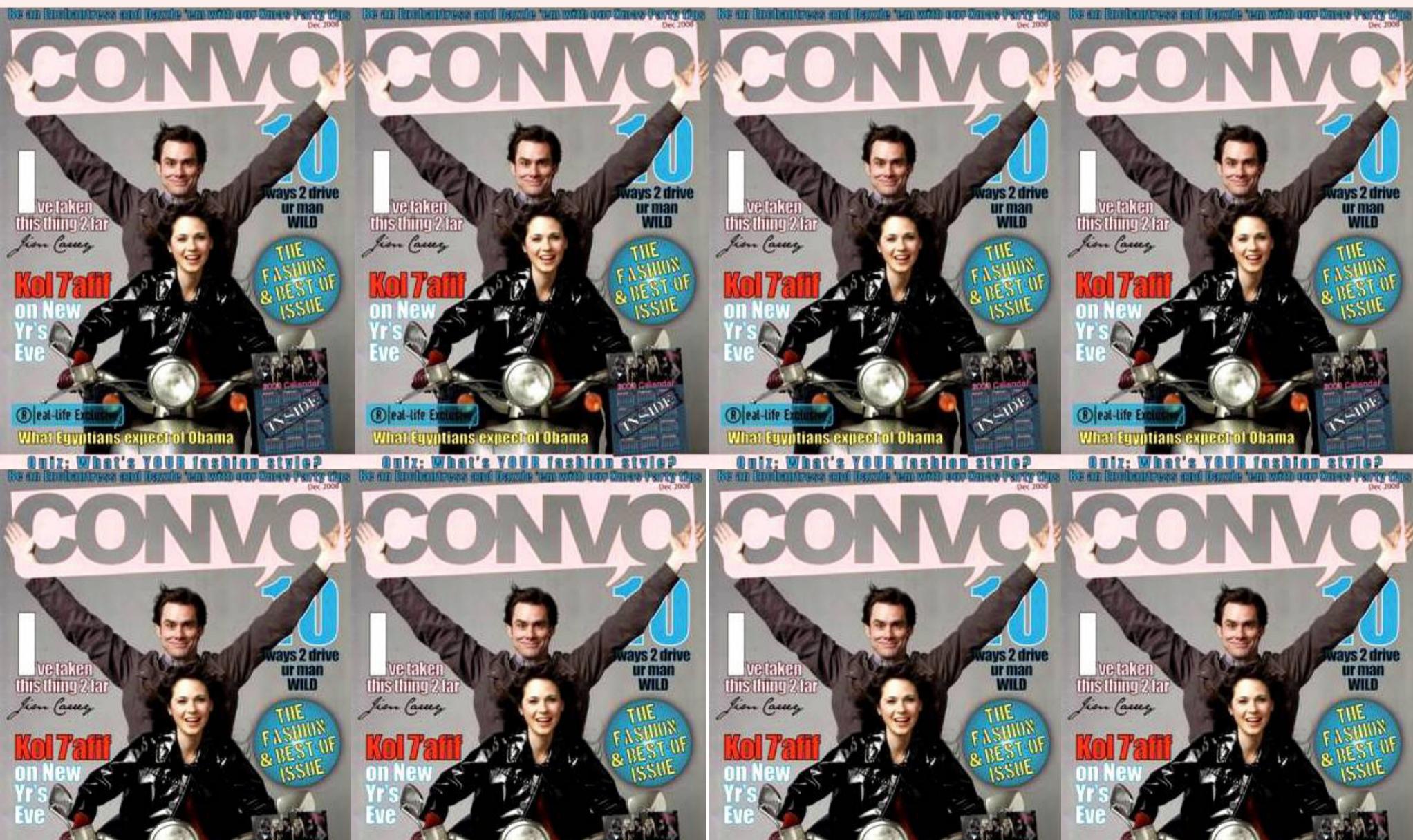


**'WE ARE YOUNG.  
WE ARE TRENDY.  
BUY OUR PRODUCT!'**



**THE USE OF LATINIZED ARABIC  
IN EDITED PRINTED MAGAZINES  
IN EGYPT**



**BY: MARIAM ABOELEZZ**

*From its infancy, the Internet has been notorious for its submission to the English language.<sup>2,3</sup> For a long time, the limited Latin characters in ASCII code (American Standard Code for Information Interchange) – which was the only code that the internet supported – accommodated no other language than English. Other Latin script orthographies had to do without their accents and diacritics, but it was non-Latin script orthographies that suffered the most. Internet users speaking such languages had no choice but to yield to the hegemony of English or to use Latin characters to transliterate or ‘transcribe’ their own languages.<sup>4</sup> In later years, software support for the once-neglected non-Latin script orthographies started to become readily available, but by then the Latinized forms had grown on the users as well as extended beyond the reach of the Internet.*

Even if software support would appease Latinization online, it meant little to mobile phone users where the compromise in message size for non-Latin script is often

thought too high a price to pay by avid texters.<sup>5</sup> The hegemony of the English language in cyber space is still apparent despite the introduction of support for non-Latin script orthographies. Indeed, even “the term ‘extended character set’ ... suggests that the symbols used for writing English are the norm, from which other alphabets are derived by ‘extending’ the English alphabet with diacritics and so on”.<sup>6</sup> Today, software support is hardly an issue, and yet, English is still the highest ranking language of all Internet content by a staggering majority<sup>7</sup>, and Latinized forms of non-Latin script orthographies have anything but disappeared. Among these forms is Latinized Arabic (henceforth, LA), a written form of Arabic that uses Latin or Roman characters as an alternative orthographic form of the Arabic language which normally employs Arabic script. The use of LA in computer mediated communication (CMC) has been reported across the Arab world from countries such as Egypt<sup>8,9</sup>, Jordan<sup>10,11</sup>, Lebanon<sup>12</sup> and the United Arab Emirates.<sup>13</sup> Despite the pool of Arabic-content websites which

