*barīza*” (ten piasters) and don’t say ten pounds

Say “*šīlin*” (five piasters) and don’t say five pounds

Say “*laḥlūḥ*”<sup>13</sup> and don’t say (an Egyptian) pound

<sup>11</sup> *Metro* is the metropolitan electric train which travels on the surface, as opposed to *metro al-ʿanfāq* (or *al-ʿanfāʿ*), the underground train, which today is sometimes also called for short *metro*.

<sup>12</sup> This is an allusion to the song *Bambi* – “Pink” - performed by Suʿād Ḥusnī in the film *Amīra ḥubbi ʿana* (“Amīra my love”): the opening line and refrain of the song, *il-ḥaya baʿa lōnha bambi* – “Life’s colour has become pink” has become a common saying in Egyptian *ʿĀmmiyya*, conveying an optimistic mood.

Say “*il-ṭaḥḍar*” (green) and don’t say dollar!  
 Say “*il-ṭaḥmar*” (red) and don’t say (pound) sterling  
 And finally, say “*zalamukka*” (fow’s bottom) and don’t say Mercedes!  
 And no commentary is possible, gentlemen, only have mercy on us,  
 and He who is in Heaven will have mercy on you. (Burhām, *Luḡat al-ṣaṣr-1*).

The following caption and terms, most of which appear also in the list above, are taken from a cartoon showing an “average” Egyptian looking puzzled at some new slang terms; the one word in this list which did not appear in the former quotation is *kōsa* (lit.: zucchini) which has become a slang word for favouritism, favourable treatment:

لغة العصر  
 فيل يعني مليار  
 أرنب مليون  
 استك ألف  
 زلمكة مرسيدس  
 كوسة طبعا معروفة

The language of the era  
*Fīl* (elephant) means one milliard  
*Arnab* (rabbit) one million  
*Astik* (rubber band) one thousand  
*Zalamukka* Mercedes  
*Kōsa* of course is known. (*Luḡat al-ṣaṣr-2*).

The lack of a definition for *kōsa* implies not only that the word is in common use, but also that the phenomenon it refers to is widespread.

### Talking about slang in literary texts

When characters in a literary text use slang, there are sometimes meta-linguistic comments concerning such use. More often than not these remarks are made when slang is uttered by someone who would not be expected to use it or when the slang is not understood.

As quoted above, the word *šīlin* - “five piasters” (from English “shilling”), has acquired a new meaning - “five pounds”, and *barīza* - “ten piasters”, has acquired the meaning “ten pounds”. In the play *It-Talat wara?āt* the word *barīza* appears several times in a conversation between Maḥrūs Afandi and a nurse, and both refer to it as ten pounds (Dewēri, *Talat*, 46). In *Fī baytina ṭānawīyya ṣāmma*, the author makes it clear, through one of the speakers, that the term *šīlin* carries its new slang meaning:

ناهد: واحنا حنعمل ايه بالكثف ده يا عم عبد العال؟  
 الفرش: خدمة مني يا ست هاتم ووهبته ثلن بالصلاة على النبي.  
 (تعلو الدهشة وجه السيدة ناهد).

<sup>13</sup> From the root *l-ḥ-l-ḥ* which refers to movement and activity.

ناهيد: معقولة خمسة جنيه حطة واحدة عشان حطة ورقة فيها عناوين وتليفونات المدرسين..

Nāhid: And what are we supposed to do with this list, “uncle” ʿAbd al-ʿĀl?

The janitor: It’s a service from me, madam, and the tip for it is one *šilīn*, may the prophet protect us from the evil eye.

(Astonishment takes over Nāhid’s face).

Nāhid: Is this reasonable?! Five pounds at once for a piece of paper with the teachers’ addresses and telephone numbers?! (Maʿaddāwī, *Fī baytina*, 43; see also the dialogue from this play quoted above).

An explanation of a slang word may be given when a speaker indicates that such a word is not understood. The following explanation is given by Sāmīr, after his father wonders about the expression *ṭarrī-lu* - “remove him, make him go away” used by Rifʿat:

رفعت: أطري له يعني إيه؟  
سامر: طري لأبو تامر. وزعه يعني [...]

Rifʿat: What do you mean get rid of him?

Sāmīr: Get rid of Tāmīr’s father. I mean get him out of here [...]  
(Ramlī, *Tiḥibb-i tšūf*, 14).

It may also happen that one of the speakers will misunderstand a slang word. In the following dialogue, a woman who does not know the slang meaning of the word *ʿarnab* used by her husband takes it literally:

عبد الصبور: طبعا فيه مشكلة، المشكلة في الارنب الاولاني.  
صفية: اذا كان على الارنب ما تحملش هم يا عبد الصبور، ادبلك جوزين تاكلهم على ملوخية، بس اقعد معاك.

ʿAbd al-Ṣabbūr: Of course there is a problem, the problem is with [making] the first *ʿarnab* (million).

Ṣafīyya: If the rabbit (*ʿarnab*) is the problem don’t worry, ʿAbd al-Ṣabbūr, I shall slaughter for you a pair and you’ll eat them in the *muluḥīyya*-soup, just let me stay with you. (Gād, *Maḥaṭṭa*, 107).

