

Do we have Arabic linguistics?

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Abstract

We have always heard about Arabic linguistics as an expression of the totality of linguistic studies at various levels and times. These include ancient Arabic linguistic studies from grammatical to pro-linguistic studies. Recent linguistic studies or exploration of modern Western linguistic lessons were also discussed. The modern Arab scholar has not tried to root for the developments of the Western lesson by looking at the old Arab lesson or trying to develop the data of the modern Arab lesson according to the Western linguistic lesson. May we name these efforts with the modern Arab lesson?

We want to answer the question: Do we have Arabic linguistics?, we want also to describe the features of the ancient linguistic lesson, and the contents of the modern one.

Key words :

Linguistics, Arabic linguistics, western linguistics...

1- Introduction

The emergence of issues in Arabic linguistic studies is worthy of attention, as it helps clarify the ambiguity surrounding the claim that there isn't Arabic linguistic. therefore We can say that the matter has escalated among those responsible for Arabic language affairs and that the issue is primarily related to terminology itself. It is impossible to deny the existence of early linguistic studies with their profound knowledge, which was pioneering in nature and reflects the genius of Arab scholars whose contributions continue to enrich us today.

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Moreover, Western linguistic studies did not emerge from nothing and do not necessarily deserve the label of precedence and superiority. Rather, their methodological framework aligns with the scientific advancements of their time.

. Furthermore, aligning their findings with the needs of modern and contemporary Arabic linguistic studies is not inherently problematic, as long as it does not conflict with the nature of the language being studied.

In this context, we seek to explore the efforts made in Arabic linguistic research which developed a linguistic course takes importance of Arabic, distinguishing between "Arabic linguistics" and "linguistics of Arabic". Then we analyze both ancient and modern Arabic linguistic studies to understand their evolution and significance

2- What are The Difference Between Arabic Linguistics and Linguistics of Arabic ?

The term "Arabic linguistics" refers to the study of language undertaken by contemporary Arab linguists, with Arabic itself as the subject of analysis. In contrast, "linguistics of Arabic" encompasses all research that takes Arabic as its subject, regardless of whether the scholars conducting the research are Arabs or non-Arabs.

2.1/ Ancient Arabic Linguistic Studies

Arabic linguistic studies developed as a comprehensive system aimed at preserving and understanding the Arabic language, particularly in relation to the Quran. These studies became a cornerstone of Arab and Islamic culture.

Linguistic course among Arabs emerged later than religious studies, following the documentation of hadith, Islamic jurisprudence, and Quranic exegesis. Given its importance in understanding religious texts, grammar and rhetoric were extensively developed, with about 80% of Arabic linguistic scholarship historically focused on jurisprudential principles ¹.

Al-Suyuti says: "In the mid-2nd century AH, Muslim scholars began recording the Prophet's hadith, authoring works on Islamic jurisprudence and Quranic exegesis. After these sciences were documented, scholars turned their attention to recording non-religious sciences, including language and grammar."², Professor Ahmed Amin states: "Most of the language was written in the early Abbasid era, not before it"³.

Key Characteristics of Ancient Arabic Linguistic Studies:

1. **Interdisciplinary Approach:** Integration of grammar, morphology, rhetoric, prosody, exegesis, and jurisprudence.
2. **Precision and Comprehensiveness:** A well-defined and structured methodology for analyzing Arabic at various levels.
3. **Codification of Language Rules:** Based on Quranic text and classical Arabic poetry.
4. **Oral Tradition and Documentation:** Initially reliant on oral transmission from native speakers before formal documentation.

Major Fields of Study:

- **Grammar (Nahw)** : emerged with the aim of preserving the language and properly interpreting the Quran. Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali, under the guidance of Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him), was the first to establish it. Ibn al-Sarraj (d. 316 AH) states:

"Grammar was intended to guide the speaker in adopting the speech of the Arabs when learned. It is a science that the early scholars derived from describing Arab speech until they identified the purpose intended by the pioneers of this language."⁴

Various schools of grammar emerged, including the Basra School and the Kufa School.