are being accessed by Arabic-speaking users from all over the Arab world<sup>14</sup>, the Latinization conventions reported in the modest literature on LA indicate regional variation influenced by local spoken dialects. This variation can be mainly seen in the representation of Arabic consonants which are absent in English, for which the users resort to using numerals which resemble the Arabic characters in appearance. Table 1 is a summary of the numerals and digraphs (number + apostrophe) used to represent LA according to three authors reporting on conventions encountered in CMC samples of Gulf Arabic<sup>15</sup>, Jordanian Arabic<sup>16</sup> and Egyptian Arabic.<sup>17</sup> Yaghan also reports the use of the number 8 to represent the Arabic /q/ sound.<sup>18</sup> However, it is not clear which regional variety his data is based on. This use of numerals to represent Arabic consonants is considered the hallmark of the contemporary form of LA which prevails in CMC between Arabic speakers, setting it apart from earlier forms which have specialized applications – referred to by Palfreyman and Al

Khalil as Common Latinized Arabic or CLA.<sup>19</sup> CLA differs from LA in that it is not intended for communication between Arabic-speakers, but rather for communication of Arabic content to non-Arabic speakers. Thus, in CLA the phonetic value of Arabic consonants is approximated by assigning the closest sound in the English lexicon, such as in the ALA-LC Romanization scheme adopted by the Library of Congress<sup>20</sup>, which is used to transcribe spoken Arabic content in this paper. In LA, however, the emphasis is on retaining these Arabic sounds, and so the numbers serve as additional symbols (characters) that codify these sounds so that the words sound more ‘locally authentic’<sup>21</sup> to the intended Arabic reader. Of course, this is in itself paradoxical, as Palfreyman and Al Khalil point out, since LA “is in orthographic terms no more ‘Arabic’ than CLA”. Moreover, since CLA predates the LA discussed here, its influence can be seen in the way some writers Latinize Arabic in CMC (e.g. the use of ‘kh’ and ‘gh’ to represent /x/ and /ɣ/ respectively in Table 1).

Sound	Arabic letter	Representation Variants		
		Gulf Arabic	Jordanian Arabic	Egyptian Arabic
/r/	ر	2	2	2
/h/	ح	7	7	7
/x/	خ	'7 / 5	'7 / 7' / 5 / kh	7' / kh
/ʕ/	ع	3	3	3
/ɣ/	غ	'3	3' / '3 / gh	3' / gh
/t'/	ط	6	6 / t	t
/ð'/	ظ	'6	6' / '6	z / th
/s'/	ص	9	9 / s	s
/d'/	ض	'9	9' / '9 / d	d

**Table 1. Representation of Arabic consonant sounds based on three different Arabic dialect groups: most common to least common representations from left to right**

In addition to regional variation in consonant representation, there is great individual variation in how Arabic Internet users transcribe vowels which are predominantly absent from the consonantal Arabic orthography.<sup>22,23</sup> However, the most important observation of all has perhaps been that it is mostly spoken Ara-

bic which is Latinized in CMC – a point on which there is absolute consensus in the literature. Bianchi refers to this as Latinized Arabic Vernacular (LAV).<sup>24</sup> Another important observation has been the spread of Latinized Arabic outside of CMC. With the exception of text messages, LA was initially thought to have been restrict-

ed to online communication, but there is growing evidence that this is no longer the case. Palfreyman and Al Khalil<sup>25</sup> cite examples of LA found in cartoons and in offline correspondence among friends, Yaghan<sup>26</sup> includes examples of LA in handwritten notes and wall writings (graffiti), while El-Essawi examines the use LA in handwritten texts.<sup>27</sup> This trend does not seem to be paralleled in what has been reported of Latinized forms of other non-Latin orthographies. A well-documented case is that of Latinized Greek or “Greeklish”.<sup>28,29,30</sup> Like LA, Greeklish owes its popularity to the initial lack of support for non-Latin scripts online. Greek users also resorted to the creative use of numerals to express Greek sounds which do not exist in English such as 8 or o for the Greek character ‘Θ’ (/θ/), also clearly based on a visual resemblance.<sup>31,32</sup> Moreover, like LA, Greeklish is still vigorously used in online communication today even though software support is no longer an issue. However, the so far similar careers of LA and Greeklish diverge here: unlike LA, Greeklish has not crossed over

to offline communication. This may have something to do with the recent growing public concerns that Greeklish may pose a threat to the Greek Language, and the role that Greek academic institutions and scholars have played in taking up this cause.<sup>33</sup> Tseliga points out that many of the Greeklish users she has interviewed have a neutral attitude towards the variety, merely viewing it as practical.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the situation in Greece is contrasted with that in the Arab countries where no formal authority has stepped forward to discourage the use of LA.<sup>35</sup> This, in tandem with the growing popularity and acceptability of LA among young Arab technology users appears to have facilitated the diffusion of LA into offline mediums. However, nowhere does LA seem to be spreading faster to offline communication than in Egypt. Encounters with LA have become a daily business in the Egyptian capital. Not only is LA clearly visible in graffiti (Figure 1), but also on movie billboards (Figure 2), in branding (Figure 3), on commercial items such as chocolate bars<sup>1</sup>, and more importantly, in print, with



