


RESEARCH ARTICLE

Poetry for linguistic description: The Maldives inside and outside the Arabic cosmopolis in 1890

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Abstract

In 1890, the Maldivian judge and poet Sheikh Muhammad Jamaluddin connected poetry with linguistic description in two ways. First, when he described features of the Dhivehi language with the aid of Arabic linguistic theory, he used Dhivehi poetry as linguistic evidence for correct usage. Second, he authored Dhivehi-language poetry about Arabic linguistic theory. Cosmopolis scholarship relates a narrative of how the wide circulation of Sanskrit, Arabic, and/or Persian fostered a vast network of writers who authored texts in major vernacular languages like Bengali, Burmese, Javanese, Kannada, Khmer, Malay, Sinhala, Tamil, Telugu, Thai, Tibetan, Turkish, and Urdu. This scholarship suggests that authors living within a particular cosmopolis wrote in divergent vernacular languages yet were, in some sense, connected because they translated and responded creatively to the same widely circulated source texts written in Sanskrit, Arabic, and/or Persian. Yet in cosmopolis scholarship's effort to reveal understudied connections, various degrees of disconnection among writers of vernacular languages within a cosmopolis tend to be missed. One problem of overlooking disconnection among writers of vernacular languages is that readers could mistakenly conflate superculture-subculture interaction with intercultural interaction. In this article, I argue that Dhivehi-language poetry and linguistic description was inside the Arabic cosmopolis but simultaneously outside, because in *circa* 1890 non-Maldivians in the Arabic cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia could not even read the Thaana script of the Dhivehi language.

Keywords: Maldives; Dhivehi; Arabic cosmopolis; poetry; linguistic description

Introduction

In 1888 CE (1306 AH), Ibrahim Nooraddeen became the Sultan of the Maldives for the second time. In that year, he banished into exile the highest member of the

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judicial branch—the chief justice.¹ The chief justice was a Maldivian poet and scholar of Arabic. His full name was Shaykh Muḥammad Jamāluddīn ibn an-Nā'ibu 'Īsa al-Mulakī (circa 1844–1907). Maldivians commonly refer to him as 'Naibu Thuhthu', which will be used henceforth in this article.² *Naibu* means 'judge'. *Thuhthu* is a term of endearment that literally means 'little'.³ For the next three years in exile, Naibu Thuhthu was forced to reside on the northern island of Fehendhoo, located on Southern Maalhosmadulu (Baa) Atoll.

Exiled in Fehendhoo, Naibu Thuhthu devoted himself to scholarly and artistic pursuits that intertwined the description of language with the composition of poetry.⁴ Over the years Naibu Thuhthu spent in Fehendhoo, the year 1890 was particularly productive. In that year, he wrote one of the earliest linguistic descriptions of the Dhivehi language.⁵ In 1930, Athireegey Ahmed

¹ The specific reason for exile remains unknown to the author.

² In this article, footnotes cite his name as 'S. M. Jamālluddīn' and subsequently as 'Jamālluddīn'.

³ In this article, Dhivehi words are transliterated according to the official Dhivehi romanization system known as Dhivehi Latin or Malé Latin. On the Dhivehi romanization system, see A. Gnanadesikan, *Dhivehi: the language of the Maldives* (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2017), pp. 26–34.

⁴ Scholars in South Asian studies have documented similar projects that blurred the boundaries between poetics and linguistic description. On Sanskrit, see V. D'Avella, 'Creating the perfect language: Sanskrit grammarians, poetry, and the exegetical tradition', PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 2019. On Sanskrit and vernacular languages like Kannada, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil, and Sinhala, see S. Pollock, *The language of the gods in the world of men: Sanskrit, culture, and power in pre-modern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 162–188, 363–379 and 380–406. In contrast to the abovementioned languages, Pollock notes 'The single most arresting fact about developments in the north is that no grammaticization whatsoever was produced: none of the languages of Place—Assamese, Bangla, Gujarati, the varieties of Madhyadeshiya—had a written grammar until the colonial period'. See Pollock, *The language of the gods*, pp. 399–400. As Pollock suggests, this topic needs further exploration.

⁵ The Dhivehi language (also known as 'Maldivian') is the official language of the Maldives. It is a member of the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family. Dhivehi and the Sinhala language of Sri Lanka are the only Indo-Aryan languages south of the Dravidian language belt of South India. The geographical separation from other Indo-Aryan languages prompted the linguist Colin Masica to describe Dhivehi and Sinhala as 'non-contiguous' Indo-Aryan languages. See C. Masica, *The Indo-Aryan languages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 22. For a linguistic comparison between Dhivehi and Sinhala, see J. B. Disanayake, *Encyclopaedia of Sinhala language and culture* (Colombo: Sumitha Publishers, 2012), pp. 677–718. For a lucid and thorough grammar of the Dhivehi language, see Gnanadesikan, *Dhivehi*. For Dhivehi-language sources on the Dhivehi language, see M. Amin, *Dhivehibas: Dharivarunje, eheetheriyaa, evvana bai* [The Dhivehi Language: A Helper for Children, Part 1] (Malé: Golden Bookshop, 1948); M. Maafaiykaleygefaanu, *Dhivehibahuge ranthari* [The Golden Star of the Dhivehi Language] (Malé: Novelty Printers and Publishers, 1957); M. Jameel, *Dhivehibahuge qavaai'dhu fiyavalhu—1* [The Rules of the Dhivehi Language: Step 1] (Malé: Novelty Printers and Publishers, 1969); M. Jameel, *Dhivehibahuge qavaai'dhu fiyavalhu—2* [The Rules of the Dhivehi Language: Step 2] (Malé: Novelty Printers and Publishers, 1970); M. Jameel, *Dhivehibahuge qavaai'dhu fiyavalhu—3* [The Rules of the Dhivehi Language: Step 3] (Malé: Novelty Printers and Publishers, 1971); and A. Ahmad, *Kueshehneydhivehibahun vaahakadhakkaasheve adhi liyaasheve* [Speak and Write Dhivehi without Errors] (Malé: Novelty Printers and Publishers, 1970). For English-language sources on the Dhivehi language, see M. Zuhair, *Practical Dhivehi* (Malé: Novelty Printers and Publishers, 1991); B. Cain and M. Waheed, *A beginning course in Dhivehi* (Malé: publisher unknown, 1994); H. A. Maniku, *A concise etymological vocabulary of Dhivehi language* (Colombo: The Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka, 2000); B. D. Cain and J. W. Gair, *Dhivehi (Maldivian)* (Munich: Lincom Europa, 2000); S. Fritz, *The Dhivehi*

Dhoshimeynaa Kilegefaan printed the study through a printing press in the Maldives known as the Maṭbā'a al-Amīrī al-Maḥaldībī.⁶ The title of the essay was 'Thaana Liumuge Qawā'id' (The Manner of Writing Thaana, 1890).⁷ In 'Thaana Liumuge Qawā'id', Naibu Thuhthu described facets of the Dhivehi language, made linguistic prescriptions, and used Dhivehi poetry as evidence of correct usage.

While in Fehendhoo in 1890 Naibu Thuhthu also fashioned a Dhivehi poem with the Arabic title, 'Taqwīm al-Lisān' (Correct Language).⁸ It presented grammatical concepts of Arabic linguistic theory, and it stressed that poets and readers needed to understand these Arabic concepts to write and comprehend Dhivehi poetry. In order to write this poem Naibu Thuhthu seems to have studied Arabic linguistic theory either directly from or via commentaries on a widely circulated thirteenth-century grammar of the Arabic language written by Ibn Ājurrūm (d. 1223) entitled *al-Ājurrūmīyya*.

The title of this article—'Poetry for Linguistic Description'—thus has two connotations. First, it refers to Naibu Thuhthu's use of poetry as source material for linguistic description and, second, to Naibu Thuhthu's utilization of linguistic description as a topic for poetry.

Inside and outside the Arabic cosmopolis

Why should the readers of *Modern Asian Studies* care about the Dhivehi-language poetry and linguistic description in the two abovementioned sources? I suggest two reasons: the first is that the analysis of Naibu Thuhthu's poetic references to the thirteenth-century grammar of the Arabic language, *al-Ājurrūmīyya*, enriches discussion in Asian studies regarding the cultivation of erudition in the Indian Ocean through the study of Arabic.

language: a descriptive and historical grammar of Maldivian and its dialects (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2002); C. Reynolds, *A Maldivian dictionary* (London and New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003); J. Gippert, 'An outline of the history of Maldivian writing', in *Grammatica et verba, glamor and verve: studies in South Asian historical, and Indo-European linguistics in honor of Hans Henrich Hock*, (eds) S. F. Chen and B. Slade (Ann Arbor, MI: Beech Stave Press, 2013), pp. 81–98.

⁶ I thank Abdul Ghafoor Abdul Raheem for explaining this to me. A. G. A. Raheem, 'Mi arabi bathhakee kobaithoa?', *Arabi Bas Jagaha* Facebook forum, 6 February 2020.

⁷ S. M. Jamālluddīn, *Thaana liumuge qawā'id* (Malé, Maldives: Maṭbā'a al-Amīrī al-Maḥaldībī, 1930 [AH 1350]), available at <http://www.hassanhameed.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/nai-buthuththu1.pdf>, [accessed 31 January 2022]. I thank Dr Hassan Hameed for digitizing and making 'Thaana liumuge qawā'id' available on his website. On Thaana, the Dhivehi-language script, see M. W. S. De Silva, 'The phonological efficiency of the Maldivian writing system', *Anthropological Linguistics*, vol. 11, no. 7, 1969, pp. 199–208; Gippert, 'An outline of the history of Maldivian writing', pp. 81–98; A. Gnanadesikan, 'Maldivian thaana, Japanese kana, and the representation of moras in writing', *Writing Systems Research*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2012, pp. 91–102; and N. Mohamed, *Divehi writing systems* (Malé, Maldives: National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research, 1999), pp. 7–10, 31–41. In this article, Arabic words are transliterated according to the IJMES Transliteration System for Arabic, Persian, and Turkish.

⁸ S. M. Jamālluddīn, 'Taqwīm al-Lisān', printed in H. Salahuddin, *Shaikhzubairu* (Malé, Maldives: Dhivehi Bahaai Thaarikhah Khidhumaiykuraa Qamee Marukazu, 1999 [1943]), pp. 194–205.

'The study of Arabic was the beginning of all wisdom', noted the Dutch philologist of Javanese and Malay G. W. J. Drewes in 1970 with regard to Indonesia.⁹ Drewes conducted archival research at the National Library of Indonesia and the Leiden University Library to understand which Arabic grammars were studied by Javanese and Malay speakers between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although he did not attempt to historicize the usage of certain Arabic grammars, he did ultimately single out the grammar *al-Ājurrūmiyya*, along with another thirteenth-century grammar of Arabic entitled *Alfiyya* by Ibn Mālik al-Ṭa'ī (d. 1274), as the two 'most widely spread works on [Arabic] grammar [in Indonesia]'.¹⁰

One must note here that *al-Ājurrūmiyya* and *Alfiyya* not only circulated from the Middle East eastwards to Indonesia, they were also in high demand as far west as Islamic West Africa. Bruce Hall and Charles C. Stewart examined copies of Arabic manuscripts that appeared in the largest numbers of representative libraries from the Atlantic to northern Nigeria to determine the Arabic texts that were used heavily in Islamic West Africa. They singled out *al-Ājurrūmiyya* and *Alfiyya* as 'the two most widely used works of syntax in West Africa'.¹¹

References to the *al-Ājurrūmiyya* in the Maldives in Naibu Thuhtu's 1890 Dhivehi-language poem not only demonstrates that Arabic grammars and commentaries on these grammars were as important for the cultivation of wisdom in the Maldives as in Indonesia and West Africa, they also serve as a reminder of the Maldives' role as an Indian Oceanic link connecting the Middle East with Southeast Asia. A. C. S. Peacock explored how in the 1500s and 1600s one chief factor to bolster the Maldivian link between the Middle East and Southeast Asia were Sufi networks, which were marked not by an openness to diversity but rather by an attempt to 'impose unity over diversity'.¹² Peacock analysed excerpts in Ḥasan Tāj al-Dīn's Arabic-language history of the Maldives in which Tāj al-Dīn described the travels and impact of Sufi shaykh Sayyid Muḥammad Shams al-Dīn. Born in Syria, Shams al-Dīn came under the direction of the descendants of the founder of the Sufi Qādiriyya order (*ṭariqa*), 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī. He later studied at the centre for Arabic learning, al-Azhar, in Cairo. Shams al-Dīn travelled to Yemen, the Coromandel coast of India, and then arrived in Aceh, Sumatra, where was royally received by Acehese elites. There, according to Tāj al-Dīn, Shams al-Dīn began to successfully forbid cultural practices that he deemed anti-*shari'a*. In 1686, he sailed to Malé, where he

⁹ G. W. J. Drewes, 'The study of Arabic grammar in Indonesia', in *Acta orientalia Neerlandica: Proceedings of the Congress of the Dutch Oriental Society*, (ed.) P. W. Pestman (Leiden: Brill, 1971), p. 63.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ B. S. Hall and C. C. Stewart, 'The historic "core curriculum" and the book market in Islamic West Africa', in *The trans-Saharan book trade: manuscript culture, Arabic literacy and intellectual history in Muslim Africa*, (eds) G. Krätli and G. Lydon (Leiden: Brill, 2011), p. 121.

