FAHAD M. ALLIHEIBI
YOUSEF SH’HADEH

Linguistic Deviation and the Tendency Towards Colloquial Arabic in Naǧīb Maḥfūẓ’s Novel
*Al-Liṣṣ wa-al-kilāb (The Thief and the Dogs)*

Abstract

Naǧīb Maḥfūẓ’s novel *Al-Liṣṣ wa-al-kilāb* might be the best example in reflecting the distinctiveness of Maḥfūẓ’ natural language, which comes closer to the common colloquial, and sometimes deviates from the traditionally familiar language. However, it has continued to be a standard language and sometimes it embodies rhetorical usages including similes, metaphors, and metonymies. This linguistic deviation can be seen as a motivation for language renovation and interconnected with the actual daily life to the extent that it is perceived as an acceptable and natural language and not as an archaic one. Maḥfūẓ digresses from familiar Arabic language usage by employing linguistic nuances such as stylistic foregrounding, backgrounding, the repetition of words, and the arrangement of a sentence’s internal structure; all which in some way or another deviate from familiar usage. Linguistic deviation has also affected prepositions in Maḥfūẓ’ texts. This kind of deviation may be due to erroneous usage in colloquial dialects. Sometimes, the author removes the preposition of the prepositional phrase constituent and changes the noun attached to it into an adverb. It is worthwhile stating that Maḥfūẓ’ trend of deviation is an imitation of modern styles in an attempt to add new expressions and structures to the standard language. In spite of the fact that Maḥfūẓ occasionally made common mistakes and was guilty of sentence structure disorder and weakness, his profound work is full with connotations and metaphors expressing the actual lived reality while still employing the standard Arabic language as much as he could.

Keywords: Naǧīb Maḥfūẓ, Arabic language, Egyptian dialect, Arabic literature, Arabs
Naǧīb Mahfūẓ (1911–2006), the Egyptian author who won the 1988 Nobel Prize for literature, was distinguished for his texts written in prose in a descriptive and rich discourse operating at various structural levels, and loaded with various semantic, stylistic and structural variations. In this discourse we find that standard local dialects and collocations have been coherently and accurately embedded in the text by the author. However, it is not surprising to find Mahfūz deviating from familiar standard Arabic styles purposefully in order to reflect the social setting which has given birth to the protagonists of his novels, reflecting their social and stylistic behaviors in their daily lives. Despite the fact that in some of his novels, like in Riḥlat Ibn Fattūma (The Journey of Ibn Fattouma), Mahfūz intentionally uses a dialect rooted in the traditions of daily real-life phenomena, making use of expressions and nomenclatures that belong to the Old World presented in exceptionally standard linguistic expressive structures. He maintains an invariable correlation between the local environment and its people’s dialect in most of his narrative works. Naǧīb Mahfūz’s most celebrated novel Al-Liṣṣ wa-al-kilāb (The Thief and the Dogs) might be the best example in reflecting the distinctiveness of Mahfūz’s natural language, which comes closer to the common colloquial language, and sometimes deviates from the traditionally familiar language. However, it has continued to be a standard dialect and sometimes it embodies rhetorical usages including similes, metaphors, and metonymies. This linguistic deviation can be seen as a motivation for language renovation and correlated with authentic daily life to the extent that it is perceived as an acceptable and natural dialect rather than an archaic one.

The first thing that attracts attention in The Thief and the Dogs is its language, where the author uses expressions that deviate from the norm of literature. This is evident in the author’s use of colloquial idioms and expressions knowingly and intentionally, although Mahfūz sees the inherited colloquial dialect as an ‘epidemic that we should get rid of’. Therefore, one should reflect the protagonists’ situations and their social environments. In other times the author diverges from the familiar dialect inadvertently in part due to the influence of colloquial variations. This results in him committing common linguistic errors which make it difficult for him us exploit the correct and standard usage. This occurs because Mahfūz language was open to its surroundings and social lives, although the distinction remains clear between the spoken and written language. This is confirmed by Mikhail Bakhtin, who claims that “literary language is especially far from being whole. There is a vast dissimilarity between the social literary language and the standard literary language. This shows a higher level of clarity”. One can claim that the use of idioms in the work of Mahfūz emphasizes a new social existence.

The tendency for using colloquial spoken language is evident in the dialogue, which is sometimes spiced up with common expression prevalent in the Egyptian social setting.

---

It is noticeable that these linguistic expressions in most cases belong to the standard spoken language, but they are not used correctly according to the recognizable precise usage, but rather are utilized to convey the communicative purposes of the protagonist’s colloquial dialect. This is not surprising because the novel is expected to articulate the intentions of its characters utilizing their language and spoken dialect. For example, one of the protagonists uses the expression *alf nahār abyaḍ* (on a thousand white days)\(^4\) when he sees another protagonist, Sa‘īd Mahrān, to express an affectionate salutation. The meaning of this expression and its connotation is common in the Egyptian dialect, which is already known to any Arab speaker belonging to the current era. In spite of the usage of correct standard expressions, however many are not used accurately and depart from the familiar traditional linguistic usage.

There are colloquial expressions that are used in all Arabic dialects. These expressions belong to Standard Arabic, but are used in the sentence structure in a way that results in flawed grammatical constructions, which in turn negatively affect the standard word order arrangements of the sentence constituents. The expression *fi al-ḥifz wa aṣ-ṣawn* (well protected and well looked after) in the following example illustrates this: *Bintuk fi al-ḥifz wa aṣ-ṣawn ma’a ummihā, wa-ṣar’an yaḡib an tabqā ma’a ummihā bint sittat a’wām* (Your daughter is in safe hands with her mother’s care and moreover legally, a six-year-old girl should stay with her mother)\(^5\). We can see that the sentence starts with the standard expression ‘in safe and caring hands’, but attaching it to the prepositional phrase ‘with’ results in a deviation from the standard practice. The structural defect it causes to the standard sentence structure and as it develops closer into the colloquial dialect, because of the mere reason that the origin of the sentence is actually a traditionally common saying. This utterance might be appropriate for the dialogue, and can be used without reservation because it makes the reader think of the addresser as a convincing realistic protagonist and not one whom is fictitious. The protagonist has been nurtured in this environment and speaks the local dialect. However, the second part of the sentence increases the linguistic inconsistency, which creates a quandary. This could be avoided if the sentence is restructured in a different way, which would make it much clearer and linguistically well-structured. The author could have avoided this repetition and weakness of some words if he, instead, had said: ‘Law mandates that a six-year-old girl stays under her mother’s supervision’. We also find the colloquial expression *Ṣiḥhatuka ‘āl* (Health with you is great)\(^6\), which deviates from Arabic syntactic structure in terms of gender modification reflected by the adjective used to modify the noun. To illustrate, the noun, health, is feminine; therefore it should be paralleled by a feminine adjective, and not by a masculine one, as it is stated in the above mentioned example. At the same time, the word connotation of ‘āl (great), as it is commonly used, deviates from the normal usage and does not conform to the well-known syntactic rules.

---

\(^5\) Ibid., p. 11.
\(^6\) Ibid., p. 50.
Another common colloquial expression used by Maḥfūẓ is *fī 'irdik* (I plead to your honor), is utilized for pleading and appealing as is shown in the following dialogic utterance: *Fī 'irdik itrūknī* (I plead to your honor, Leave me!)*. This sentence cannot be understood without reference to its colloquial context which deviates from the standard literature.