**Figure 1. LA in Graffiti on street walls in Cairo (picture taken January 2009).**

**يا لول 7to7fa 'I love you, fool' (as would be read from right to left): writing mixes Arabic in Arabic script with Arabic in Latin script with the two scripts proceeding in opposite directions. The last word is perhaps placed on a separate line to overcome this conflict in script directionality so that the writing can only be read from right to left. 7 used in the last word to denote the /h/ sound.**

a number of magazines now including content in LA. LA has even featured in literary works by young writers, published by Malamih, a pioneering publishing house with a mission to empower young Egyptian writers 'without ideological, national, or linguistic restrictions'. These developments are significant not only because they indicate the diffusion of LA from online to



**Figure 2. LA on a film poster 3essabet El Dr. Omar 'Dr. Omar's Gang': 3 used to denote the /q/ sound in the first word in the title but not in the proper name 'Omar' where it occurs as an initial sound.**

offline mediums, but because they signal a transition from unregulated spaces to regulated spaces.<sup>36</sup> From this viewpoint, the speed and manner with which LA is spreading in Egypt does not appear to be



**Figure 3. LA in Branding: The logo of an Egyptian band: Uss W Laz2 ‘Cut and Paste’**



**Figure 4. LA on commercial item: From top to bottom the LA messages on the wrappers mean: “On my mind”; “Chill out”; “I love you”**

paralleled anywhere else in the Arab world. To understand why and how this is happening, this study explores the use of LA in printed, edited magazines in Egypt. Of course, this would hardly be possible without a preliminary understanding of the context and setting, which is what the next section seeks to deliver.

### **The Setting: The Sociolinguistic Situation in Egypt**

The language situation in Egypt is a textbook case of what Ferguson terms ‘diglossia’<sup>37</sup>. Broadly speaking, there are two varieties of Arabic in constant use in Egypt. The standard, taught (High) variety is the variety of official, religious and highly formal use. This is

Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), which is most commonly found in religious sermons, political speeches and in print material. It is predominantly a written variety acquired through formal education. On the other hand, the vernacular, informal (Low) variety is the variety of casual conversation and everyday use. In the case of Egypt, this is Egyptian Arabic. It is predominantly a spoken variety acquired at home. With the exception of folk literature and works of poetry or fiction which may contain varying amounts of Egyptian Arabic<sup>38,39</sup>, the overwhelming majority of printed, edited Arabic periodicals and works of non-fiction in Egypt would be expected to be in MSA. Apart from Arabic, another language which is visibly present in Egypt is English. The way in which the use of English has grown steadily in past decades suggests that it may be fitting to revise its status from a foreign language to a second or additional language<sup>40</sup>. English has become increasingly important as “a practical vehicle for educational, economic and ... social mobility”; a development which “parallels, in many

ways, the development of Egypt’s identity as a modern nation”.<sup>41</sup>

According to Kachru, there are four main functions which English may serve in countries where it is a foreign or second language: a regulative function for official or administrative purposes; an instrumental function as a medium of instruction; an interpersonal function for social communication; and an imaginative/innovative function involving creative and literary use of language.<sup>42</sup> Writing about the English language in Egypt in 1997, Schaub notes that English serves limited interpersonal functions between professionals and the very well-educated.<sup>43</sup> Similarly, the regulative functions are limited to international diplomacy, while hardly any English is used for imaginative/innovative functions. Schaub suggests that the main application of English lies in its instrumental function as an obligatory subject that is introduced at preparatory level in public schools and much earlier in private schools, and as a requirement in most faculties of public universities across Egypt.

Over the last half century, English has overtaken other foreign languages (particularly French) as the language of choice for the educated elite.<sup>44</sup> Schaub also notes the role that English plays in the tourist industry, and its salient presence in the media. In audio and visual media this includes imported entertainment such as music, films and TV programs. In printed media, Schaub mentions imported English newspapers, publications geared towards expatriates, and two publications explicitly intended for Egyptian readers. Although the two magazines cited by Schaub, which were geared towards an Egyptian readership, have since disappeared from the market, the publishing industry and the market for magazines in general, and English publications in particular, has undergone a tremendous boom at the turn of the century.<sup>45,46</sup> The number of English magazines actively targeting Egyptians significantly increased in a relatively very short amount of time.<sup>47</sup> In recent years there was also the appearance of English literary works by young Egyptian writers,

published by Malamih. This clearly fulfills a creative/innovative function which Schaub deemed absent a decade ago. In addition, there has been an important extension in the interpersonal functions of English in CMC.<sup>48</sup> Both developments support Schaub's remark that English appears to have the greatest appeal among Egyptians who are characterized as young, educated, and middle or upper class.<sup>49</sup> The overarching ideological and symbolic factors underlying these changes are by no means simple. However, these changes are often associated with globalization and the status of English as a global language.<sup>50</sup> In explaining the increasing interest in English, Schaub states that "an obvious motivation ... is the promise of more money or better jobs that many Egyptians associate with the 'commodity' of English".<sup>51</sup> The word commodity here immediately brings to mind Bourdieu's notion of the linguistic market place, where: *Linguistic exchange ... is also an economic exchange which is established within a particular symbolic relation of power between producer, en-*

*dowed with a certain symbolic capital, and a consumer (or market), and which is capable of procuring a certain material and symbolic profit.*<sup>52</sup>

Bourdieu's theory assumes that the language of the dominant groups – i.e. the official language sanctioned by the state – would be the language of greatest cultural, economic, social and symbolic power. Haeri<sup>53</sup> critiques the suitability of this model for Egypt, where the state's power to reproduce the symbolic capital of its chosen language is restricted to public institutions (schools, businesses and media), while private institutions thrive on a preference for foreign languages. In line with Schaub's

observations, Haeri notes that foreign languages have greater commercial and symbolic capital to Egyptians than MSA, the official language of Egypt.

