

Intertextuality with Folk Proverbs in Naguib Mahfouz's Novel "Cairo Modern"

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Abstract

This research explores the theme of intertextuality in Naguib Mahfouz's novel "Cairo Modern," considering it a mechanism within the creative processes discussed by postmodern-era critics. This study aims to examine instances of intertextuality with folk proverbs in the aforementioned novel. The significance of this research lies in highlighting the role of the eminent author Naguib Mahfouz in the literary field. It showcases his ability to draw from other texts through citation, absorption, or transformation to create his artistic material. This, in turn, enriches the novel both in form and substance. The research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, theoretically explaining the phenomenon of intertextuality. In terms of analysis and application, it focuses on highlighting the model of intertextuality with folk proverbs. The study explores its objective and artistic functions, elucidates the reasons for its use, and justifies its citation by the author or one of the characters. Consequently, it connects this intertextuality with the narrative context to enhance the fictional events or the emotional states of the characters, contributing to the overall narrative structure and rhythm. The research concludes with several key findings, notably that intertextuality with folk proverbs has a significant presence in the novel "Cairo Modern," showcasing Naguib Mahfouz's adeptness in handling this phenomenon. The research asserts that the novelist does not evoke these proverbs merely for embellishment, decor, or a display of poetic capabilities. Instead, he employs them for a purpose he deems essential to deepen his ideas and crystallize his vision on a particular issue, aligning harmoniously with the artistic or stylistic structure of his novels.

Keywords: Intertextuality, Folk Proverbs, Naguib Mahfouz, Cairo Modern

Introduction

"Intertextuality" is considered a central critical concept, and it is a mechanism among modern creative mechanisms introduced to critics of the postmodern era. According to Angenot Intertextuality refers to the fact that each text coexists in a certain way with other texts (al Baqa'i, 2013). Studies on this matter have shown that intertextuality is a vital tool used by both writers and readers for analyzing and comprehending literary texts (Abed, 2022). Intertextuality is more than retrieving cultural inventory, restoring cultural memory, or weaving texts in literary work without philosophy or purpose. Instead, it is an intentional process with goals, particularly achieving the literary process and facilitating successful communication between the creator and the reader. This suggests that using intertextuality in texts reflects the author's cultural depth and familiarity with previous works. Writers intentionally incorporate these texts, whether consciously or unconsciously, to convey the ideas in their work (Eldin, 2022).

Furthermore, creative writing requires the literary vitality of the mechanism of intertwining and mixing texts, known as "intertextuality." It is considered a crucial and practical tool for both text creators and readers (Zabidin & Eldesoky, 2023). For these reasons and more, the significance of intertextuality in modern criticism is deemed indispensable for reading texts. As mentioned earlier, the process of intertextuality is one of the most important mechanisms through which we can interpret and explain texts.

Building upon these theoretical propositions, this study aims to explore intertextual aspects represented in popular proverbs used in the novel "Cairo Modern" by Mahfouz. The goal is to highlight the hidden meanings and connotations conveyed by these proverbs in the studied novels.

Proverbs

A proverb, or "Mathal," is something used as an example to make something else comparable to it (Lakhdar, 2016). Arabs have displayed a strong interest in proverbs, acknowledging their significance and presenting them with eloquence. According to their perspective, proverbs are esteemed for their richness, nobility, and excellence in speech, attributed to the succinctness of their words and the abundance of their meanings. The speaker easily grasps their utility, coupled with significant attention, resulting in substantial returns (al 'Askari, 1988).

Al-'Askari (1988) points out many similarities between proverbs and wisdom. He asserts that every widespread wisdom can be termed a proverb, but not every well-phrased saying necessarily becomes one. In simpler terms, a proverb is a wisdom that circulates among people and becomes something they repeat in situations similar to when it was first uttered. Thus, wisdom can be categorized into two types: one that circulates, becoming a proverb, and another that doesn't lend itself to such circulation, remaining unclassified as a proverb (Lakhdar, 2016).

It is noteworthy that proverbs in any language encapsulate the experiences of nations, distilled into a concise linguistic form. Proverbs serve as a mirror reflecting a nation's culture, intellectual inclinations, and perspective on life. Thus, proverbs are laden with ideas, accurate

perspectives, and wisdom. When people hear or read them, the meanings resonate, enabling speakers and writers to convey a lot with fewer words (Sini, 1992).