There are many expressions that may be standard, but are employed colloquially which denote that their meanings do not conform to those listed in linguistic dictionaries. These colloquial expressions are difficult to understand by native Arabic speakers from countries other than Egypt. Thus we find variation from the originally intended meaning. Another example is the word *šīš*, used in the novel *The Thief and the Dogs* to mean a window made of glass or wood: *wa-la'allaka tanẓur min aš-šīš mustahfiyan ka-an-nisā‘ yā ‘Alīš* (Yea ‘Alīš! You might be hiding like women peeping through the hole in the wall)*. The original meaning of *šīš* is ‘dates’ whose kernels germinate fully or those that produce weak kernels. However, the divergence from this meaning to other meanings has become common during this age, such as: the delicate swords that are used in competition games. Also, *lu'bat aš-šīš* (the *sheesh* game) is the swords game itself. One of its meanings of *šīš* is ‘glass’, which etymologically means ‘glass window’. This has also been used later to mean ‘the window made of wood’.

Maḥfūẓ uses the word *laqṭa* (excellent catch) for his protagonists when talking about one of the characters in the following two places: It is said: *qīla innahu laqṭa* (they said that he is a catch)*, and *bal anta tufakkir bi-al-laqṭa* (In fact, you mean the catch)*. This usage confuses the reader. Does the author intend the word ‘catch’ in its colloquial meaning, i.e. ‘who or what is worthy of being won’? Or does he intend one of the standard meanings encountered in language dictionaries? According to *Lisān al-'Arab* (The Arab Tongue) and *Tāǧ al-'Arūs* (The Crown of the Bride) dictionaries, “Al-Layṯ says that *laqṭa* (catch) with a pause on the [q] consonant means the name of something you find somewhere and then it’s picked up; this meaning also applies to a foundling (i.e. an abandoned child), whereas *laqṭa* with a short open upper diacritical mark on [q] means *ar-rağul al-laqqāṭ* (a professional who looks for something to catch). Al-Azhari says: ‘The standard Arabic language is unlike what Al-Layṯ states about *al-laqṭa* and *al-laqaṭa*. Abū ‘Ubayd narrates on the authority of Al-Aṣma‘ī and Al-Aḥmar as saying: It means the catch, or a plate, all of which are stressed. He says: ‘And this is the argument of intellectual grammarians, as I have never heard of *luqṭa* from anyone other than Al-Layṯ. For this is how the traditionalists narrate on the authority of Abū ‘Ubayd as saying: In addition, Al-Farrā’ narrates it as *al-laqaṭa* (the catch) with a pause on [q]. However, the opinion of Al-Aḥmar and Al-Aṣma‘ī is much more accurate.”*
Some of the expressions that are widespread in Egypt and that are maybe not understood by native Arab speakers is the word qarāfa which Naḥīb Maḥfūẓ uses in numerous places in his novel to mean ‘cemetery’. Originally, this word is the name of a Yamani tribe that used to live in Egypt near cemeteries. The cemetery is named after the tribe’s qarāfa. As for the word šarrā‘a, it might be difficult to understand despite the fact that it is derived from the standard Arabic verb šara‘a (open), and the author uses it to mean miṣrā‘, which is a hole above the door or window of a house for lighting and ventilation purposes. It seems that this is one of the new expressions used in Egypt and thus in turn helps in developing language and creating new contemporary expressions.

Many widespread words have been recently introduced in the 20th century. They are used to describe either a verb or a particular expression; one of these is the verb farmala (break) which is a loanword borrowed from English. Although Arab linguists use the synonymous equivalent kabaḥa (break) in Arabic for the word farmala, we find others opt for introducing new borrowed words into Arabic and deriving new words from those that match standard usage and their derivatives and inflectional word formations. Maḥfūẓ is not an exception when using the verb farmala to mean kabaḥa in the following sentence: “And she held [farmala] her feet firmly to the carpet and tilting her body backwards.”

One of the recently borrowed words adopted in Arabic that has been commonly used is narfaža (nervousness); the author uses it in a narration as follows: “She acts nervously [fī narfaža]; then she staffed the wound with yogurt and wrapped it tightly with a piece of cloth from the remains of her dress.”

We can also find strange expressions in other Arabic dialects, one of which is the word firānda (veranda) which has the synonymous equivalent šurfa (veranda) in standard Arabic, and also the word bidūrm (bedroom), which is defined in the Muʿğam al-luğa al-ʿarabiyya al-muʿāṣira as an underground floor used for living or storage purposes. It seems that the prevalent common usage of this word by Egyptians motivates the author to employ it in his novel despite the fact that, as it is expected; he knows that there are other synonymous equivalent words in Arabic dialects giving the same meaning. al-qabw, which is commonly used in other Arabic dialects, and the word as-sarab, which we find in Arabic dictionaries are a few such examples.

There are also other foreign expressions utilized by Maḥfūẓ such as: ǧākītta (jacket) which has the Arabic equivalence sutra, and nārǧīla, having the Arabic synonym šīša; also dūš (shower), and salāmlık (sitting room). Maḥfūẓ uses these words in his novel although there are other Arabic equivalents for these foreign words.

As for the use of the word sikritāriya (secretariat) in the following sentence: “And he will remain as such, despite his incredible greatness and the strange articles, and his superior
sikritāriya (secretariat)”\footnote{Ibid., p. 31.}; this word deviates from the norm in terms of pronunciation because it is difficult to articulate in Arabic. Therefore the author should have used another easily pronounced equivalent, which does not deviate from the familiar usage, such as al-ǧihāz al-idārī (administrative staff) fulfilling the same function and meaning.

Linguistic deviation from the standard towards the common colloquial Arabic is proliferous in Maḥfūz’ works; we encounter such a phenomenon in Egyptian colloquial expressions. For example, the expression māsiḥ al-ǧūẖ (broadcloth polisher), metaphorically speaking, means praising the rich or somebody who has high status and power, is used by the needy for the purpose of getting personal benefits from them. The sentence that reads “one of the māsiḥī al-ǧūẖ (broadcloth polishers) said”\footnote{Ibid., p. 11.} is a metaphor for ‘lip service’ in this context and refers to flatterers and hypocrites. Therefore, Maḥfūz employs this expression to have a connotative rather than denotative meaning. It is worth noting that the word al-ǧūẖ (broadcloth) is a foreign loanword and might be etymologically Turkish, which means ‘cohesive wool texture’. This kind of wool texture feels delicate and is cleaned manually by moving one’s hand over it because cleaning it using other traditional ways would ruin it. The clothes of the well-off and affluent people during Ottoman era were made of wool texture and if one had wanted something, he would come closer to one of them and move his hand over their wool clothes. Therefore it is said ‘You are like the massāḥ al-ǧūẖ (broadcloth polisher) if you praise somebody for the purpose of getting something from him.

As for the colloquial expression qadd ad-dunyā (as big as the world), Maḥfūz uses it to contest the dialogue which is loaded with common colloquial expressions: “And my wealth, money and jewelry, he usurped, and by means of which he became mu’aliman qadd ad-dunyā (a well-known professional)”\footnote{Ibid., p. 27.}.

Likewise, the expression ḥuluww riǧl (lease) diverges from its literal standard meaning and is usually fixed to be commonly used to mean a lump sum of money requested by a tenant from a new tenant in order to evacuate the rented property. It is sometimes called badal ḥuluww (lease) in legal terminology. Maḥfūz uses this expression colloquially as follows: “A new family occupied the flat; it may have paid badal ḥuluww (a lease)”\footnote{Ibid., p. 69.}.

There is a commonly used expression in Arabic dialects which is employed either to distinguish the modified noun or to give it a higher rank with reference to its equivalents; like the expression walā kull (not like), which is encountered in The Thief and the Dogs: “You are a woman walā kull (not like) the other women”\footnote{Ibid., p. 85.}. The familiar linguistic usage is to say: “You are a woman laysat ka-kull (unlike) all women”, or laysa ka-miṯliki imra’ah (No woman is like you as a woman).

