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ARTIFICIAL PUNNING IN THE EGYPTIAN ARABIC BALLAD: A REINTERPRETATION OF STRUCTURALIST POETICS

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This article presents a linguistic analysis of a specific feature of a literary genre: the artificial punning found in the Egyptian Arabic narrative ballad (as described in Cachia 1989). A comparison of how these puns differ from regular processes in the phonology and morphology of the language reveals that this encoding by the poet-performer is very much a mirror image of regular processes. The audience's decoding of them, therefore, follows a pathway similar to regular processes. The dichotomy between the puns' linguistically based formal composition and their contextually based semantic interpretation is analyzed within a reinterpretation of a Jakobsonian structuralist framework involving a hierarchization of linguistic levels based on two factors: the degree of combinatoric freedom and the degree of semantic immediacy. This analysis reveals that the artificial punning in these ballads is actually the obverse of what one would expect to find following the definition of poetic discourse given by Roman Jakobson. This study thus shows that such artificial punning subverts normal expectations about poetic discourse and this has great implications for understanding the production and interpretation of literary word play in any tradition.*

1. INTRODUCTION. Cachia 1989 described a form of word play, termed ZHR, found in the narrative ballads of modern Egypt.¹ Typical word play or puns involve phonetic similarity at the level of the word or phrase, usually involving naturally occurring homophonous or polysemous words. The word play found in these ballads is different from typical puns, since it involves phonetic similarity not at the level of the word or phrase but at the level of the morphemic tiers of the consonantal root.² The *zahr* is exemplified in 1. In these three lines, the *zahr* occurs in the QAAFIYA or rhyming word (or words) at the end of a line in the ballad, when a word or phrase is phonetically modified to make it identical to a preceding *qaafiya*.³

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¹ 'Finally, it is a matter of pride among masters of the art to replace mere rhymes by an elaborate play on words which the learned call *jinaas* "paronomasia", or *tawriya* "double entendre", but which in the tradition is known as *zahr* "flower" ' (Cachia 1989:34). The interpretations of the *zahr* puns are taken from Cachia 1989, and are based in part on interviews with the poet-performers, and in part on Cachia's own interpretation. This type of punning is most characteristic of the *mawwaal* genre of song, and it is also found in great profusion in performances of the Bani Hilaal epic, as described in Slymowics 1987, Connelly 1986, and in most analytical detail, Reynolds 1995. In addition, Krotkoff 1994 describes a folk poem from Iraq which is remarkably similar to those from Egypt in its use of this device.

² Cachia (1989:34) described this feature of the *zahr* as follows: 'The pun usually extends over several syllables and is achieved by deliberate distortion of the normal pronunciation; great liberties are taken with vowels, with gemination, and even with phonetically cognate consonants, only the order of the radicals being immune.'

³ The rhyme structure of the narrative ballad involving these *zahr* as well as some regular punning or rhymes is structured in various ways. For example, in 'Ghareeb' (Cachia 1989:34), the rhyme structures are as follows:

aaa bcbcbc dedede...lmlmlm...qrqqrqr...zyzyz a

That is, the stanzas (other than the initial one) are made up of rhyme-groups of either three, four, or five lines interdigitated with a rhyme group of an equal number of lines, although the most usual is a three-line grouping. In contrast, in 'God's Prophet Adam' (Cachia 1989:139-53) the stanzas are structured as follows:

aaa bcbcbc ddd a / eee fgfgf hhh e / iii jkjkj ll i / etc.

That is, throughout the ballad, every three stanzas are grouped together and marked by a difference in the succession of the rhymes: there is an initial stanza of straight rhymes (aaa), a second stanza of interdigitated

- (1) a. *iza k̄an bidd-ak ti-rūh makka lihiggilbeet* (lahhig lil-beet)
 if it-was desire-your you-go Mecca ... (head for-home)
 'If you wish to visit Mecca, head for home'
- b. *taaxud gimaal-ak ribaa l-mawlaa lihiggilbeet*
 you-take camels-your boon-(of) the Master
 (luh ḥagg il-batt)
 (to-him right of-decision)
 'To gather your camels, the Master's boon—He it is Who has the right to decide'
- c. *wi t-ṣuuf maqaam il-xaliil mabni lihiggilbeet*
 and you-see shrine-(of) the-beloved built
 (liih hīgal biid)
 (to-it canopies white)
 'And you shall see the shrine of his intimate, built with white pavilions'
 (Cachia 1989:228)

In this type of punning, the intended pun (in 2 termed SURFACE)⁴ is a word or phrase that shares primarily the consonantal root with the word or phrase that underlies it (the BASE).

- (2) Surface: *li ḥ i g g i l b e e t* 'to make a pilgrimage to the Kaaba'
 Base 1: *l a ḥ ḥ i g l i l b e e t* 'head for home'
 Base 2: *l u ḥ ḥ a g g i l b a t t* 'He has the right to decide'
 Base 3: *l i i ḥ ḥ i g a l b i i d* 'with white pavilions'

1.1. APPROACHES. These artificial *zahr* puns have been examined from literary, artistic, and even socioliterary points of view (e.g. by Connelly 1986, Slymovics 1987, Reynolds 1995). Since the literary or artistic effect is tied closely to the manipulation of linguistic forms and processes, it is important to consider the linguistic aspects as well, and the conjunction of the linguistic and the literary frameworks. Examining the linguistic aspect of these artistic processes should lead to insights into the artistic process (ENCODING) and its intended (or unintended) effect (DECODING). I base this analysis on a reinterpretation of some of Roman Jakobson's ideas on the nature of poetic language.⁵ According to this interpretation, Jakobson's structuralist poetics implicitly and explicitly differentiated linguistic levels (phonological, morphological, syntactic, pragmatic) with respect to two general notions: that these linguistic levels represent a HIERARCHY OF CREATIVITY OR FREEDOM in the combination of their basic units and they also represent a HIERARCHY OF IMMEDIACY with respect to meaning. The former notion is based on Jakobson's discussion of the role of equivalency in poetic discourse, as summed up in his observation that poetry is the 'projection of equivalence from the paradigmatic axis (or axis of selection) onto the syntagmatic axis (or axis of combination)'. The latter notion is based on his discussion of the character of distinctive features and how they

rhymes (bcbbcb), a third stanza of straight rhymes (ddd), and a final line in rhyme with the initial stanza. The *zahr* is not present in all of these ballads, and not necessarily in every rhyme group of a song in which some *zahr* appear. The reader is referred to the works cited in n. 1 for more information on the exact frequencies and behavior of these puns.

⁴ This is termed the surface form because it is what the poet says, while the other forms are termed base because they are where the poet starts from. This terminology reflects the perspective of the author, not the audience.