Intertextuality

The term "intertextuality" gains clarity, as per Kristeva (1969/1977), when she asserts that a text is a "wandering of texts and textual interplay, where numerous disjointed notes from other texts intersect and conflict". This is further emphasized in her statement, claiming that every text is a "mosaic of quotations," signifying an absorption and transformation of other texts ('Azzam, 2001).

In Angenot's view, intertextuality is described as follows: "Every text coexists, in one way or another, with other texts, thus becoming a text within a text—intertextual. Consequently, the word belongs to everyone, as it alludes to an idea expanded in every cultural study" (Zu'bi, 2000).

Beaugrande's definition of intertextuality (1980/1998) aligns closely with his predecessors: "Involving the relationships between a text and other related texts that fall within the limits of previous experience, either directly or indirectly".

Arab critics have addressed "intertextuality" in their definitions, mostly translating Western critics' definitions, from Kristeva to Gerard Genette, with differences mainly in wording. This includes what Miftah (1992) stated when defining intertextuality, influenced by Kristeva's definition, saying: "It is a mosaic of other texts, integrated with different techniques, absorbed by it, making them part of its elements, transforming them to harmonize with its structure and purpose, modifying them by smoothing them out or intensifying them to contradict their characteristics and meanings or reinforce them".

Therefore, intertextuality is a departure from one text to another absent texts that must be invoked to complete the present text. This implies that the text is not self-sufficient but necessitates elements outside of it. The interplay of ideas, cultures, or languages represents the absent texts that the text cannot do without and can only be invoked during study and analysis (Zu'bi, 2000). In conclusion, intertextuality involves the melting of previous texts into a present text, whether consciously or unconsciously. In a new text, a part inseparable from it appears in the manifestations of the new text, and the reader can, based on their understanding derived from their knowledge and culture, realize or ignore this intertextuality.

An Overview of Cairo Modern Novel (1945)

To delve into the phenomenon of intertextuality, it is imperative to provide a succinct overview of the contemplated novel. This summary aims to equip the reader with a broad framework of their themes, ideas, and perspectives, especially if faced with the unavailability of the original texts. Such a summary is poised to enhance the reader's comprehension and clarity regarding the subject matter of the novel, thereby making the subsequent exploration more fruitful. Cairo Modern portrays the life of Egyptian society in the 1930s, shedding light on various aspects such as poverty and bribery, while depicting the lives of the middle class in Cairo. The narrative explores the social and economic issues faced by Egyptian society under British occupation (Zabidin, 2024).

The author strategically chooses four university students to represent conflicting ideas and trends in modern society. The novel depicts faith in religion, morality, and virtue as a path to salvation. It also explores beliefs in society and social justice, illustrating the practical struggle to achieve social and personal virtue. Furthermore, the novel delves into self-belief, utilitarian worship, and the harnessing of principles, ideals, and ideas in service of a new deity. The narrative also introduces the role of the spectator who observes without active participation, merely recording, watching, and observing (Qutb, 1946).

Notably, in this novel, Mahfouz attempts to address social issues and provide a clear depiction of the intellectual structure of youth in that historical period. The character "Mahgub Abd al-Da'im" symbolizes the social dimension of these issues, while "Ma'mun Radwan" represents the right-wing direction, "Ali Taha" symbolizes the left-wing direction, and "Ahmad Badir" symbolizes a group of youth not affiliated with any specific direction, indifferent to presenting a clear idea about what is happening. Ahmed Badr's character, deeply immersed in academic life, aims to avoid involvement in partisan and political problems, despite his engagement in journalism. He uses this opportunity to establish relationships with the upper classes in society, leading to the downfall and deviation of individuals, as seen in the case of Mahgub Abd al-Da'im (Turabi & Sayyid, 2014). Readers of the novel may discern the author's inclination towards the triumph of principles in any situation, a disdain for self-indulgence, moral and social deterioration, filth, and decadence. This inclination is evident in both the details of the novel and its conclusion.

Methodology

This research attempts to evaluate some texts that comprise folk proverbs taken from Mahfouz's novel "Cairo Modern" (1945). The selected texts that are supposed to be untextualized with prior sentences will be analyzed. Moreover, qualitative methodology will be applied to the data. The qualitative approach can be described as a method of data collecting that frequently depends on interpretation, that is to say, data generally requires several explanations (Alhojailan, 2012).