¹² A. C. S. Peacock, 'Sufi cosmopolitanism in the seventeenth-century Indian Ocean: *shari'a*, lineage and royal power in Southeast Asia and the Maldives', in *Challenging cosmopolitanism: coercion, mobility, and displacement in Islamic Asia*, (eds) J. Gedacht and R. M. Feener (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), p. 55. On the advent of Islam in the Maldives, see R. M. Feener, 'Maldives', in *The encyclopaedia of Islam: three*, (eds) K. Fleet, G. Krämer, D. Matringe, J. Nawas and E. Rowson (Leiden: Brill 2021), pp. 89–93.

was warmly received by the Maldivian Sultan Ibrāhīm Iskandar, and again was encouraged to enforce a stricter adherence to Islamic law and a rejection of local customs. It appears that both the Acehnese nobles and the Maldivian sultan sought to legitimate their authority by encouraging Shams al-Dīn to make *sharī'a*-based religious proscriptions.

In the case of Naibu Thuhthu's two forms of 'poetry for linguistic description', the large process that comes to the fore is not Sufic Islamization in the Indian Ocean but rather the circulation of Arabic language and literature in the region. This brings me to the second reason why readers of *Modern Asian Studies* might take note of Naibu Thuhthu's Dhivehi-language poetry and linguistic description: these sources can provide new perspectives on vernacular languages and literatures within what Sheldon Pollock described as the 'Sanskrit cosmopolis', what Ronit Ricci termed the 'Arabic cosmopolis', and what Richard Eaton designated as the 'Persian cosmopolis'.¹³

Pollock coined the term 'cosmopolis' to refer to the Sanskrit language's supra-regional ('cosmo') spread across South and Southeast Asia between 400 and 1400, its prominent political dimension ('-polis'), and the primary role of this particular language in influencing expressive culture in South and Southeast Asia.¹⁴ Ricci analysed how one Arabic-language text, the *Book of One Thousand Questions*, was translated into Javanese, Tamil, and Malay.¹⁵ In response to Pollock, she coined the term 'Arabic cosmopolis' and defined it as 'a translocal Islamic sphere constituted and defined by language, literature, and religion'.¹⁶ Richard Eaton introduced the term 'Persian cosmopolis' to refer to the transregional spread of the Persian language, as well as Persian ideas, values, and aesthetic sensibility between 900 and 1900 via texts like dictionaries and poems as well as material culture.¹⁷

¹³ Pollock, *The language of the gods*, p. 12; Ronit Ricci, *Islam translated: literature, conversion, and the Arabic cosmopolis of south and southeast Asia* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 4; R. Eaton, 'The Persian cosmopolis (900–1900) and the Sanskrit cosmopolis (400–1400)', in *The Persianate world: rethinking a shared space*, (eds) A. Amanat and A. Ashraf (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019), pp. 63–83.

¹⁴ Pollock, *The language of the gods*, p. 12.

¹⁵ See Ricci, *Islam translated*, Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

¹⁶ Ricci, *Islam translated*, p. 4. One noteworthy difference between the monographs of Pollock and Ricci is that Pollock focuses more on source texts, while Ricci focuses more on target texts. Ricci does not devote attention to source texts written in the cosmopolitan language of Arabic. She examined how Tamil, Javanese, and Malay writers translated Arabic into their respective target languages. It was ambitious to study how one Arabic text became translated in three vernacular languages. In contrast, Pollock devoted less attention to vernaculars. He wrote six chapters in which he explored source texts from the Sanskrit-language cosmopolis in the first millennium. Then he turned to the second millennium, which he called the 'vernacular millennium', to analyse the rise of Sanskrit-influenced vernacular literature. The vernacular language to which Pollock devoted the most attention was Kannada in Chapter 9.

¹⁷ Eaton, 'The Persian cosmopolis', p. 64. On the Persian cosmopolis, see R. Gould, 'The geographies of 'Ajām: the circulation of Persian poetry from South Asia to the Caucasus', *The Medieval History Journal*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 87–119; on Kashmir's entanglement with the Sanskrit and Persian cosmopolis, see S. Ogura, 'In this corner of the entangled cosmopolises: political legitimacies in the multilingual society of sultanate and early Mughal Kashmir', *Journal of Persianate Studies*, vol. 12, 2019, pp. 237–260.

The 'cosmopolis scholarship' of Pollock, Ricci, and Eaton tells a narrative about how the wide circulation of Sanskrit and Arabic throughout South and Southeast Asia, and Persian literature throughout West, Central, and South Asia fostered a commensurably vast network of writers who, under the influence of Sanskrit, Arabic, and/or Persian, authored texts in major vernacular languages like Bengali, Burmese, Javanese, Kannada, Khmer, Malay, Sinhala, Tamil, Telugu, Thai, and Tibetan. This scholarship suggests that authors living within the Sanskrit, Arabic, or Persian cosmopolis wrote in divergent vernacular languages, but nonetheless were connected in some sense because they translated and responded creatively to Sanskrit, Arabic, and/or Persian literary forms.

Ricci, for example, suggested that 'as the cross-regional use of untranslated Arabic terms [in Javanese, Tamil, and Malay translations] gave rise to a shared religious vocabulary, so the use of a common script across cultural and geographical distance contributed to the consolidation of an orthographically unified community'.¹⁸ Similarly Pollock emphasized that Sanskrit forms of knowledge connected literati throughout South and Southeast Asia:

Just as the *kāvya*s were studied everywhere throughout this domain, so were the texts of literary art (*alankāraśāstra*), metrics, lexicography, and related knowledge systems. Not only did these texts circulate throughout the cosmopolis with something like the status of precious cultural commodities; they came to provide a general framework within which a whole range of vernacular literary practices could be theorized ...The vernacular intellectuals of southern India, Thailand, Cambodia, Java, and Bali took in Sanskrit metrics in a gulp, as they did Sanskrit lexicography.¹⁹

When one reads these statements by Pollock and Ricci one may begin to feel that writers who lived across vast distances in Asia became 'connected' through their mutual contact with cosmopolitan languages of Sanskrit or Arabic. Yet in cosmopolis scholars' effort to reveal understudied connections, they tend to overlook various degrees of disconnection among writers of vernacular languages within a cosmopolis. One problem of overlooking disconnection among writers of vernacular languages is that readers could mistakenly conflate superculture-subculture interaction with intercultural interaction.²⁰

Allow me to first discuss superculture-subculture interaction before I turn to the issue of intercultural interaction. At the level of superculture-subculture interaction, one could persuasively argue, as Ricci has done, that the Muslim speakers of Tamil, Javanese, and Malay were, in Ricci's words, an 'orthographically unified community' due to their shared entanglement with the overarching dominant system of Arabic. In Drewes' article 'The Study of Arabic Grammar in Indonesia', he described how Malay and Javanese scholars often

¹⁸ Ricci, *Islam translated*, p. 170.

¹⁹ Pollock, *The language of the gods*, p. 163.

²⁰ The topic of intercultural interaction or 'vernacular interaction' has tended to be overlooked in cosmopolis studies. On 'superculture', 'subculture', and 'interculture', see M. Slobin, 'Micromusics of the West: a comparative approach', *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 36, no. 1, 1992, pp. 1–87.

left Arabic technical terms untranslated in commentaries on and translations of Arabic texts and, over time, such terminology became integrated into the lexicons of Malay and Javanese.²¹ Ricci, for example, noted how a key feature in Malay-language texts of *One Thousand Questions* is the frequent use of Arabic in lexicons, citations from the Quran, and conventional phrases of praise.²²

Similarly, in the Maldives, Naibu Thuhthu wrote primarily in the Dhivehi script Thaana, but when he required a more technical term for linguistic description, he selected terms that he knew from his study of Arabic. Naibu Thuhthu had studied Arabic with teachers in the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Saudi Arabia.²³ To give the reader a sense of Naibu Thuhthu's usage of Arabic, Table 1 lists 11 Arabic terms Naibu Thuhthu wrote in the Arabic script for his description of the Dhivehi language in *Thaana Liumuge Qawā'id*.²⁴

It is possible to broadly conceive of this issue through the lens of 'digraphia',²⁵ which refers to 'the employment of two (or more) writing systems to represent varieties of a single language'.²⁶ One finds digraphia even in the title of his linguistic description—*Thaana Liumuge Qawā'id* (The Manner of Writing Thaana) (see Figure 1).²⁷ Note how Naibu Thuhthu employed two Dhivehi-language terms: *Thaana* (ތާނަ) is the name of the script used for the Dhivehi language and *liumuge* (ލިއުމުޅެ) literally means 'of writing'. The third term, *qawā'id* (قواعد) (lit. 'rules') is Arabic, and it appeared in the Arabic script.

Naibu Thuhthu had cultivated his knowledge of Arabic with Arabic teachers in the Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Arabia.²⁸ Indeed, it is highly likely that his very impulse to utilize Dhivehi poetry as source material for the linguistic description of the Dhivehi language stemmed from his familiarity with the approach of Arabic grammarians from the first to the seventh centuries who, in Michael Zwettler's words, attached 'primary importance to the evidential value of

²¹ Drewes, 'The study of Arabic grammar in Indonesia', p. 63.

²² Ricci, *Islam translated*, p. 131.

²³ Dhivehi Bahaai Thaareekhah Khidhmaiy Kuraa Qaumeer Marukazu, *Dhivehi adheebun 1* (Malé, Maldives: Dhivehi Bahaai Thaareekhah Khidhmaiy Kuraa Qaumeer Marukazu, 1993), p. 14.

²⁴ Thanks to Abdul Ghafoor Abdul Raheem and Ibrahim Shareef Ibrahim for help translating many of these terms.

²⁵ In the Maldives, the production of texts with digraphia is less common today because of the widespread use of dotted Thaana, which consists of 14 dotted Thaana letters added to accommodate 14 Arabic-language sounds not found in Dhivehi. In Dhivehi, dotted Thaana is called *thiki jehi thaana*. It was introduced in the 1950s. Yet it only became standard around the end of the twentieth century.

²⁶ I. Dale, 'Digraphia', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, no. 26, 1980, p. 6. Dale distinguished two forms of digraphia: diachronic digraphia, the historical transition from one script to another; and synchronic digraphia, the simultaneous use of two writing systems. I focus on the latter. But students of the Maldives could also examine diachronic digraphia: Thaana was created either in the 1500s or the 1600s, replacing the older writing system, which in its twelfth- and thirteenth-century form is known today as *Eveyla akuru*, and its fourteenth- and fifteenth-century form is referred to as *Dhivehi akuru* (sometimes spelled *Dhives akuru*).