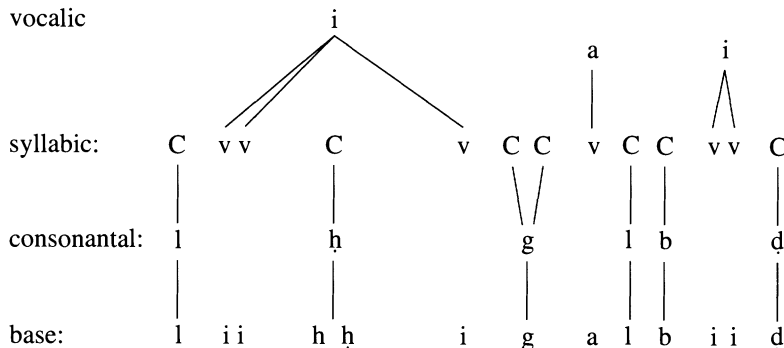
⁵ I have used Linda Waugh's lucid summary of Jakobson's ideas in Waugh 1985, 1987 and Jakobson & Waugh 1987, but the reinterpretation presented here is my own.

relate to meaning, namely that they signify mere otherness and do not directly signify a meaning but rather mediate indirectly between sound and meaning. The application of this framework to the artificial punning found in the Egyptian Arabic (EA) narrative ballads described in Cachia 1989 will allow a deeper understanding of the *zahr* as an artistic device and provide insight into the construction of a text and its interpretation by an audience.

2. THE LINGUISTIC ASPECT. What is it about the linguistic code of EA that allows the poet-performer of these narrative ballads to engage in this kind of word-play and allows the audience to decipher it and understand it? How do the artificial puns in these narrative ballads differ from or conform to the regular rules of the phonology and morphology? The poets are exploiting two general features of the Arabic language: sandhi and the root-and-pattern system of derivation and inflection. SANDHI, the elision of word boundaries in pronunciation, marks all forms of Arabic, and is exemplified in a wide variety of phenomena, ranging from the rules governing the recitation of the Qur'an (*tajwiid*) to its use in popular songs, especially the *mawwaal* (in Egypt and elsewhere)⁶ and the *Sataab(a)* (in Lebanon). The root-and-pattern system of derivation and inflection common to the Semitic languages has been analyzed in autosegmental or metrical phonological frameworks, where such processes are termed *nonconcatenative processes* or NCP. This framework distinguishes three different tiers in these processes: a vocalic tier, equivalent to the vocalic patterning, a syllabic tier, which contains information about the syllabic structure of the word, and the consonantal tier, which is equivalent to the root. Thus example 1c above may be analyzed according to this approach in 3.

(3) TIER

vocalic



⁶ An example of this is the following:

ya maṣr ya ḥafzīt quʔaan-ik wi-ʔanagii-ik
 Egypt memorizer (of) Quran-your and Gospels-your
 'Egypt, you who have learned the Qur'an and Gospels by heart'
 wi-law tinaadii-ni m-il ġurba ʔana -gii-lik
 and-if you-call-me from exile I-come-to you
 'If you call me from exile I will come to you'
 fi waʔt iš-šidda ʔadʕii-lik w-anagii-lik
 in times (of) stress I-pray-for you and-soothe you
 'In times of stress I pray for you and soothe you'
 wi-mahma timuut hina ʔagyaal ana-gii-ik
 no matter die here generations I-generation-your
 'No matter how many generations pass away, I am your generation'

To answer the two questions posed above I analyze the puns found in selected ballads from Cachia 1989 for the linguistic processes (deletion, insertion, feature change) that occur at each of the three levels or tiers (vocalic, consonantal, syllabic), and then compare these to regular morphological and phonological processes in EA.

I began my analysis by counting the number and kinds of changes that took place between the underlying forms and the surface forms in the ballads 'Ghareeb', 'God's Prophet Adam', 'New Era', and 'Danshaw II'. Most of the changes in these *zahr* puns are found on the syllabic (S-)tier, and the fewest changes are found on the consonantal (C-)tier, with the vocalic (V-)tier somewhere in between. This parallels the situation found in normal NCP processes in Arabic, which overwhelmingly involve some change on the syllabic tier, little or no change on the consonantal tier, and varying levels of change on the vocalic tier. More interesting, however, is how the formation of these *zahr* puns differs from the normal processes, even while relying on them for their generation and decipherment.

2.1. C-TIER AND V-TIER CHANGES. Changes on the C-tier in the *zahr* puns are greatly restricted. Almost no consonant may be completely elided: they may be degeminated (a change on the syllabic tier) or have a single feature change but complete elision is rare and restricted. Feature change on the C-tier is also much less frequent than feature changes that take place on the vocalic tier. In 'God's Prophet Adam', for example, I noted only seven examples of C-feature changes out of 154 lines, and in 'Ghareeb' only nine examples in 85 lines. The most common type of feature change involves voicing or devoicing, and less often a change in emphasis. Occasionally, each of these may occur together with another feature change.

Almost all of these processes exist in the phonology of EA, but unlike the examples from the *zahr* puns they are conditioned by context. For example, voiced C's are devoiced only in final position or after voiceless C's, as, for example, with the devoicing of /z/ in the broken plural of *ʔustaz* 'professor', *ʔasatsa* 'professor'. In the puns, however, no triggering context is needed for the process to take place, and at times the change that does take place is completely contrary to what one might expect: for example, in lines 24–25 in 'Adam' (Cachia 1989:142) there is devoicing of /g/ to /k/ in context of a voiced C, and voicing of /k/ to /g/ in initial position (*gamgama* 'muttering' → *gamkann* [rhyme word]) and in line 20 in 'Ghareeb' (Cachia 1989:230) we find a final voiceless /t/ being voiced to /d/ in final position, contradicting the general tendency for final voiced C's to be devoiced (*bizzāt* 'the very...' → *bizzād* [rhyme word]). In addition, a great many of the examples of C-feature changes collected involve velarization; this reflects normal Arabic phonology, where velarization spread in a word is very common. The opposite process, de velarization, is much less common in regular phonology, although there are examples of it in certain inflectional processes, for example in the broken plural of *raqgil* 'man', *riggaala* 'men'. Nevertheless, it is quite common in the pun examples.

While changes on the C-tier are greatly restricted, there are very few restrictions on changes on the V-tier. The examples of these changes collected from Cachia's volume indicate that modification of vowel quality may take place without any restrictions as to the type or placement of vowels: all vowels may be elided (either partially or completely), and vowel quality may be freely modified in any position, with one interesting restriction: in a great majority of the puns there is at least one syllable which retains the same vowel in all of the various permutations in the different lines. With the exception of this last restriction, all of these processes are in and of themselves familiar to regular EA morphology and morphophonology, even though the patterns in the *zahr* may neither be exactly the familiar morphological patterns nor occur naturally in EA

phonology. Yet though there may be no cases in EA phonology where the vocalic changes found in the *zahr* puns automatically take place, there are cases INTERDIALECTALLY where the reflex of a word in one dialect might have a vowel with a different quality; for example, the reflex of Cairene Arabic *kull* 'all' is *kill* in some Palestinian dialects, while Cairene Arabic *wiṣil* 'he arrived' is *waṣal* in certain dialects in the Nile Delta. The knowledge of such dialectal alternations is a part of the audience's competence, and is played upon by the poet.⁷ In regular EA morphophonology, some changes in vowel quality may occur because of changes in stress and syllable structure. For example, when a C-initial pronoun suffix is attached to a word with a /ee/ in the final syllable such as *ištareet* 'I bought', there is a concomitant shortening and raising of /ee/ to /i/: *ištareet + ha* → *ištarit-ha* 'I bought it (fem.)'. The changes that normally occur in the vocalic tier in EA involve primarily morphological processes, and changes in the vocalic quality are common in NCP derivations, e.g. in stem vowel ablaut in verbal inflection such as perfect verb *ṭalab* 'he requested' vs. imperfect *yutlub* 'he requests'. However, the placement of such suppletions in regular NCP inflectional and derivational processes is restricted with regard to the consonants and other vowels in the pattern, while there does not seem to be any such restriction in the *zahr* pun. In addition to this, in regular morphology most combinations of vowels are found on the vocalic tier, with one exception, /i-u/; however this pattern is found in the *zahr* pun.