Sometimes, some expressions digress from familiar usage as a consequence of replacing a verb by another because of the influence of the colloquial dialect. For example, the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{Ibid., p. 31.}
\item \footnote{Ibid., p. 11.}
\item \footnote{Ibid., p. 27.}
\item \footnote{Ibid., p. 69.}
\item \footnote{Ibid., p. 85.}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
following common expression ya’mal lahu alf hisāb (thousand calculations should be made for it) meaning (one should take all precautions) which diverges from the familiar expression yahsub lahu alf hisāb (one should count a thousand times for it). We notice that although the author of The Thief and Dogs employs the common colloquial style, he maintains the syntactic structure of the standard language: antumā ta’malān li-hādā al-yawm alf hisāb (You have been making a thousand calculations for this day)\textsuperscript{22}.

Naṣīb Maḥfūz uses complete sentences uttered by his protagonists that cannot be interpreted and understood except in their Egyptian colloquial dialect and its connotations that digress from the familiar standard language. The following sentence exemplifies this: aḥuṭṭak fī ‘aynayya wa-akaḥḥil ‘alayk (I will wrap you with my eyelids and seal them with kohl)\textsuperscript{23}.

It is worth pointing out to indicate how accurate the researcher, ‘Abd al-Maǧīd ‘Īsānī, is as he noticed the high frequency of colloquial expressions and parables that are used in the novels produced in popular social settings, which Maḥfūz himself was constrained by. Some of these novels are: Al-Harāfīš (The Harafish), Qaṣr aš-Šawq (Palace of Desire), Zuqāq al-Midaqq (Midaq Alley), Awlād ħaratinā (Children of Gebelawi or Children of our Alley), etc.\textsuperscript{24} We can assure that the novel The Thief and The Dogs belongs to the aforementioned collection. It includes many colloquial expressions uttered by the characters of the novel. These expressions are derived from the heart of the popular social context; they have been used by Egyptians and reflect the colloquial dialect and style. The following expressions exemplify this: yā ḥabar abyaḍ which literally means ‘what a white news!’ (i.e. What a surprise!), ūl ‘umrihā wa-hiya maqlūba’\textsuperscript{26} which literally means ‘it is always turned over’ (i.e. he or she has always been unlucky) and layla bayḍā bi-ṣ-ṣalāt ‘alā an-nabī’\textsuperscript{27} which literally means ‘a white night blessed with a prayer upon the Prophet’ (i.e. everything is okay).

Naṣīb Maḥfūz’ protagonists use daily expressions that are specific to the Egyptian context and indivisible of the reality there, like šarbāt (drinks): “Come to the shop to have šarbāt (drinks)!\textsuperscript{28} Undoubtedly, this word is derived from the standard root šariba (drink) from which is derived šarba (one drink). Egyptians utilize the plural form šarbāt (drinks) to indicate the meaning of ‘much drink’. However, it cannot convey this meaning exactly because the colloquial Egyptian meaning of the expression šarbāt is a drink made from a light and sweet fruit juice. This word, which is only commonly used in Egypt, diverges from what is expressed by the following familiar expression:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 5.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 75.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Naṣīb Maḥfūz, Al-Liṣṣ..., op. cit., p. 124.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 45.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Ibid., p. 8.
\end{itemize}
‘a drink made from the fruit juice’. In addition the word ǧid’ān29 the plural of ǧada‘ which means ar-raǧul aš-šahm (the generous man), does not have an etymological root in standard Arabic. Furthermore, the verb ǧada‘a meaning (cut), does not indicate any denotation of courage and generosity; The one who is ǧada‘ is the person who has been taken by part of his/her body or nose.

In the following sentence: miṯluk yantaẓir wa-law ḥukima ‘alayhi bi-at-ta’abīda (The one who is like you should wait even if he is given a life sentence)30, you find divergence from the infinitive ta’abīd (to sentence for life) derived from the verb abbada having the meaning of hallada (to mortalize). This is a new legal term, commonly used in the form of a participle mu’abbad (life sentenced), which means ‘the verdict of a life sentence in prison’; while in actuality the verdict is reduced to 20 years.

Naǧīb Maḥfūz sometimes uses standard words in the singular but when used in the plural form, he again diverges from the familiar linguistic usage found in the dictionary. In doing so, he most likely wants to cope with the colloquial usage. A representative expression of such plurals is the word ḥāra (alley), which is given the plural of ḥawārin [al-ḥawārī], as is used in the following instance: Al-Ḥammārat uḡliqat abwābuhā wa-lam yabqā illā al-ḥawārī al-latī tuḥāku fīhā al-mu‘āmarāt (The bars were closed and nothing remained except the al-ḥawārī (alleys) in which conspiracies are made)31. The plural form of ḥāra (alley) is the feminine plural ḥārāt (alleys) and there is no equivalent broken plural form (an irregular plural form) for this word. The broken plural form is called hawārin [al-ḥawārī]. The author may have resorted to the unusual broken form because he noticed that the regular plural of ḥārah (i.e. ḥārāt), creates a heavy ‘assonance’ by the repetition of the final sound /at/ of the words, al-ḥammārat, al-ḥārāt, and al-mu‘āmarat, as illustrated in the example: Al-Ḥammārat uḡliqat abwābuhā wa-lam yabqā illā al-ḥārāt al-latī tuḥāku fīhā al-mu‘āmarat. (The bars were closed and nothing remained except the al-ḥārāt (alleys) in which conspiracies are made). The question then arises: Does Maḥfūz intentionally avoid assonance (which he rarely employs in his texts), or whether he erroneously uses the colloquial plural form of this word?

Maḥfūz digresses from familiar Arabic language usage by employing linguistic nuances such as stylistic foregrounding, backgrounding, the repetition of words, and the arrangement of a sentence’s internal structure; all which in some way or another deviate from familiar usage. It seems that the author of the novel The Thief and The Dogs realizes the importance of the linguistic coherence in creating the intended meanings, which in turn agrees with De Saussure’s view that language ‘is not a heap of words that gradually accumulated to have the primary function of referring to entities in the world’32.

Words and expressions are woven in Maḥfūz’s text to reflect functional relations. However, the author’s deviation from the familiar standard language in this context is

29 Ibid., p. 45.
30 Ibid., p. 75.
31 Ibid., p. 6.
generally purposive. However, it sometimes violates the internal structure of a sentence and confuses the reader, as illustrated in the following: *wa nawāfīḏ al-buyūt al-muḡriyah ḥattā hiya ḥāliya* (and the tempting windows of the houses are even uninhabited). Would it not be more appropriate to say: *Ḥattā nawāfīḏ al-buyūt al-muḡriya [kānat, żallat, badat] ḥāliya* (Even the tempting windows of the houses [were, remained, looked] uninhabited)?

One such example of a sentence that suffers from structural defects is the following: *waǧada nafsahu fī ḥuǧra kabīra mustaṭīla zuḡāǧiyyat al-ǧidār al-muṭilli ‘alā aṭ-ṭarīq wa-laysa bi-hā mawḍi‘ li-ǧālis* (He found himself in a big rectangular chamber with a glass wall overlooking the road, which does not have a place to sit). Does the author mean that the chamber was *kabīra mustaṭīla ḏāt ǧidār zuḡāǧī muṭill ‘alā aṭ-ṭarīq* (big and rectangular with a glass wall overlooking the road)? Or does he mean another one which remained ambiguous because of deviation from the familiar internal structure of the sentence?

His saying: *wa-lākinnahu qāla lī malāyīn hum al-laḏīna yuqtalūn ḥaṭa‘an wa bi-lā sabab* (But he said to me, thousands are those who are killed erroneously and without any reason) defies normal sentence internal structure because it includes foregrounding. It might have been better if the sentence had been structured as follows: *wa-lākinnahu qāla lī [inna] al-laḏīna yuqtalūn ḥaṭa‘an wa bilā sabab hum malāyīn* (But he said to me, verily those who are killed erroneously and without any reason are millions).

