Linguistic Expression and Creative Writing: Medieval and Contemporary Arab Literary Criticism

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Medieval Arab literary critics wrote at great length on the theory of literary expression, its characteristics, types, accomplishments, internalization, etc. They also focused on language, as the main vehicle of written expression, serving simultaneously as medium and objective, through which its other features are realized. Perhaps the best-known of these compositions was Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Qalqashandī's *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā fī ṣināʿat al-inshā*, a large work divided into twelve parts, including the Introduction and the Conclusion. The author set forth the art of writing in detail by means of literary epistles. Thus in his third epistle he presented linguistic terms and expressions dealing with surnames and nicknames while the second epistle explained the conditions which writers had to meet (al-Qalqashandī, 2009). Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī in his famous work *al-Ṣināʿatāni* (al-ʿAskarī, 1981) examined the two arts of poetry and prose writing. In the chapter on the second art, that of prose writing, he explained the conditions of "linguistic correctness" (*istiqāmat al-lugha*) that help create a work's esthetic uniqueness, and the ways to achieve a felicitous way of expression. Ibn Qutayba al-Dīnūrī in his *Adab al-kātib* also listed the elements of linguistic culture which are necessary for writers. He divided his book into four parts, in each of which he presented a pioneering theory of linguistic composition. In the first chapter, entitled "Chapter on Knowledge" he dealt with the anterior knowledge that a writer must have in preparation for commencing his composition. The second chapter, entitled "Amending the Hand", lists the common errors committed by writers of his time; the third chapter, "Amending the tongue", deals with common errors of speech, while the fourth chapter, "Structure of Verbs and Nouns", addresses the morphology of written and spoken Arabic (al-Dīnūrī, 1900).

Abū Bakr al-Ṣawlī in his famous *Adab al-kitāb* addresses the same issues as al-Dīnūrī but from a different perspective (al-Ṣawlī, 1980). A later writer from Andalusia, Abū al-Qāsim al-Kalāʿī, wrote a similar tome entitled *Iḥkām ṣanʿat al-kalām* (al-Kalāʿī, 1985). The list of writers is long, so of necessity we mentioned only the most prominent.

Written expression has attracted the attention of critics and linguists in modern times, since it is both objective and means, as noted above. Interest in the subject has taken the form of scholarly studies and conferences (Norton, 1997, 5). It seems that the growing attention which this issue is gaining is due to the importance of linguistic expression in the teaching of other related subjects that are based on it, such as correct handwriting, the transmission of language, linguistic taste, the way ideas are perceived by students, writing style, etc. Because this is the case, written expression can be considered a basic linguistic concept, not merely a secondary element such as those noted above. Written expression is more than just the various linguistic skills which students must master in order to be able to write well; more important than the linguistic dimension is the cognitive one, which in turn is associated with obtaining

information, facts, expertise and culture, all of which are based on reading (al-Dulaymī & al-Wā'ilī, 2003:17-18), in keeping with Aristotle's saying: "Reading creates the perfect man".

Written expression brings together numerous forms of operations of thinking, composition and revision, which intersect to create a written text in its final form. The thinking stage is the first of the three operations. It crystallizes thought before writing. It is followed by the stage of preliminary writing or what is called the "draft stage", after which comes the stage of revision (*Reading Language Arts*, 1999:26). This is the stage with which the present study is concerned; this is when one reexamines what one has written and replaces routine, exhausted words with newer or meaningful ones derived from the richness of language.

Written expression is a language that realizes its objective and its means simultaneously. In fact, according to Muḥyī al-Dīn b. al-ʿArabī in one of the best-known philosophical works in antiquity, *al-Futuḥāt al-makkiyya*, it is "the secret of existence, the root of the universe's creation, the prime mover in the ontology of creation, the descendant of the initial "let there be", from which the act of creation began (Ibn al-ʿArabī, 1972-1985:16). Language is an expressive creative arrangement that allows one to create from nothing or to force the preexisting (i.e., language) into its creative final form, which fits the image which the author sees in his imagination (Bateson, 1985:81-85).

Creative writing, according to the medieval Arab critic Abū al-Ḥasan al-Jurjānī, is "the creation of something from nothing.

Original writing as described by the medieval Arab critic Abū al-Ḥasan al-Jurjānī is "making up something from nothing. It is said that creative writing means basing one thing on another while creation is making something from something". Al-Jurjānī bases his conclusion on the following Qur'ānic phrase: "Originator (*badīʿ*) of the heavens and the earth" (Q 2:117; al-Jurjānī, 1987, 28). Literary expression is similar to reporting events, with the difference that the latter can be either true or false while the former is neither, since it does not refer to any external reality to which can be said to conform or not to conform (ʿAtīq, 1985:74). Creative expression, especially the written kind, is an effect of the author's imagination. Now naturally every human being possesses imagination to a greater or lesser degree, and imitation is a creative writer's artistic talent, one that plays an important role in the writer's relationship with the reality from which he draws his ideas (Jabr, 1993: 71). Written expression thus involves the imitation of the imagination with a medium taken from reality, namely language. The main element which constitutes the accumulative cognitive and esthetic system that connects between literatures composed in different times is that of imitation or mimesis, as noted by Aristotle in his *Poetics* when he defined tragedy as "the imitation of a momentous deed, an imitation that consists of parts of different texts which language has created" (Aristotle, 1993: 43).