²⁷ The Maritime Asia Heritage Survey has digitally documented digraphic manuscripts from the Maldives that employed Thaana/Arabic or Dhivehi Akuru/Arabic. These manuscripts can be accessed here <https://maritimeasiaheritage.cseas.kyoto-u.ac.jp/manuscript-viewer/>, [accessed 14 February 2022].

²⁸ Markazu, *Dhivehi adheebun 1*, p. 14.

Table 1. Arabic terms found in Naibu Thuhthu's *Thaana Liumuge Qawā'id* (1890).

Transliteration	Arabic	Meaning
'alāmāt	علامات	case markers
ism	إسم	name
fi'l amr	فعل أمر	imperative verb
lafz	لفظ	utterance
m'ana	معنى	meaning
māḍi	ماضي	past tense
muta'addi	متعدّي	transitive verb
qawā'id	قواعد	rules
tanwīn	تنوين	nunation
zarf makān	ظرف مكان	adverb of place
zarf zamān	ظرف زمان	adverb of time

Figure 1. Digraphia in the title of Naibu Thuhthu's 1890 essay.



poetry for determining “correct” usage’.²⁹ Likewise, it is distinctly possible that Naibu Thuhthu’s idea to compose poetry about Arabic grammatical categories stemmed from his familiarity with Arabic grammarians who wrote their grammars through the medium of verse, such as the widely circulated Arabic long poem in *rajaz* meter entitled *Mulḥat al-i'rāb fī al-naḥw* composed by Al-Ḥarīrī of Basra (1054–1122).³⁰

However, at the level of intercultural interaction among writers of vernacular languages the situation in the Arabic cosmopolis may have been marked with unacknowledged forms of isolation. For example, one could argue that the Tamil translators of *One Thousand Questions* were disconnected from the Malay/Javanese translators of the same text because in the 1700s, when individuals were creating Malay-language and Javanese-language translations of this text, they had no knowledge of Vaṅṅapparimalapḥluluvar’s Tamil language *One Thousand Questions*, which he authored in the 1500s.³¹

²⁹ M. Zwettler, *The oral tradition of classical Arabic poetry: its character and implications* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978), p. 172.

³⁰ Hall and Stewart have noted that Al-Ḥarīrī’s *Mulḥat al-i'rāb fī al-naḥw* was in demand in Islamic West Africa’s book trade. See Hall and Stewart, “The historic “core curriculum””, p. 122.

³¹ That is not to say that Tamils and Malays did not interact in other contexts. Ricci has explored Malay manuscripts from nineteenth-century Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) in which Malay is

I am not suggesting that there was no intercultural interaction. For example, scholars have noted that Javanese and Malay authors, translators, and scribes are likely to have engaged in dialogue in some ways. Because the Prophet's son-in-law Ali is regularly featured in Javanese-language texts of *One Thousand Questions*, G. F. Pijper argued that the mention of Ali in a Malay *One Thousand Questions* meant that this work was based on a Javanese text.³² Pijper found further evidence for Javanese-Malay interaction in the way the name of the Jewish scholar in a Malay *One Thousand Questions* was written: the name was 'Samud ibnu/ibni Salam' or simply as 'Samud', which followed Javanese practice.³³ E. Wieringa further argued that the Malay text's orthographic features pointed to Javanese origins.³⁴ Ricci noted how the Palembang Sultanate in eastern Sumatra was a 'meeting place for Malay and Javanese cultures'.³⁵ She further notes that the sultanate's library holds both Malay and Javanese manuscripts, and that Javanese was the official court language.³⁶

Regarding the Maldives, it is important to note that at the level of intercultural interaction, no written documents exist to suggest that in *circa* 1890 Malays, Javanese, Tamils, and other ethnicities within the Arabic cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia could even read the Thaana script of the Dhivehi language. If the vast universe of non-Maldivians in the Arabic cosmopolis of South Asia and Southeast Asia could not read the Dhivehi script, then one begins to feel differently about Ricci's notion of an 'orthographically unified community'.³⁷

I would thus like to suggest here that the emphasis on connection in research in cosmopolis studies must at least be tempered with the acknowledgment of contemporaneous types of isolation and disconnection among vernacular languages and literatures. In this article, I characterize the relationship between the Maldives and the Arabic cosmopolis as a 'disconnected connection'. I argue that Dhivehi-language poetry and linguistic description were not only 'inside' the Arabic cosmopolis because it was influenced by Arabic texts, but 'outside' as well because non-Maldivians living within the Arabic cosmopolis could not even read Naibu Thuhtu's two forms of poetry for linguistic description.

accompanied by Arabu-Tamil (*arwi*) and even sections in Tamil script because in Ceylon, Malay- and Tamil-speaking Muslims interacted through 'intermarriage, business endeavours, residence in adjoining or shared neighbourhoods, prayer in the same mosques and the use of Tamil for everyday pursuits by native speakers of both Malay and Tamil'. See R. Ricci, *Banishment and belonging: exile and diaspora in Sarandib, Lanka and Ceylon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 30.

³² Ricci, *Islam translated*, p. 132; G. F. Pijper, *Het boek der duizend vragen* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1924).

³³ Ricci, *Islam translated*, p. 132; Pijper, *Het boek der duizend vragen*, p. 69.

³⁴ Ricci, *Islam translated*, pp. 133–134. See E. Wieringa, 'Dotting the dal and penetrating the letters: the Javanese origin of the *Syair seribu masalah* and its Bantene spelling', *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-, ed Volkenkunde*, vol. 159, no. 4, 2003, pp. 499–518.

³⁵ Ricci, *Islam translated*, p. 133.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 170. It must be noted that some Maldivians did write Dhivehi in modified Arabic script. This is known in Dhivehi as '*hedhi akuru*'. I thank an anonymous reviewer of this article for making this point. Research must be conducted to learn about the extent to which writings in '*hedhi akuru*' reached people in the Arabic cosmopolis outside of the Maldives.

To my knowledge, between 1841 and 1901 the only non-Maldivians who had a basic knowledge of Dhivehi were a handful of Western civil servants, missionaries, and Orientalists. What these men did was either compile a list of words based on speech or collect documents and ask a Maldivian to assist them in a word-for-word translation. There is no evidence to suggest that these men could fluently read or converse in Dhivehi. For example, in 1841 the Scottish missionary Reverend John Wilson published a vocabulary of Dhivehi terms that was originally compiled by W. Christopher, a British lieutenant of the Royal Indian Navy, who had visited the Maldives in 1834. In 1878, a British civil servant named Albert Gray published another vocabulary based on the lexicon originally compiled by French navigator François Pyrard de Laval when de Laval lived in the Maldives between 1602 and 1607. In 1883, the archaeological commissioner for Ceylon H. C. P. Bell discussed the Dhivehi language in his monograph *The Maldive Islands: An Account of the Physical Features, Climate, History, Inhabitants, Productions, and Trade*. Finally, between 1900 and 1902 the German Orientalist, Wilhelm Geiger, published etymological studies of Dhivehi.³⁸

Having explained what I mean by ‘outside’ the Arabic cosmopolis, I now devote the rest of the article to exploring how the two aforementioned texts written in 1890 by Naibu Thuhtu were inside the Arabic cosmopolis. Before I proceed, one explanatory note is in order. Although this article focuses on the writings of Naibu Thuhtu’s ‘poetry for linguistic description’, readers should not assume that his fusion of poetry and linguistics was an anomaly in the Maldives. Two intellectuals of the next generation approached verse and linguistics in similar ways. In 1928, Naibu Thuhtu’s arguably most influential student Hussein Salahuddin (1881–1942) completed a new linguistic study of the Dhivehi language. He bestowed on the study the Arabic title *al-Tuhfat al-Adabiyyatu li-Tullāb il-Lughat il-Mahaldībiyyati* (The Literary Gift for Students of the Maldivian Language).³⁹ In this study, Salahuddin, like his teacher Naibu Thuhtu, used Dhivehi poetry as part of his linguistic corpus.⁴⁰ Then in 1936, the Maldivian scholar Sheikh Ibrahim Rushdee al-Azharee (d. 1961) published a linguistic description of Dhivehi entitled *Sullam al-Ārib fi Qawā'id Lughati al-Mahaldību* (The Ladder for the Intelligent Student for Learning the Grammar of the Maldivian Language).⁴¹ In this study, Sheikh Ibrahim followed

³⁸ See J. Wilson, ‘Vocabulary of the Maldivian language, compiled by Liet. W. Christopher, I.N.’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1841, pp. 42–76; A. Gray, ‘The Maldive Islands with a vocabulary taken from Francois Pyrard de Laval, 1602–1607’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 10, 1878, pp. 173–209; H. C. P. Bell, *The Maldive Islands: an account of the physical features, climate, history, inhabitants, productions, and trade* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2004 [1883]); W. Geiger, *Māldivische studien I, III* (Munich: Akaemie der Wissenschaften, 1900–1902); W. Geiger, ‘Māldivische studien II’, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen morgenländischen gesellschaft*, vol. 55, no. 3, 1901, pp. 371–387; and W. Geiger, ‘Etymological vocabulary of the Maldivian language’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, Oct. 1902, pp. 909–938.

³⁹ See H. Salahuddin’s *al-tuhfat ul-adabiyyatu li-tullāb il-lughat il-mahaldībiyyati* (1928) reprinted in *Dhivehi adheebunge dhuvasvee liyuvvunthah 22* (Malé: Novelty Printers and Publishers, 2008).

⁴⁰ See *Dhivehi adheebunge dhuvasvee liyuvvunthah 22*, p. 37.

⁴¹ See S. I. R. al-Azharee’s *Sullam al-ārib fi qawā'id lughati al-mahaldību* (1936) reprinted in *Dhivehi adheebunge dhuvasvee liyuvvunthah 23* (Malé: Novelty Printers and Publishers, 2008). I thank Abdul

in the footsteps of Naibu Thuhthu and Salahuddin: he too used Dhivehi poetry to make observations about Dhivehi grammar.⁴² Finally, in 1946, Salahuddin, like his teacher Naibu Thuhthu, published a poem entitled ‘Bas’ (Language), which discussed grammatical concepts within the framework of poetry.⁴³

Poetry for linguistic description I

Poetry for the linguistic description of a vowel

The first reason why Naibu Thuhthu analysed Dhivehi poetry in his essay *Thaana Liumuge Qawā'id* was to substantiate linguistic prescriptions pertaining to the proper use of a vowel known in Dhivehi as *aibai-fili*. To become oriented with the vowels of the Dhivehi language, consider Tables 2, 3, and 4. They depict the Thaana letters for the short vowels (see Table 2), long vowels (see Table 3), and vowel sounds created through the combination of two vowels, that is, diphthongs (see Table 4). In each table, the second column provides the Dhivehi-language name of each letter, and the third column lists each letter's International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbol.

Consider the final vowel listed, the *aibai-fili*. Note that it is a diphthong because it is a sound created through the combination of two vowels. Note too that because *aibai-fili* is written with the combination of two letters we can consider it a ‘digraph’. Specifically, the letter ޯ (<a>) combines with the letter ޱ (<i>) to produce the digraph of ޱޯ (Thaana is written from right to left like Arabic). Further, and most importantly, due to Dhivehi dialects, this letter is pronounced in three ways. In Malé, the capital of the Maldives, the vowel is usually pronounced as <æ:~>. In the north, it is pronounced as <a:~>. In the southern islands *aibai-fili* pronounced as <ai>.⁴⁴

When Naibu Thuhthu discussed the *aibai-fili* vowel he articulated both implicit and explicit mindsets about the Dhivehi language. Linguistic anthropologists call such mindsets ‘language ideologies’, that is, ideas and attitudes people express about language.⁴⁵ Regarding the implicit idea, to convey the

Ghafoor Abdul Raheem and Ali Shareef Ibrahim for explaining to me the meaning of this title. A. G. A. Raheem and A. S. Ibrahim, ‘What is the proper way to transliterate this Arabic title?’, *Arabi Bas Jagaha* Facebook forum, 7 January 2020.