In sum, the changes in the *zahr* puns that take place on the V-tier are similar to the changes on the C-tier: they are familiar and available to regular EA morphology and phonology, but they occur in an unrestricted fashion, in nonconditioned contexts. There is, however, a remarkable restriction on the V-tier in the *zahr* puns which is not readily apparent, and was not mentioned by Cachia, despite its near universal presence in these examples: very often the vocalic pattern is retained in whole or in part, despite the sometimes drastic changes in syllable structure. Even more remarkable is the fact that in almost all of the examples at least one syllable retains the original vowel throughout the various permutations on the bases. Most of the exceptions to this tendency can be explained as being caused by other factors (e.g. all of the words involve the same root, or all of the V's have a similar feature, and so forth); only a few do not fit into this pattern. This phenomenon of the anchoring vowel is exemplified in Table 1.

SURFACE		VOCALIC TIER
66. <i>maa</i> manaʕak	'what prevented you'	a a - a # a
BASE		
67. <i>maa</i> min nooʕak	'not of your substance'	a i o # a
68. <i>maa</i> min ʕakk	'not of trampled earth'	a i a
76. <i>maa</i> ʔamnaʕak	'how impregnable are you'	a a - a a
.....		
SURFACE		VOCALIC TIER
77. u <i>ragiim</i>	'and cursed'	u a - i
BASE		
78. wa <i>Raa</i> giyaama	'and after a scene'	(w)a - a i(y) - a
79. ir- <i>ragiim</i>	'brand(ed)'	i # a - i
89. u <i>ragaahum</i>	'and he requested them'	u a - a # u

TABLE 1. 'Anchoring' vowel in 'God's Prophet Adam' (Cachia 1989:146)

⁷ This was noted by Cachia (p.c.), but is also evident in the mutual intelligibility of speakers of different dialects, and the ability of native speakers of different dialects to identify the origin of the speakers of other dialects and, for some, to mimic and make fun of them. This phenomenon is perhaps most clear on the C-tier, where a poet within a single song may use different dialectal reflexes of the Classical Arabic 'qaaf' /q/—viz. /g/ or /ʔ/ (see 4.2, Table 3).

This restriction is very similar to processes in EA verbal inflection where the perfect stem V-patterning is identical in whole or part to the imperfect stem patterning, e.g. perfect *faaʕil* vs. imperfect *yifaaʕil*. This phenomenon has important implications for understanding the decoding of these puns by the audience, since the net effect of this restriction on the freedom of V-suppletion is to provide an anchor for the decipherment of the pun. The importance of this point will be considered further in 4.2 below.

2.2. SYLLABIC TIER. AS with the processes that occur on the vocalic and consonantal tiers, changes that occur on the syllabic tier in *zahr* puns are similar in kind to what is available in regular EA phonology and morphology. They differ, however, in the details of occurrence and specific placement. They involve the deletion or insertion of consonants and vowels, the lengthening of short vowels and consonants (for consonants termed gemination), or the shortening of long vowels and consonants (for consonants termed degemination). Two points of similarity stand out: first, complete C-deletion is rare both in regular EA morphology and phonology and in these puns, and those that are deleted are 'weak' /w, y, h, ʔ/; while the second, V-shortening takes place in closed syllables. While C-deletion is relatively rare for most consonants in regular EA morphology and phonology and in these puns, for others it is not uncommon and may be quite frequent. Consonants such as /ʔ/, /h/, /w/, /y/, and /l/ form most of the examples of C-deletion in these puns, and make C-deletion the third most frequent type of S-tier change in puns. This seems odd, given Cachia's original observation concerning the inviolability of the consonantal patterns in the puns, but considering the fact that these same consonants are also elidable (or assimilable) in regular processes as well, both synchronically and diachronically, it is not surprising. At the morphological level, for example, the definite article /l/, is assimilated to a following dental or alveolar consonant, word initially, but the syllable structure is maintained. The /h/ marking 3 ms. pronoun *-hu* 'his' is also deletable in word-final position following a vowel, where the pronoun is expressed through the lengthening of the final vowel: *ʕarfa* 'know-FEM' → *ʕarfa(h)* 'know-FEM.him'. Also, /ʔ/ is deletable synchronically as *hamzat al-waʕl* ('the connecting glottal stop') in the definite article and word initially on many forms. It is likewise deletable in glottal stop-initial verbs of the type *ʔaxad* → *xad* 'he took', *ʔakal* → *kal* 'he ate', etc. The phonemes /y/ and /w/ are most commonly deletable in the morphology of weak verbs, most especially in hollow verbs, where the presence of /y/ or /w/ in certain forms alternates with its absence in other forms (*ʔaal* 'he said' → *yiʔuwl* 'he says', *ʔaar* 'it flew' → *yitiyr* 'it flies'). However, all of these regular processes take place in very limited, specific contexts, none of which are found in these puns. The second similarity between these puns and regular EA morphology and phonology is the high frequency of long V's (/VV/) being shortened in closed syllables. Shortening of VV is a very common phenomenon in EA phonology, where it is conditioned primarily by stress and syllable structure—e.g. unstressed long V is shortened (**faa-kir* → *fa-*kir-hum* 'he remembers them'), while long V in a closed syllable is also shortened (*saa-fir* → *saf-ru* 'they traveled'). The difference with VV-shortening in the *zahr* puns is that it appears to be unconditioned by either stress or syllable structure. For example, the following examples from 'Adam' (Cachia 1989: 140–53) do not show any obvious phonological conditioning and in addition have no morphological counterpart: line 31 *ʕaal* 'diverged from course' → *ʕala* 'went up'; line 50 *ʕaaraq* 'opposed' → *ʕaraq* 'presented'; line 67 *maa min nooʕak* 'not of your substance' → *maa manaʕak* 'what prevented you'. However, in more than half the cases there is V-shortening in what resembles a closed syllable, across word boundaries,

which mimics the normal process that happens intraword in regular phonology (*ištareet* + *ha* → *ištariit-ha* ‘I bought it (fem.)’, *kitaab* + *hum* → *kitab-hum* ‘their book’, etc.) In other words, it is as if the poet-performer extended the intraword vowel shortening rules to the next level, so that they applied to groups of two or more words, not just to word-level items.

These two similarities also point to the most obvious difference between the *zahr* puns and regular processes: they occur in nonconditioned contexts, similar to the changes on the C-tier and V-tier of the puns. As a result of the free usage of these processes, some show a very clear difference in the frequency of use (summarized in Table 2) in the regular morphology versus their use in the puns.⁸ The most salient feature of *zahr* puns in contrast to regular processes is the extent to which they are elliptical in nature: the processes in the puns are more than three times as likely to involve shortening of some sort, while regular processes are more than twice as likely to involve lengthening.⁹

<i>zahr</i> PUNS	# OF TOKENS	REGULAR MORPHOLOGY	# OF TOKENS
1) V-deletion	70	1) V-insertion	18
2) degemination	47	2) C-insertion	12
3) C-deletion	40	3) V-elision	11
4) V-shortening	32	4) V-shortening	7
5) V-lengthening	28	5) V-lengthening	6
6) V-insertion	18	6) gemination	4
7) gemination	13	7) degemination	2
8) C-insertion	7	8) C-deletion	2

TABLE 2. Frequency of sound changes in puns and regular morphology.