In the following passage the author, who has also written a dictionary of slang words, not only explains a new slang term, but refers the reader to his own dictionary:

اهلا يا شقيقي (لفظ يقوله الشباب الروش لاصدقائهم، وتستطيع ان تراجع كتابنا قاموس روش طحن)....  
ايه النظام.

Hello brother (a word said by the cool [riwiš] youngsters to their friends; you can refer to our book *Riwiš taḥn dictionary*). What's up? (Ḥimāya, *l'Asīq*, 15).

### Using slang in written texts

The most common slang words figuring in written texts are words denoting amounts of money, nicknames for Mercedes cars, the word *kōsa*, and currently the words *riwiš*, *taḥn* and *bī'a* (see below). Other words appear less frequently, except for some texts which are intentionally loaded with slang.

### Talking about money

In a surrealist scene in the play *It-Talat wara?āt* Maḥrūs Afandi addresses his wife from outside a maternity ward while she is having labour pains inside. Maḥrūs Afandi mentions large amounts of money and uses the appropriate slang words; the structure of the phrases here is an allusion to the title *One Thousand and One Nights*.

٣٢٠ و ٤٠ (زاعقا) الف باكو وبأكو يهون لأجل خاطر ك بس تولدي و ٦٠ و ٨٠  
الف ارنب وارنب يهون بس تخلف لي ولد ٤٠٠ و ١٠ و ٢٠ الف فيل وفيل يهون  
لأجل مهروس [...]

320 and 40 thousand thousand (*bāko*; lit.: package) and one are nothing for your sake, just give birth, and 60 and 80 thousand million (*?arnab*; lit.: rabbit) and one are nothing, she just should give birth to a boy for me, 400 and 10 and 20 thousand milliard [or: 100 million] (*fiḥ*; lit.: elephant) and one are nothing for the sake of Maḥrūs [the child to be born]. (Dewēri, *Talat*, 41).

A metalinguistic comment is made in the following excerpt from the novel *Laban il-ṣaṣfūr* in which the slang terms for large amounts of money are explained:

وقاله دا سيم. الاستك يعني ميه, والألف يعني باكو, الارنب مليون, عشان الانارب  
بتخلف بسرعة, والمليون بيخلف السرعة من الانارب [...].

And he told him: this is a secret language. *Astik* means one hundred, one thousand is *bāko*, the rabbit (*?arnab*) is one million, because rabbits procreate quickly, and one million procreates faster than rabbits [...]. (Qaṣīd, *Laban*, 101).

### Talking about Mercedes cars

It is a tradition in Egypt to give nicknames to various models of Mercedes cars; every new model gets its own nickname<sup>14</sup>. One of the newest models is called *šabaḥ* (lit.: ghost, and also the Arabic name of the stealth bomber, an American combat aircraft).

<sup>14</sup> For a list of these nicknames see Farag, *Muṣgam*, 408-409.

عايز عربييتي الخاصة تبقي مرسيدس شبح، أسود ميتالك.

I want my private car to be a *šabaḥ* Mercedes, metallic black. (Ramli, *Zaki*, 70; see also above).

The word *šabaḥ* here is followed by another slang word taken from the jargon of the car world, *metalik* - “metallic colour”. A previous nickname, very common to this day, is *zalamukka* (lit.: fowl’s bottom): وميسناهلوش الزلمكات اللي راكبينها: They do not deserve the Mercedes cars that they are riding in (Wakīl, *Hawānim*, 25; see also above).

### Talking about favouritism

The word *kōsa* appears quite frequently in written texts. Two decades ago the mere occurrence of this word in a conversation would have caused either surprise or an indignant reaction; today, although still regarded as slang, its use does not attract the same attention.

In a poem entitled *في مصر المحروسة* - “The zucchini (“favouritism”) in guarded Egypt”<sup>15</sup>, the poet Qaṭāmiš asks: “بلادي متى تشفي من القرع والكوسة؟” - “My country, when will you recover from corruption and favouritism (lit.: ‘pumpkin’ and ‘zucchini’)?” Qaṭāmiš, *Qalb* [“Al-Kōsa.. fī miṣr al-maḥrūsa”], 103). In *al-Hamagi*, a play by Lenīn al-Ramlī, a devil complains to an angel: “دي كوسة واضحة: “this is clear favouritism” (Ramli, *Hamagi*, 431). In another play, a pun is created when the word is used in both its literal and figurative meanings: in an institution for the blind, when one of the inmates smells the rotten vegetables purchased by the management for consumption in the institution, he remarks: ريحة الكوسة فايحة: “the stinking smell of the *kōsa* has spread” (i.e. “it is clear that there is favouritism here” (Ramli, *Wughit naḥar*, 22).

In a satirical story by Magdī Šābir, the narrator imagines a new version of the story of ʿAlī Bāba. In his text *simsim* (“sesame”) is the cave guardian’s name, a slave whose duty it is to open and close the gate. The narrator feels that the name *Simsim* should be replaced by *Kōsa*:

وسمسم هذا هو حارس المغارة الذي يفتح كل الابواب بمجرد سماع اسمه..  
وحكايته انه كان قد تم أسره من بلاد الغال ليعمل في فتح المغارة وقلها باعتباره  
من العبيد.. ولعل الاسم قد تطور في أيامنا من السمسم الى الكوسة.. لأنها هي التي  
صارت تفتح كل الابواب المغلقة.. وصرنا نحن العبيد واصحاب الكوسة هم  
الأسباد.