### **The Present Study**

The recent developments in the use of LA in Egypt are perhaps better understood in the context of the recent developments in the Egyptian publishing industry. With this in mind, a study was outlined to interview magazines which use LA in order to understand their motives and to investigate any contributions they may be making to regulating the use of LA. The following research questions were formulated: The magazines interviewed had to satisfy a

	Convo	G-Mag	Live	Teen Stuff
First Published	July 2007	March 2003	August 2006	April 1996
Price	L.E. 10	L.E. 3.5	Free	L.E. 10
Copies Printed	7,000	6,000-8,000	5,000 (soon to rise to 8,000)	10,000
Distribution	Egypt & 4 other Arab countries	Egypt	Egypt	Egypt
Age of Contributors	17-35	21-26	20-29	13-21

**Table 2. Profile Information of the Four Magazines**

number of conditions: they had to be based in Egypt; they had to be printed, edited magazines; they had to have a considerable market share; and they had to be using LA regularly for the previous year. Magazines where only the occasional odd use of LA could be found were not included in the study. At the end of 2008, four magazines satisfied the study's conditions: *Convo*, *G-Mag*, *Live* and *Teen Stuff*. *Convo* and *Live* have since made a silent exit from Egypt's fickle magazine market, but *G-Mag* and *Teen Stuff* are still going strong, suggesting that the tough competition in this sector favored more established publications.

The interviews with the magazine editors were supplemented by studying the content of the magazines' most recent issues (June to December 2008). Table 2 lists the profile details of the four magazines based on the information obtained from the interviews. The rest of the information in the interviews was divided into 5 broad themes: target audience, motives for using LA, readers' attitudes, and measures to regulate LA use.

With the exception of *G-Mag*, which was issued every 45 days, all of the magazines in this study were monthly magazines. The distribution of the magazines in Egypt is restricted to the main cities of Cairo and Alexandria and coastal regions during holiday seasons. None of the magazines had regular distribution in other Egyptian regions. Despite the varying degree of LA used in

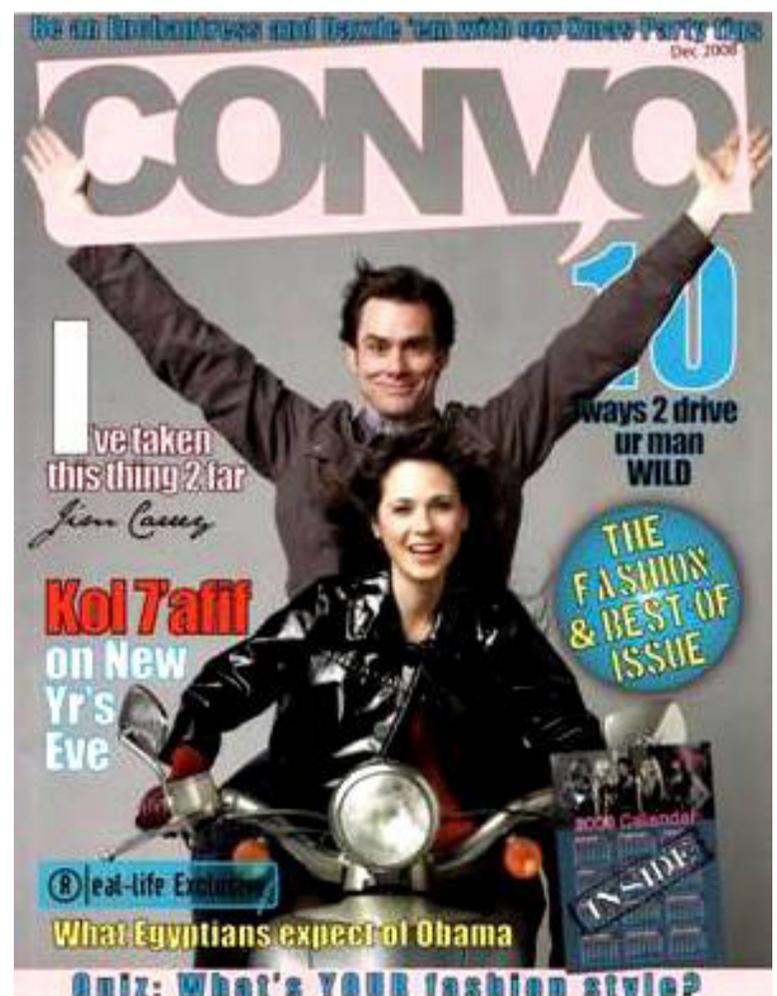


Figure 5. Cover of the December 2008 issue (no. 17) of *Convo* magazine

the magazines, English was the dominant base language of all four magazines. With the exception of *Teen Stuff*, which was established in 1996, the magazines in this study appear to have emerged in the context of the recent boom in English publishing industry. *Convo* was the latest arrival on the market among the magazines in this study. The idea behind the publication was to create a magazine that used “internet-chatting style language”, and in that sense, the magazine’s family considered themselves market innovators. As the magazine cover in Figure 5 shows, this approach did not only entail the use of LA but also word play using symbols, emoticons, abbreviations and non-standard spelling – as is common in Internet-chat.