⁴² See *Dhivehi adheebunge dhuvasvee liyuvvunthah* 23, pp. 51, 54, 56.

⁴³ See H. Salahuddin, ‘Bas’, in *Lhenvereenge gulzaaruge 'nūrānē maa' 2*, (ed.) M. Amin (Malé: Novelty Printers and Publishers, 2017 [1946]), pp. 27–30. To my knowledge, prior to Naibu Thuhthu's *Thaana Liumuge Qawā'id*, the only extant work of Dhivehi-language linguistic description is the first Dhivehi-Dhivehi dictionary, authored around 1769 by a minister named Ali Hakuraathakurufaanu, who worked for the court of the Maldivian Sultan Ghiyaaz'uddin. See *H'aa'jee Bandaarain as-sult'aan Muhammadhu Ghiyaaz'uddin Iskandharu Siree Kularanmani Keerithi Mahaarafunge fureyfu* (Malé, Maldives: Dhivehibahaai Thaareekhah Khidhumaiykuraa Qaumeer Marukazu, 2008). I thank Naajih Didi for introducing me to this text.

⁴⁴ Gnanadesikan, *Dhivehi*, p. 30. Thanks to Naajih Didi for explaining to me the ways in which *aibai-fili* is pronounced in Malé, Naifaru, Addu, and Maliku. Naajih Didi, personal communication, 24 October 2019.

⁴⁵ On language ideology, see L. M. Ahearn, *Living language: an introduction to linguistic anthropology* (West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2017; 2nd edn), pp. 23–25. Alan Rumsey originally used the phrase

Table 2. Short vowels.

Thaana	Name	IPA
ا	aba-fili	⟨a⟩
ي	ibi-fili	⟨i⟩
و	ubu-fili	⟨u⟩
ه	ebe-fili	⟨e⟩
و	obo-fili	⟨o⟩

Table 3. Long vowels.

Thaana	Name	IPA
اا	aabaa-fili	⟨aː⟩
يي	eebee-fili	⟨iː⟩
وو	ooboo-fili	⟨uː⟩
هه	eybey-fili	⟨eː⟩
وو	oaboa-fili	⟨oː⟩

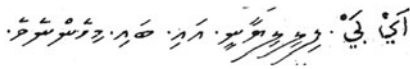
Table 4. Diphthongs.

Thaana	Name	IPA
او	aubau-fili	⟨au⟩
اي	aibai-fili	⟨ai⟩ ⟨æ⟩ ⟨aː⟩

linguistic sound of the vowel *aibai-fili* Naibu Thuhthu spelled ‘aibai-fili’ with Arabic letters—‘اَي، اِي’. One may conjecture that for Naibu Thuhthu the Arabic script was a more scientific code, like today’s IPA. In other words, it can be suggested that Naibu Thuhthu believed that the Arabic script could help him describe more empirically the linguistic sound of the vowel *aibai-fili*.⁴⁶

‘linguistic ideology’, and he defined it as ‘shared bodies of commonsense notions about the nature of language in the world’. See A. Rumsey, ‘Wording, meaning, and linguistic ideology’, *American Anthropologist*, vol. 92, no. 2, 1990, p. 346.

⁴⁶ Similar implicit language ideologies related to Arabic can be found in the linguistic descriptions of Naibu Thuhthu’s influential student, Hussein Salahuddin. In Salahuddin’s 1928 work *al-Tuhfat al-Adabiyatu li-Tullāb il-Lughat il-Mahaldībiyyati* (The Literary Gift for Students of the Maldivian Language), when he sought to systematically describe the system of Dhivehi speech sounds produced by each letter of Thaana he used Arabic letters to symbolize the linguistic sounds.



Transliteration: *aiy.baiy fili liyaanee ai.bai.*
 mihenneve.
 Translation: The vowel sound of *aibai-fili* is written
 [in Thaana] as *مِهْنِي*.

Figure 2. Jamälluddīn, *Thaana Liumuge Qawā'id*, p. 4.

Figure 2 is an image of the sentence where Naibu Thuhtu used Arabic to name the phonetic sound of *aibai-fili*. Next to the figure is a transliteration followed by a translation.

Naibu Thuhtu also articulated more explicit language ideologies. Maldivians, Naibu Thuhtu suggested, had become accustomed to pronouncing the *aibai-fili* vowel as a ‘long aa’—(a:).⁴⁷ He claimed that writing and speaking *aibai-fili* in this way was ‘unpleasant’, and he further suggested that ‘a person who knows the grammar of the Dhivehi language can write and speak without confusing these two vowels’.⁴⁸ In this sentence, when Naibu Thuhtu employed the word ‘grammar’ he not only selected the Arabic term *naḥw* but he also defined this term for his readers as: ‘the name given in the Arabic language to the ways of knowing the rules and principles of speaking in any language’.⁴⁹

Having discussed improper use of *aibai-fili*, Naibu Thuhtu set out to illustrate the proper usage. The source he selected for his linguistic prescription was a verse of poetry composed in a genre of Dhivehi sung poetry known as *raivaru*. Specifically, it was the fiftieth stanza from the Dhivehi poem entitled *Dhiyoage Raivaru* (The *Raivaru* of the Beautiful Woman, circa 1800), a long poem of 331 stanzas.⁵⁰ Figure 3 presents an image of the poem as it appeared

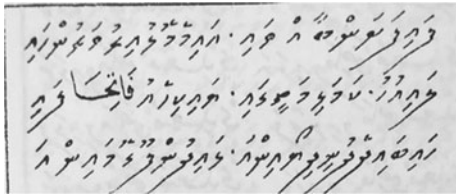
Interestingly, for speech sounds in Dhivehi not found in Arabic—like ⟨ḡ⟩ ⟨ṭ⟩ ⟨ṇ⟩ and ⟨ṣ⟩—Salahuddin slightly adjusted the Arabic letters. For example, the sound produced by the letter *shaviyani*—⟨ṣ⟩—is a relatively uncommon retroflex fricative. When Salahuddin sought to indicate this sound with an Arabic grapheme he placed a dot below the Arabic *rā'*. See Salahuddin, *Al-tuḥfat al-adabiyatu*, p. 6.

⁴⁷ Since northerners tend to pronounce the *aibai-fili* vowel as (a:) one can conjecture that Naibu Thuhtu was reacting against the northern accent.

⁴⁸ Jamälluddīn, *Thaana liumuge qawā'id*, p. 4: Mi buni gothah aibai fili kiyumugai kuree akuru dhamaialaa kiyeykamahttakai mizamaanugai dhivehi moshi ulhunumugai aibai fiyyaai aabaa fiyyaai olhigengos basthah huthurukoh kiyenee ves lienee ves madhukun nooney. Mi dhefili nuolhuvai liyenee ves kiyenee ves Dhivehi hahuge naḥū dhenegen vaa meehakasheve. I have translated the Dhivehi term ‘huthuru koh’ as ‘unpleasantly’. I thank Mohamed Haneef for his suggestion that I translate the term in this way. M. Haneef, ‘For this sentence, how would you translate “huthuru koh” to English?’, *Bas Jaqaha* Facebook forum, 10 January 2020.

⁴⁹ Jamälluddīn, *Thaana liumuge qawā'id*, p. 4: naḥū e ee konne bahesh ves moshi ulhumuge aṣlu-thakaai qawā'idu-thah dhenegathumuge goiythakah ‘arabi bahun kiyaa namekeve.

⁵⁰ The author of *Dhiyoage Raivaru* was named Ban'deyri Hasan Manikufaanu. He had fashioned the work while serving as the adviser to Sultan Mohammad Mueenudeen I. According to Hussein Salahuddin, Manikufaanu created the work after the sultan suggested that poets could more easily write about their personal experience than about fiction. Manikufaanu argued that it was easier to write fictional poetry. The sultan challenged him to create a work of poetic fiction in three months. Manikufaanu consequently composed *Dhiyoage Raivaru*. It tells a fictional tale of two royal sisters. The younger sister lives in Mozambique and the older sister lives in South India. They each construct a fleet of ships to go to battle to become the next ruler of Thailand. See



fai fashan baahvai. ai memolhu iruvarun hai
 lai uhu kamalhi matheegai. yai ki heu faathih'aa fai
 hai bai dhe dhuni dhiyoya in a. lhai dhun foo gomain a

Figure 3. Naibu Thuhtu's citation of the fiftieth verse from *Dhiyoage Raivaru*: Jamälluddīn, *Thaana Liumuge Qawā'id*, p. 5.

in *Thaana Liumuge Qawā'id*. To the right of the figure is a transliteration. Although the verse customarily appeared in continuous script (no spaces) I have transliterated it with spaces to indicate how Maldivian readers would automatically parse the intact words and scrambled syllables.

Naibu Thuhtu authored just one terse sentence to explain why this verse was significant for its proper usage of the *aibai-fili* vowel: “The words at the beginning and end of [lines 1 to 4] are recited with *aibai-fili*.”⁵¹ Further, Naibu Thuhtu did not unscramble the syllables of the verse for his readers. By the mid-twentieth century it had become common for scholars of *raivaru* to unscramble verses for their readers because the *raivaru* genre and its unique trait of syllable scrambling had fallen out of usage. Writing in 1890, Naibu Thuhtu must have assumed that his readers did not need an explanation of how the syllables in this verse should be unscrambled.

Why did he point out that the words at the beginning and end of lines 1 to 4 were recited with *aibai-fili*? To answer this question, one must first translate the stanza and understand the syllable scrambling involved. Table 5 organizes the verse as it would usually appear in print: a six-line stanza with each poetic foot comprising one line.⁵² The *aibai-fili* vowels are bolded in lines one to four. The verse portrays the younger sister from Mozambique (see footnote 50) and

A. Sadiq, *Ban'deyri H'asanmanikufaanuge dhiyoya lhen bahuruvain liyaa bahuruvayah* (Malé, Maldives: Dhivehibahaai Thaareekhah Khidmaiyruraa Qaume Marukazu, 2007), p. 15. The term *raivaru* refers to a genre of Dhivehi-language sung poetry composed in three- or six-line stanzas. Six-line stanzas have a fixed ‘moraic’ structure. Line 1 must be 10 moras; lines 2, 3, and 4 must be 12 moras each; line 5 must be 13 moras; and line 6 can be 11 or 12. The six-line stanzas must have an end-rhyme scheme of AAAABB and the poet also must create assonance through the repetition of the first vowel sound as well as the following vowel or consonant-vowel in all six lines. The lines are traditionally recited to fixed melodies (*raagu*). Finally, a unique feature of *raivaru* is syllable scrambling, known as *bas olhuvun*. On syllable scrambling and formal features of *raivaru*, see G. Field, ‘Scrambling syllables in sung poetry of the Maldives’, *Anthropological Linguistics*, vol. 61, no. 3, 2019.

⁵¹ Jamälluddīn, *Thaana liumuge qawā'id*, p. 5: Mi ee basthah fettumugai ves huttumugai ves aibai filen kiyaifai oiy lhemekeve.

⁵² Although the poem in Figure 3 may look like a tercet (three-line stanza), please note that it is a six-line stanza but printed with two poetic feet per line like this:

- Line 1. Line 2
- Line 3. Line 4
- Line 5. Line 6.

her entourage performing a keel laying ceremony to recognize the commencement of the construction of their fleet of ships.

Readers of the transliteration in Table 5 can see the *aibai-fili* vowels in bold at the beginning and end of lines one to four. This is precisely what Naibu Thuhthu was referring to when he wrote, ‘The words at the beginning and end of [lines 1 to 4] are recited with *aibai-fili*.’⁵³

Before considering why Naibu Thuhthu presented this verse of poetry in his essay about linguistic description, it will be instructive also to grasp the syllable scrambling involved. Allow me to explain one instance of syllable scrambling. Let us consider line 1. Figure 4 attempts to explain how the syllables of one word in line 1 were scrambled. The figure follows common practice in the discipline of phonology to represent the syllable with the lowercase Greek symbol sigma ‘σ’. Notice the superscript numerals next to the sigmas. The numerals indicate the order of syllables in the regular word. Thus, to unscramble the line, the listeners would have known that the first syllable in the line of poetry—*fai*—is really the final syllable in the conjunctive verb *baahvaifai* (having layed). The three commas (,,,) represent the three-syllable word *fashan* (keel), which appeared intact in the verse. I use these commas to abstractly represent the word *fashan* to focus the mind of the reader on the syllable scrambling.