- **Morphology (Sarf):**

Morphology focuses on studying the structure of words and the conjugation of verbs and nouns. Kamal Bishr defines it as:

"In modern linguistic terminology, morphology is one of the levels of analysis that work together to examine and study language. According to the most widely accepted views, these levels include phonetics, morphology, syntax, lexicography, and semantics."⁵

Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi is considered one of the most prominent scholars who laid the foundations of morphology.

- **Rhetoric (Balagha):**

It has been defined as:

"Rhetoric, as seen by most contemporary rhetorical thinkers, is present in all texts and is, in fact, a natural component of human communication. This is the subject of rhetoric, which may sometimes manifest as a set of persuasive structures (argumentative rhetoric), at other times as a collection of stylistic and ornamental devices with an aesthetic function (rhetoric of embellishments), and

sometimes as a variety of expressive and figurative forms found in different literary genres, types, and texts (literary rhetoric)."⁶

Rhetoric focuses on the aesthetics of expression and the precision of meanings. It encompasses the sciences of Bayān (figurative speech), Badī‘ (embellishments), and Ma‘ānī (semantics).

Abdul Qahir was preceded in writing about issues of Bayān (rhetorical eloquence) by some earlier rhetoricians such as Al-Jahiz, Ibn Duraid, and Qudamah, but they did not develop it into a structured and well-founded discipline as he later did. He is considered the true founder of *Ilm al-Balagha* (the science of rhetoric), as affirmed by some scholars.

However, historians who documented his biography did not acknowledge this distinction. "Even Ibn Khaldun, who undertook the task of tracing the history of various arts, neglected to mention him. Instead, he claimed that it was Al-Sakkaki who refined the discipline after those who had written on scattered rhetorical issues. Yet, Al-Sakkaki was merely a follower of Abdul Qahir, building upon his work—though differing somewhat in organization and classification. However, he did not escape excessive complexity in some of his expressions and intricacy in certain aspects of his methodology."⁷

➤ **Phonetics (*Ilm al-Lugha al-Sawti*):**

The phonetic studies of early Arab scholars were characterized by comprehensiveness and a holistic approach in terms of terminology and methodology. They focused on studying the articulation points and characteristics of sounds, as seen in *Makhārij al-Hurūf* (The Articulation Points of Letters) by Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad. Additionally, they examined rhythm and meter, which later developed into the science of Prosody (*Ilm al-‘Arūd*).

Abdul Jalil Abdul Qadir defines phonetics as:

"A branch of linguistics that focuses on the study of human speech sounds, starting from their physical state (as an air current within the lungs) until they are formed and produced as distinct sounds."⁸

Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad is regarded as the pioneer of phonetic studies, as he explained the human speech organs and the articulation of sounds using his unique analytical method and refined linguistic sense. Other key scholars in the field include Ibn Jinni, Sibawayh, and Ibn Sina, among others.

The Arabs, driven by their interest in Qur'anic recitations, meticulously examined sounds and described them with remarkable precision. They were the first to dedicate independent research to this subject in order to accurately preserve the Qur'an, calling it "Tajweed of the

Qur'an" or "the science of Tajweed."⁹ Therefore, their studies of phonetics were not far from the discoveries made by modern scholars.

➤ **Prosody and Rhyme:**

Devised by **Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad** to regulate the meters of Arabic poetry, prosody is defined as **"the science that examines the conditions of recognized poetic meters."**¹⁰ It is distinguished by its systematic classification of poetic meters into **distinct rhythmic patterns, known as "bohors" (seas).**

➤ **Lexicography:**

Lexicography, or 'Ilm al-Ma'ājim (the science of dictionaries), is an approach that, through theoretical and applied perspectives, seeks to conceptualize the structure or structures of a dictionary and their practical application.... It is concerned with the process of dictionary-making, including collecting lexical material, organizing and arranging entries, verifying texts and content, and defining the dictionary's scientific and practical functions.