This *Simsim* is the cave guard who opens all the doors when he hears his name. What happened to him was that he was taken prisoner in Gaul in order to work at opening and shutting the cave, as a slave. But his name today should more properly be *Kōsa*, since this is what opens every locked door; we are now the slaves and those with *Kōsa* are the masters. (Šābir, *Ḥikāyāt/Muʿassasa* [“Maḡarat ʿAlī Bāba”], 148).

<sup>15</sup> “Guarded Egypt” is a common epithet of Egypt, here used to rhyme with *kōsa*.

I have found a connection made between *kōsa* and Indian elephants in two texts. The first is in a play by Amīn Bakīr: الكوسة تمشي هنا كما تزرع هناك كما تمشي الافيال في شوارع الهند - "The *kōsa* 'walks' here as it is sown there and as the elephants walk in the streets of India" (Bakīr, *Mutaḥantiz*, 38). A similar connection is made in the following joke:

س: ايه الفرق بين الفيل والكوسة؟!  
ج: الفيل بيمشي في الهند.. لكن الكوسة بتمشي في كل حته!!

Question: What's the difference between elephants and *kōsa*?

Answer: Elephants walk in India [only], but *kōsa* "walks" everywhere. (Marzūq, *Iḍḥak*, 82).

*Kōsa* also appears in cartoon captions, serving to reinforce the humour. In the following example there is criticism of a woman who got a job through favouritism:

بس لازم تعرف يا فندي انها جايبة امتياز في المادة المطلوب التعيين لتدريسها.. وهي مادة تشريح الكوسة.

But you must know, sir, that she received an outstanding grade in the subject needed for getting appointed as a teacher, namely zucchini (*kōsa*) dissection. (*Al-Wafd*, 27.6.1985).

### *Riwiš, ṭaḥn and bīʿa*

New slang is already being employed in contemporary literary texts. The three common words in this category are *riwiš*, *ṭaḥn* (often in the collocation *riwiš ṭaḥn*) and *bīʿa*. The following is an example of the use of the *riwiš ṭaḥn* collocation in the feminine:

وأكثر حاجة عجبتي كانت الأزياء التاريخية. كانت روضة طحن. وديكور الخيمة كان (ستايل).

And the thing which I liked the most was the historical costumes. They were very cool. And the tent decoration was stylish (*stayl*). (Ramlī, *Ḥaṣāwi*).

*Bīʿa* (lit.: environment, apparently an abbreviation of *bīʿa watya* - "low environment", *bīʿa wiḥṣa* - "bad environment") has become an invariable adjective denoting a low class or ill-mannered person. In a recent play by Lenīn al-Ramlī, Ruqqaya talks about Madlene, an American girl: "She is low class. Isn't she a Western person? Still, she is low class" (Ramlī, *ʿĒn*, 14); later, Ruqqaya refers to Waḥṣī: "A criminal and low class person" (ibid, 27).

The following excerpt contains the words *bīʿa* and *ṭaḥn* as well as the word *rawšana* derived from *riwiš*:

رايت بنت زي القمر.. ترتدي افخر الموديلات وتركب سيارة سيور.. وكان احد الشباب يعاكسها فواقفت السيارة ونزلت له.. علوز ايه يا روح امك.. وشغلت الكلام البيئة والطحن والروشنة كلها طلعت.

I saw a girl as beautiful as the moon, wearing the most luxurious fashion style and driving a sports car. One of the youngsters started flirting with her, and she stopped the car and went out to him: What do you want, you spoiled child?! And she started using the low class (*bīʿa*) and “*ṭaḥn*” language, and all of the coolness (*rawšāna*) came out. (Maʿāṭī, *ʿAfārīt* [“Waʿāmil ?ēh in-nahārda!!?”], 89).

### Computers and communications

*Mobāyl* and *kombyūtar* - “cellular telephone, mobile telephone” and “computer”, respectively, have become common items in Egyptian daily life as elsewhere, and consequently common words in Egyptian Arabic, pushing away the invented standard words *maḥmūl* (lit.: portable [telephone]) and *ḥāsūb*. Some other words in these fields are still regarded as slang, like *mesej* - “message (SMS)”: برضه الموبايل ما برضه الموبايل ما - “Also this cellular telephone does not work. I can’t even send a message” (Ramli, *ʿĒn*, 15).

While *mobāyl* and *kombyūtar* have become standard words in Egyptian Arabic, many words connected to the computer world still convey the feeling of slang. The following, all borrowed from English, are some examples collected from informants:

*dallīt* and *ʿamal delīt* - “to delete, to erase”; *ʿamal kōbi* - “to copy”, *kansil* - “to cancel”, also in the phrase *kansil ʿalēh* - “refused to talk to him (on the cellular telephone; *kansilt-i ʿalēh* - I refused to talk to him); *farmat* - “to format, to erase completely (a disk)”; *brintar* - “printer”; *hard-i disk* - “hard disk”, *kart-i vega* - “screen card”, *kart-i saund* - “sound card”, *skanar* - “scanner”, *ʿamal skān* - “to scan”, *flobi* - “floppy (disk)”, *ṣabwūfar* - “sub woover”, *drayver* - “driver”, *drayf* or *drayf* - “drive”, *kēsa* - “computer’s case”, *ramāya* pl. *ramāt* - “computer memory”, *ʿab grēd* - “upgrade [of the computer]”.

