

perspectives would heighten, clarify and evidence the degree of aesthetic and thematic polyphony so characteristic of the modern Iraqi novel. Such study, for example, would even benefit from theoretical elaborations from such fields as post-colonial studies and cultural theory. Considering the current gaps in scholarship, especially in the field of Iraqi literature, *The Iraqi Novel: Key Writers, Key Texts* is a serious addition, and likely to become a solid point of departure for more specialists to begin and complete further scholarly contributions.

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Arabic in the Fray: Language Ideology and Cultural Politics.

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There are many ways to deal with Arabic. One is the descriptive and structural approach. This, in Suleiman's opinion, misses the link to "a rich canvas of political impulses and meanings in society" (p. 150). A different approach, represented in the book under review, is to study Arabic in its social context. The volume is the fourth of a planned pentalogy on language and society in the Arabophone world. The preceding three volumes were dedicated respectively to the use of Arabic in constructing pan-Arabist and national ideologies (*The Arabic Language and National Identity*, Washington, 2003); to the conflict between dialects and standard language (*A War of Words*, Cambridge, 2004); to the relationship between individual identity, group identity and conflict (*Arabic, Self and Identity*, New York and Oxford, 2011). *Arabic in the Fray* deals with identity and conflict in society and the way "they are manifested through debates about language in the political, cultural and theological spheres" (p. 1). The core concept around which the book revolves is the symbolic role of language in society. This is a touchy issue for any language, much more so for Arabic, and it is therefore a very sensible idea to dig into the symbolic role of Arabic in the pre-modern and modern periods.

The principles underpinning this essay, summarized in the introduction, are the distinction between the instrumental and the symbolic role of language, the recognition of language as a proxy for other issues of concern in society, and the nature of data ("second order meta-linguistic views, discussions or debates", p. 5). Accordingly, the arrangement is thematic and not chronological. This does not exclude a diachronic perspective: moving back and forth along the time line (see e.g. ch. 2) the author emphasizes the infrastructural continuities across time. The methodology adopted combines traditional scholarship based on a thorough and careful reading of the texts and qualitative investigation.

The volume is organized in five chapters, the first having an introductory nature and the remaining four being organized around core issues like identity, ideology, cultural politic and language cognition. Chapter 1, "Language construction and language symbolism", pinpoints the different roles of language and argues that language is a fact of construction supported by ideologies. The role of standardization, in both language and script, is treated with a wealth of examples of diverse countries (e.g. Greece, Turkey, Spain, Italy, Belgium) with a special focus on the Arabophone world, where Arabic is seen as a tool for constructing national identities.

Chapter 2, “(In)imitability, (un)translatability and inter-group strife” is focused on the pre-modern period and on issues touching the language-identity link and intra- and intergroup conflicts, in particular the role of Arabic in the *šu’ūbiyya* and the anti-Arab polemic. This chapter presents some problematic aspects, in particular in the sections dedicated to al-Jāhīz. One interpretation seems especially controversial: *niṣba* is translated as “universe” while the current translation points to “posture” or “attitude” (S. Enderwitz, “Culture, history and religion”, in A. Heinemann et al., *Al-Jāhīz: A Muslim Humanist for our Time*, Beirut, 2009, p. 229; and earlier C.A. Nallino, “Del vocabolo arabo *niṣbah* (con ṣād)”, *RSO* 8, 1919–20, 637–46). This translation drives a questionable interpretation of al-Jāhīz’s ideas on language and human communication. A minor problem of the same nature is the inexact translation of *‘uqad* (transcribed as *‘aqd*) which refers to a very specific kind of calculation and not to calculation in general. Clearly, part of the existing scientific literature on the subject has been neglected, included – among others – primary essays like L. Behzadi’s *Sprache und Verstehen. Al-Ġāhīz über die Vollkommenheit des Ausdrucks* (Wiesbaden, 2009).

Chapter 3 “Framing Arabic: paratexts, poetry and language ideology” offers a refreshing approach to paratexts, only recently considered worthy of exploration by researchers. The relationship between language and ideology is investigated starting from titles, prefaces etc., where different functions (designation, description, temptation) are pinpointed. The analysis is also extended to poetry where three main tropes (crisis, fossilization, war) are singled out. Through a fresh vision of the quotidian, the author delves into language ideology, which is considered “a productive site for getting at the amalgam of ideas that relate language to faith, morality, politics and culture in the widest sense in society” (p. 145).

Chapter 4 “Hybridity, language ideology and cultural politics” reviews literary texts written in non-mother tongues usually at the intersection of conflicting situations (e.g. Hebrew used by Palestinian writers, French used by Algerian novelists). The issue of identity is at the core of this chapter, where the choice of the language is interpreted as a necessity, the expression of an ideological position or something conditioned by cultural politics. This is a stimulating analysis, based on the concept of overt/covert language in the texts.

Chapter 5, “Through the looking glass: Arabic, thought and reality” focuses on the cognitive role – i.e. connecting thought and reality – attributed to Arabic, investigated through an accurate reading of meaningful texts distributed over pre-modern and modern times. The accusations made by al-Jabartī against the French for the linguistic mistakes in their proclamation of 1798, are placed side-by-side with the assumptions contained in modern or contemporary essays (e.g. those of Sharīf al-Shubāshī, ‘Abdallāh al-Qāsīmī and others) that in different ways support the hypothesis of linguistic determinism and the influence of (standard) Arabic on the personality of the Arabophones.

A wide-ranging bibliography of works in Arabic and English (other languages are not represented) closes the volume. The chapters and subchapters are carefully organized, and the introduction and conclusions synthesizing the premises and results of each chapter help the reader to memorize the contents, even if sometimes this model induces a sensation of redundancy. Apart from the problematic aspects of ch. 2 and some minor shortcomings such as occasional typos (e.g. *hub* for *hubb*, p. 197) and a certain repetitiveness (e.g. the same sentence of Gramsci is quoted verbatim at p. 5, 45 and 92), all in all, this is very enriching reading for both Arabists and (socio)linguists.

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