Dictionaries serve as essential tools in educational, linguistic, cultural, civilizational, economic, and social fields.¹¹

The first Arabic dictionary, "Al-ʿAyn," was compiled by Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad Al-Farahidi. Over time, dictionaries evolved and diversified. Arabic linguistic studies witnessed early efforts in lexicography, with the first complete dictionary emerging in the mid-2nd century AH (8th century CE) at the hands of Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad Al-Farahidi (100–175 AH).¹²

Philology:

Among the notable works in the field of philology are:¹³

- "As-Sahibi fi Fiqh al-Lugha wa Sunan al-Arab fi Kalamaha" by Ahmad ibn Faris (d. 385 AH).
- "Fiqh al-Lugha" by Abu Mansur Al-Thaalibi (d. 429 AH).
- "Al-Muzhir fi Ulum al-Lugha wa Anwa'iha" by Al-Suyuti (d. 911 AH).

❖ **Objectives of Classical Linguistic Studies:**

Classical linguistic studies aimed to achieve several objectives, primarily:

- Preserving the language from grammatical errors that became widespread among speakers and corrupted their speech.
- Understanding the Qur'an and Hadith, facilitating interpretation and explanation.
- Enhancing cultural identity by safeguarding Arabic linguistic heritage.

❖ Key Scholars and Their Works

1. Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad Al-Farahidi:

- *"Kitab Al-'Ayn"* – the first Arabic dictionary.
- Founder of the science of **prosody** ('ilm al-'arud).

2. Sibawayh:

- *"Al-Kitab"* – the first comprehensive reference on Arabic grammar.

3. Al-Jahiz:

- *"Al-Bayan wa Al-Tabyin"* – a study of rhetoric and Arabic eloquence.

4. Ibn Jinni:

- *"Al-Khasa'is"* – an in-depth analysis of linguistic phenomena.

5. Al-Kisai and Al-Farra:

- Pioneers of the Kufan school of grammar.
- **The Impact of Classical Linguistic Studies:**

❖ Classical Arabic linguistic studies have been, and continue to be, a **fundamental basis** for modern linguistic research. Despite the transformations that linguistics has undergone globally, classical Arabic studies provide a **comprehensive and historical perspective** for understanding the Arabic language and its development.

2.2/ Modern Arabic Linguistic Studies

Modern Arabic linguistic studies represent a qualitative advancement compared to classical studies, as they have been influenced by modern linguistic sciences and global theories in language analysis and comprehension. This development emerged as a result of interaction with Western cultures during the modern renaissance,

particularly in the 19th and early 20th centuries, when translation and modernization movements began across various fields of knowledge.

❖ **Characteristics of Modern Linguistic Studies:**

1. Influence of Western Theories:

- Drawing inspiration from structuralist, generative, and functionalist theories.
- Integrating concepts from modern linguistics, such as semiotics, modern lexicography, and semantics.

2. Shift Toward Functional Analysis:

- Emphasizing how language is used in everyday communication.
- Studying the relationship between language, society, and culture.

3. Technology and Computational Processing:

- Applications such as text analysis, machine translation, speech recognition, and Natural Language Processing (NLP).

❖ **Key Aspects of Modern Linguistic Studies:**

1. Descriptive Grammar:

- Studying grammatical phenomena as they are used in reality, rather than as dictated by fixed rules.
- Relying on structural analysis to interpret linguistic phenomena.

2. Modern Phonetics:

- Studying sounds using technology, such as phonetic analysis software.
- Analyzing articulation and the nature of sounds based on phonemic studies.

3. Modern Semantics:

- Studying the meanings of words and sentences in different contexts.
- Applying modern semantic theories, such as lexical semantics and textual semantics.

4. Sociolinguistics:

- Examining language in its social context.
- Analyzing differences among Arabic dialects and their cultural influences.

5. Discourse and Text Analysis:

- Studying written and spoken texts using a modern approach that focuses on structure and implicit meanings.
- Analyzing the relationships between different parts of a text to determine its overall structure.

6. Computational Linguistics:

- Applying technology to the Arabic language, such as building large linguistic databases.
- Using computing to develop electronic dictionaries and language processing software.