It is clear that Naibu Thuhthu found it significant that the poet used the *aibai-fili* vowel at the beginning and end of lines 1 to 4. But what would have been the incorrect alternative? To answer this question, it will be instructive to read a commentary about this stanza written by scholar Abdulla Saadiq. Like Naibu Thuhthu, Saadiq highlighted the way in which the author of this stanza used *aibai-fili*:

Next I will present an example of how Manikufaanu, the author of *Dhiyoage Raivaru*, employed *aibai-fili*. Some teachers of Dhivehi say that if a word has adjacent *aibai-fili* vowels then one of the *aibai-fili* vowels should be made into an *aabaa-fili*...The good Hasan Ban’deyri Manikufaanu tells us [through his fiftieth verse] that *aibai-fili* [rather than *aabaa-fili*] should come in each place.⁵⁴

Saadiq discussed words that have ‘adjacent’ *aibai-fili* vowels. In Dhivehi, the class of verbs that regularly contains adjacent *aibai-fili* vowels are the conjunctive verbs, sometimes referred to as ‘converbs’, ‘absolutives’, or ‘conjunctive participles’. Conjunctive verbs are often translated into English as ‘having told’, ‘having eaten’, etc. because conjunctive verbs make explicit that the action of the conjunctive verb precedes the action of the main

⁵³ Jamālluddīn, *Thaana liumuge qawā'id*, p. 5: Mi ee basthah fettumugai ves huttumugai ves aibai fileen kiyaifai oiy lhemekeve.

⁵⁴ Sadiq, *Ban’deyri H’asanmanikufaanuge dhiyoo lhen bahuruvain liyaa bahuruvayah*, p. 17: Dhen aibaifileege misaaleh hushahalhailaanameve. Dhivehi bahuge baeh edhurun vidhaalhuvanee, jehijehigen dhe aibaifili athuvejjenama, eh aibaifili aabaafiyakah hadhaanajeheyne kamugaeve...Heyo Ban’deyri H’asan Manikufaanu vidhaalhuvanee, mi in konne thanehgaives onnaanvaanee aibaifiyyeh kamugaeve.

Table 5. Verse 50 in *Dhiyoage Raivaru* and translation.

Line	Transliteration	Translation
1	fai fashan baahvai	laying the keel
2	ai memolhu iruvarun hai	at all the auspicious times
3	lai uhu kamalhi matheegai	on the chopping block
4	yai ki heu faathih'aa fai	they said a prayer
5	hai bai dhe dhuni dhiyoa in a	and lit the ambergris incense
6	lhai dhun foo gomain a	in the presence of the great Dhiyoa

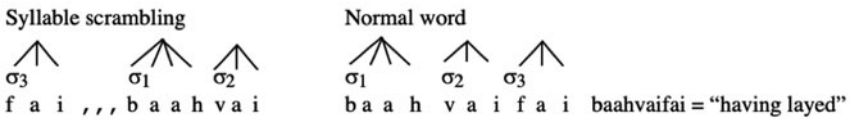


Figure 4. Diagram illustrating the use of syllable scrambling and the normal word in verse 50, line 1 of *Dhiyoage Raivaru*.

verb.⁵⁵ For the purpose of this article one must understand the concept of the conjunctive verb because two of these verbs appear in the fiftieth stanza: *baahvaifai* (having laid) and *kiyaiifai* (having recited). Consider how these words have adjacent *aibai-fili* vowels (bolded here): *baah**vai**fai* and *kiya**ai**fai* (having recited).

Saadiq then unscrambled the syllables and put the words of each line into normal syntax, which I have presented in Table 6 along with a translation.

Consider the unscrambled version of line 1. Notice specifically how the line changed when Saadiq unscrambled the syllables and placed the two words in normal syntax: from *fai fashan baavvai* to *fashan* (the keel) *baahvaifai* (having layed).

Having presented the unscrambled version of this stanza, Saadiq explained to his readers what the incorrect alternative would have been regarding the spelling of adjacent *aibai-fili* vowels. The incorrect alternative would have been to use *aabaa-fili*—(a:). As I explained, the letter *aibai-fili* can be pronounced in three ways. In Malé it is often pronounced as an *aabaa-fili*. This is precisely the spelling and pronunciation that Naibu Thuhthu described as ‘unpleasant’. Naibu Thuhthu in 1890 (and Saadiq in 2007) believed that the fiftieth verse of *Dhiyoage Raivaru* offered proof that the correct way to spell, and maybe speak too, was to employ two adjacent *aibai-fili* vowels rather than *aabaa-fili* vowels. To drive home this point Saadiq presented to the reader the rearranged verse as correct and incorrect prose. In the correct sentence he spelled with *aibai-fili*. In the incorrect sentence he spelled with *aabaa-fili*:

⁵⁵ See Gnanadesikan, *Dhivehi*, p. 219.

Table 6. The fiftieth stanza of *Dhiyoage Raivaru*, original, unscrambled, translated (adapted from Saadiq, *Ban'deyri H'asanmanikufaanuge Dhiyoo Lhen*, p. 17).

Line	Original wording	Unscrambled	Translation
1	fai fashan baavvai	fashan baahva ifai	laying the keel
2	ai memolhu iruvarun hai	aihai molhu iruvarun	at the auspicious time
3	lai uhu kamalhi matheegai	uhulai kamalhi matheegai	on the chopblock
4	yai ki heu faathih'aa fai	heu faathihaa kiy aifai	they said a prayer
5	hai bai dhe dhuni dhiyoo in a	dhuniain haiba dhiyoo in'dhe	in the presence of the Dhiyoo
6	lhai dhun foo gomain a	gomain dhun alhaifoo	and lit the ambergris incense

Ban'deyri Hasan Manikufaanu has written, *aihai* molhu iruvarun fashan baahva**ifai** kamalhi matheegaa uhulai heyo faathih'aa kiy**aifai** dhuniyein haiba dhiyoo gomain dhun alhaifieve

Ban'deyri Hasan Manikufaanu did not write, *aihaa* molhu iruvarun, fashan bahva**aifai** kamalhi matheegai uhulai heyo faathihaa kiy**aafai**, etc.⁵⁶

Saadiq's point, I am convinced, is precisely what Naibu Thuhtu in 1890 sought to express when he wrote the sentence, 'The words at the beginning and end of [lines 1 to 4] are recited with *aibai-fili*.'⁵⁷ In the next sub-section I explore one more example of how Naibu Thuhtu utilized poetry for linguistic description in *Thaana Liumuge Qawā'id*.

Poetry for the linguistic description of a diacritic

The second reason why Naibu Thuhtu analysed Dhivehi poetry in his essay *Thaana Liumuge Qawā'id* was to authenticate his linguistic recommendations regarding the diacritic known as the *sukun*. 'Diacritic' means a sign written above or below a letter to indicate that the letter should be pronounced in a different way. The Dhivehi term *sukun* comes from the Arabic-language term *sukūn* (سُكُون). In both writing systems the *sukun* is a small mark in the shape of a circle which is placed on top of consonants that do not carry a vowel.

In Dhivehi words, the *sukun* appears only on syllable-final consonants, which are sometimes referred to in phonology as 'coda consonants'.⁵⁸ For example, consider the final bolded consonants in these hypothetical syllabic

⁵⁶ Saadiq, *Ban'deyri H'asanmanikufaanuge dhiyoo lhen*, p. 17.

⁵⁷ Jamālluddīn, *Thaana liumuge qawā'id*, p. 5: Mi ee bathhah fettumugai ves huttumugai ves aibai fileen kiyafai oi y lHEMEKEVE.

⁵⁸ In loanwords the *sukun* can appear at the syllable's onset, nucleus, or coda. See Gnanadesikan, *Dhivehi*, pp. 30, 32.

structures in which ‘V’ means vowel and ‘C’ means consonant—VC, CVC, CVVC, and VCC. In Dhivehi, the final bolded consonants would be letters marked with a *sukun*.

The Dhivehi *sukun*, however, is a more complex phenomenon for three reasons, which I introduce now but explore in more detail below. First, there are restrictions on the number of letters that can carry *sukun*. Maldivians thus learn acronyms to remember the letters that can carry the *sukun*. Second, the *sukun* is a more complex phenomenon due to the way it is used to spell doubled consonants. Third, when four letters follow the *sukun* it triggers nasalization. Maldivians learn a second acronym, explained below, to remember these four letters. Given these issues, it is no surprise that Naibu Thuhthu and later grammarians of Dhivehi sought to bring order to this thorny issue.

In *Thaana Liumuge Qawā'id*, Naibu Thuhthu began his discussion of the *sukun* with an explanation of the restrictions on letters that can carry the *sukun*: ‘In every dialect spoken north of the Huvadhu channel the *sukun* can be carried by four letters. These four letters are “uni thoshi” or “thoonu oshi”.’⁵⁹ Naibu Thuhthu’s linguistic description was space-contingent: the Huvadhu channel is the waterway that separates the northern and southern atolls, two regions that are home to major dialect differences.⁶⁰ The terms *uni thoshi* and *thoonu oshi* function as acronyms, but they do have literal meanings, which are albeit arbitrary.⁶¹

The terms *uni thoshi* and *thoonu oshi* were devices Maldivians memorized to remember the letters that the Dhivehi *sukun* could carry: the four letters of *u-ni-tho-shi* represented the four letters *abafili* (ا), *noonu* (ن), *thaa* (ث), and *shaviyani* (ش). Likewise, the four letters of *thoo-nu-o-shi* represented the same letters in a different order: *thaa* (ث), *noonu* (ن), *alifu* (ا), and *shaviyani* (ش). When these letters carry a *sukun*, the names of the letters are: *thaa sukun*, *noonu sukun*, *alifu sukun*, and *shaviyani sukun*.

Naibu Thuhthu’s thoughts on the *sukun* and his discussion of the *sukun* in poetry can be understood if one has knowledge of additional linguistic information, which I explain in the following paragraphs. Students of Dhivehi not only learn that the four letters *thaa* (ث), *noonu* (ن), *alifu* (ا), and *shaviyani* (ش) carry the *sukun*, they also learn that when these four letters carry the *sukun* there is an impact on two additional linguistic realms: spelling and pronunciation.

⁵⁹ Jamālluddīn, *Thaana liumuge qawā'id*, pp. 6–7: Huvadhuo kadun uthurugai moshi ulhey hai baheh liyunumugai sukun kuraanee hatharu akurasheve. E hatharu akurakee unithoshi ... [sic] nuvatha thoonuoshi mi eve. I thank Yanish Suveyb, Thirugey Beyyaa, Hassan Waheed, Ahmed Omar, Iyaz J. Naseem, and Mohamed Haneef for explaining this sentence to me. Y. Suveyb, T. Beyyaa, H. Waheed, A. Omar, I. J. Naseem and M. Haneef, ‘Mi jumla in’gireysi bahah genesdhevvaafaananthoa?’, *Bas Jagaha* Facebook forum, 17 January 2020.

⁶⁰ Standard Dhivehi (Dh. *rasmee bas*) comes from the dialect spoken in Malé. On dialect variation in Dhivehi, see S. Fritz, *The Dhivehi language: a descriptive and historical grammar of Maldivian and its dialects* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2002). On space-contingency in Sanskrit texts, including texts that dealt with linguistic description, see Pollock, *The language of the gods*, pp. 189–222.

⁶¹ The term ‘*uni thoshi*’ literally means the outer covering (*thoshi*) of a type of shrub called sea randa (*uni*). The term ‘*thoonu oshi*’ literally means a sharp (*thoonu*) part of the palm leaf where fronds are formed (*oshi*). I thank Raaif Rushdee for explaining these terms to me. Raaif Rushdee, ‘Mi jumla in’gireysi bahah genesdhevvaafaananthoa?’, *Bas Jagaha* Facebook forum, 17 January 2020.

