

# The Politics of Pro-*‘āmmīyya* Language Ideology in Egypt

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## Introduction

As other chapters in this volume demonstrate, the increasing use and acceptability of written *‘āmmīyya* in Egypt is now well-documented. The motivations behind this are rarely studied, although speculations have been made about the role of political ideology. One well-discussed dimension of language politics in Egypt takes the form of a binary of Egyptian nationalism vs. pan-Arab nationalism: the former ideology favouring *‘āmmīyya* and the latter favouring Standard Arabic or *fushā* (Suleiman 1996; Suleiman 2003; Suleiman 2008). However, the salience of this binary in present-day Egypt is unclear: on the one hand, it is often suggested that Egyptian nationalism was overtaken by pan-Arab nationalism (*ibid.*), and on the other, emerging literature suggests that pan-Arab nationalism is now a spent force (Phillips 2014). Moreover, although there has been a tendency to delimit the discussion of language politics in Egypt to the question of nationalism, it has recently been suggested that *‘āmmīyya* might be used to counter the hegemonic discourse of the (language) authorities (Bassiouney 2014; Ibrahim 2010). The symbolic significance of *‘āmmīyya* in this latter case is clearly very different (*cf.* Aboelezz forthcoming).

While by no means suggesting that political ideology is the only explanation for the increasing use of *‘āmmīyya* in written domains in Egypt, this chapter hopes to shed light on the complicated relationship between language and politics in Egypt. To highlight the relationship between political ideologies and language ideologies, I draw on two interviews with what I term pro-*‘āmmīyya* ‘agents of change’ in the summer of 2010. The timing of the interviews is significant. By focussing on the political dimension, which has been at the forefront of Egypt’s turbulent recent history, I aim to demonstrate how political ideologies reflect and relate to broader social and moral concerns still relevant today.

## Methodology

In this chapter, I aim to answer this central research question: What role does language ideology play in the motivation of the two *pro-āmmiyya* agents of change? This research question includes two central concepts which warrant explanation: language ideology and language change. Language ideologies may be understood here as “sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalisation or justification of perceived language structure and use” (Silverstein 1979: 193). Milroy (2004) stresses the instrumentality of language ideology in bringing about language change and argues that the two should be studied in tandem. Language change may be said to occur at two levels: the first level is the *structure* of the language (lexicon, grammar, etc.); the second is the *use* of the language, that is, “the functional allocations of the varieties of language used” in a speech community (Ferguson 1977: 9). This chapter is concerned with this latter type of language change, which Ferguson notes is usually fuelled by changes in users’ *evaluations* of language – or in other words, their language ideologies.

In this chapter, I refer to groups or individuals who play an active part in bringing about (language) change as ‘agents of change’. I focus specifically on the ideological motives of two *pro-āmmiyya* agents of change. The first agent of change is the Liberal Egyptian Party (henceforth, LEP), an Egyptian political party established in 2008 with an ideology of separatist Egyptian nationalism and an aim to standardise Egyptian Arabic. The second agent of change is Malamih, a publishing house established in 2007 which published work by young Egyptian writers in a range of language varieties, and crucially championed publishing in *āmmiyya*.

To answer the research question, interviews were conducted with representatives of LEP and Malamih in the summer of 2010. From the outset, I did not intend the interviews to be a fact-finding mission, but rather a means of eliciting ideological positions vis-à-vis the language situation in Egypt. Indeed, I argue that although both LEP and Malamih have now ceased to exist, the ideological underpinnings of their agency in language change remain salient.

My analysis of the interviews draws on three main theoretical approaches. The first approach draws on Eisele’s (2000; 2002; 2003) work who has developed one of the most elaborate frameworks for studying language ideologies in Arabic sociolinguistics. Eisele assumes the presence of ‘authorising discourses’ in society, which he terms *regimes of authority*:

Each of the regimes of authority present in a society/culture may have an effect on the kind of language which is valorized, and on the metalinguis-