### Watching a tragedy and listening to slang: Condensed contemporary slang in one literary text

The most extensive use so far of youth slang in a literary text was made by Lenīn al-Ramli in his play *Tiḥibb-i tšūf maʿsāt*. In the prologue and the first scene there are dialogues between Riḥāt and ʿAzmi, fathers who represent the older generation, and a group of youngsters (including their sons), and then among the young ones. Al-Ramli puts many slang words and expressions in the mouths of the young characters, and the first scene is thus loaded with condensed slang vocabulary. The author has told me that in order to create the dialogues in that scene he made use of Yāsir Ḥimāya’s *Qāmūs Riwiš Ṭaḥn* (vol. 2); in some cases he even used slang words which he himself had not known. The slang employed in this scene is so condensed that it goes beyond actual use in normal speech.

Following are excerpts from these dialogues. Slang words and expressions appear in bold in Arabic and in the translation, which is usually a colloquial approximation<sup>16</sup>:

مودي: الإشارة حمرا وسكسكا في الحمبالييز.

Mūdi: **Watch out! There's danger.** (Ramlī, *Tiḥibb-i tšūf*, 10).

سامر: أنا اهو.  
 (يدق كف أصحابه بيس مان.. بيس مان).  
 مودي: أنا اللي أدبتك الفلاش وشلت أكباس النور. مبسوط مني.  
 رفعت: رحنت فين وسبت ضيوفك.  
 سامر: ما فيش ضربت الحتة الباجي والبدي وكان معايا سهلوب صغير طق في  
 النافوخ روشت حياتي مع البيت الماشين السكاموزة والجو كان آخر دعك.  
 الواد مودي قلب لي النور واداني فلاش اي خدعة جيت لك جري.

Sāmīr: Here I am. (Shakes his friends' hands). **Peace, man, peace, man.**

Mūdi: I'm the one who **warned you** and cut off the electricity. Are you pleased with me?

Rif'at: Where did you go and leave your guests?

Sāmīr: It's nothing. I **put on my Jeans** and the **tight T-shirt** and had myself a little **cigarette with "stuff"** that made me feel good. I **had a good time** with a **good-looking chick** and we had it cool as could be.

This guy Mūdi **gave me a signal** and **warned me. Can I do something for you?**<sup>17</sup> I came to you running. (Ibid, 13).

سامر: فوت يا معلمي ما تيقاش دقة قديمة. خليك **on** ما تيقاش **off** دي الحياة فيلم  
 هابط اقلب اليافطة دا كله في الهرتلة والهردييز دمغ.  
 رفعت: آيه يا ولد الكلام ده.  
 سامر: دمغ يعني "سنتر" دماغك وشغل الجمجمة وارحج شوية... أعصابك.  
 عزمي: سيبيهم، شباب فرحانين بروحهم.  
 سامر: **الشطبة** يا أونكل. **استيبلز** أكيد. **عنب** يا باشا.  
 رفعت: على رأيك، ما عندهمش مسؤوليات زينا.  
 سامر: عداك العيب وقزح. إحنا عيال بايعة نفسها بابا (وهامسا) طري له بقى.  
 رفعت: **أطري له** يعني إيه.  
 سامر: **طري** لأبو تامر. **وزعه** يعني عايزين نعيش اللحظة ونشرب لنا اتنين  
**سخاميت** براحتنا.  
 (ويأخذ علبة السجائر من جيبه) **سخاميتك** نوعها إيه.  
 رفعت: تعال يا عزمي لما **أطري لك**.

<sup>16</sup> I use the text published in 2002. I also have a newer electronic version which I received from the author; this version contains some minor changes and more punctuation between independent expressions (this punctuation is reflected in the translation); some problematic parentheses have been corrected in the electronic version and this is reflected in the Arabic text quoted here.

<sup>17</sup> This is a humorous expression used in contemporary slang; *hidfa* (deception, trick) replaces the word *hidma* (service) in the expression *?ayy-i hidma* – “can I do something for you?”.

Sāmīr: Don't take it so hard, sir. Don't be so old-fashioned. **Be with an open head. Life sucks, change the subject, everything is foolishness and nonsense, don't take it to heart.**

Riff'at: What is this that you're saying, son?

Sāmīr: "**Don't take to heart**" means **listen to what I say, use your head and calm down** your nerves a little.

ʿAzmī: Leave them alone, they are young people who are happy to be what they are.

Sāmīr: **You are completely right**, "uncle", **very true. I agree completely**, sir.

Riff'at: You are right, they do not have the responsibilities that we bear.

Sāmīr: You are right, **no mistake about it**, we are guys who are willing to take any risk (whispers) well, **get rid of him**.

Riff'at: What do you mean **get rid of him**?

Sāmīr: **Get rid of Tāmīr's father**. I mean **get him out of here**. We want to live for the moment and smoke some **cigarettes** in peace.