The elliptical nature of the *zahr* puns is most evident in the frequency of V-insertion processes. V-insertion is perhaps the most common syllabic change in regular EA morphology and phonology, where there are many examples of epenthetic vowels being inserted, both at word boundaries (to break up a three-consonant cluster: *ḍarb-i šdiid* ‘a severe blow’) and as a result of syntactic rules: *šāafuu* + *ik* → *šāafuu-ki* ‘they saw you (fem.)’; *katabt-il-ik* + [NEG] → *ma-katabtil-kii-š* ‘I didn’t write to you (fem.)’. In regular EA morphology as well, this is perhaps the most common type of syllabic change. It is found in almost all broken plural patterns as well as other nominal and verbal derivations and inflections. V-insertion in the *zahr* puns, however, is far less frequent than elliptical devices such as deletion and shortening. The application of elliptical devices extends far beyond what is seen in the regular morphology/phonology. V-deletion, by far the most common type of syllable-structure change found in the *zahr*, occurs in regular phonological rules, where certain unstressed short vowels may be deleted in certain contexts (e.g. /i/ and sometimes /u/, but not /a/). However, contrary to the regular processes, in the *zahr* puns /a/ is the most common vowel deleted, as in line 48 of ‘Adam’ (Cachia 1989:144) (*rawaah* → *lirwaah*), and line 58 *yu^cašš* → *yi^cš*. In regular phonology stressed vowels and long vowels are not deletable, but in the *zahr* they may be, and there are numerous examples of the latter in ‘Ghareeb’ (Cachia 1989:228–37).

As far as regular EA morphology is concerned, an elliptical process such as V-

⁸ The figure for frequency in morphology reflects only how many derivational or inflectional processes the changes have the potential to appear in in the lexicon. In evaluating the overall frequency, however, I did try to take into account actually occurring frequency, which is an educated guess. Much work remains to be done on determining the frequency (both potential and actual) of different morphological processes relative to various points.

⁹ It is important to point out that Roman Jakobson often noted the elliptical nature of poetry. For a discussion of this see Jakobson & Waugh (1987:10–12).

deletion in regular NCP derivations and inflections is fairly common, but again it follows predictable patterns, based on word-level structure, unlike the unrestricted and nonconditioned processes in the puns. More interestingly, however, are examples of V-deletion in the *zahr* puns which seem to be the reverse of morphological patterns e.g. moving from a plural to a singular form, or a *nisba* 'relational' adjective form to its nominal counterpart. In line 14 of 'Adam' (Cachia 1989:140) the deletion of final /-a/ is similar to going from a feminine form to its unmarked masculine counterpart (*mara* → *?amar*), while in line 21 the deletion of /-ii/ is similar to a back formation of a *nisba* 'relational' adjective to a noun (*?insaani* → *?insaan*). Line 28 seems to be the reverse of a broken plural morphological pattern (*mixa?iil* 'Michael' → *mikaal* 'Mike'), as is line 30 *qubaalu* → *qabliih*.

This difference in the frequency and direction of elliptical processes is also evident in processes that involve C-shortening or degemination, which occurs frequently in the *zahr* pun.¹⁰ This contrasts to its almost total absence in EA phonology and its infrequency in EA morphology, where it occurs, for example, in some verbal nouns of Form I doubled verbs (*marra* 'instance' → *miraar*), and Form II verbal nouns derived from the perfect verb (*kattab* → *taktiib*). In general the reverse process—C-lengthening or gemination—is more common in regular morphology. Therefore, as in the case with V-deletion above, the *zahr* pun presents the reverse of the more common morphological process: rather than using the process that takes one from the base (singular noun or Form I verb) to the output (plural noun or Form II verb), the poet uses the process that proceeds from the output to the base (plural to singular noun, derived to basic verb). This difference in direction, together with the elliptical nature of the *zahr* pun, is important in understanding the encoding and decoding processes of these puns. Simply put, the poet, in creating the pun, reverses the normal process, which means that the audience, in deciphering the pun, proceeds in the direction more like the regular process.

2.3. SUMMARY. While many of the devices the poet uses in creating his puns are to be found in regular EA morphology and phonology, the most interesting aspect of the puns is how they differ from regular processes. This interplay between linguistic similarity and difference lies at the heart of the punning. The poet-performer has to provide the audience enough similarities between the puns and what native speakers are accustomed to in their language to allow his audience to solve the riddle. At the same time, the pun has to camouflage and obscure enough to make it a worthy word-play. The author accomplishes the greatest camouflage at the syllabic tier, and gives many clues for a solution on the consonantal tier, with one very important tip given on the vocalic tier.

There are four main differences between the *zahr* pun processes and regular morphological ones, and these provide important clues for understanding the FORM—the author's manipulation of linguistic structures—and the MEANING—the interpretive process followed by the audience in decoding this form. The important points for understanding form include: (1) the nonconditioned application of rules, (2) their relative frequency, and (3) the elliptical nature of the punning craft. Point 1 refers to the greater freedom the poet allows himself in applying the feature-changing and lengthening/shortening rules on all tiers. These changes in form may take place without any of the conditioning

¹⁰ Another feature of note in these C-shortenings is that almost all of the consonants involved in these degeminations are voiced (37/43). The significance of this point is unclear, but it may be related to the fact that acoustically speaking voiced consonants are a little longer than unvoiced consonants, and thus degeminating them has less of a disruptive effect on their decipherment.

factors being present, and without any of the expected changes in meaning taking place. Point 2 and point 3 are concerned primarily with the author's manipulation of the syllabic tier. The frequency of the processes found in the puns is a reverse of the frequency normally found in regular processes, while their elliptical nature is the opposite of regular morphological phonological processes.

Points 2 and 3 are also relevant in understanding the nature of the audience's decoding process: encoding puns is in essence a mirror-image of regular processes; decoding by the listeners must follow along the same directional pathway as regular processes. The audience must RECREATE the words that have been stripped down and shortened to an almost unrecognizable form, and in recreating the words the listener follows a directional pathway similar to what one finds in regular morphological and phonological processes. The vocalic tier holds a special clue for the decipherment of the pun, namely the 'anchoring' vowel, in which a single vowel is maintained in a constant position in the various surface realizations relative to the underlying forms. However, these linguistic clues are not the only ones that the listener has to work with. There are contextual clues, at the level of text and discourse, which provide many more important hints and suggestions. In order to address these and other related questions further, it is first necessary to place the puns in the context of other word-play devices cross-linguistically, and from there to consider them in the context of poetic language in general.