Findings And Discussion

The novel "Cairo Modern" is rich in a collection of folk proverbs that intertwine with the narrative structure, forming symbolic representations that reflect the intentional use of Folk proverbs within the text. The following examples illustrate this phenomenon:

Example 1:

"نطقت بالحق. ولا يؤيسنكم قبح هؤلاء الفتيات. فهن دفعة أولى للجنس اللطيف وسيتبعهن أخريات. الجامعة موضحة حديثاً لا تلبث أن تنتشر، وإن غداً لناظره قريب". (Mahfouz, 2016)

"What you say is true and you derive no pleasure from their sickening appearance, but this is merely the first installment of the fair sex. They'll be followed by others. The university is a new trend that will soon catch on among females. **If you keep your eyes on tomorrow, it won't be long in coming**" (Mahfouz, 2009)

The underlined text إن غداً لناظره قريب intertextualizes with a folk proverb which translates as "If you keep your eyes on tomorrow, it won't be long in coming".

Mahfouz's use of the folk proverb in the context of the text serves to emphasize the inevitability and rapid progression of societal change, particularly in the realm of women's education. The author employs the proverb to convey a sense of anticipation and assurance that the transformation he envisions, symbolized by women entering the university, will soon become a widespread reality.

By invoking this proverb, Mahfouz suggests that the introduction of the first group of female students to Cairo University is just the beginning of a larger, transformative trend. The use of "tomorrow" in the proverb implies a near future, reinforcing the idea that societal attitudes toward women's education are evolving rapidly. The phrase "it won't be long in coming" implies a sense of inevitability, suggesting that the changes he anticipates are on the horizon and will manifest sooner rather than later.

Essentially, Mahfouz employs the proverb to express optimism and confidence in the societal shifts he envisions, reassuring readers that the changes in women's roles and education are not distant but imminent, emphasizing the progressive nature of the depicted transformation.

Example 2:

"فقال محبوب:
- مكره أخاك، لشد ما أعاني من الاضطراب؟
وتفرس مأمون في وجهة بعينه النجلاوين السوداوين، فهاله ما يرى من الهزال والقنوط، وسأله باهتمام وإشفاق:
- ما بك يا أستاذ محبوب!
فقال دون تردّد:
- ظروف قاسية، فقدت آخر مليم من نقودي، لا أملك من ثمن كتاب اللاتيني مليما واحدا".

(Mahfouz, 2016)

Mahgub replied, "Bad stuff, brother. **I'm really in a bind.**" With his large, black eyes, Ma'mun examined his face and was alarmed by how emaciated and despondent it looked. He asked with concern and compassion, "What's wrong, Mr. Mahgub?"

Without beating around the bush, he replied, "Rough times. I've lost my last millieme. I don't have even a millieme to buy the text for Latin" (Mahfouz, 2009).

In the context of the provided text, Naguib Mahfouz strategically employs the folk proverb "مكره أخاك لا يطل" to underscore the reluctant and compelled nature of the protagonist, Mahgub Abd al-Da'im's, actions. This proverb, which translates to "Compelling your brother does not make you a hero," serves as a poignant metaphor for someone coerced into actions contrary to their nature or someone thrust into circumstances imposed upon them.

Mahgub is facing financial difficulties, compounded by the fact that his father is bedridden and he cannot work to send money as usual. The attempt to borrow from his former neighbor, Mr. Salem al Ikshidi, did not yield the expected results. Instead, he was offered the opportunity to work as a translator for "al-Najma" magazine, which he reluctantly accepted. The use of the proverb captures the essence of Mahgub's predicament – he is compelled to take certain actions due to necessity, not out of his own free will or heroism. In this case, he

is forced to seek financial help from his acquaintance, Ma'mun Radwan, even though he dislikes the idea.

Mahfouz employs the proverb to convey the theme of constraint, emphasizing that Mahgub's actions are borne out of necessity rather than a voluntary and heroic choice. It adds depth to the character and provides insight into the internal conflict Mahgub experiences in the face of his financial struggles.

Example 3:

"فسأله الإخشيدي بصوت لم يفقد أي رنة من رنات الرئاسة:
- أي إشاعات؟
- سقوط الوزارة. ماذا وراء الأكمة؟
فابتسم الإخشيدي وقال:
- وراء الأكمة ما وراءها!
- هل حقا يمكن أن يزول هذا العهد؟
فقال الإخشيدي وقد تملكته رغبة عابثة في تعذيبه:
- كل شيء زائل... " (Mahfouz, 2016)

In a voice that had lost not an iota of its authority, al-Ikhshidi asked, "What rumors?"
"That the government will fall. **What's behind them**?"
"**Whatever is**," al-Ikhshidi replied with a smile.
"Is it possible for this alliance to end"? (Mahfouz, 2009)

In the context provided, Mahfouz's use of the folk proverb "وراء الأكمة ما وراءها" serves to emphasize the elusive and hidden nature of the truth or information that Mahgub Abd al-Da'im is seeking from his boss, Salem al Ikshidi, regarding the rumors of the government's fall.