Māḥfūz not only deviates from the familiar standard usage of the Arabic sentence by foregrounding, and extrapositioning devices, but also uses incomplete sentences; he initiates his speech with dependent clauses that are not coupled either to the preceding sentences or to the following ones. The following exemplifies this tendency: *Ṭawāla arba‘at a῾wām la ṭaģi b`a’nīb, fa-hal yasmaḥ al-ḥaẓẓ bi-makān ṭayyib yaṣļuḥ li-tabādul al-ḥubb. Yan῾am fī ẓillihi bi-surūr al-muẓaffar, wa-al-ḥiyāna ḏikr ā karīh a`bāid a?* (During the past four years, he has not forgotten her, and she has gradually grown up, and she became a vague picture. Does luck let off to have a nice place, good for mutual love? Where accessible pleasure can be enjoyed, and betrayal is a bad disgusting memory?)

At the beginning of the sentence, the author postpositions the adverb of time ‘During the past four years’, a case which is common in Arabic discourse, the purpose of which is to place emphasis on the postpositional constituent in order to draw the addressee’s attention to it. The normal structure of this sentence should be as follows: ‘He has not forgotten her for four years, and she has gradually grown up and she became a vague picture…’. However, the extract, ‘Where accessible pleasure can be enjoyed, and betrayal is a bad disgusting remembrance?’ following the preceding sentences has been separated by a full stop despite the fact they are related in terms of meaning, context and co-text indicated by the incomplete interrogative sentence. Therefore the extract ‘and betrayal

---

34 Ibid., p. 30.
35 Ibid., p. 120.
36 Ibid., p. 6.
is a bad disgusting remembrance?’ seems to be ambiguous and unrelated to the context of the text. We also notice that the author jumps from the verb ‘be’ which must precede the verb ‘betrayal’. In doing so, it is left to the addressee to understand the meaning as follows: ‘Betrayal becomes a dead disgusting remembrance’.

If we consider the following sentence: wa satakūn muğāmarat al-lyla ibtidā‘an aftatiḥ bihi al-ʿamal, wa satakūn muğāmara dasima (Tonight’s adventure will be a commencement with which work is opened; it will be a robust adventure)\textsuperscript{37}, we notice the repetition of the constituent satakūn muğāmara (It will be an adventure). It seems that the author has structured this sentence in such a way in order to achieve two functions: Firstly, he wants to indicate that the adventure will be a commencement of his work. Secondly, he wants to describe this adventure and emphasize its importance and enormity, which is realized here by the employment of the unfamiliar adjective dasima (robust) to modify the noun. It is worth pointing out that this repetition is beneficial as it echoes the protagonist’s monologue and his stream of consciousness, where the constituents of speech spontaneously over flow, oblivious of its organization. Consequently, in such cases, most of the structure of the text deviates from the familiar norms of literature.

It is noticed in Mahfūz’ texts that he resorts to elaborations in particular places. This tendency results in very long sentences, each of which is extended over many pages without paying attention to punctuation marks. Although this tendency is considered a violation of the modern standard styles in writing, it brings to memory classical Arabic prose (e.g., Arabian Nights) where discourse overflows spontaneously without pauses or full stops. You can notice that the narrator of the novel The Thief and The Dogs arouses the character’s remembrances running over many pages (e.g., from page 78–83) in one sentence embodying many embedded sentences. The author might have intended to illustrate that this very long sentence is a spontaneous overflow of the character’s stream of consciousness, which is always absent in another period of time. And it ends with the character’s return to the current state during the time of the story imagined; then, re-emerges a new textual structure embodying shorter sentences constrained by punctuation marks.

Deviating from the punctuation marks for the sake of coping with the stream of consciousness and its complicated narrative styles may confuse the reader; it is created because of moving from one sentence to another employing an intricate and complicated structure. The text becomes too difficult to understand as is shown in the following sentence: wa lan yansā fī an-nihāya annahā imra‘a kamā anna Nabawiyya imra‘a al-ḥā‘ina al-ġabāna sayaqtuluhā al-ḥawf ‘alā ġayātihi (He will not forget at the end that she is a woman and that Nabawiyya is a woman a traitorous and a coward the dreadful care for her life will kill her)\textsuperscript{38}. After a careful reading of the aforementioned sentence, the reader finds that he should stop before the word ‘coward’ and then continue to a following sentence. Therefore, in the absence of punctuation marks, it becomes difficult

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 43.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., p. 83.
to understand the sentence structure, as one may think that the word ‘woman’ and the word immediately following (traitorous) are related to each other by means of al-idāfa (genitive construction) muḍāf and muḍāf ilayh, where the first word, woman, is the head noun, muḍāf, and the latter is muḍāf ilayh, the post-modifying adjective. This affects the functional meaning intended. Undoubtedly, the author may have embedded this sentence in the context of the monologue in a way that reflects the character’s expressions of his responses, so that the reader will assimilate and understand the internal structure of these responses and their punctuation.

Sometimes, we find recurrent verbless sentences in Maḥfūz’s texts introducing a general description of a particular thing. These sentences remain incomplete unless the reader recovers the implicit missing meanings in these sentences. In the following extract, we find a stretch of language about a city. The reader can only assume whether the author is addressing the city by a deleted vocative article or by intentionally informing the reader about the city by a deleted mubtada’ (subject of a logical proposition) and the verb, as follows:

“He dressed the officer’s suit to try it Nūr stared at him raising her hands surrendering although he was not threatening her. The city of silence and truth. The gathering of success and failure, the murderer and the murdered. The gathering place of the thieves and the policemen where they sleep next to each other in peace and for the first time. And it seems that Nūr’s snore does not stop unless she wakes up at the twilight” ³³⁹.

It is clear that the aforementioned sentences lack logical cohesion because the author jumps from one process to another. The narrator starts talking about the protagonist dressing an officer’s suit while Nūr is looking at him; then, he abruptly talks about the city and after that returns to Nūr’s snoring. Surprisingly, Nūr is simultaneously sleeping and staring at the man!

Maḥfūz usually deviates from writing styles by violating the pronoun system. We find that some sentences start with the third person pronoun, then the author moves to the second person pronoun, then to the first person pronoun. All of this occurs in one long sentence while talking about one protagonist (Saʿīd):

“[Saʿīd] used to stand near the door of the students’ house after he finishes work, looking towards the end of the road that [Nabawiyya] used to come along until he realizes her beautiful figure and lovely walk approaching arousing in him the best feeling (…) And your eyes follow her enjoying wine (…) She sometimes disappears and other times appears as your love continually increases more and more and wishing to do anything (…) She said: ‘turn back my grandmother is sitting next to the window. She will see you if you move a step further’. I said ‘I am stubborn and if you want me to return let us return together’ (…) but she slows down and bends her neck like a cat’s, but she slows down then I do not doubt anymore that I have reached and that Nabawiyya has some feelings towards me…” ³⁴⁰.

³³⁹ Ibid., p. 77.
³⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 78–81.
The pronouns are sometimes confusing in the way they are interlinked to the extent that the reader does not know to whom the implicit pronoun refers to and who exactly the subject is. We realize this confusing overlap in the following extract:

“The young man set out in the dark night like a meteor. And he threw himself inside the car very quickly and suddenly started the engine and ran quickly. She finished dressing her clothes while she was saying…”

In the first sentence of the aforementioned text, the author mentions the actor, ‘the young man’ but in the second he mentions the third person pronoun ‘he’ (which is the subject/agent) referring to (Sa‘īd) as it is understood from the context; then we find an implicit the subject/agent ‘he’ (i.e. Sa‘īd), the subject of the verb ‘start’. After that we find the implicit third person pronoun ‘it’ referring to ‘the car’. Until now the texts seems to be comprehensible; however, the following sentence deviates from the norm because the subject/agent is not mentioned explicitly but must be implicitly understood (i.e. ‘she’ of the verb ‘completed’). What comes to our minds at the beginning is that the pronoun refers to ‘the car’, but it is illogical to say that ‘[the car] completed dressing its clothes…’. Therefore, we anticipate that the subject/actor is the protagonist, Nūr. It seems that the author intends to be short and quick in order to leaves it to the reader to understand the text correctly.