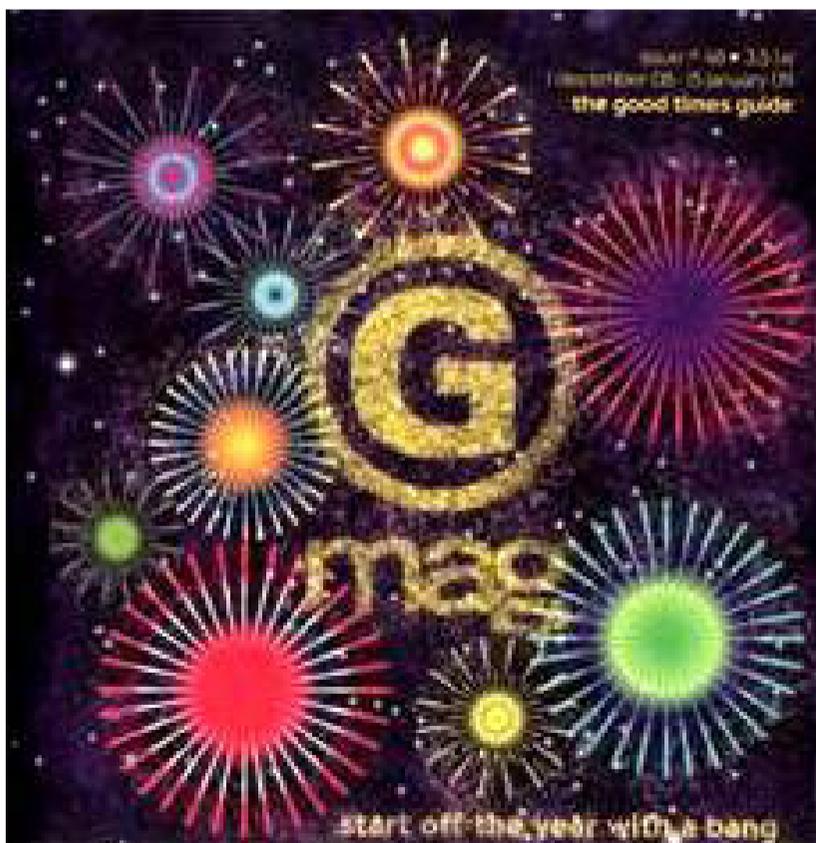
*Convo* targeted youth and young adults (17 to 35 year-olds), who belonged to the A+ to B social classes. Their audience included university students, young employees and married people. According to the assistant editor, Rania Hussein, they bridged the gap between magazines for teenagers and grownups, catering for a niche that had

been neglected. LA was an integral part of the magazine’s identity and its “fun and easy” language since its inception, and this original use of language in the magazine received positive feedback from the beginning. Hussein noted that this was in part owing to the launching campaign which featured celebrities and VIP clients praising the magazine’s unique style. Not surprisingly, most of the letters and feedback that the magazine received contained LA.

LA was not restricted to any one section of *Convo*, but could rather be seen scattered in bits and chunks throughout the magazine. According to Hussein, LA was ideal for when the writer wanted to say something in Arabic which is not readily translatable into English. When asked if LA could be replaced by Arabic in Arabic script (AA), Hussein said ‘no’ adamantly: “But what would be special about the magazine then?” She added that the magazine may as well become an Arabic magazine if it started using AA. This response is interesting in that it has two subtle implications. It suggests that LA is not Arabic, and it implies that

the magazine identified itself primarily as English (and not Arabic).

Hussein noted that there was great variation in contributors' use of LA, and that the spelling of LA words might be modified in the editing process. With regard to quantity, editors would only interfere if the whole article were written in LA. Some measures were also taken to standardize consonant representation. For in-



**Figure 5. Cover of the 1 December 2008 to 15 January 2009 issue (no. 48) of G-Mag**

stance, 5 is changed to 7' (representing the sound /x/), "because it is less confusing". Other changes were made, according to Hussein, so that the words 'look better', or so the words would not be mistaken for English words. This includes changing 'kh' to 7' and 'gh' to 3'. This justification is important as it suggests that the numerals in LA serve an aesthetic function, as well as act as a marker of Arabic words. *G-Mag* was the first magazine to use LA regularly in print. It is part of Core Publications, a publishing company which started out with an English magazine *Campus* in the 1990's. Then came *G-Mag* in 2003, followed a few years later by an Arabic magazine *E7na* which uses Egyptian Arabic in Arabic script.<sup>54</sup> *G-Mag's* price (L.E. 3.5) is proportional to its compact size. It is a pocket magazine which serves as a guide to dining and events around Egypt and provides reviews of newly released films and books. It also contains jokes and light, humorous pieces usually containing specific references to aspects of Egyptian life or culture. The corporate definition of the

age of *G-Mag*'s target audience is 9 to 99. However, a closer look at the magazine's content suggests a readership in the 15 – 30 age range. As readers are expected to have at least some basic understanding of English, the magazine is generally targeted at those in the A and B social classes.

Junior editor, Eddie Zidan, described the writing style of *G-Mag* as that of one friend talking to another, telling them where to go and what movies to watch. He described the language of the magazine as “witty, humorous, everyday language, with no big words”. If he had to put a language label on the language they used, he said it would be something like “Franco-Arab: Primarily English with a bunch of Arabic words thrown in”.<sup>55</sup> Zidan highlighted the positive attitude towards the magazine's style of writing among its loyal readership. He also mentioned the very positive response that the magazine had when it first started. Most of the feedback and contributions that the magazine received from readers contained LA. According to Zidan, LA was inserted in the text “to give it a local feel”.