The proverb translates to "Behind the hill, there is something beyond it" or more idiomatically, "There is more than meets the eye." It is used when there is a suspicion that there is something concealed or undisclosed behind a certain situation or appearance.

In the dialogue, Mahgub asks about the truth behind the rumors, and instead of providing a straightforward answer, Salem al Ikshidi responds with a proverb. This usage implies that there is more to the situation than what is openly discussed or revealed. The proverb adds a layer of mystery and suggests that there might be hidden motives, information, or complexities behind the apparent rumors of the government's fall.

Mahfouz strategically employs this proverb to create intrigue and suspense in the narrative, prompting the reader to delve deeper into the subtext of the conversation and consider the possibility of concealed truths or undisclosed motives in the political landscape described in the novel.

Example 4:

"وخاطب - بالتلفون - جمهرة من صحبه في الوزارات المختلفة وتلقى الإجابات: ماذا عندك من الأخبار يا فلان؟ - الحالة حرجة، ما آخر الأخبار يا أستاذ؟ قطران، هل من جديد يا فلان؟ - **ضربوا الأعور على عينه**، أسمعت الإشاعات الغربية يا عزيزي؟ عن الوزارة؟ إلى الجحيم يا سيدي! وهكذا حتى أيقن أن الوزارة في النزاع الأخير". (Mahfouz, 2016)

At noon, the ministry was filled with the rumor that the cabinet had resigned. Someone said he had telephoned Bulkeley and that the report had been confirmed. The office workers were agitated in a way seen only when cabinets fell. They congregated in the corridors speaking in raised voices about the new ministers. Mahgub was very upset and there was a glum look in his eyes. The messenger came to tell him that Qasim Bey had left the ministry. He contacted al-Ikhshidi by phone to ask which direction the boy had been heading when he left. He replied he didn't know. Mahgub spoke with a bunch of friends in the different ministries by telephone and received these responses. "What news do you have, so-and-so?" "The situation is critical. What's the latest news, sir?" "Shit. Anything new, so-and-so?" "**They hit the one-eyed man's good eye.** Have you heard the strange rumors, my dear?" "About the cabinet? To hell, sir." And so forth, until he felt certain that the cabinet was in its final throes (Mahfouz, 2009).

In this context, Mahfouz's utilization of the proverb "ضربوا الأعمور على عينه" serves to emphasize the futility or irony of a situation, particularly concerning the rumors surrounding the cabinet's resignation. The proverb translates to "They hit the one-eyed man's good eye" and is used to convey the idea that there is no benefit in harming someone who is already disadvantaged. In the given passage, Mahgub Abdul al-Da'im is receiving updates and rumors about the cabinet's situation. One of his friends mentions the proverb when informing him about Qasim Bey leaving the ministry. The usage of this proverb in this context implies that the departure or troubles of Qasim Bey (the one-eyed man) may not bring any further harm to him because he is already in a difficult situation. It adds a layer of irony to the news, suggesting that the events unfolding may not worsen the already challenging circumstances.

Conclusion

After examining the usage of folk proverbs in narrative discourse, several key findings can be outlined as follows:

1. Mahfouz expertly integrates folk proverbs in "Cairo Modern," not as mere decoration, but strategically to enrich ideas and convey a distinct vision, showcasing his literary finesse and thematic depth.
2. The use of folk proverbs in Mahfouz's "Cairo Modern" significantly contributes to the narrative construction, enriching both the artistic and aesthetic aspects of the text.
3. The employed folk proverbs in the narrative reflect the cultural background of the characters, providing insights into their cultural awareness and traditions. This enriches the characters' depth and vividly portrays their daily reality.
4. The folk proverbs used in the narrative reflect the cultural and heritage background of the characters, emphasizing their awareness of culture and traditions. This deepens the characters and realistically portrays their life experiences.
5. Mahfouz, as a novelist, endeavors to activate popular heritage through the incorporation of folk proverbs. Consequently, he establishes a communicative link between heritage and narrative reality, enabling readers to analyze societal contradictions.

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