In the sentences “He found his blue suit and rubber shoes waiting for him. Except for them, none was waiting for him”, we realize a witty repetitive style in Maḥfūz’s novel. Using the expression ‘waiting for him’ twice attracts the reader’s attention. At first glance, one may think that this sentence is weak in its structure, but suddenly it’s realized that the repetition is utilized purposively to emphasize the idea that ‘none was waiting for him’. We can rewrite this sentence in a normal way so that it fulfills the intended communicative function. For example, we can say: ‘He did not find anybody waiting for him but his blue suit and rubber shoes’. The word ‘anybody’ is used only to refer to animates; therefore, we cannot exclude inanimate things from it. This might be the reason why the author intentionally deviates from this familiar contextual usage. However, the following wording for the aforementioned sentence may resolve the ambiguity: ‘He found his blue suit and his rubber shoes waiting for him, but nobody was waiting for him’.

As for the following sentence, “Sleep stole him, but he did not know how it had stolen him, and he did not remember that he had slept, indeed…” it seems to be a weak
sentence because of the repetition of the word ‘stole’, which could have been replaced by another verb, as follows: ‘Sleep stole him and he did not know how this happened…’.

Sometimes we find strange language structures that violate sentence internal construction. To illustrate, we encounter stretches of language, each consisting of two separate sentences that are interrelated, but the author separates them. This tendency results in sentences that look as if they are incomplete having awkward structures. The following two sentences exemplify this tendency: *Li-ta’ti li-yarā māḏā fā’al az-zamān bi-hā. Al-latī ‘abaṯan arādat imtilāk qalbahu* (She can come so that he can see what a lifetime has done to her. Who irrationally tried to possess his heart)\(^44\). As can be noticed in the aforementioned structure, the author initiates the second sentence with the relative pronoun ‘who’. However, the second dependent clause should be tied to the preceding sentence in order to understand the meaning of the relative pronoun ‘who’, which cannot be realized unless it is joined to the immediate preceding sentence. If the two clauses were tied by adding an entity to indicate the referent intended, the sentence would be understood as follows: ‘She can come so that he can see what a lifetime has done to her, who nonsensically tried to possess his heart’. The two sentences could have been left separated by repeating the verb ‘come’ so that we could have the following two grammatical sentences: ‘She can come so that he can see what a lifetime has done to her. She, who nonsensically tried to possess his heart, can come’. However, it seems that the author avoids makings use of repetition, and intends to emphasize the idea that the narrator’s speech seems to be incoherently overflowing from the protagonist’s stream of consciousness.

More often than not, linguistic deviation is achieved by violating the familiar sentence syntactic structure. We find constituents that are syntactically and textually irrelevant and incoherent which, in turn, results in nonspecific ambiguous expressions. This odd sentence is an example: "These roads loaded by sun, and these crazy cars, and the pedestrians and those who are sitting, the houses and the shops, and there is no lip give up smiling…”\(^45\). We notice that all of the expressions are verbless apart from the final one. The reader can only assume what the author intends to means by such expressions. Although the final sentence includes a verb, one finds that it does not relate to the preceding co-text. This in turn, leaves likelihood for various possible interpretations that may not include the intended meaning.

Some changes can be made to the internal structure of a sentence; one of which is ‘deletion’ which the author makes use of in multiple places. He tends to delete important constituents of the sentence. He may delete the ‘subject’, the ‘verb’ or the ‘object’, so that the reader is required to configure the element deleted from the general context of the sentences. In some cases, ellipses are utilized to cope with the colloquial styles of expression, as shown in this example: *laḥaqa bi-himā kaṯrūn min ad-dakākīn ‘alā*  

---

\(^44\) Ibid., p. 49.  
\(^45\) Ibid., p. 5.
al-ǧānibayn (Many followed them from the shops on both sides)\textsuperscript{46}. Following the colloquial speech of the masses, the author deletes some constituents of the sentence, which should have been included as follows: ‘Many [clients, workers...] followed them [coming out] from of the shops on both sides’. The sentence included in Maḥfūẓ’ text seems to be weak and inaccurate in meaning. If read carefully, various possible interpretations can be conceived. The sentence can be read in different ways such as:

(a) ‘Many of those who were coming out of the shops on both sides of the road followed them’,

(b) ‘Many of those who were in the shops on both sides of the road followed them’, or

(c) ‘Many of the owners of the shops who were walking on the sides of the road followed them’.

No doubt, the sentence utilized in the novel remains ambiguous because of its deviation from the standard linguist structure due to the employment of ellipsis devices. The author’s usage of the colloquial style may be acceptable in dialogues since the stylist preferences ought to reflect the character’s intellectual and cultural level. However, when employed in the written text, the use of colloquial dialect style results in weakening the text’s syntactic structure and affecting its literary standard level.

If considering this sentence: \textit{Wa-taharrakat li-tatasallal raği’a lawlā ar-rağul warā’ahā} (She moved to sneak out backwards slowly if the man were not behind her)\textsuperscript{47}, we realize that some constituents are deleted in order to diverge from normal usage. The interpretation of this sentence might have been left to the reader who may understand it as follows: ‘She moved turning backwards slowly if the man were not [standing] behind her’.

We may be surprised to encounter in Maḥfūẓ’ text sentences like: \textit{Al-Arḍ aṭfāl wa-rimāl wa-dawābb wa-huwa min at-ta’ab wa-al-infi’āl yalhaṭ} (The earth is children, sand, and creatures and he was out of breath because of tiredness)\textsuperscript{48}, and ponder how can the earth itself become children and creatures, and why did the author resort to such a witty metaphor?’ However, the deletion of any part of speech results in a sentence diverging from the norms of speech. Therefore, the aforementioned sentence can be interpreted as follows: ‘The earth is [full of...] children, sand and creatures...’.

There are numerous instances of weak dialogues in the text due to ellipses, which are prevalent in Arabic dialects and styles of speech. One example is: – \textit{Man qāl innī ġi’tu li-ġayr at-tafāhum?} (Who said that I came except for mutual understanding?)\textsuperscript{49}. This sentence is should be structured differently in order to conform to the standard, as follows: ‘Who said that I came [for anything else] except for mutual understanding?’ The deletion encountered in this sentence is to emphasize the influence of the colloquial spoken styles.

What is prevalent in the dialogue is the use of common colloquial expressions, the purpose of which is to remind the addressee of genuine verbal communication and its

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p. 7.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., p. 15.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., p. 19.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p. 9.
colloquial styles. The following example illustrates this phenomenon: *ihz aš-šayṭān* (damn devils). What is noticeable is that the author adds declensions to show the grammatical case in this expression; he deleted the final letter /i/ of the word *ihz* (damn) to conform to grammatical rules though it is written with the final /i/ in some dialects.