Regarding spelling, Dhivehi linguist Amalia Gnanadesikan has noted that, 'Thaana orthography is unusual in having explicit markers of gemination rather than specifically doubling each letter (or leaving gemination unmarked) as most other scripts do.'⁶² 'Gemination' in phonetics refers to the phenomenon when consonants are doubled and pronounced for a longer period of time than a short consonant. Gnanadesikan is saying that when Dhivehi consonant are doubled (that is, 'dd', 'gg', 'bb', etc.), the particular consonant is not written twice (as I have done in the previous parentheses). Rather, there are only certain letters that can serve as the initial consonant of the double. That is what Gnanadesikan means by the term 'marker of gemination'.

What letters can serve as this marker of gemination? In Dhivehi, the letter that primarily serves as the marker of gemination is *alifu sukun* (آ). Thus, when one spells the standard word for 'father'—*bappa*—the first geminate consonant is not written with /p/—(پ+پ+و) but rather with *alifu sukun* (آ+پ+و).

However, the issue is more complex because in certain words two different letters can serve as the marker of gemination: *shaviyani sukun* and *noonu sukun*. For example, the geminate consonant in the word for 'eighth'—*avvāna*—is spelled not with *alifu sukun* but rather with the *shaviyani sukun* (ش+ش+و), and the geminate consonant in the word *emme* (all) should be spelled not with *alifu sukun* but rather with *noonu sukun* (ن+ن+و).⁶³

Given the Maldives' location within the Arabic cosmopolis and Naibu Thuhthu's training in Arabic, it should not surprise the reader that when Naibu Thuhthu described the behaviour of the geminating *sukun* he explained this phenomenon with a related concept in Arabic linguistic theory: the *tashdīd*. Naibu Thuhthu wrote, '... even when the four letters [*abafili* (ا), *noonu* (ن), *thaa* (ث), and *shaviyani* (ش)] carry a *sukun* one does not understand that it is a *sukun* because *shaviyani sukun* and *alifu sukun* are pronounced with *tashdīd*'.⁶⁴ *Tashdīd* refers to the placement of an Arabic diacritic known as the *shadda* (◌◌) on top of Arabic letters to indicate gemination of consonants. Naibu Thuhthu's point was that when a *sukun* is placed on *shaviyani sukun* or *alifu sukun*, the *shaviyani sukun* is not pronounced as 'sh' (ش) and the *alifu sukun* is not pronounced as (ʔ). Instead, both transform into the geminate consonant.

In addition to spelling, the *sukun* also has an impact on pronunciation. When the *alifu sukun* and *shaviyani sukun* appear at the end of a word they are both pronounced as a glottal stop (ʔ), which is the consonant created by release of the airstream when one closes the glottis (as in the sound of the term 'uh-' in 'uh-oh!'). In the Dhivehi Romanization system this glottal stop—whether it should be spelled with *alifu sukun* or *shaviyani sukun*—is supposed to be written as 'h'. Western scholars, as Gnanadesikan has described, have criticized the official Dhivehi Romanization system precisely because of this ambiguity: 'h' in the

⁶² Gnanadesikan, *Dhivehi*, p. 42.

⁶³ This linguistic data is drawn from Gnanadesikan, *Dhivehi*, p. 43, Table 3.8.

⁶⁴ Jamālluddīn, *Thaana liumuge qawā'id*, p. 7: E buni hatharu akurugai sukun kulhayas, sukunah kiyaairu neygeyneyey sukun kameh—shaviyane sukunaai alifu sukun kiyeynee tashdīd aa akuru kiyey gothasheve.

syllable-final position can represent either *alifu sukun* or *shaviyani sukun*.⁶⁵ Yet these scholars seem to have been unaware of a test Maldivians learn at a young age to identify whether the letter for the glottal stop should be *alifu sukun* or *shaviyani sukun*. Regarding this matter, Naibu Thuhtu wrote,

One knows to spell the glottal stop at the end of a word with a *sukun* on *shaviyani* rather than with *alifu sukun* by [a validation test that involves] changing the pronunciation from a glottal stop to a *shaviyani aba-fili*. If that word's meaning remains intact then the glottal stop should be spelled with *shaviyani sukun* rather than *alifu sukun*.⁶⁶

Naibu Thuhtu alluded to the fact that in the Maldives children are taught a method to identify whether the glottal stop at the end of Dhivehi words should be spelled with *shaviyani sukun* or *alifu sukun*. The test is to change the pronunciation from a glottal stop to a *shaviyani aba-fili* and see if the meaning is affected. If the meaning stays intact, then *shaviyani sukun* is correct. For example, consider the word '*geah*' (to the house). *Ge* means 'house' and *-ah* is the dative case and means 'to'. At the end of the word '*geah*' one hears the glottal stop. If one spells the final glottal stop with *shaviyani abafili*, then the word becomes *gea+sha*. *Geasha* like *geah* means 'to the house'. The reason that the meaning of '*geasha*' is the same as '*geah*' is because in some dialects of Dhivehi the *shaviyani sukun* appears as *shaviyani + aba-fili* for the dative case. Thus this exercise reveals that the glottal stop should be spelled with a *shaviyani sukun* and not with an *alifu sukun*.⁶⁷

As mentioned above, another reason the *sukun* is a complicated phenomenon is because when four letters follow the *sukun* it triggers nasalization. More specifically, if the letters *alifu*, *haa*, *noonu*, and *meemu* come after a letter that carries a *sukun* these letters add a nasalization to the glottal stop. To remember the four letters that trigger a nasalized sound Maldivians today learn the acronym 'a-haa-na-ma'.⁶⁸ Here the four initial letters of each syllable of *a-haa-na-ma* represent the four Thaana letters of *alifu*, *haa*, *noonu*, and *meemu*.⁶⁹ In 1890, Naibu Thuhtu referred to the rule with three different

⁶⁵ As Gnanadesikan has noted, linguist Leonid Kulikov suggested that the Dhivehi Romanization system has 'no scientific value'; anthropologist Clarence Maloney contended that it is 'misleading'; and linguist and lexicographer Christopher Reynolds argued that it 'suffer[s] from certain drawbacks'. See L. Kulikov, 'Christopher Reynolds: a Maldivian dictionary', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, vol. 67, no. 2, 2004, p. 250; C. Maloney, *People of the Maldives Islands* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1980), p. 96; and Reynolds, *A Maldivian dictionary*, p. vi.

⁶⁶ Jamālluddīn, *Thaana liumuge qawā'id*, p. 8: *shaviyaneegai sukun kuraanee shaviyani mathee thedhu fiyyah kiyaiyyas e liyevunu bas goas nuvaaney bas bahugaeve*.

⁶⁷ Thanks to Ahmed Omar, Ahmed Sharyf, and Mohamed Haneef for explaining this to me. A. Omar, A. Sharyf and M. Haneef, 'Thedhu filige maana akee kobaithoa?', *Bas Jagaha* Facebook forum, 12 November 2019.

⁶⁸ The term literally means 'if one listens'.

⁶⁹ In a personal communication linguist Amalia Gnanadesikan explained the particular nasalization produced in this situation: 'Before a vowel (*alifu*) or a *haa*, the sound [of the *alifu sukun* or *shaviyani sukun*] is a velar nasal. Before a *meemu* or a *noonu*, it is a *meemu* (labial nasal) or

mnemonic devices: ‘hoa-ma-i-n’ (lit. from Monday), ‘he-u-na-ma’ (lit. if good), and ‘u-haa-na-ma’ (lit. if happy).⁷⁰

Naibu Thuhthu again articulated a language ideology but this time regarding the correct pronunciation of the nasalization. His idea was similar to his earlier suggestion that the improper pronunciation of *aibai-fili* was unpleasant: Naibu Thuhthu regarded the correct pronunciation of nasalization as pleasant or appealing (Dh. *rivethi*): ‘If *alifu sukun* or *shaviyani sukun* are followed by the letters found in [acronyms like] “hoamain”, “heunama”, or “uhaanama” it is pleasant for the speaker to pronounce the *alifu sukun* or *shaviyani sukun* as though with a *noonu sukun* [nasalization].’⁷¹

For evidence of this pleasant phenomenon, Naibu Thuhthu again turned to the realm of verse. He presented another *raivaru* verse composed by Ban’deyri Hasan Manikufaanu. This time he cited the thirty-fourth verse from Manikufaanu’s long poem *Dhivehi Arumaadhu Raivaru* (Raivaru for the Maldivian Fleet of Ships). Naibu Thuhthu wrote, ‘In the words of the following three lines of poetry one thinks that the *alifu sukun* and *shaviyani sukun* sound like a *noonu sukun*.’⁷² Figure 5 below presents an image of the poem as it appeared in *Thaana Liumuge Qawā’id* alongside a transliteration.

Consider how Naibu Thuhthu annotated this verse. He used the Arabic numeral symbols 1 (1) and 2 (2) to mark the instances where nasalization should be produced. He placed the first two instances of the symbol 1 on top of the *shaviyani sukun*, which in the recitation of the verse should have been pronounced with nasalization because it is succeeded with a *meemu*. He placed the third instance of 1 on a *shaviyani sukun* that should have been pronounced with nasalization because it is succeeded with an *alifu*. Naibu Thuhthu placed the symbol 2 on an *alifu sukun* that should have been articulated with nasalization because it is followed with a *noonu*.⁷³

noonu (dental nasal) respectively, so as to result in a doubled/geminate nasal consonant. The process that produces this effect can be termed nasalization, as it is the process of a consonant becoming nasal’. Gnanadesikan, personal communication, 28 January 2020.

⁷⁰ Jamālluddīn, *Thaana liumuge qawā’id*, p. 9.

⁷¹ I thank Mohamed Haneef for explaining to me the meaning of this passage. Jamālluddīn, *Thaana liumuge qawā’id*, pp. 8–9: Shaviyaneegai thedhu fili hama vaa bas bunumugai, bas bunaa meehaayah sukun rivethi kamugai, shaviyaneegai sukun kulhayas nuvatha alifu sukun annaanvee thaakugai alifu sukun kulhayas bas bunairu noonu sukuneh hen heevaa gothah kiyeynee e dhe akuruge sukunah fahugai. ‘hoamain’ nuvatha ‘heunama’ nuvatha ‘uhaanama’ mi hatharu akurun akureh ai hidhakugaeve. M. Haneef, ‘Can “RIVETHI” mean “correct” or “appropriate”?’ *Bas Jagaha* Facebook forum, 24 January 2020.

⁷² Jamālluddīn, *Thaana liumuge qawā’id*, p. 9: shaviyane sukunaa alifu sukunaa adhi edhe akurugai, sukun vevifaima noonu sukun hen heevaaney gothah annaaney bas bahaai mithin goyi mi liyefai huri lhen lhemugai annaane eve.

⁷³ The words ‘mahmeehu viligilee vedhu/kah mikamagheh nuveyvaadho/shah arumaadhu athuvaadho’ should be unscrambled as ‘viligilee meehu vedhemah/vaadhogeh kamakah minuvey/arumaadhu dhoshah athuvai’. The meaning is ‘to offer gifts the people of Villingili/this is the truth/ came close to the fleet to offer gifts’. This analysis is based on a commentary by Yusuf Alifulhu as well as feedback at the *Bas Jagaha* Facebook forum. See Y. Alifulhu, *Ban’deyri H’asanmanikufaanu hehdhevi Dhivehi arumaadhu raivaruge dheyya* (Malé, Maldives: Dhivehi Bahaai Thaaereekah Khidhmaikyuraa Qaumeer Marukazu, 2003), p. 19. I thank Mohamed Haneef, Raafid Rushdee, Fath

conventions of the Maldivian genre of poetry known as *raivaru*.⁷⁷ He bestowed on the work the Arabic-language title, ‘*Taqwīm al-Lisān*’ (Correct Language). The purpose of the poem was to suggest that understanding core concepts in Arabic linguistic theory facilitated the craft and comprehension of Dhivehi poetry.