3. THE LITERARY ASPECT. The word play found in the *zahr* puns is similar to a form of English pun called a PORTMANTEAU WORD (from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland's* Jabberwocky), or simply a BLEND WORD.¹¹ It is a subset of assonance devices available to literary discourse, where ASSONANCE is defined simply as phonetic similarity between two or more words. Assonance may involve similarity between segments (consonantal or vocalic, including quality and length), as well as similarity in syllable structure and stress. The most basic of these assonance devices is RHYME, which usually involves the complete assonance of at least the final syllable or final two syllables of different lines of metered verse. Other types of assonance devices, which may or may not appear in poetry, include puns, and portmanteau words, often seen as a subset of puns.¹²

A pun generally involves complete assonance: two or more homophonous or polysemous words are used in a context that brings both meanings to the fore. In a typical pun, only one of the pair is mentioned, the other is usually not there but is brought out or alluded to by context. A pun could also exist in a rhyme, in which case the other member(s) is present.¹³ A typical pun is naturally occurring, not artificially created. A portmanteau word, on the other hand, involves partial or complete assonance between two (or more) words based not on a naturally occurring, real assonance but on an artificial one: the basic form of the word or words is manipulated and modified to bring about or enhance the partial assonance which exists naturally. The way the words and phrases are manipulated depends, in large measure, on the morphological structure of

¹¹ Blend words are a very productive device in present-day English, especially in the creation of new words in science and advertising, as witnessed in such common expressions as *smog*, *Reaganomics*, *urinalysis*, and the endless journalistic permutations of *-gate* in referring to political scandals (*Iran-gate*, *Nanny-gate*, etc.). Many more examples of these are contained in Thurner 1993.

¹² The *zahr* puns are most obviously related to word play in Arabic tradition, viz. *tajniis* (or *jinaas*) and *tawriya*. While this is an important point to consider (e.g. in form the *zahr* is most clearly like *tajniis*, while in terms of interpretive strategy it shows more affinity to *tawriya*), space limitations preclude a more detailed consideration of this aspect.

¹³ See Attardo (1994:114–19) for a detailed summary of the various linguistic taxonomies of punning.

the language. English portmanteau words, for example, found in such abundance in James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* rely in large part on exchanging syllables (and morphs) between words or phrases, in order to create a partial assonance, with stress placement being maintained to a great degree, as in the examples in 4, analyzed in 5.¹⁴

(4) pride, *comfytousness*, *enevy*...the man *megallant* with the *bangled ears*
 (a) (b) (c) (d)
 (Joyce 1939:620)¹⁵

(5) (4a) (4b) (4c) (4d)
 surface: *comfytousness* *enevy* *megallant* *bangled ears*
 base 1: *covetousness* *envy* *gallant* *bando—liers*
 base 2: *comfort* *enemy* *Magellan* *bangled*

The formation of portmanteau words in English is therefore constrained by the morphological and phonological structure of English in that it works in terms of syllables, either morphemes or parts of morphemes, which are concatenated in a linear manner. Unlike more usual processes of English derivation and inflection, however, these pseudo-words are created by detaching and attaching these syllables, morphemes, or morpheme parts at will, not following the usual patterns or placement of normal processes.

As we have seen, the same is true of the Arabic examples of portmanteau words from the Egyptian narrative-ballads, since they too are constrained by basic organizational principles of Arabic morphology and phonology, but not by the specific rules ordinarily found in those fields. That is, in order to bring about a complete (or nearly complete) assonance between two or more nonidentical words, they rely almost exclusively on modifying syllable structure and vowel patterns, while maintaining the integrity of the consonantal skeleton. This difference in the relative strength or integrity of the consonantal morphemic tier as against the vocalic tier (the vocalic tier being more often and more radically modified than the morphemic tier), mimics the maintenance of the consonantal tier throughout the course of nonconcatenative morphological processes in Arabic, those that involve the manipulation of the syllable structure and vowel pattern for the derivation and inflection of words.¹⁶ Also, within the consonantal tier itself there is a hierarchy of modifiability. Certain sounds (e.g. /w/, /y/, and /h/), and certain features (e.g. voicing) are more easily modifiable or elidable than others. These modifications at the consonantal level parallel similar modifications found throughout the phonology and morphology of the language.

Thus the formal composition of the *zahr* puns and Joycean portmanteau words, despite their superficial unrelatedness and dissimilarity, are actually quite similar. They are also quite similar in their effect on semantic interpretation. Assonance devices and figures of speech such as metaphor and irony are different from other unmarked words or sequences of words found in literary discourse because they invite (or demand) a double reference or allusion, which goes against semantic expectations, pragmatic presupposition, and conversational implicature. Puns and portmanteau words are generally used to multiply allusion, either by making the allusion suddenly (and sometimes

¹⁴ As noted by Culler: 'Finnegans Wake...makes explicit a vision of language as sequences of syllables echoing other syllables that we have heard, in ways that sometimes but by no means always form codified signals' (Culler 1988:14).

¹⁵ The interpretations in 7 and 8 are given in Attridge (1988:146) and McHugh (1991:620).

¹⁶ In *zahr* puns, however, these processes are essentially phonological in nature, since they ignore word and morpheme boundaries and apply as much to phrase level as to word level.

painfully) obvious, as in most typical puns which involve complete phonetic similarity, or by partially masking the allusion, as in most typical portmanteau words. In *Finnegans Wake* the net effect of this is a deliberate accumulation and intensification of different meanings and allusions occurring simultaneously in the text, such that several texts seem to occur at the same time in one place. In the Egyptian narrative-ballads, according to Pierre Cachia (p.c.) the intention of the poet-performer in using a *zahr* portmanteau word is not necessarily to multiply the allusion or reference, but merely to mask the allusion. While multiple readings may be possible, there is only one 'proper' one, and it is part of the appreciation of the genres in which this device is used to be able to interpret the *zahr* properly, that is, according to the intended reference of the composer. Joycean word play and the Egyptian Arabic *zahr* punning thus share similarities in the way they affect semantic interpretation: they mask the true meaning of the word or phrase, by a manipulation of linguistic form which mimics the regular morphological and phonological processes of each language. The most interesting aspect of this type of word play, however, is how it relates to notions of poetic language developed in structuralist poetics by Jakobson and others.

4. JAKOBSON'S POETICS. In dealing with the nature of poetic language Jakobson both implicitly and explicitly differentiated the various linguistic levels (phonological, morphological, syntactic, pragmatic) in two ways: (1) a hierarchy of creativity or freedom in how their basic units are combined, and (2) a hierarchy of immediacy with respect to meaning. Jakobson's differentiation of various functions or types of discourse (referential, poetic, metalingual, etc.) depends on which factor in the communicative act (addresser, addressee, code, etc.) the speech is oriented toward. This differentiation of communicative functions, together with the hierarchization of the linguistic levels based on combinatoric creativity and semantic immediacy, provides a means of clarifying what is happening in the *zahr* puns, and the puns themselves provide us with a new understanding of these hierarchies and their relationship to an artistic act.

4.1. LINGUISTIC LEVELS AS A HIERARCHY OF COMBINATORIC CREATIVITY. According to Jakobson, verbal communication has six different functions: the emotive (or expressive), the conative (or appellative), the metalingual, the poetic (or aesthetic), the referential (or cognitive, denotative), and the phatic. Poetry is set apart from these other functions, but most especially from the referential, by its 'orientation toward the message-sign as a message-sign' (Waugh 1985:148), that is, towards the form of the message itself. Referential discourse is oriented towards the context, the referential 'meaning' of the form. Poetic orientation towards the message sign as message sign is accomplished primarily by emphasizing the equivalence or similarity between the different components of the poetic discourse at any linguistic level. Thus rhyme is equivalence at the level of the syllable, meter is equivalence at the level of stress placement, grammatical parallelism is equivalence at the morphological level, and so on (Waugh 1985:154). For Jakobson, this equivalency is the defining characteristic of poetry. Poetry, he writes, is the 'projection of the principle of equivalence from the paradigmatic axis onto the syntagmatic axis'. I interpret this as follows: constructing a poetic text based on relations of equivalency between its subparts makes the syntagmatic process of composition (i.e. combining words into phrases into sentences) similar to the process of delimiting paradigmatic classes. That is, in lexical paradigms (semantic classes) and in morphological paradigms (grammatical classes of inflectional and derivational forms) items are related by being similar to or different from other items in

the set, whether that set is the paradigm of a single word or the set of lexical items that participate in a single paradigm.