The present participle (*ism al-fā'il*) frequently replaces the verb of the sentence in order to deviate from the norms. Although this style can be used in standard Arabic to fulfill certain purposes, it is prevalent in colloquial language to the extent that it has become the norm. Maḥfūz uses the following two expressions that are commonly used in colloquial speech: “Anā ‘ārifuk wa-fāhimuk, anā ḥayr man yaqra’ dāẖil ra’sik… (I know and understand you, I am the best one who can read your mind...)”. This expression suits the dialogue because it places the reader in the setting of the fictitious story, up close and personal with its characters. An example of this is the colloquial word ṣāyda (trapped) which is encountered in the following dialogue:

> “– Every now and then, she will be pleased to see you.
> – Ṣāyda (Trapped)?
> – Of course, the boy of the owner’s son of the sweets factory…”

Maḥfūz uses some words in their inappropriate places in the sentence. The author uses the word *šattā* (diverse) incorrectly in the following below: *šar'an hiya ḥaqq li li-šattā al-mulābasāt wa-aẓ-ẓurūf* (Legally, it is mine for diverse circumstances). The word *šattā* is encountered in the Qur’an in various places. For example: *wa-anzala min as-smā'i mā'an fa-aẖraġnā bi-hi azwāḏan min nabātiin šattā* ([He] has sent down water from the sky. With it, have We produced diverse pairs of plants). Based on this usage, Maḥfūz’ sentence cannot be used to indicate the following meaning: ‘Legally, it is mine [in all] circumstances’.

We find the word *kāffat* (all) in the genitive construction to function as *muḍāf* followed by a post-modifying *muḍāf ilayh*, as follows: *wa-al-qawl bi-anannt maḏnūn yanbaġī an yašmul kāffat al-‘āṭifīn*… (The saying that I am mad should include all sympathetic). The word *kāffat* is commonly used as an indefinite in the accusative case, and should not be preceded by *li* (to) and encountered in a genitive construction. It usually occurs when a final sentence is in the accusative case, as it is used in the Qur’an: *wa qātilū al-mušrikīna kāffatan kamā yuqātilūnakum kāffatan* (And fight the Pagans all together, as they fight you all together). The word *kāffat*, may have another meaning, like that encountered in the Quran: *wa mā arsalnāka illā kāffatan li-an-nās*… (We have not sent thee, but as a [Messenger] to *all* mankind...) . The meaning of *kāffat* (all) is *kāff*.
(preventer) who prevents others of doing bad deeds. Based on classical usages of this word, *Maǧma’ al-Luğa al-‘Arabiyya* (The Center of Arabic Language), states that *kāffat* (all) can be used in definite and indefinite cases, and with inanimate nouns.58

Another common mistake is the word *dāt* or *nafs* (same), which is used inappropriately for emphasis, before the noun to be emphasized, as shown in the following examples: *wa-ṣaraẖa bilā kibriyā’* *wa-bilā muqāwama fī dāt al-waqt* (He cried out without dignity and without resistance at the same time),59, and *Laqad taraka ‘Alīš Sidra wa Nabawiyya bayyahumā fī nafs al-yawm al-laḏī zārahumā fīh bi-ḥuḏūr al-muẖbir wa-al-a῾wān* (*‘Alīš Sidra and Nabawiyya left their house the same day, when he visited them in the presence of the detective and associates*).60 If *dāt* (self) and *nafs* (self) are used for emphasizing purposes in these two sentences; these reflexive emphasizers should be preceded by the nouns they emphasized. These emphasizers should agree with the nouns emphasized in case markers. Each of these words should also be attached to an explicit pronoun that agrees with the emphasized noun in terms of gender, and number (singular, dual and plural).61 If the author intends to make emphasis in the aforementioned sentences; he should have said *fī al-waqt dātihi* (in the time itself), and should have said *fī al-yawm nafsihi* (on the day itself). However, the expressions *dāt aš-šay’* or *nafs aš-šay’* (the same thing) can also be used to indicate other functions. Consider the following sentences from Sībawayhi’s book: *nazaltu bi-nafs al-ǧabal, wa-nafs al-ǧabal muqābilī* (I sit in the same mountain, and the same mountain in front of me).62 Al-Ǧāḥiẓ also said: *wa-lā-budda li-at-turǧumān min an yakūna bayānuhu bi-nafs at-tarǧama*… (The translator’s illustration should be evident in the same translation…)63 When you say ‘I read the same book’ this means that you read the essence or essentials of the book, but when you say ‘I read the book itself’, this emphasizes the book and negates the idea that the reading was about the book.64

Maḥfūẓ sometimes deviates from normal Arabic usage of expressions. For example, He uses the word *ḥamās* (enthusiasm) instead of *ḥamāsa* as shown in the following example: *fa-irtāḥa ilā ḏālik dūna ḥamās* (He accepted that without enthusiasm).65 The word *ḥamās* according to Tāǧ al-‘Arūs means strength, prohibition and fighting. However, both words *ḥamās* and *ḥamāsa* have been commonly used synonymously in contemporary dictionaries.66

Maḥfūẓ sometimes uses words inappropriately in regards to his usage not reflecting the meanings included in the classical Arabic dictionaries. For example, he uses the word

---

59 N. Maḥfūẓ, *Al-Liṣṣ…*, op. cit., p. 64.
60 Ibid., p. 69.
daraġāt (steps) instead of darakāt (low levels) to indicate the descending of the protagonist from the third floor to the ground floor, as shown in the following: \textit{wa maḍā yāṭīb fawqa ad-darağāt bi-lā hirs ḥattā balağa bi’r as-sullam ft tawânin} (He continued leaping down the steps until he reaches down the stairs in seconds)\footnote{N. Maḥfūz, \textit{Al-Liṣṣ…}, op. cit., p. 61.}. It is well-known that the word, \textit{ad-darağa} (the step) has a positive meaning (i.e. a high rank), whereas \textit{ad-daraka} has a negative meaning (i.e. low rank). Accordingly, \textit{darakāt} means descending levels one after another, whereas \textit{darağāt} means ascending levels one above the other. In classical Islam, it is said that \textit{Al-Ǧanna darağāt wa-an-nār darakāt} (Paradise is ascending levels and Hell is descending levels).

Although Maḥfūz deviates from the standard usage, his expressions remain within the range of acceptability. One such expression is \textit{awwal ams} ‘the first of yesterday’\footnote{Ibid., p. 45.} (meaning the day before yesterday). In standard Arabic, it is said: \textit{awwal min ams} (the day before yesterday) but the Egyptian Centre of Arabic Language approved both expressions: \textit{ams al-awwal} ‘yesterday the first’ (meaning the day before yesterday), and \textit{awwal ams} ‘the first of yesterday’ (also meaning the day before yesterday).

In his texts, Maḥfūz utilizes some contemporary linguistic structures that have not been encountered in such a usage. For example, when the word \textit{muḡarrad} (only) is preceded by the Arabic preposition \textit{bā’}, this structure indicates a different meaning from those occurring with this preposition; therefore, it gives a meaning synonymous to that of ḥālamā (as soon as), as shown in the following sentence: \textit{wa-kunta taẓunnu annaka satamūt nawman bi-muḡarrad an yamass ǧilduka al-ard} (You thought that you would have been fast asleep because you would sleep as soon as you lied down)\footnote{Ibid., p. 63.}. What is expected to be used here is either ḥālamā (as soon as) or \textit{lahžata mà} (the moment when) instead of \textit{bi-muḡarrad}.

Most of the times, the author makes use of expressions that are considered common errors. For example, he uses the word \textit{ṣudfa} (by chance) instead of \textit{muṣādafa} (coincidence), as shown in the following sentence: \textit{anta lam tuqābilnī illā ṣudfa, wa-la’allaka kunta nasītanī tamāman} (You met me by chance. You might have forgotten me completely)\footnote{Ibid., p. 76.}. Unlike what is common in colloquial language (e.g. \textit{ra’aytuḥu ṣudfa}), using the word \textit{muṣādafa} is obligatory in such a context.