Naibu Thuhtu prefaced his poem with an epigraph which was a citation from a sixteenth-century Arabic text. The text’s author Sharaf ad-Din Yahya ibn Nūr al-Dīn (d. 1581) had written the text as part of an introduction to a widely circulated thirteenth-century grammar of the Arabic language, *al-Ājurrūmiyya*.

Nūr al-Dīn’s idea, which Naibu Thuhtu cited for his epigraph, can be translated in this way: ‘It is best to learn grammar first because without it speech will not be understood.’⁷⁸ As grammar imbued speech with meaning, ad-Dīn suggested, it was necessary to study grammar (*naḥū*) to truly understand speech (*kalām*). It is fitting that Nūr al-Dīn wrote this passage about speech for his introduction to the *al-Ājurrūmiyya* because its opening chapter offered a definition of speech from a grammatical point of view. I discuss this definition in more detail below.

In verse 1, Naibu Thuhtu evoked the idea of the epigraph. Consider verse 1 in translation:

Ponder and understand!
 I will perfectly explain:
 However pathetic,
 Words lacking grammatical rules
 Cannot be expressed
 By the human heart (v.1)⁷⁹

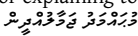
In line 1, Naibu Thuhtu used the imperatives ‘ponder’ and ‘understand’ to request the reader to focus on the forthcoming message. In line 2, he promised

⁷⁷ For a basic description of *raivaru*, see footnote 50. For an extended discussion of the poetics of *raivaru*, see Field, ‘Scrambling syllables’.

⁷⁸ Jamālluddīn, ‘*Taqwīm al-Lisān*’, p. 194: *an-naḥū awla awwalā an yu’lamā, idha al-kalām dūnahu lan yufhamā*. I thank Abdul Ghafoor Abdul Raheem for explaining to me the meaning of this phrase. A. G. A. Raheem, ‘Who is the author of this text?’, *Arabi Bas Jagaha* Facebook forum, 3 October 2019.

⁷⁹ Jamālluddīn, ‘*Taqwīm al-Lisān*’, p. 194. In the transliterations that follow, on the left-hand side below I provide a transliteration of the original wording, and on the right-hand side I have placed in brackets each line of verse 1 with the syllables unscrambled and the resultant words placed in normal syntax:

naashe visnegen tha dhe	[tha dhene visnaashe]
saariyasha ne fi buname ma dhe	[ma dhene fisaariyasha]
maa ekun hama viyas radhe	[ekun maa dhera viyas hama]
gaa hinu baheh nah’oo vadhe	[nah’oo nuvadhe hin’gaa baheh]
aadham ibunu thun rekun hi	[ibuni aadham hithun rekun]
laanu buneyshi dhulakun hi (v.1)	[dhulakun hilaa nubuneyshi]

Thanks to Shayadh Saeed, Mohamed Haneef, Raaif Rushdhee, and Siraj Mohamed for explaining to me the meaning of this stanza. S. Saeed, M. Haneef, R. Rushdhee, and S. Mohamed,  *Bas Jagaha* Facebook forum, 2 October 2019.

he would flawlessly convey the message. In lines 4–6, he echoed Nūr al-Dīn's emphasis on the importance of grammar. Specifically, Naibu Thuhtu suggested that it was impossible to utter a word that lacked the inflection of grammar.

While the meanings of lines 1, 2, and 4–6 are fairly closed for interpretation, the connotation in line 3 of the adjective 'pathetic' and this adjective's referent are open for interpretation. I translated line three as 'However pathetic'. The Dhivehi adjective here is *dhera* which denotes 'sad', 'pathetic', and 'inferior'.⁸⁰ It is possible that Naibu Thuhtu used the word *dhera* to connote 'uneducated'. If so, he may have been referring generally to all individuals everywhere or even to the specific reader of the poem. Accordingly, the connotation here could have been, 'however uneducated one is', 'however uneducated people are', or 'however uneducated you, the reader, are'.

There is, however, another way to interpret the referent of the adjective *dhera*. It is not improbable that Naibu Thuhtu used the word *dhera* as an adjective to sarcastically allude to how, from his perspective, Maldivians (or maybe his circle of Maldivian friends?) sometimes considered the Dhivehi language as 'inferior' or 'underdeveloped' in comparison to other languages. I suggest the possibility of this interpretation because of the way Naibu Thuhtu used the term *dhera* in *Thaana Liumuge Qawā'id*, which he authored in the same year as 'Taqwīm al-Lisān':

For any group, the language they speak and the letters they use to write are excellent for that group. However pathetic [*dhera*] the language is, the language spoken by the people is the most excellent language. It is said that the Dhivehi language is inferior [*dhera*] to Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, Tamil and many other languages.⁸¹

In light of this usage it would not be amiss to conjecture that one goal of Naibu Thuhtu's projects involving poetry for linguistic description was to 'raise the standards' of Dhivehi-language knowledge production.

As stated, one of the chief purposes of the poem 'Taqwīm al-Lisān' was to introduce grammatical concepts of Arabic linguistic theory and stress that poets must comprehend these concepts in order to write good poetry. Yet Naibu Thuhtu did not mention the topic of poetry in verse 1. Why would he begin a poem about grammar-and-poetry with a stanza about speech?

The logic of this action suggests that Naibu Thuhtu conceived of Dhivehi poetry, at least the genre in which he wrote—*raivaru*—to be quintessentially oral and aural (like speech), rather than written and visualized on a page. In fact, it is beyond question that *raivaru* was originally meant to be recited. For example, in *Thaana Liumuge Qawā'id* when Naibu Thuhtu introduced the topic of the Thaana letters that could carry the *sukun* he wrote, 'Currently it

⁸⁰ Thanks to Shayadh Saeed for explaining this to me.

⁸¹ Jamālluddīn. *Thaana liumuge qawā'id*, p. 2: Konme bayaku ves moshi ulhey bahakaai liye ulhey akureh e e e bayaku medhugai molhu ehchekeve. Kithamme dhera namaves ebahakun moshi ulhey meehunnah molhu vaanee ebahekeve. A'rabi, farisi, urudhu, thamalha adhi minoon ves ehe-nehen gina bas bahah vure mi Dhivehi bas maa dherame yey.

has become very rare for people to understand the letters onto which the *sukun* is added for writing, speaking, and the recitation of poetry.⁸² Note how Naibu Thuhtu did not write the ‘writing of poetry’ (*lhenbas liumugai*) but rather the ‘recitation of poetry’ (*lhenbas kiyai ulhunumugai*).⁸³

In verse 2 of ‘*Taqwīm al-Lisān*’ Naibu Thuhtu suggested that one needed to learn the rules of speech to comprehend and compose *raivaru*.⁸⁴

One has not learned much
 [Yet] believes that one understands.
 Without knowing the rules of speech
 Even though one thinks they understand
 One certainly cannot understand the real meaning of a poem
 Without untangling the knots of thick twine (v.2)⁸⁵

In this verse, Naibu Thuhtu constructed a metaphor of ‘untangling knots’ to portray the challenging process of decoding Dhivehi poetic language in *raivaru*.⁸⁶ It is possible that he meant this metaphor to refer specifically to the sometimes tough process of unscrambling syllables in *raivaru*. Lines of *raivaru* that involve multiple steps of unscrambling can be quite difficult to unravel, like the untangling of a difficult knot.⁸⁷ A literal translation of this unscrambled phrase would be something like ‘to untie without a knot being there’ (*nanuge gosheh nethi mehadhinun*).⁸⁸

⁸² Jamālluddīn, *Thaana liumuge qawā'id*, p. 2: Mizamaanugai thaana liumugayyaa basmoshi ulhunumugayyaa lhenbas kiyai ulhunumugai sukun araaney akuruthah vakikoh balai visnai ulhey meehun dhaadhmadhuveje eve.

⁸³ Consider too how he considered the recitation of poetry to be an additional linguistic category coexistent with the realms of writing and speaking.

⁸⁴ The word Naibu Thuhtu used to express the idea of ‘rule’ is ‘*qawā'idu*’. In the printed version that I studied, one finds this word spelled with the Thaana letters—*قواويد*—instead of Arabic. However, in the original manuscript Naibu Thuhtu must have spelled this word in Arabic letters. I say this because dotted Thaana—the 14 letters added to the Thaana alphabet in circa 1956 to accommodate sounds of Arabic letters—did not exist in 1890. The word he employed for ‘poem’ was not *raivaru* but rather the general term for poetry in Dhivehi: *lhen*.

⁸⁵ Jamālluddīn, ‘*Taqwīm al-Lisān*’, p. 194:

gene vinu u molhah maa	[maa molhah nu ugenevi]
fenevi hen hithu therah dhaa	[hithutherah fenevi dhaa hen]
dhenenu moshumuge i'dhuqavaa	[moshumuge gavaai'dhu nudhene]
hene hithai ulhunas thiyya	[thiyya hene hithai ulhunas]
me nethi ha dhinun gosheh nanuge	[nanuge gosheh nethi meha dhinun]
rene lhemu veyshi maana nuge	[lhemuge maana nunereveyshi]

Thanks to Mohamed Abdulla, Mohamed Haneef, Mohamed Musthaq, Ahmed Omar, Muneer Manikfaan, Fazloon Bin Muhammad, Ibrahim Sameer, Sariira A. Shareef, and Ahmed Shihan for explaining to me the meaning of this verse.

⁸⁶ There is a Dhivehi saying that alludes to the impossibility of truly comprehending poetic meaning: ‘*maana onnane lhenveriyaa ge ban'dugaieve*’ (The meaning lies in the poet’s stomach).

⁸⁷ Often the most complex types of syllable scrambling are found in the penultimate line in both three- and six-line *raivaru*.

⁸⁸ I thank Mohamed Abdulla for explaining this to me. M. Abdulla, ‘What does the word “nethi” mean in this phrase?’, *Bas Jagaha* Facebook forum, 21 October 2019.

In verse 2, Naibu Thuhthu introduced what would become a recurring rhetorical strategy: he created an anonymous character whose attitudes he sought to correct. For example, in verse 2 the character is someone who ‘has not studied much’ (line 1) and does not ‘know the rules of speech’ (line 3) yet mistakenly believes that he has comprehended poetry (line 2).⁸⁹ Naibu Thuhthu took a similar approach in verse 3:

I am telling you:
 You may think that your words are beautiful
 But if you have not considered deeply
 How speech is compounded
 It may be hard to digest this but,
 You definitely will not be able to understand the [true] meaning (v.3)⁹⁰

Here, too, an uneducated character falsely assumes his words are beautiful but lacks the requisite knowledge to understand poetry.

Naibu Thuhthu may have derived inspiration for verse 3 from the opening idea expressed in Chapter 1 of *al-Ājurrūmiyya*, the aforementioned thirteenth-century grammar of the Arabic language. Recall that the epigraph Naibu Thuhthu chose for ‘*Taqwīm al-Lisān*’ was written by Sharaf al-Din Yahya ibn Noor al-Din in the 1500s in his introduction to *al-Ājurrūmiyya*. Thus, one can assume Naibu Thuhthu was familiar with *al-Ājurrūmiyya*.

One can further suggest that Naibu Thuhthu derived inspiration for verse 3 from this idea because Chapter 1 in *al-Ājurrūmiyya* defined ‘speech’ (*al-kalām*) as utterance that combines or connects (*murakkabu*, ‘compounded’) words and is ‘meaningful’ (*al-mufīdu*, literally ‘that which is beneficial’).⁹¹ It is precisely this definition of speech that Naibu Thuhthu creatively employed in verse 3 to speak about the comprehension of poetry. He argued that ‘one surely cannot

⁸⁹ I use the word ‘he’ because Maldivian women only began to engage in the composition of poetry in the 1940s due to the reforms of Mohamed Amin Didi. One can safely assume that in 1890 Naibu Thuhthu was writing for a male audience.