Elsewhere Jakobson rephrases this in terms of how the various linguistic levels differ according to the extent of their 'combinatoric freedom or creativity' (Waugh 1985:146–9). The various linguistic levels represent three types of signs, ranged in a hierarchy of ascending combinatoric freedom or creativity. At the phonological and morphological level there are 'signs codified as such—prefabricated wholes, whose occurrence in individual messages is an example of a direct type-token relationship: words, morphemes, syllables, phonemes, distinctive features' (147). At the syntactic level there are 'signs which occur in or as messages but which are not necessarily given fully prefabricated in the code, but their rules of combination are obligatorily codified: sentences, clauses, phrases' (147). Finally at the level of pragmatics are 'signs which are codified only as generalizable and optional patterns of combination and which bear a more indirect relation to the code: discourse, utterances' (147). With regard to the relative combinatoric freedom in the REFERENTIAL function, therefore, one may say that the lower levels are more restrictive in their principle of organization than the upper levels. Reinterpreting the defining characteristic of the poetic function ('projection of equivalence from the paradigmatic onto the syntagmatic') in terms of levels of combinatoric creativity then leads to the following insight: Poetic discourse is limited or constricted in ways that referential discourse is not by the application of this principle of equivalence in the selection of the signs or forms that make it up, and it is limited in precisely the way that items on lower linguistic levels (phonological and morphological) are limited, namely, in terms of equivalence or similarity. In other words, in the poetic function, the more restrictive organizational principle of a LOWER level (viz. similarity/difference in form in phonological and morphological paradigms) is extended UPWARD to the syntactic level.¹⁷

The *zahr* puns found in the Egyptian narrative ballads (and the portmanteau words found in *Finnegans Wake*), however, provide an interesting counterpoint to this observation. When the poet-performer of the ballad or *mawwaal* (and Joyce in *Finnegans Wake*) '(re)create' their words what they are doing is the reverse of the normal process found in the poetic function: they are extending the greater freedom or creativity in composition found at the higher level (syntactic or discourse level) further down into the hierarchy than is generally permitted. They are treating words, phonemes, and so on, as if they were sentences or even discourses, which can be put together with much greater freedom than can words or morphemes. They are, in a sense, turning the structuralist notion of PROJECTING EQUIVALENCY from the paradigmatic axis onto syntagmatic axis on its head (or rather: into its mirror image). I interpret 'projecting the paradigmatic axis onto the syntagmatic axis' to mean that in poetry syntax (choice of words, phrases, clauses, and syntactic patterns) is made more constrictive and thus similar to phonological or morphological paradigms: the choice of words is limited to those that are similar to (or are related to) other words in the poem. But what the Egyptian folk poets and James Joyce do is make the lower level less constrictive; they allow themselves a greater deal of freedom than they would ordinarily have. Paraphrasing Jakobson one

¹⁷ An argument might be raised that, contrary to this claim, poetry is actually freer than ordinary prose because of poetic license, but this is not so. Most cases of poetic license in traditional poetic discourse are actually archaisms, and therefore represent a different kind of restriction on poetic discourse, this time coming not from below but rather from above (from the pragmatics of being a part of a specific literary tradition). For a discussion of nontraditional poets such as e.e. cummings, see the next note.

could say that they project the greater combinatoric freedom of the syntagmatic axis onto the paradigmatic. However, even while the process of artificial punning seems to be the obverse of the normal processes associated with the poetic function, it is nevertheless still tied to the demand in the poetic function for EQUIVALENCY. It is as if the poetic demand for sameness at the syntagmatic level is taken to an extreme at the paradigmatic level, to the extent of breaking the rules for the paradigmatic level. One could view this in a sense as a parallel to the demand for sameness at the syntagmatic level which sometimes leads to the breaking of grammatical rules as exemplified in the nontraditional poetics of a poet such as e.e. cummings.¹⁸

The notion of combinatoric creativity helps clarify what the poet-performer of the narrative ballad is doing in creating these puns. That is, it helps us to understand the encoding process, the creation of form: the poet allows himself a freedom to recreate and recombine words in ways that are not found in normal, referential uses of language. This is done by taking away the features of the words or phrases that make them distinctive at the phonemic or morphemic level. In order to understand how the audience reacts to this process in deciphering the puns (i.e. in order to understand the decoding process), and how they make up for the lack of distinguishing features at the phonemic and morphemic levels, it is necessary to consider another aspect of Jakobson's poetics: semantic immediacy.

4.2. LINGUISTIC LEVELS AS A HIERARCHY OF SEMANTIC IMMEDIACY. Jakobson's discussion of the relation of various linguistic levels to semantic immediacy is less explicit than his discussion of their relation to combinatoric creativity. It takes place in the context of his description of the SIGNATUM of distinctive features, that is, the relation of distinctive features to meaning.

One of the most basic ideas underlying Jakobson's thought is the notion that language is a system of systems of signs, where sign is taken to be the relation that holds between a signans and a signatum. A SIGNANS is something that stands in for or points to the signatum. In language this is exemplified by the relation that stands between a linguistic expression or form (a word, phrase, sentence) and its meaning, but Jakobson and others have extended it to cover all levels and types of linguistic and nonlinguistic expression. Thus, from the level of the smallest sounds capable of distinguishing meaning (the

¹⁸ The idiosyncratic poetry of e.e. cummings (as examined in Waugh 1985:161) can be accounted for in terms of the same hierarchy. In fact, what makes cummings's poetry so interesting is not its "equivalence at the combination axis" (a feature it would share by definition with any other poetic text) but rather the fact that the poet violates the combinatoric rules at the syntactic level, similar to the way Joyce and the Egyptian ballad poets violate the combinatoric rules at the morphological level. In cummings's poetry, the poet is freeing up the syntactic level based on analogy with the higher, utterance level: in creating new syntactic categories (comparatives of comparatives) or expanding old ones (using an infinitive verb as a noun), he is using these words as if they were utterance-tokens, that is, as if they were being taken out of an utterance context and referred to as if someone had just uttered them:

love is more "thicker" than "forget..."
 more "thinner" than "recall..."
 love is less "always" than to win
 less "never" than alive
 less "bigger" than "forgive..."

Rather than being problematic for my interpretation of the hierarchy of combinatoric freedom, the peculiar features of such poets as cummings can actually be analyzed and pinpointed in a much more insightful manner than is otherwise done, and can be related to other experimental verbal artists such as James Joyce quite easily.

distinctive feature level) to the level of the utterance, linguistic expressions are signs having a signans and a signatum. However, these signs stand in a different relation to the overall meaning of the utterance of which they are a part depending on the linguistic level of which they are a part. This is evident in Jakobson's discussion of the role of distinctive features in language. Distinctive features are the 'building blocks of language' (Jakobson & Waugh 1987:2), the parts of sound which go into making the complex of sound which is the phoneme. A phoneme is the minimal unit of sound which is used to differentiate meaning in words and morphemes. Jakobson and others considered it a bundle of features, each one of which has a distinguishing or discriminative function: the presence or absence of a particular feature may serve to distinguish one word from another. An important characteristic of these features, emphasized by Jakobson, is that they themselves are not the carriers of the meanings of the words of which they are a part despite the fact that they serve to distinguish these words and their meanings:

Generally speaking the distinctive features and their combinations (phonemes, syllables) do not carry meaning directly, but are rather used to differentiate between signs (such as morphemes, words) which ARE different in meaning. (Waugh 1985:155)

There is thus a mediate or indirect relation between these signs and the meaning of the words which they serve to differentiate. As signs, their signatum is simply that differentiating function, mere otherness.