(He takes out a pack of cigarettes from his pocket) What kind of **cigarettes** do you have?

Riff'at: Come, ʿAzmī, come and **I'll get rid of you**. (Ibid, 13-14).

(أثناء الحوار التالي الشلة تضحك وتصفق بعدك [ل] جملة من تامر وسامر).

سامر: إيه الحركات بقى وإيه أخبار الترويش وازاي حال الشيروكس يا تفاح.

تامر: ترويش إيه و"سكس" إيه [...]

تامر: تقدر تشرب كام كاس ويسكى؟

سامر: أنا اشرب المحيط طحن. شربت أنت الشيشة؟ جربت الصراصير.

تامر: أبو صليبة دا بتاع الغلابة. طب شديت خيط ولا لسه؟

سامر: أنا كنت ضريب ومهبير وسرنجاتي وسموني سامر توهان. دلوقتي ببليغ،

اصل البودرة.. ما أترتش فيا. بطلتها.

(The group laughs during the following dialogue and applauds every utterance of Tāmīr and Sāmīr).

Sāmīr: **What's up** then? And what's new with the **coolness** and how's **the sex life, my dear**?

Tāmīr: What **coolness** and what **sex**? [...]

Tāmīr: How many glasses of whiskey can you drink?

Sāmīr: I can drink up **the whole** ocean. Have you smoked a water-pipe? Have you tried **pills**?

Tāmīr: "**Abu ṣalība**" **pills** are for poor people. Have you taken a **sniff [of heroin]** or haven't you yet?

Sāmīr: I used to be **addicted, a heavy user** and **mainliner**. They used to call me Sāmīr the vagrant. Now I swallow (pills) because the "**powder**" (**heroin**) didn't do it for me. I stopped taking it. (Ibid, 14-15).

سامر: طب عندك كام نمرة بت "ماشين" في الأجنده بتاعتك؟

تامر: أجنده؟ أنا حااطط اللسته ع الكمبيوتر.

سامر: تيكلام تيكلام. أنت هتشتغلنا؟ وتعمل لي تيكلا تيكلا. فاك نفسك للمبى؟

تامر: دادى هيشترى لنا قمر صناعي.

سامر: ما أفكرش بابي هيجلي الحكومة هتنور له أخضر. خليه يشتري لك قمر الدين.

Sāmīr: Well, how many numbers of **good-looking** girls do you have in your notebook?

Tāmīr: Notebook? I entered the list into the computer.

Sāmīr: **What nonsense. Do you want to make fun of me and deceive me?** You think you're a **smart guy**<sup>18</sup>?

Tāmīr: Daddy will buy us a satellite.

Sāmīr: I don't think that (my) daddy will let the government **give him permission**. Let him buy you some dried apricot leather<sup>19</sup>. (Ibid, 15).

سامر: صباح الدماغ [...].

Sāmīr: **Happy morning** [...]. (Ibid, 15).

تامر: سمسم.. أنا واقع في ورطة... تبقى جدع وتقف جنبي؟

سامر: عيب يا توتي، إلا أنت. أوامر أي خدعة.

تامر: البت علا بتحبني قوي ولازقة لي وعايز اباصيها لك تخلصني منها.

سامر: لازقة لك أنت؟ ياريت. دا أنا أتخنقت من غيرتها عليا.

ظاظا: الله إيه الحكاية يا جماعه؟ تتخانقوا عشان بنت؟

سامر: أنا استحالة اخسر اي راجل عشان موزة ولو انطبقت السما على الأرض

Tāmīr: Simsim [a nickname for Sāmīr], I've fallen into trouble. Will you be a man and stand by me?

Sāmīr: Of course, Tūti [a nickname for Tāmīr], who if not for you? Just say it. **Can I do something for you?**

Tāmīr: This girl ʿUla loves me and sticks to me. I want to **pass her on** to you so you'll save me from her.

Sāmīr: She sticks to you? You only wish! I was already choked because of how much she is jealous for me.

Zāza: By God, what's the problem, guys? Are you fighting over a girl?

Sāmīr: There's no way I will lose a man's [friendship] because of some **chick**, even if the world should turn upside down. (Ibid, 17-18).

سامر: وهي كانت بتاعتك أصلا؟ أنت لو عاوز موزز أجييب لك.

Sāmīr: Was she really ever yours? If you want **chicks** I'll get you some. (Ibid, 17-18).

<sup>18</sup> Al-Limbi is the name of a character and the title of an Egyptian film.

<sup>19</sup> This is a pun based on the word *ʿamar* (in standard Arabic: *qamar*, lit.: moon) which appears in both expression. Tāmīr boasts that his daddy will buy him a *qamar šinālī* - "satellite", and Sāmīr mocks him and says that his father should rather buy him *ʿamar id-dīn* - "dried apricot leather".

### Coarse words, army slang, the Internet and Egyptian writing

#### Coarse words

Arabic, like any other language, contains words which are regarded as coarse and taboo by society. Such words usually belong to the domains of sex, intimate organs, excretion, and cursing. The appearance of such words in written texts is dictated by the norms prevailing in a society at a given time. Such norms may change. Today, norms in Western literature are more permissive, and slang and coarse words can be found in mainstream (“respectable”) literary works. Arab societies are generally more conservative than their Western counterparts, and this is reflected in literary norms which forbid the appearance of such words in written texts.