Linguistic expression is a most important branch of Arabic; it is the substance and form into which a person puts his thoughts and through which he expresses his feelings and emotions. It makes it possible for anyone to easily understand what they read and hear.

Expression is the objective of all linguistic studies; all other branches of linguistic knowledge serve as means for achieving this objective. Thus reading helps the learner to understand the substance of expression, its ideas and its styles, syntax helps writers compose without making linguistic errors, literary texts enrich students' linguistic knowledge and dictation helps in writing down words correctly. But expression is the ultimate objective of the use of all these means, in speech and in writing. As a branch of language it is thus not isolated from the others,

but involves skills that are intertwined with other branches. Expression is not a set of linguistic skills which a student must master in order to become adept at it, but rather it concerns the acquisition of information and words through reading (al-Dulaymī & al-Wāʾilī, 2001:2-3).

Linguistic expression can be divided into two types, depending on its purpose: functional and rhetorical. Functional expression aims at fulfilling a need in a person's everyday life and can be oral or written; this includes everyday conversations, letters, memoranda, written complaints and all the other forms that help us to manage our daily affairs. This kind of expression does not require great effort or complex organization and rhetorical devices. Rhetorical expression, on the other hand, which like functional expression can be either oral or written, is used much less than the latter, and only for very specific purposes, usually on special occasions and in resounding speeches that aim at drawing people's attention and for achieving a certain objective. This kind of expression requires considerable effort on the part of the speaker or writer in order to draw people's attention; he must choose well-ordered and ornate expressions and the proper kind of rhetorical phrases in order to produce the desired effect in his readers or listeners.

With respect to form, linguistic expression is basically of two types, oral or written. Oral expression is acquired by students by means of and interprets the logic of language (orally) while written expression is acquired and interpreted through writing. The two types are interrelated and support each other. It is oral expression that students use extemporaneously in the form of sentences and constructions possessing linguistic meaning; its importance lies in the fact that it enables students to acquire speaking skills and the ability to participate in constructive debate and to express themselves in an effective and esthetically pleasing manner. In contrast, written expression as carried out by students in the classroom demonstrate their ability to express themselves using error-free language that obeys the rules of grammar and of writing (al-Dulaymī & al-Wāʾilī, 2001:21).

The concept of "linguistic expression" has been given numerous definitions. According to ʿĀbid al-Hāshimī it "is a means for mutual understanding among people, for presenting their ideas and feelings with the tongue and the pen" (al-Hāshimī, 1986).

Written expression is always a difficult subject, especially in the primary schools. For this reason it is a topic that has received much scholarly attention. Thus the researcher Riyāḍ Zakī Qāsim, for example, in his *Taqniyyāt al-taʿbīr al-ʿarabī* discusses the various problems and issues related to written expression and the many reasons why in Arabic this kind of expression is so poor. The author argues that the main cause of the poverty of expression among Arab students is due to syntactic and morphological factors and poor knowledge of the language. He focuses on the morphological aspects of Arabic which he claims, have a major effect on success or failure in written expression in Arabic (Qāsim, 2003).

A number of more modern studies have approach the subject of written expression from a psychological perspective, relating it to students' perceptual abilities. Thus Ranā Bakdāsh in her *al-taʿbīr al-kitābī* (Bakdāsh, 1996) used educational theories and modern psychology for her analysis of written expression, while Walīd Aḥmad al-Jābir in his *Tadrīs al-lugha al-ʿarabiyya – mafāhīm naẓariyya wa-taṭbīqāt ʿamaliyya* discussed written expression and its various uses (functional, literary) as well as the most appropriate methods for teaching primary school children the art of writing. He also noted the problems and weaknesses in Arabic writing, pointing to poor knowledge of the language's richness as one of these problems (al-Jābir, 2001).

Rātib Qāsim ʿĀshur and Muḥammad Fakhrī Miqdādī in their *al-Mahārāt al-kitābiyya wal-qirāʾiyya* discuss reading and writing skills. They consider the two to be interconnected and argue that expressive writing interprets reading, which explains the role which linguistic richness plays in it (ʿĀshūr & Miqdādī, 2003).

In a unique study published by the University of Diyālī in Iraq in 2009 under the title *Athar al-tharāʾ al-lughawī fī al-adāʾ al-taʿbīrī* the author, Muthannā al-Jashʿamī, provides a comprehensive and profound analysis of the subject. In the book's first chapters he discusses medieval Arab critics and constructs a theoretical foundation for discussing written expression as perceived by ancient Arab criticism. On the basis of this theoretical foundation he carries out a linguistic-mathematical field study in which he applies his theory to the issue of the effect of linguistic richness on the expressive writing of university students (al-Jashʿamī, 2009).

In another thesis, entitled *Tanmiyat al-tadhawwuq al-adabī ladā talāmīdh al-ṣaff al-thālith al-iʿdādī wa-athar dhālika ʿalā qudrātihim ʿalā al-taʿbīr al-kitāb*, presented by Tharayyā Maḥjūb Maḥmūd to the University of Ḥilwān in 1991, the author discusses the element of literary taste, mentioned in the introduction to the present study, and its role in the acquisition of linguistic skills, and the role of these skills in the construction of expressive texts and their language.

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