⁹⁰ Thanks to Ibrahim Sameer and Ahmed Omar for explaining the meaning of these difficult-to-decode lines of this verse. Jamālluddīn, ‘*Taqwīm al-Lisān*’, p. 195:

gaa sha an bunee mima	[angaasha ma mi bunee]
saarikasha bas rivethi fima	[saarikasha bas rivethi fima]
vaa goiy murakkabu kalima	[kalima murakkabu vaa goiy]
naavis sha nume balai ima	[imasha visnaa nume balai]
dhaa thasha tha kulha viyas na nu hi	[tha hithasha kulhadhaana nuviyas]
laa nereveyshi maana nu hi	[maana hilaanunereveyshi]

⁹¹ *al-kalāmu huwa al-lafzu al-murakkabu al-mufīdu bilwad’i*. The in-text translation is based on the translation found in *The Matn of Ajeromiah* [sic]: *By the Most Learned Scholar Abi Abdullah Mohammad bin Mohammad bin Ajerom*, translated by Hamza Yusuf. <https://islamicnotes.files.wordpress.com/2007/03/al-ajurumiyah-hamzayusuf.pdf>, [accessed 31 January 2022]. J. S. S. Perowne translated this passage as, ‘A sentence is a compound expression, which adequately conveys our meaning.’ In this context, it may have been misleading to translate *al-kalām* as ‘sentence’, which evoked written language rather than spoken language. See Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Sinhaji, called Ibn Ajurrum, *Al adjrumiieh; the Arabic text*, (trans.) John James Stewart Perowne (Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1852).

understand the meaning of poetry’ (Dh. *maana hilaa nunereveyshi*) without deeply considering ‘how speech is compounded’ (Dh. *kalima murakkabu vaa goiy*).

In verse 4, Naibu Thuhthu continued to focus his readers’ minds on the anonymous character with attitudes in need of correction. Here, the character was someone who authored incomprehensible song texts for a popular Maldivian musical genre:

In poetry recited by Maldivians
 Please do not assemble words
 In which no one will be quite able to comprehend what is being said;
 In such a way that one must endlessly swirl it in the heart;
 In a way that is done in *baburu bas*
 As though one had to clean it to flush out the dirt (v.4)⁹²

Notice the italicized term *baburu bas*. The Dhivehi word *baburu* means ‘African’. In this context, the term *baburu bas* literally meant ‘African language’, but Naibu Thuhthu was probably referring to *baburu lava* (lit. African song).⁹³ *Baburu lava* is a Maldivian genre of song accompanied by the *bodu beru*, a double-headed barrel drum. It is said to have originated in Feridhoo in Ari Atoll. Historian Naseema Mohamed explains that,

A group of slaves brought to Maldives by a sultan are said to be the ancestors of many of the people on this island [of Feridhoo]. These freed slaves integrated into the community easily. Such slaves brought the sound of the African drum into the cultural music of Maldives.⁹⁴

According to historian Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya, Maldivians trace *baburu lava* back to a slave named Sangoaru, who lived on the island of Feridhoo who was brought to the Maldives by a Maldivian sultan who went to Mecca on pilgrimage. Jayasuriya suggests that African slaves in the Maldives were usually brought from Zanzibar, Muscat, or Jeddah.⁹⁵

⁹² Thanks to Ibrahim Sameer for unscrambling this verse and explaining the meaning to me. I. Sameer, ‘*Bas Jagaha* Facebook forum, 22 October 2019. Jamālluddīn, ‘Taqwīm al-Lisān’, p. 195:

naashe ekunulai thabu	[tha ekulai nubunaashe]
vaa nudhe kalima murakkabu	[murakkabu nuvaa dhe kalima]
raa hithu therey abura abu	[hithu therey abura aburaa]
zaathasha ru bas moshey babu	[baburu bas moshey zaathasha]
laa madhu na hen nuvaa gai ki	[kilaa nagai madhu nuvaa hen]
yaa dhiveheen lhemugai ki	[dhiveheen kiyaa lhemugai]

⁹³ I am grateful to Ibrahim Sameer for explaining this to me. Sameer, ‘*Bas Jagaha* Facebook forum, 22 October 2019. Sameer, ‘Taqwīm al-Lisān’, p. 195.

⁹⁴ N. Mohamed, *Essays on early Maldives* (Malé, Maldives: National Centre for Linguistic and Historical Research, 2008), p. 40.

⁹⁵ S. D. S. Jayasuriya, *Uncovering the history of Africans in Asia*, (eds) Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya and Jean-Pierre Angenot (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 12–13.

When you walk onto an unknown path of [concepts like] present tense [*mādee*], past tense [*muḍāri*], first person [*mutakallim*], second person [*mukhātab*], definite [*ma'rifa*], and indefinite [*nakira*] if you have the attitude 'I am content with what I know' you will never understand the meaning of the poem (v. 8)¹⁰¹

One can understand the meaning of poetry only after pondering the nisba suffix to form adjectives [*nisba*], that which is possessed in an *idāfah* construction [*muḍāf*], the circumstantial qualifier [*h'āl*], the adverb of time [*ẓarf zamāna*], the caller [*munādī*], the person called [*munādā*], and the adverb of place [*ẓarf makān*]. (v. 11)

Thus readers of these four verses would have thus encountered the following 16 concepts that remain fundamental to Arabic linguistic theory:

1. *fā'il* = subject
2. *fi'ul* = verb
3. *maf'ūl* = object
4. *māḍī* = past tense
5. *muḍāri* = present tense
6. *mutakallim* = first person
7. *mukhātab* = second person
8. *ma'rifa* = definite
9. *nakira* = indefinite
10. *nisba* = suffix to form adjectives
11. *muḍāf* = that which is possessed in an *idāfah* construction
12. *h'āl* = the circumstantial qualifier
13. *ẓarf zamāna* = the adverb of time
14. *munādī* = the caller
15. *munādā* = the person called
16. *ẓarf makān* = adverb of place

saafu nu ma'una veyshi rene	[saafu ma'una nunereveyshi]
laanu hama kanfulhen kohki	[hama kilaa kanfulheh nukoh]
yaa lhemun rivethi kohki	[rivethikoh kiyaa lhemun]

¹⁰¹ I thank Mohamed Haneef and Safiyyuddeen Rasheed for helping me to understand this verse. M. Haneef and S. Rasheed, 'Thaakasha u e ba ma dhanna lhemuge maana akee kobaithoa?', *Bas Jagaha* Facebook forum, 20 February 2020.

Jamālluddīn, 'Taqwīm al-Lisān', p. 196:

maaḍee muḍaari'aa	[muḍaari'aa maaḍee]
khaat'abu mu muthakahlimaa	[muthakahlimaa mukhaat'abu]
yaa ma'rifa nakira yaa	[ma'rifayaa nakirayaa]
vaamagu nudhene vedhe [vadhe] higaa	[hin'gaa magu nudhene vaa vadhe]
thaakasha u eba ma dhanna lhemu	[ma dhanna bau e lhemu[ge] thaakasha]
dhaa egi ney nu maana lhemu	[lhemu maana nuen'gidhaaney]

Note, however, how Naibu Thuhthu did not define these terms. Rather, he states that everyone needs to understand such grammatical categories to comprehend poetry. Given the epigraph and the content of these verses, one could again persuasively speculate that when he presented these terms he had in mind chapters from *al-Ājurrūmiyya*. Chapter 15 of *al-Ājurrūmiyya* named 15 parts of speech, which include *maf'ūl* (object), *ẓarf zamāna* (the adverb of time), *ẓarf makān* (the adverb of place), and *h'āl* (the circumstantial qualifier). Chapter 18 of *al-Ājurrūmiyya* focused exclusively on the *ẓarf zamāna* and *ẓarf makān* while Chapter 19 dealt with the circumstantial qualifier.

The purpose of this section was to examine how Naibu Thuhthu made Arabic linguistic theory the main topic of his poem 'Taḳwīm al-Lisān'. It was revealed that Naibu Thuhthu seems to have been inspired by *al-Ājurrūmiyya* and strived to teach his readers that *raivaru* poetry like speech necessitated the understanding of key grammatical concepts.

Conclusion

When one considers the Arabic cosmopolis in the Maldives via Naibu Thuhthu's writings in 1890, one could characterize the relationship of the Maldives to the Arabic cosmopolis as connected in some ways but disconnected in others. The Maldives was connected with the superculture of the Arabic cosmopolis in the sense that Naibu Thuhthu explained aspects of the Dhivehi language with the assistance of the Arabic script and Arabic linguistic theory. He symbolized the phoneme of the *aibai-fili* vowel with Arabic script, as one would use the IPA today. He utilized concepts in Arabic linguistic theory like *tashdīd* and *ghunna* to explain how the *sukun* behaved with geminate consonants and produced nasalization. He even crafted verses of *raivaru* about core concepts in Arabic linguistic theory, concepts that he may have learned from the Arabic grammar *al-Ājurrūmiyya*.

Yet Naibu Thuhthu's poetry for linguistic description was simultaneously disconnected from the Arabic cosmopolis on account of the fact that there is no evidence that non-Maldivians living outside of the Maldives in the Arabic cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia could read the *Thaana* script of the Dhivehi language. Thus, the case of Naibu Thuhthu's two Dhivehi texts encourages acknowledgment of forms of intercultural disconnection within a cosmopolis.

This case study affords us the opportunity to reflect upon the efflorescence of 'cosmopolitan vernaculars'. Pollock coined the term to describe how writers throughout South and Southeast Asia in the second millennium began to use vernacular languages for epigraphy and then literary expression, rather than the cosmopolitan language of Sanskrit. Yet when these writers used the vernacular they infused the vernacular texts with cosmopolitan norms from Sanskrit epigraphy and literature.¹⁰² Pollock's analysis of this phenomenon

¹⁰² Pollock writes, 'Vernacular intellectuals define a literary culture in conscious opposition to something larger; they choose to write in a language that does not travel—and that they know does

prompted him to write, 'It was predominantly Sanskrit knowledge and texts that underwrote the literization of the vernaculars and many of their most dramatic inaugural...productions.'¹⁰³ In *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men* Pollock analysed the process of cosmopolitan vernacularization through the lens of the history of written texts in the Kannada language. He also surveyed the literary histories of Marathi, Javanese, Sinhala, Tamil, Telugu, and briefly touched upon the literary histories of northern languages like Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Newari, and Oriya.¹⁰⁴

In *Islam Translated*, Ronit Ricci turned the discussion towards three vernaculars in South and Southeast Asia—Javanese, Tamil, and Malay—that came under the influence not of Sanskrit but of Arabic. The era of cosmopolitan vernacularism in the Arabic cosmopolis began approximately 500 or 600 years later than that of the Sanskrit cosmopolis, which Pollock suggested commenced with the turn of the second millennium. Ricci discussed how 'Arabic...was vernacularized' in Javanese, Tamil, and Malay translations of the Arabic *Book of One Thousand Questions*, translations that can be traced to the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries.¹⁰⁵ Ricci also explained that cosmopolitan vernacularism in the Arabic cosmopolis diverged from the Sanskrit and Persian cosmopolises: in the Sanskrit and Persian cosmopolises writers drew upon secular ideas, values, and aesthetic sensibilities. In contrast, in the Arabic cosmopolis a major impact on cultural production was the Islamic religion.¹⁰⁶

Due to the fact that Naibu Thuhthu infused cosmopolitan Arabic linguistic theory into his vernacular linguistic description and poetry, it seems appropriate to consider Naibu Thuhthu's texts as a Maldivian instance of cosmopolitan vernacularism in the Arabic cosmopolis. Yet it should be stated at the outset that Naibu Thuhthu wrote the aforementioned texts while he was in exile. In contrast, literature in the Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic cosmopolis tended to be created under the patronage of royal courts.¹⁰⁷

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not travel—as easily as the well-traveled language of the cosmopolitan order': S. Pollock. 'The cosmopolitan vernacular', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 57, no. 1, 1998, p. 8.

¹⁰³ Pollock, *The language of the gods*, p. 469.

¹⁰⁴ See *ibid.*, pp. 330–397.

¹⁰⁵ Ricci, *Islam translated*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

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