Some of the strongest taboo words in various Arabic dialects are derived from the root *n-y-k*; some of them have existed in the language for hundreds of years<sup>20</sup> but are still regarded as very vulgar and are absent from some Arabic dictionaries<sup>21</sup>. Words derived from this root are not supposed to be heard in “decent” conversation or printed on paper. Exceptions are so rare that they prove the rule. One is the novel *Al-Ṭāfūn* - “The Plague”, by Saad Elkhadem, but it should be noted that the author is an Egyptian who has emigrated to Canada and publishes his works there, and therefore enjoys the liberty of not abiding by the norms prevailing in Egyptian society and literature. This novel, which bluntly criticizes Nasser’s regime in Egypt, is loaded with coarse words which serve as a stylistic means of emphasizing the author’s indignation. Elkhadem attacks Nasser’s Egypt with no holds barred, and his vocabulary reflects what he thinks of it. It is quite probable that the author would not have been able to publish the novel in his motherland<sup>22</sup>. The following are examples taken from the novel: *عابزين كمان بينكوا في البلد ببلاش* - “they also want to fuck around in the country for free” (Elkhadem, *Ṭāfūn*, 1); *كلكم عابزين تنيكوا* - “you all want to fuck” (ibid, 18); the verb *ʔitnāk*, the passive form of the verb *nāk*, appears once in the novel: *كانت بتتناك لطوب الارض* - “she would fuck with everybody” (ibid, 17).

Words from the same root also appear in al-Wālī’s recent novel *Ḥikayāt Šārīf al-baḥr*, which contains many coarse words. The following example has both the verb *nāk* and its passive form: *انت جاي عشان تنيك، بس انا يا خويا مش بتتناك بجوافة وجزر* - “You came in order to fuck but, my dear, I do not get fucked for (just) a guava and a carrot” (Wālī, *Šārīf*, 197); the verb in its active form appears many times (ibid, 83, 249, etc.); the infinitive form *nīk* also appears several times (ibid, 175, 195, etc.). The expression *نيك الراجل ومش تنيك كلامه* - “you should respect a man’s words” (lit.: fuck the man but don’t fuck his words; ibid, 132), appears in Elkhadem’s collection of proverbs and coarse sayings (Elkhadem, *Life*, 149) in the version: *نيك الراجل ولا تنيكش كلامه*.

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., *Kitāb al-muḥaṣṣaṣ* by Ibn Sayyidih (died 1656) which includes the verb *nāk*, the verbal noun *nayk*, and the noun *nayyāk* which is defined as *al-kaṭīr al-nayk* - “one who fucks a lot” (Ibn Sayyidih, *Muḥaṣṣaṣ*, vol. 5, 111).

<sup>21</sup> The definition of the verb *nāk* in Wehr, “to have sexual intercourse” (Wehr, *Dictionary*, 1014), camouflages the actual coarse usage of this verb. The definition in Spiro, “to copulate”, also avoids reflecting the coarse tone of the word (Spiro, *Dictionary*, 589). Badawi and Hinds point out that the word is coarse and give “to fuck” as the only definition (Badawi and Hinds, *Dictionary*, 894).

<sup>22</sup> Elkhadem is also the author of *Colloquial Egyptian Proverbs Coarse Sayings and Popular Expressions* (Elkhadem, *Life*); this collection does in fact contain some coarse expressions.

Another strong taboo word is *kuss* - “cunt”, which is also regarded as very vulgar and is not to be heard in “decent” conversation or found in print; its position in Egyptian culture (and Arab culture in general) is similar to that of the English equivalent. In the spoken language this word often appears in abusive utterances, especially in the construction *kuss ʔummak* - (lit.: your mother’s cunt) which means “the hell with you; fuck off”, as well as *kuss ʔumm...* - “the hell with...”. This word appears several times in Elkhadem’s novel, for example: كس امك - “your mother’s cunt” (Elkhadem, *Tāfūn*, 2); كس ام اللي اسمه محمدين - “The hell with whoever’s name is Muḥammadēn” (ibid, 28).

The word also figures in al-Wālī’s novel; in one case the application is somewhat softened, as it is included in a wedding song: عليها كس/ يخبز ويرص - “She has a cunt/ that can bake and arrange [the loaves]” (Wālī, *Šārī*, 183); the authenticity of quotation in this case “justifies” including the word in the published text; the novel contains many footnotes by the author, and the phrase is repeated in a footnote that explains the line (ibid, 187, footnote 11). The word appears many times elsewhere in the book (ibid, 240, 263, etc.). The expression *kuss ʔumm...* also appears several times, for example: كس ام الشغل - “the hell with work” (ibid, 71); كس ام الشهادات - “the hell with the documents” (ibid, 79).

There are two common words for homosexuals in Egyptian *ʔĀmmiyya*, regarded as coarse and taboo: *ḥawal* and *ʔilʔ*. The first is more common in speech and often heard as a term of abuse.

I have found the word *ʔilʔ* once in a printed text (Ismāʔīl, *ʔUqd*, 29), while *ḥawal* appears once (in the plural form *ḥawalāt*) in Elkhadem, *Tāfūn*, 13, and several times (in both singular and plural) in Wālī, *Šārī*, 98, 159, etc.