Jakobson discusses how distinctive features may be brought into a more direct or *immediate* relation with meaning through such devices as 'sound symbolism, synesthesia, sound symbolic ablaut, word affinity relations, glossolalia, children's play with sound anagrams, reduplication, poetry, etc.' (Waugh 1985:156). In poetry this immediacy between distinctive features and meaning is developed or made stronger by the poetic focus on the message-sign as message-sign, and on the 'use of equivalence as the main device—the direct connection between sound and meaning and the ability of the sound shape of given units to inform unequivocally about their correlated meanings are brought to the fore' (Waugh 1985:155). Thus the focus on equivalence and on the sign in itself brings about a closer relationship between sound and meaning. Jakobson, however, also discusses another way in which these items stand in a more direct relation to meaning, namely in their sense-determinative function. According to Jakobson, these features have two functions: a sense-distinctive one (at the phonemic or phonological level) and a sense-determinative one (at the morphophonological level). Distinctive features are in a closer relation to meaning at the morphological (derivational and inflectional) level because of their sense-determinative function. Whereas in their sense-discriminative function (at the phonemic or phonological level) they function to 'keep words apart which differ in meaning' (Jakobson & Waugh 1987:5), in their sense-determinative one, they 'supply [information] about derivational and inflectional structure and lexical and grammatical meaning' (5), and hence are relatively closer to this overall meaning than they are on the phonological level.

Although Jakobson did not explicitly do this, one can generalize this notion of relative immediacy to meaning to other features on other linguistic levels. For example, relative to phonemes or distinctive features, morphemes stand in a more direct relationship to meaning, but relative to words or phrases, they stand in a less direct or immediate one. Thus one can state that morphemes such as those in Arabic which involve roots and patterns, like other morphemes, stand in a more direct relationship to meaning than do the distinctive features in their sense-discriminative function (they indicate plurality or

present tense, etc.), but it is a less direct relationship than that of the word or phrase as a whole to its meaning. Therefore, as one goes up the linguistic hierarchy (from distinctive feature to phoneme to morpheme to phrases, etc.), there is greater immediacy between the sign on each ascending level and the meaning of the larger sign of which it is a part. Paraphrasing Jakobson's comments on the greater immediacy between sound (distinctive features and phonemes) and meaning in poetry in terms of this hierarchy one could say that in the referential function, the lower levels are less immediately related to meaning than they are in the poetic function. In the latter function, the lower levels (phonological and morphological) are brought closer to the meaning because they function as part of the overall meaning of a poem. In other words, poetic discourse, being marked by the closer relationship between sound and meaning because of the poetic focus on the sign as sign, is characterized by having items on a lower level (sounds as distinctive features or phonemes) take on a characteristic proper to items found on higher levels, immediacy to meaning. Thus poetic discourse is marked by a transference of characteristics from a higher level to a lower level of semantic immediacy.

How do the *zahr* puns relate to this hierarchy? In general the author's purpose in creating these puns is to hide meaning or 'ambiguous' expressions, increase allusions, and so on. The net effect of this, in terms of the hierarchy of semantic immediacy, is to distance the expression (at the higher level) from the intended meaning. In other words, the higher level (word or phrase) becomes less immediately related to its meaning. There is thus a transference of the feature of lesser semantic immediacy from the lower level to the higher level. This is the opposite of what normally happens in the poetic function. Thus, just as with the hierarchy of combinatoric creativity, *zahr* puns (and Joyce's portmanteau words) subvert the normal process of poetic composition by reversing the expected direction of the transference of level functions. This means that the audience, in deciphering the 'artificial homonyms', cannot rely on the normal phonemic or morphemic features that have been stripped from them by the poet but must rely instead on features from higher levels (be they syntactic, pragmatic, discursive, etc.). The audience transfers to the higher levels the distinguishing function of these features stripped from the lower levels. Rather than relying on either phonemic distinctive features or a morphemic feature (e.g. syllable structure in Arabic), the audience has to rely on syntactic, semantic, or pragmatic features.

The features that an audience relies on in the interpretation and decoding of these puns may exist on any level: at the phonological level the most important clues are the root consonants that remain, with few if any changes (the C-tier); in addition, the vocalic tier in most of these puns also retains an important clue, the 'anchoring' vowel common to all underlying and surface realizations of the *zahr* pun. The distinctive feature that is most often stripped from these levels is syllabic structure, and the audience must make recourse to items on the levels of syntax, discourse, and pragmatics to distinguish and disambiguate the puns, to decode them. For example, in the ballad 'God's Prophet Adam' (Cachia 1989:139–54), there is a constant play on different dialectal pronunciations of the Classical Arabic *qaaf* <q>, a voiceless pharyngeal stop. In Cairene and many other dialects in the north of Egypt, the dialectal reflex of <q> is /ʔ/, a glottal stop. However, in the south and in many Bedouin dialects the reflex of <q> is /g/, a voiced velar stop. In 'God's Prophet Adam' there are several pun-groups which are based on this dialectal variation, cognizance of which is at the level of pragmatics. One of these pun-groups is noted in Table 3: in line 4 the underlying *foʔ-*

PRAGMATICS

mixing of different dialectal pronunciations of *qaaf* vs. *jiim* (i.e. in dialects where /q/ = /g/, /j/ = /j/, not /g/)

(4 & 8) *foog* < *foo?*
(6) *foog* < *fooj*

SYNTAX

parallelism:

apposition: 'our prophet the pure one'
apposition: 'Gabriel the messenger ...'
'cares upon care'

nabiina mustafa
gibriil ... rasuul
humuum + foo? hamm

MORPHO-SYNTACTIC

preposition *foo?* 'above' is associated with the lexical items *faddalt* and *šaal*

faddalt + foo?
šaal + foo?

M-FEATURES (sense-determinative)

syllable structure
degemination in line 8

C v v C C v C
C v v C C v C C

P-FEATURES (sense-discriminative)

V: 'anchoring' vowel = /o/ in first syllable

o # u
o # u
o | a

C: play on different pronunciations of *qaaf*: a glottal stop is replaced by a voiced velar stop (see 'pragmatics' above)

4. *wi faddal-ti fii-hum nabii-na l-mustafa foog-hum*
and preferred-you among-them prophet-our the-chosen above-them
'And have placed at their head our own prophet, the well favored one'
6. *gibriil lu-hum wahyi min ŧandak rasuul foog-hum*
Gabriel to-them a revelation from you, messenger of band-their
'To them Gabriel is the channel of Your revelation, the messenger of their band'
8. *wi illi kafar šaal fi d-dinya humuum fooghum*
who apostasizes carries in life cares upon-care
'The unbeliever in life is burdened with care upon care' (Cachia 1989:140)

< *fo?* -*hum* 'above them'
< *fog-hum* 'their band'
< *foo?* *hamm* 'upon care'

TABLE 3. The 'linguistic score' for 'God's Prophet Adam'.

hum 'above them' is transformed into the surface *fooghum*, while in line 8 a similar transformation takes place: *foo?hamm* 'upon care' is likewise transformed into the surface *fooghum*. In line 6, however, the surface *fooghum* is related to the underlying *fog-hum* 'their band', in which the /g/ is a North Egyptian reflex of the Classical Arabic *jiim* <j>, not of *qaaf* <q>. Meanwhile, the ordinary dialectal reflex of *qaaf* <q>, the glottal stop /ʔ/, is present in most of the rest of the lines, including line 5 which is interpolated between line 4 and 6 (Cachia 1989:140).