He explained that there were some things which simply could not be translated, particularly words referring to the local culture, which, if translated, would no longer conjure the same image in the readers' minds. Although LA had been a distinctive part of *G-Mag*'s identity since its inception, Zidan concedes: *I'm pretty sure that no one actually sat down and thought, well, we're going to do this. It's actually a matter of, we're talking to people, so we're just going to write exactly the way we talk ... and the way we talk, is that sometimes we do use Arabic in the middle of English. And you see that everywhere – this whole idea of Franco-Arab – where mumkin a'ul kilmitein bil 'arabi [I might say a couple of words in Arabic] and then suddenly switch back to English and it's totally fine.*

When asked, why he says that they switch from English to Arabic when, as Arabic speakers, it might make more sense to say the opposite, Zidan explains, “this is an English magazine in the end. It's not an Arabic magazine.” This highlights how the magazine regarded itself primarily as an

English publication. It also points to the manner in which the magazine attempted to simulate the speech of its target audience. On the question of using AA, Zidan felt that it would stand out too much, adding that the different script and script direction would be odd-looking and off-putting to the reader. As part of the editing process, the editors would go over the LA content to make sure it is readable. Sometimes, this involved adding vowels to make sure that consonants are separated by vowels where necessary. Also, 2 (denoting the /ʔ/ sound), would be omitted if it occurred in an initial position in a word, “since the letter ‘a’ does the job,” explained Zidan. In general, only the numbers 2, 3 and 7 were used to denote Arabic consonants. Numbers such as 6 and 9 were never used, and the sounds /ɣ/ and /x/ were denoted as ‘gh’ and ‘kh’ respectively (rather than 3’ and 7’ or 5). As an advertising-based magazine, *Live* was the only magazine in this study which was distributed for free. It was also the only magazine with an online edition (although *Teen Stuff* did make some old-

er archived articles available online). *Live* was geared towards people aged 18-32 and belonging to the A and B+ classes who are well-educated English speakers. *Live*’s executive manager, May El-Naggar, narrowed the audience down further to young English-speaking Egyptians with a particular interest in art and culture. These are people who have dual cultural sensitivity in that “they are bilingual as well as bi-cultural”. However, El-Naggar was careful not to exclude the expatriate community of English speakers living in Egypt from the magazine’s target audience. She identified *Live* as an English magazine, but one based in Cairo, which she felt was an integral part of its identity. El-Naggar described the magazine’s writing style as humorous, daring and personal, and mentioned the influence of blogging journalism on the magazine’s style. She described the language as neither formal nor informal, with lax spelling restrictions. She explained that the magazine went through a series of experimentation phases with the language it used, and that LA was one of the things

they experimented with. The initial motivation behind using LA was to get closer to the way that a segment of the magazine's target audience speaks. However, this implied alienating another segment of the audience, which, however small, "is still readership". This gradually changed the magazine's approach to LA which featured much less in the magazine's later issues. El-Naggar noted that the only readers who complained they could not understand LA content were in their forties or fifties, well above the target age of the magazine. Having said that, she pointed out that the overwhelming majority of the feedback they receive from readers included LA. According to El-Naggar, the manner in which contributors used LA was characterized by randomness and inconsistency: sometimes they would use numbers, and sometimes they would use letters to denote the same sounds. "The writers are confused," El-Naggar remarked, "which confuses me as an editor". El-Naggar explained that she had started editing such contributions to moderate the use of LA. Her in-

terventions would depend on the content: first, she would attempt to remove the LA and replace it with an English translation, if she felt that the content would suffer, she would then remove all the numbers and replace them with English characters (converting LA to CLA) followed by an English translation in brackets, so that the text became accessible to non-speakers of Arabic. However, El-Naggar explained that sometimes she had no choice but to keep the numbers in LA. Examples included quoting segments from chat conversations, or reviewing a film whose title appeared in LA on billboards. The content was always the determining factor: If I cannot present an English alternative to an Arabic word, then I write it in Arabic using Latin characters but without the numerals which would result in narrowing down my readership; and then it's up to the reader to research the word ... I will keep it [LA] only when I feel that it will affect the meaning if I take it out. So, it is just to serve the content, and not the other way round; the content won't promote this

kind of language. *Live* had no clear guidelines for editing LA, but the sounds /y/ and /x/ were denoted as ‘gh’ and ‘kh’ respectively, while 3 and 7 were still occasionally used for /ʕ/ and /ħ/ respectively. Her plan for the future was to develop a style book to regulate the magazine’s use of LA. She mentioned that she referred to the Associated Press style book with regard to the English content, and that she would like to have a similar point of reference for LA. In general, she planned to use Arabic only when absolutely necessary in the future, but she added: *That is not to say I will not use Latinized Arabic in the form of English letters. I would. Definitely. We are an English magazine released in Cairo. This is how we speak. We insert some Arabic words in the middle of our speech, even when we’re speaking English.* El-Naggar did not rule out the possibility of using AA instead of LA either, saying that it might provide an interesting visual experience that she is not opposed to as an editor so long as it is there to serve the content. However, she conceded that the different

script would bring up design and typesetting issues, making proof-reading more difficult and time-consuming. When asked if this would not put off readers who do not speak Arabic, she responded, “Well, I’m sure that the 3 and the 5 would put them off just as much”. *Teen Stuff* was the oldest of the magazines in this study, which may explain the fact that it was also the magazine with the largest circulation and widest fan base. This is emphasized on the magazine’s cover (see Figure 7) with the sentence “Egypt’s best-selling English magazine” which appears below the title. The use of the word ‘English’ on the magazine cover already implies a claimed identity. *Teen Stuff* is based on the slogan “from teens to teens”, alluding to the fact that the contributors are teenagers who write for teenagers like themselves. It also has a sister magazine, *Kelmetna*, also directed to Egyptian teenagers, but written in Standard Arabic and some Egyptian Arabic in Arabic script. *Teen Stuff*’s content is a combination of contributions sent by readers and material prepared by in-house teenage ‘staff’. Most

of these in-house writers fell between the 16-19 age-range despite the magazine's aim to attract a wider age range of 13-21. This is the same as the age-range of the magazine's target audience who belong to the A and B social classes; mainly English-educated school and university students.