Other coarse words appear in the above-mentioned novels by Elkhadem and al-Wālī, as well as in some other recent books. Here are some examples: خرا - “faeces, shit”, and metaphorically: “bad, lousy”, as in شغلتنا الخرا دي - “this shitty work of ours” (ʔAbd al-Munʔim, *Min ḥalāwīt*, 23); فسناً - “to break wind quietly, to fart silently” (ʔAbd al-Munʔim, *Min ḥalāwīt*, 28); زب - “penis” (Wālī, *Šārī*, 18, 240); البتاع - “appellation for the genitals” (Wālī, *Šārī*, 32, 175); نط على - “to have sex with, to ‘ride’” (lit.: to jump on) (Wālī, *Šārī*, 83, 131, etc.); طيز - “butt, ass, behind” (ʔAbd al-Munʔim, *Min ḥalāwīt*, 65, 138; Wālī, *Šārī*, 107, 156, etc.).

### Army slang

Army slang is generally not used in Egyptian literature. One common army slang phrase, ضابط مخلة (*zābiṭ miḥla*, also in the written version ضابط مخلة [*dābiṭ miḥla*]), a derogatory nickname for an officer of lower rank (lit.: Duffle-bag officer), is used in a story which appeared in an Internet literary journal (Fīl, *Tazḥīf*). The title word, *tazḥīf*, is another army slang word which means “forcing [the soldiers] to crawl”, a common form of military punishment.

The term *zābiṭ miḥla* also appears in other Internet sites. This term, together with three other army slang expressions, figures with explanations in a website dedicated to the Egyptian army:

Some reverse wisdom can be seen in proverbs and saying [sic] that are famous in the army such as:

\* “Injustice to all is justice!” «الظلم لما يعم يبقي عدل» [*iz-zulm lamma yiʔimm yibʔa ʔadl*].

This is told by officers when recruits complain of some situation. The response is to apply injustice to everyone, then it becomes justice. Of course, not even this twisted logic is true, given the bribes and favouritism that are widely practiced.

\* “In the army, you have to find a way” «الحيش قال لك اتصرف» [il-gēš ʔāl lak ʔiṭsarraf]. This used to mean resourcefulness, and making do with what you have. However it gradually evolved into “the ends justify the means”, such as bribes.

\* “Talk only about yourself” «اتكلم عن نفسك بس» [ʔitkallim šan nafsak bass]. A rebellion in the army is a big disaster to the chain of command. A mutiny used to be punishable by death (e.g. *Fletcher Christian* and the *Mutiny on the Bounty*). Hence, the army always do not want any kind of groups forming under any circumstances. (Baheyeldin, *Notes*).

Another story by Samīr al-Fil with an army background has appeared on an Internet site, followed by a list of selected army slang expressions and terminology (Fīl, *Ḥadīṭ al-rūsī*). The following are some army slang words and expressions which I have so far not found in published texts:

*ʔinta lissa gēšak fi ʔaṣr-i -l-miḥla* - You are still new in the army, you are still “green” (lit.: your army [service] is still at the bottom of the kit-bag); *servīs* - “army food tray”; *ʔarawāna* - “prison food tray”; *ʔakalna min ʔarawāna waḥda* - “old friends” (lit.: we ate from the same tray); *girāya* - “army bread, army pita”; *ḥamastāšar yōm ya gēš winʔul šala -l-girāya šēš* - “I have another fifteen days until my release from military service” (lit.: another fifteen days, oh army, and I will call the *girāya* “bread”; *ḥamastāšar yōm ya ʔulal wennām ša -s-sirīr ʔabu mulal* - I have another fifteen days until my release from military service (lit.: another fifteen days, oh “jars” [the function of this word is to form a rhyme], and we will sleep on a bed with springs); *al-musawā fi -z-ḥulm-i šadl* - “equality in injustice means justice” (a principle on which punishments in the army are based); *ṭabḥa sōda* - “cooked egg-plants” (lit.: black dish).

### Drug slang

Drug dealers and users tend to develop their own slang<sup>23</sup>; some words and expressions in this slang extend beyond dealers and users and become part of general slang. For some examples of contemporary drug slang see the quotations above from al-Ramlī’s play *Tiḥibb-i tšūf maʔsāt*. Some of the terms in that text also appear in ʔAbd al-ʔAlīm’s novel *Bāzil*: ابتدا المعلم علي يطفح البانجو.. دا غير برشام أبو صليبة - “Master ʔAli has started consuming bango, in addition to *Abu šaliba* and (other) pills and all that” (ʔAbd al-ʔAlīm. *Bāzil*, 12).

### Slang, coarse words and the Internet

Many Internet users are presumably young people who do not hesitate to include slang and coarse words in their electronic messages; many of the slang words described in this paper appear in Internet chats. I quote the following excerpt taken from an Internet chat, in which the writer describes the phenomenon of “chat”, while using the new slang words *šāt* - “chat”, *stayl* - “very nice, on a high level, stylish”, *bīʔa* and *riwiš ṭaḥn*:

انا اول ما عملت شات كانت سنة ١٩٩٤ وكان الشات زمان موش زي دلوقتي...  
الشات زمان كانت ستايل وما كانش اي حد بيخشه زي دلوقتي... يعني بصراحة

<sup>23</sup> For some of the terms employed by hashish users see Hussein, *Sub-culture* (with a glossary, pp. 66-70).