The interplay of the different linguistic levels in these songs begins to resemble nothing if not a linguistic score of sorts, in which the audience listens for the linguistic notes of disambiguating references left on the various levels. For example, in this same pun group from 'God's Prophet Adam' noted in Table 3, there is also a clue left on the lexico-syntactic level, in the prepositions that are associated with the verbs in each line. For example in line 4 the verb *faddal* 'prefer' is usually associated with the preposition meaning 'on' (*ŧala*) or 'above' (*foo?*). In line 8 as well, the verb *šaal* 'carry' is also usually associated with the preposition *foo?* 'above'.

More often than not, however, the commonest clues that are left are parallelisms,¹⁹ which may be related to several levels at once. For example in the pun-group from the ballad 'Ghareeb' (Cachia 1989:234) in ex. 6 there are a number of associations—syntactic, semantic, discursive—between the puns and other words in the line which are clues

¹⁹ Jakobson was the first modern scholar to point out the parallelistic nature of poetry (Jakobson 1996). For an application of these ideas to Semitic poetry in general see Burt 1993.

to their interpretation. For example in line 66, one clue is on the syntactic level: there is a type of syntactic parallelism, termed CHIASTIC (of the form ab-ba) between the verbs *yihlaa* ‘become sweet’ and *yiddi* ‘it gives’ which contributes to the decipherment of the pun *wigadiid* into *wi(gaddi yiddii)* ‘and heart gives’. In line 68 there is a semantic parallelism (of antonymity) between *?adiim* ‘old’ and *gidiid* ‘new’; in line 70 there is a semantic relationship on the pragmatic level between the pairs *gulaam* ‘child’ and *daada* ‘nurse’; in line 72 one might relate the preposition *wust?* ‘middle of’ to the hidden preposition *didd* ‘against’; finally in line 74 there is a semantic connection between the pairs *sawaab* ‘recompense’ and the hidden *guud* ‘generosity’.

- (6) 66. baʿd it-tuʿam wi š-šarab (**yihlaa** l-kalaam) *wigadiid* ⇒ wi
 after feeding and drinking (*sweetens* speech) and
 (gaddi **yiddii**)
 (heart gives)
 ‘After food and drink, discourse becomes pleasant, and gives heart’
68. ʿa -lli gaRa l-haa tšuuʿu min **?adiim wi gdiid**
 about what happened to-her you-see from *old* and *new*
 ‘And all that had befallen her, see, of old and recently’
70. nadah il-ʿubbiṭaan yaa rgaal haatu l-**gulaam** *wigadiid* ⇒ wi gaat
 called the-captain O men bring the-**child** has come
daada
 a **nurse**
 ‘The captain called out: “Men, bring the child—a nurse has turned up”’
72. ihna laʿeena gulaam **wust?** il-biḥaar *wigadiid* ⇒ wi gaa
 we found a child **middle-of** the seas and he-came
didd
against (us)
 ‘For we have found a child; in the midst of the sea he came up against us’
74. iza kaan maʿaaki laban yibʿaa lik **sawaab** *wigadiid* ⇒ wi
 if it-was with-you milk it-is to-you **recompense** and
guud ?iid
generosity of hand
 ‘If you have milk, you shall have merit, and recompense for a good deed’

(Cachia 1989:235)

These are just a few examples of the many factors that may contribute to the audience’s decoding of the pun, and their arrival at the ‘proper’ meaning. However, there are many different associations, and different audiences and different members of the same audience may arrive at different understandings based on different interpretations, even though the poet-performer may have had only one particular one in mind at the time of composition. Here it resembles quite clearly the process of interpretation of *tawriya* as described in the classical rhetorical tradition, where there is an immediate meaning that is called forth, but which in actuality interrupts or delays the ‘true’ meaning intended by the poet (Cheneb 1913–39).

5. SUMMARY. Poetic discourse usually involves a transfer of features from one level to another according to two general notions: the first, combinatoric creativity, is of greater relevance for understanding the composition of a text, while the other, semantic

immediacy, is of greater relevance for understanding the act of interpretation. In normal poetic discourse within the hierarchy of combinatoric freedom there is a transfer of the feature of lesser freedom/greater restriction from the lower phonological level to the higher syntactic level; while in the hierarchy of semantic immediacy there is a transfer of greater semantic immediacy from the higher syntactic level to the lower phonological level.

Both the Egyptian narrative ballads and *Finnegans Wake* show a complementary transfer in the opposite direction for both of these hierarchies in the composition and interpretation of artificial puns. In the creation of these artificial puns the author allows himself a greater freedom in word creation than is usually assumed, and treats the words and phonemes that are the raw material of his pun as if they were elements at a higher level—syntactic categories, or sentences, or discourse elements—which he then reshapes to camouflage his original material. The author is actually constructing a kind of ANTI-POETRY: rather than projecting the organizing principle of the paradigmatic level (equivalence) onto the syntagmatic level (i.e. restricting the choices in the syntactic composition of a work) he is projecting the organizing principle of the syntagmatic level (greater combinatoric freedom) onto the paradigmatic level. This may be seen as an extreme response to the poetic demand for equivalency: rather than proceeding in the normal direction and restricting the syntactic composition, the author reverses himself and proceeds in the reverse direction, freeing up paradigmatic composition.

This word play—a kind of ARTIFICIAL HOMONYMY—is accomplished when the poet takes away the features of the words or phrases that make them distinctive at the phonemic or morphemic level, thereby creating new words or phrase-words. He is thus transferring to higher linguistic levels the distinguishing function of these features stripped from the lower levels. The audience, then, rather than relying on either phonemic distinctive features or morphemic features (e.g. syllable structure in Arabic), has to rely on syntactic, semantic, or pragmatic features. The result of this process is a reversal of the roles of the different levels: in composition they are freely playing with the lower levels (phonology and morphology), which usually do not admit such free play because their signatum is less immediate to the meaning of the utterance, while in interpretation the upper levels are constrained to provide the features necessary to decode the utterance. Therefore the greater freedom allowed in creating words and word-phrases at the lower morphological levels in turn affects the relative semantic immediacy of the upper level. The absence of the distinguishing features at the lower level decreases the semantic immediacy of items at the higher levels, by increasing their ambiguity and possible referents. It thus imbues the higher level items (phrases and sentences) with a characteristic found in items on the lower level—increased distance from meaning, or a lack of immediacy with respect to meaning.

Artificial puns of this type therefore involve a two-way transference of functions between the different levels, along the hierarchies of semantic immediacy and combinatoric freedom. The net effect of these reverses in the normal displacement of features in poetic discourse is a further heightening of the 'estrangement' of poetic discourse from ordinary discourse, accentuating its nonreferential function, and emphasizing the element of play.

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