*Teen Stuff*'s chairperson, Manal El-Mahdy, described the magazine's language as "light English"; "English that is not sophisticated at all". *Teen Stuff* did not use LA at all when it first appeared on the market. In fact, it was not until very recently that the magazine started using LA. El-Mahdy is not sure when exactly this happened, but says that the trend grew in the last two years. She explained that it started rather spontaneously with LA appearing in feedback mail and in contributions by readers. "I am not in favor of it, but I can't help it," she said, "personally, I would like to stick with English."

In readers' feedback, which abounded in LA, readers would sometimes use LA to write expressions that they did not know

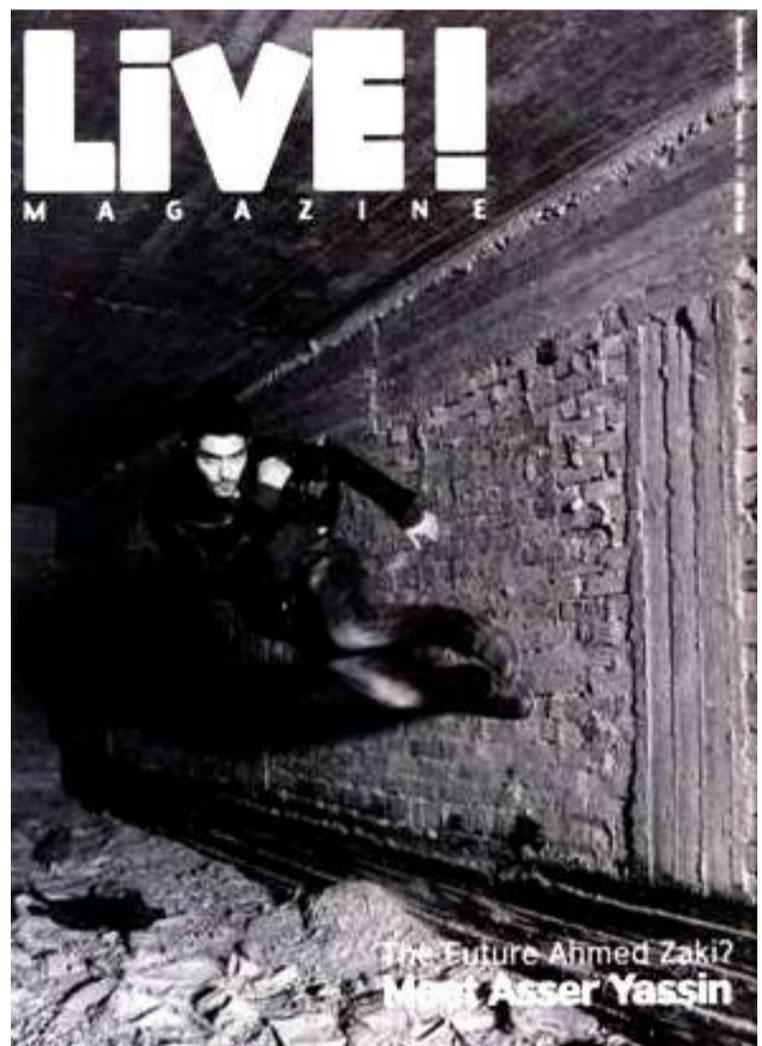
how to translate into English. On the other hand, writers would typically use LA in articles where there was a funny quote in Egyptian Arabic that would only "click" with the mainly Egyptian readership if it remained in Arabic, whereas "English would kill the joke", according to content supervisor Omneya Ragaie.

LA was mainly used for its comic effect and because it made it easier for the Egyptian reader to relate to some content. This explains why most of the articles containing LA were found in the "Fankesh" section of the magazine (a section for jokes and comic pieces). Commenting on the possibility of replacing LA with AA, Ragaie said that it would look odd because of the different script – "it would not suit the magazine because it is an English magazine." She added that AA would only be used in "very rare and very obvious" occurrences such as in a book review or a coverage of an event where the picture of the book or the logo of the event is in Arabic script, and in these cases the AA becomes an image rather than text. Measures taken by the magazine con-

tent supervisors Omneya Ragaie and Mai Hany to moderate LA use included limiting LA content. This entailed excluding articles with too much LA since, as Hany points out, “it [Teen Stuff] is still mainly an English magazine.” While the content supervisors were less explicit about the type of amendments that they might make to the spelling of LA words, they said that they would generally modify the spelling slightly (e.g. by adding vowels) if this made the word easier to read, especially if a misreading could alter the meaning of the word. Their criterion was that, if they find a word too difficult to read, then the readers probably would too. They also mentioned that LA words would sometimes be flagged by inserting them between inverted commas.

### Discussion

The importance of LA to the magazines interviewed in this study varied according to the identity that the magazine claimed for itself. This is illustrated in Table 3 which summarizes the responses of the four