الشات دلوقتي بقى بيئة خالص... زمان كان ممكن انك تلاقى حد كويس تقعد تتكلم معاه وممكن تعمل معاه صداقة سواء بنت او ولد وما يعملش معاك حركات قرعة زي اللي بنتعمل دلوقتي.  
 [...] كان عندي زميل ليا متجوز وكان لسة داخل على الشات جديد [...] كان كل ما يبجي يتعرف على واحدة الكلام بيندي معاها عادي والكلام يبقى روش طحن وتهريج واخر حلاوة [...]

The first time I had a "chat" was in 1994. Chats a long time ago were not like now. Chat then was stylish, and not everyone entered it like now. Frankly, today chatting has become very low-class. It used to be that you could meet someone nice, sit and talk with him. You could build a friendship, whether it was a girl or a boy, and they wouldn't do dirty tricks on you like those done now.  
 [...] I had a colleague, a married man, who was new to chatting [...] Whenever he would get to know a girl he would start talking to her in the usual way. The talking would be very cool, joking and extremely nice [...]. (*Chat 2001*).

### Conclusion

Writers who create literature in *šĀmmiyya* have more stylistic options at their disposal, since they can employ both *Fuṣṣḥā* and *šĀmmiyya* in their texts. Writers who use slang have an additional stylistic option, as they can switch between *Fuṣṣḥā*, *šĀmmiyya* and slang and have another instrument for characterization.

Internet messages, presumably written by young people, sometimes include slang and coarse words, which in other circumstances only seldom appear in print. This practice is undoubtedly encouraged by the fact that the participants in such acts of communication remain anonymous. This reflects a significant change in the writing habits of Egyptians (as well as Internet users all over the world).

The use of slang in literary and semi-literary texts in Egypt is quite limited; slang is usually avoided and coarse words are only implied. However, the rise of *šĀmmiyya* as a literary language has also encouraged some writers to include elements of slang in their texts. Many writers who use *šĀmmiyya* still avoid slang, but some writers do use it, for various reasons.

Playwright and satirist ʿAlī Sālīm has told me that he is against using slang because he uses only words of Arabic origin and because slang words do not survive in the language. Therefore he would not use a word like *rīwīš*. When I asked him about the use of some slang and foreign words in his satirical stories, he said that those words served as names for existing objects and would remain in the language and as such their use was justified. In other words, Sālīm accepts the use of words which denote *realia*<sup>24</sup>.

Yāsir Ḥīmāya, a young writer of prose who has also compiled a dictionary of Egyptian slang, represents the opposite policy. He supports the use of slang in written literature, and has told me that he considered it a legitimate vehicle describing a changing younger generation with a changing language, a generation to which he belongs.

<sup>24</sup> Compare the attitude of Nagīb Maḥfūz - an opponent of the use of *šĀmmiyya* in literature - who nevertheless includes *šĀmmiyya* words which denote *realia* (see 98-99, 133).

Playwright Lenīn al-Ramlī takes the middle road. Although, as he told me, he does not support the use of slang *per se*, in fact he does use it whenever he thinks that this would contribute to characterization or help convey a message.

Partridge lists fifteen possible reasons for using slang (Partridge, *Slang*, 6-7), on which Crystal comments: "One theme recurs among all these reasons: the use of slang as a means of marking social or linguistic identity" (Crystal, *Encyclopedia*, 53). Using slang on the Internet tells a lot about its users; in literary and semi-literary texts it may help in characterizing literary figures; some Egyptian writers are now willing to take advantage of this option.

Slang words and expressions often change in status; they may either become part of the standard language or be forgotten:

Slang words can come and go very quickly: either passing out of the language completely, or being 'promoted' to standard usage (Wales, *Stylistics*, 424)<sup>25</sup>.

Cuddon, who regards slang as "the poetry of the common man" (Cuddon, *Dictionary*, 834), recognizes its potential as a stylistic means, but points out that writers should be careful when they include slang in their works:

So slang is the language of intimacy, of everyday conversation, and much of it is ephemeral. However, if it passes the hard tests of vitality and originality it may survive for centuries. It *can* date very rapidly, like fashions in clothes, and the writer, therefore, is obliged to be judicious in his use of current slang in order to remain natural and unaffected.

Including slang words in written literature may lead to a change in their future status and help in their "promotion to standard usage". Even if they become extinct, the printed text preserves them on paper. They might even be picked up from the text by future writers and resurrected in their works.

Knowledge of Egyptian slang is now needed in order to understand not only oral utterances, but also some written texts. The following quotation may apply to such texts as well:

It is impossible to acquire a thorough knowledge of English [or of any other language, for that matter] without being familiar with slang and vulgarism. Whoever is uninitiated... will be at a loss to understand many of the masterpieces of English literature. Nay... he will scarcely be able even to understand an English newspaper<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> See also Lemon, *Glossary*, 70-71.

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<sup>27</sup> The book also has an English title: "Puzzle".

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