Naǧīb Maḥfūz is well-known for his ability to adjust language to serve the narrative in his novels. It is often noticed that the author makes use of the rhetorical devices and linguistic metaphorical styles to create metaphorical alternatives that diverge from the normal usage. These strange metaphorical alternatives are used to articulate the linguistic functional purposes and artistic implications in his discourses and narrative texts. Like other prominent authors, Maḥfūz does not deal with language as automatic and static, but he de-automizes it in order to create unfamiliar expressions having implications and
interpretations that have not been encountered in common usage. The following quotation, about the creators of art, by Ahmad ‘Alī Muhammad is applicable to Mahfūz’ style:

“The creators of art (...) intentionally violate language systems; they choose some lexical items that can have a wide range of influential implications and load them with various implications, a tendency that results in violating the well-established linguistic relations. This is intentionally done in order to increase the number of lexical connotations of the expressions used and enlarge their semantic fields. This, in turn, can accommodate the meticulous experiences to be articulated. For these reasons, the metaphorical use of language, which enable the author to deviate from linguistic norms, avails the opportunity for the author to employ stylistic options that reflect his peculiar stylistic choices”71.

Allegorical statements are prevalent in The Thief and the Dogs, one of which is: wa-ṣāḥa aḥad ar-riḡāl muwaḡğīha hanḡaratahu ilā ad-dawr at-tānī min al-bayt (One of the men shouted directing his larynx toward the second floor of the house...)72. It is strange for the larynx to be directed toward a particular place, because it is a fixed organ of speech; however, its vocal cords vibrate in the process of articulation. Therefore, making the immobile entity mobile is a kind of exaggeration; the function of which is to attract the reader’s attention to the narrative text and to the dynamic mobile words used. This usage adds unconventional meanings to a strange world which has become unfamiliar to its characters. Mahfūz is employing physical things to represent concepts here73. This sort of rhetoric is mentioned by Ar-Rummānī, who states: “explain what is unseen by using what can be seen and explain what we do not know by something we do know”74.

Likewise, in the following sentence: wa-taṭalla’at bi-waḡh asmar wa-ša’r aswad musabsab fawaqa al-ḡabin fa-ilṭahamathā rūḥuhu (She appeared with a brown face and straight black hair on her forehead so that his spirit swallowed her)75. This sentence is a deviation from the familiar usage. It is used for a metaphorical and allegorical purpose. The expression iltahamathā rūḥuhu (his spirit swallowed her) is an imaginary poetic image which is not that easily encountered in Arabic prose. Badā al-qasr musdal al-ḡūfīn taḥrusuhu al-ašḡār min kull ḡānīb ka-al-ašbāḥ (The palace looks as if its eyelids were sealed and guarded by the trees from everywhere like ghosts)76. The above sentence can be perceived as one full of connotative metaphorical images, which animate the inanimate by bringing life to ‘the palace’ and humanize it by giving the palace ‘sealed eyelids’. Such a divergence is made in order to portray a dramatic scene for the palace tonight while the lights are off.

72 N. Mahfūz, Al-Liṣṣ…, op. cit., p. 8.
75 N. Mahfūz, Al-Liṣṣ…, op. cit., p. 44.
76 Ibid., p. 44.
The author violates familiar usage in the following sentence as well: _Marratūn uḥrā yatanaffās nasmāt al-ḥurriyya, wa-lākinna al-ḡaww ḡubār ḥāniq wa-ḥarr lā yuṭāq_ (Once again he breathes the breeze of freedom, but it is a suffocating dust and an unbearably high temperature type of weather). This is the description of the weather. It is common to say that _al-ḡaww muṣṭabbār_ (The weather is dusty), but the author makes use of exaggeration to denote that ‘the weather itself is full of dust. It is worth mentioning that this style is commonly utilized for the sake of exaggeration.

Another example of an unusual metaphor that is utilized by Nāgīb Mahfūz in his novel is when he describes a complicated allegorical image for treachery. The author draws a comparison between treachery and man’s expiation for his sins, but instead of doing so, treachery expiates for its ugly look. “It is time for wrath to explode and burn, for treacherous people to despair forever, and for treachery to expiate for her ugly look.”

Linguistically, it is familiar to automatically presume that the verb _kaffāra_ (expiate) indicates the meaning of expiation for a sin or an oath; but expiation for a look, shape, appearance, or color diverges from the linguistic norms and lexical interpretations related to this verb. Another unusual metaphor that has been encountered in Mahfūz’ text is the following description of the door: _The deaf door of the prison is going away enfolding the depressed secrets_. It is impossible for a door made of iron or wood to be bent or wrapped, but this is an allegorical connotation indicating that there are many secrets hidden behind this door.

Linguistic deviation may result due to overlooked syntactic errors or due to inattentiveness, a phenomenon which is rarely encountered in the novel of _The Thief and the Dogs_. One example is masculinizing the feminine as indicated by the word ‘cup’ in the following sentence: _wa-rāḥa mala‘a al-ka‘ayn ṭumma qaddama aḥadahumā ilā Sa‘īd wa-rafa‘a al-ḥurā qā‘ilan_ (He filled the two cups then he introduced one of them to Said and raised the other saying…).

Surprisingly, Mahfūz has mentioned the word ‘cup’ in the masculine form and then has feminized it in the same text; he masculinized it by using the word _ahadahumā_ (one of them) (i.e. one of the cups), and feminized it when he uses _al-ḥurā_ (the other) (i.e. the cup). Using the masculine form to represent feminine has been established in Arabic literature for a long time. Ibn Ğinnī is explaining this by saying: “Using the masculine to represent the feminine is widely used because the primary original form is used instead of the secondary branch form. However, using the feminine to represent the masculine is difficult to recognize.”

According to Arabic linguistic dictionaries, some Arabic words can be feminized and masculinized at the same time. However, the word ‘cup’ has only been used as feminine, as it is used in the Qur’anic verses: _bi-ka‘sin min ma‘īn bayḍā‘_ (A cup from the clear-flowing fountain, crystal-white [+ Feminine]). Maḥmūd Ismā‘īl ‘Ammār points out that

---

77 Ibid., p. 5.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., p. 34.
if the metaphorical feminine usage is described or referred to by a pronoun, we say: *ka’s al-‘ālam aḏ-ḏahabī* (the world [golden + Masculine] cup), *ka’s al-mubārāt al-fiddī* (the competition [silver + Masculine] cup), *šarīb tu min bi’r ʿamīq* (I drank from a [deep + Masculine] well), and *wa kaffahu šadadtu ‘alayhi* (and his hand I [pulled + Masculine]), but they do not say *ka’s al-‘ālam aḏ-dahabiyya* (the world [golden + Feminine] cup), or *bi’r ʿamīqa* [deep + Feminine] well), etc.  

82 Ḩamd Muḥṭār in his study on linguistic deviation in modern Arabic realized such changes are now common in modern Arab media.

Sometimes, it can be observed that the author employs a plural form instead of a dual form when talking about the parts of human body, like ‘arms’ and ‘legs’. This is a deviation from familiar usage, because humans, in general, have two legs and two hands. Consider the following example: *Wa naṭaqa bi-al-iġrā’ fustān abyaḍ inṭalaqat minhu al-aḏru῾ wa-as-sīqān bilā ḥaraḡ*… (A white dress expressed seduction when the legs [-dual] and the arms [-dual] set out carelessly) 84. It seems that the author intentionally utilizes the plural instead of the dual to describe the scantily dressed woman, who was wearing a provocative dress. He resorts to the plural instead of the dual denoting that the woman’s revealing body parts were too exposed to be expressed by the dual form.