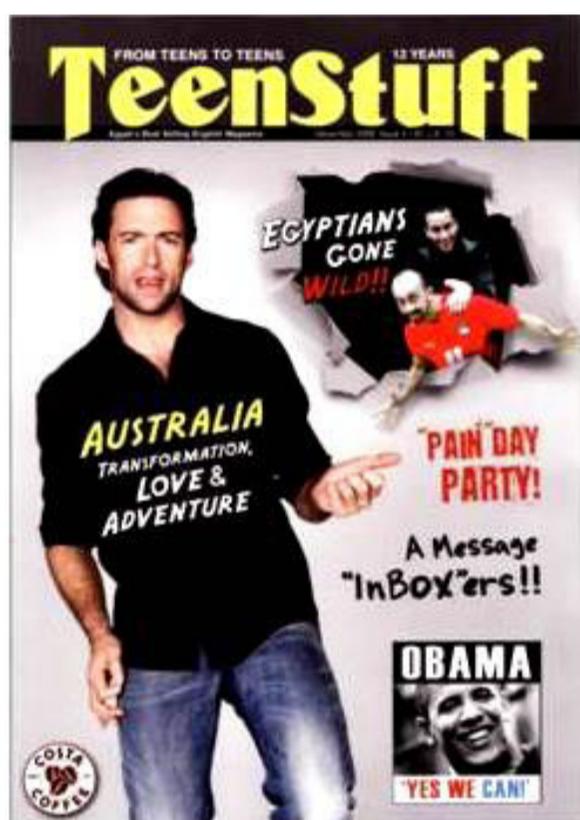
*Figure 6. Cover of the November 2008 issue (no. 28) of Live Magazine*

magazines to the final question in the interview: If the magazine were to stop using LA, which of the following – if any – would be likely to happen?

As Table 3 indicates, for *Convo* and *G-Mag*, LA was an indispensable part of the magazine identity despite the fact that they still classed themselves as mainly English. For

each of these two magazines, LA was part of the magazine's appeal, and it contributed to its uniqueness. For *Live* and *Teen Stuff* on the other hand, the use of LA was not indispensable. This was clearly associated with these two magazines' consciousness of a need to conform to their self-description as English publications. May El-Naggar of *Live* magazine says, "If I am standing out because I use 3 and 7 then I have a big problem – as a magazine; as a publication. If that's all that's going on for me, then we have a serious issue to address." This serious issue would be the clash between the magazine's claimed identity and attaching excessive importance to LA. The responses in Table 3 also indicate that the main motive for using LA was the fact that it facilitated the expression of references to the local culture. On the other hand, magazines were less sure about the importance of LA to their readers. For *Teen Stuff*, it was readers' feedback and contributions which first introduced LA to the magazine, and so, the editors felt that it is possible that some readers might object if the mag-

azine were to stop using LA. Eddie Zidan of *G-Mag* was not sure that the readers were as conscious of the presence of LA as we might assume, and thought that they might not immediately notice if it disappeared. He offered an example to make his point: *If they stop putting sesame seeds on the bread buns in fast food, you will probably eat it the first couple of times without noticing. But then the fourth time you'll wonder: where did the sesame seeds go?* The four magazines in this study started using LA within the last decade. They were also all staffed by young writers and geared towards young readers. These similarities all suggest a trend in the growing popularity and acceptability of LA. However, the discrepancies in the measures adopted by the four magazines in this study to regulate LA suggest that there is a long way yet towards an agreed 'standard' for LA. For instance, while *Live* and *G-Mag* favored the CLA variants 'gh' and 'kh' for the sounds /ɣ/ and /x/ respectively, *Convo* uses 3' and 7 'for the same sounds. Indeed, the examples from billboards and graffiti are no



**Figure 7. Cover of the December 2008 issue (no. 130) of Teen Stuff Magazine**

more consistent. An interesting observation is that, with the exception of *Live*, the magazine editors did not seem to be conscious of the steps they are taking to regulate LA use. When asked about how they regulated LA use, their responses always pertained to quantity rather than quality. It was only when they were asked how they represented specific LA variants that they admitted to a set of ad hoc guidelines. It was clear that the four

magazines were still negotiating their way into a set of rules for editing LA specifically, which may explain conflicts between the editing guidelines that some of the editors cited in the interviews and actual instances of LA use which were found in their respective magazines. Despite the differences in the specific age ranges of the target audiences of the four magazines, there is still a significant overlap; that is, young, English-educated Egyptians of the more advantaged social classes. This is consistent with Schaub's<sup>56</sup> description of the group to whom English is of the most interest, and with Haeri's<sup>57</sup> group to whom foreign languages have the greatest symbolic and commercial value. This group also happens to be the fastest growing group of Internet users in the Arab world.<sup>58</sup> Palfreyman and Al Khalil<sup>59</sup> indicate that it is this younger generation among whom the use of LA is most popular. It is perhaps no surprise then that May El-Naggar remarks that LA is used by the advertising industry to send the message: *We are young. We are trendy. The movie is cool. The ad is cool.*

*Buy our product. Watch our movie... It's a selling mechanism. You are trying to appeal to a younger audience, and this is part of your strategy: using their language.* This statement suggests that it is not just English which has symbolic and commercial value in Egypt, but also LA. Indeed, combining the two appears to maximize their value. This also explains the reluctance of some of the interviewees to attribute the same value to AA: because LA uses the Latin script like English, it becomes more like English than Arabic, making it easy to forget that LA is still Arabic.

## **Conclusion**

LA continues to grow in popularity and acceptability in Egypt, and its spread to print magazines is one manifestation of this. The popularity of LA among the younger generation appears to be an important motive behind its growing use, particularly among businesses which capitalize on LA's appeal to the youth market. Like English, LA has become a commodity that has symbolic and commercial power, and

their value appears to be maximized when combined. The magazines in this study use LA to make it easier to refer to objects or concepts in the local culture, but more importantly, they use it in order to speak the language that their audience speaks. Even where the magazine also caters to a non-Arabic speaking audience, it is difficult to ignore the audience of young Egyptians to whom LA has clear appeal. Here, striking a balance becomes a tricky issue. Despite the magazines' efforts to regulate the use of LA, the steps they have taken appear to be proceeding in different directions, suggesting that these attempts will remain, at least for the time being, isolated efforts which reflect the magazines' respective needs with no far-reaching implications.

## **Endnotes:**

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