One of the parsing errors encountered is utilizing the nominative case instead of the accusative, as indicated in the following sentence: *tafā’alnā ḥayr bi-aḥbār al-ʿīd* (We were optimistic about the good news of the feast) 85. Using the word *ḥayr* in the nominative case violates the parsing system because it should be written in the accusative case. This kind of error might have occurred due to the influence of the colloquial dialect in which declension markers are not paid attention to and also the fact that such a sentence is uttered by one of the protagonists in a conversational dialogue. Another error encountered in the narration and not in the dialogue is the following sentence: *muṭārad wa sayaẓall muṭāradun ilā ākhir laḥzatin fī ḥayātih* (He is chased and will be chased to the last moment in his life) 86. The word *muṭāradun* is written in the nominative, whereas it should be written in the accusative (i.e. *muṭāradan*). This might be an unintentional typo.

Linguistic deviation has also affected prepositions in Maḥfūz’ texts. This kind of deviation may be due to erroneous usage in colloquial dialects. One of the most common inaccurately used preposition is *bā*’ which is utilized instead of the preposition *fī* (in) or vice versa. This is usually encountered in the Egyptian dialect. For example, the author employs the intransitive verb *tamassaḥa* (clean) attached to the preposition *fī* (in), as follows: *a-nasīta yā ʿAlīš kayfa kunta tatamassaḥ fī sāqī miṯl al-kalb?* (ʿAlīš!

---


85 Ibid., p. 45.

86 Ibid., p. 70.
Did you forget how you used to wipe my leg like the dog?) According to Arabic linguistic dictionaries, the verb \textit{tamassaḥa} ‘wipe’ is a transitive verb that takes either of the following prepositions: \textit{al-bā’}, \textit{al-lām}, or \textit{min} depending on the function of the utterance. An illustrative example is the following prophetic saying: \textit{tamassahū bi-l-ard…} (Make dry ablution with earth…).

The author uses the common error \textit{taˈarrafa} ‘alā (recognized) as indicated in the following example: \textit{wa-rubbamā taˈarrafa alayhi baˈḍuhum mimman raˈū shūratahu ft al-ḡarida} (Maybe some of those who saw his photo in the newspaper recognized him). According to linguistic dictionaries, this deviates from the standard usage, because the verb \textit{taˈarrafa} (recognize) is transitive in itself and does not need a preposition. As documented in \textit{Muḥtār aṣ-Ṣiḥāḥ} under the lexical entry \textit{ˈarafa} (recognize or know), the verb \textit{taˈarrafa} is used as follows: \textit{wa-taˈarrafa mā ˈinda fulān ayy taˈlabahu ḥattā ʿaraфаh, wa taˈārafa al-qawm ˈarafa baˈḍahum baˈḍan} (He recognized what someone has and asked about it until he understood it. When people introduce each other means ‘they come to recognize each other’). It has become prevalent nowadays that the transitivity of this verb can be achieved when it is followed by either of the prepositions: ‘alā (on), or \textit{al-bā’}. However, others see that \textit{ilā} (to) is the most suitable preposition to follow this verb.

Transitivity is also violated when using a verb or a present participle followed by a preposition though it is unnecessary as illustrated in the following sentence: \textit{ẓaharat Nūr ˈinda al-bāb ɡayra mutawaaqqiˈa li-al-mufāجاˈa al-latī tantaẓiruhā} (Noor appeared near the door but she was not expecting the surprise which was waiting for her). It is better to say: \textit{ɡayra mutawaaqqiˈa al-mufāجاˈa} (…she was not expecting the surprise), because the verb \textit{tawaqqaˈa} (expect) is a transitive verb and does not need a preposition to follow it as is said in, \textit{tawaqqaˈa aʃ-ʃayˈ} (he expected something), and \textit{tawaqqaˈa qudūmahu} (He expected his/its coming).

The sentence: \textit{wa-rāḥat tamla ˈal-akwāb mubtaˈsima ṭawāla li-qawlihi, mubdiya ˈan lawnihā al-asmar} (She went filling the cups, smiling all the time for his speech, revealing about her brown complexion) includes a mistake related to the transitivity of the verb \textit{abdā} (reveal) which is followed by the preposition ‘an (about). This verb is mono-transitive as it takes one object followed by the preposition \textit{al-bā’} or \textit{al-lām} as is used in Arabic dictionaries and cited in the Qur’an \textit{wa in tubdā ḥayran aw tuḫʃīhu} (Whether ye show what is in your minds or conceal it). It seems that the author uses the verb \textit{abdā} to have the meaning of ‘reveal about’, which causes a type of confusion to him.

Sometimes, the author removes the preposition of the prepositional phrase constituent and changes the noun attached to it into an adverb. The word \textit{aṭmāˈ} (during) in the following

\begin{itemize}
\item[87] Ibid., p. 6.
\item[88] Ibid., p. 70.
\item[89] See: \textit{Muḥtār aṣ-Ṣiḥāḥ}, under the lexical entry ‘\textit{ˈarafa}’.
\item[90] N. Maḥfūẓ, \textit{Al-Liṣṣ…}, op. cit., p. 49.
\item[91] Ibid., p. 85.
\item[92] The Holy Qur’an, 2:284.
\end{itemize}
sentence exemplifies this phenomenon: 
*dārat afkāruhu aṯnā’ dālik hawla ḥiyānat Ra’ūf* (His ideas during that time were about Raouf’s treachery). This sentence deviates from language norms because we should insert the preposition *fī* (in) before the noun *aṯnā’* to have *fī aṯnā’*. The expression *aṯnā’ aš-šay’* (during the thing) means in its middle, and *aṯnā’* is not an adverb here nor is it a part of genitive construction; thus, it should be connected with the preposition *fī*.

However, according to The Center of Arabic Language in Cairo, it is possible to use *aṯnā’* (during) without being accompanied by a preposition. Despite the approval of the usage aforementioned *aṯnā’*, the linguist, Abū al-Hayğā’ recommends the use of *aṯnā’* in this context and asserts the use of a preposition with it. He argues correctly: ‘In spite of what is stated in *Lisān Al-‘Arab*: *wa ţinyu: wāḥid aṯnā’ aš-šayi’ ayy taḍā’īfu hu* (and fold is the singular form of the folds of something (i.e. its doublings)). For instance: *anfaḏtu kaḏā ţinya ayy fī ṭayyihi* (I penetrated something in the fold of my book, i.e. in its fold). The word *ţiny* (fold) has not been used either by traditional grammarians or by modern ones. It seems that those who use *aṯnā’* (during) without being attached to a preposition have been influenced by English language or by equating it to other Arabic words. This is what Abū al-Hayğā’ concludes when saying: “There remain two issues: Firstly, it is likely that translation has played a significant role, specifically for the word ‘during’. Secondly, the synonymous equivalent word *ḥilāl* (during) was used in the genitive case or non-genitive by the traditional grammarians. The following Qur’anic verse exemplifies this tendency: *fa-ǧāsū ḥilāla ad-diyār* (They entered the very inner-most parts of your homes).

It can be concluded that in order to write his masterpiece, *The Thief and the Dogs*, Mahfûz opted for an ambitious balance of language, not only based on the standard but also akin to rhetoric. He utilized metaphorical and allegorical language. However, he remained attracted to the colloquial dialect, from which he chose many common expressions and structures that deviate from those in dictionaries and the books of literature, which diverge from standard styles in order to present a faithful portrait of his realistic fiction genre. It is worthwhile stating that Mahfûz’ trend of deviation is an imitation of modern styles in an attempt to add new expressions and structures to the standard language. In spite of the fact that Naǧīb Mahfûz occasionally made common mistakes and was guilty of sentence structure disorder and weakness, his profound work is full with connotations and metaphors expressing the actual lived reality while still employing the standard Arabic language as much as he could.

---

95 Abū al-Hayğā’, *Qirā’a fī...*, op. cit.
96 Ibid.