❖ **Pioneers of Modern Arabic Linguistic Studies:**

- **Tammam Hassan:**
 - One of the most influential figures in modern Arabic linguistics.
 - His book "Al-Lugha Al-Arabiyya: Ma'naha wa Mabnaha" (The Arabic Language: Its Meaning and Structure) is a key reference in functional analysis.
- **Ibrahim Anis:**
 - A pioneer in modern Arabic phonetics.
- **Ahmed Mukhtar Omar:**
 - Contributed to the development of modern semantics.
- **Ramadan Abdel-Tawab:**
 - A leading scholar in morphology and the study of Arabic linguistic manuscripts.
- **Abdelkader Fassi Fehri:**
 - A researcher in comparative Arabic linguistics.
- **Ahmed Al-Mutawakkil:**
 - A specialist in functional grammar.
- **Mahmoud Al-Sa'ran:**
 - One of the most prominent researchers in modern linguistics.
- **Kamal Bishr:**
 - A highly influential figure in modern Arabic linguistics.
- **Nihad Al-Musa:**
 - A specialist in linguistic studies.
- **Abdul Rahman Al-Hajj Salih:**
 - Known as "the father of linguistics", he led multiple linguistic projects, most notably the Linguistic Corpus Project.
- **Saad Maslouh:**
 - A prominent figure in modern Arabic linguistics.
- **Abdelkader Al-Mehiri:**
 - A linguist, politician, and academic.

- **Mazen Al-Waer:**
 - One of the leading scholars in modern Arabic linguistics.
- **Michel Zakaria:**
 - A pioneer in modern Arabic linguistics.

❖ **Key Challenges:**

1. Dialectal Variation:

- Difficulty in reconciling Classical Arabic and colloquial dialects.
- Studying the impact of dialects on linguistic identity.

2. Linguistic Technologies:

- The need for further development in Arabic language processing technologies.

3. Engagement with Global Theories:

- Efforts to harmonize Arabic linguistic heritage with modern linguistics.

❖ **Impact of Modern Linguistic Studies:**

- Enhancing the understanding of the Arabic language in a global context.
- Developing tools for teaching Arabic to non-native speakers.
- Improving computational language processing to support machine translation and data analysis.

Modern Arabic linguistic studies serve as a bridge between authentic Arabic heritage and modern linguistic theories, reflecting the dynamism of the Arabic language and its ability to evolve and adapt to contemporary times. However, from the perspective of modern linguists, three main approaches have emerged: acceptance, rejection, or an attempt to reconcile tradition with modernity.

Modern Arabic linguistic discourse raises multiple and contradictory challenges, both in terms of substance and form. The dual dominance of classical heritage and modern linguistic theories has led to diverging perspectives on the nature and objectives of linguistic research: Absolute adherence to classical arabic linguistic heritage....Literal adoption of modern Western linguistic theories. ...a balanced reconciliation between heritage and modern linguistic theories. »¹⁴

The fanaticism toward heritage has confined Arabic linguistic studies within a closed circle, reinforcing among many scholars the idea that modernity must interact with an alternative framework in contemporary thought. This alternative is centered around heritage, which calls for its reinterpretation through current methodological approaches.

In this sense, Arabs do not perceive their heritage as an immediate possession, but rather as a potential legacy that remains dormant unless reclaimed. Reclaiming it means reviving it, and reviving it requires applying a renewed methodological perspective and subjecting it to critical analysis.¹⁵

Thus, building a linguistic theory inevitably relies on drawing from classical knowledge while simultaneously engaging with modern Western linguistic studies.

One of the challenges faced by Arab researchers is the need to overcome deeply rooted misconceptions resulting from the study of certain aspects of ancient Arabic linguistic activity. Addressing this issue is a demanding and critical task that can only be achieved through:¹⁶

- Reevaluating Arabic linguistic studies using a new methodological approach.
- Presenting the principles of modern linguistics in a manner that combines accuracy, clarity, and coherence.
- Highlighting the differences between various linguistic perspectives.
- Acknowledging other essential factors in linguistic analysis.

Mahmoud Al-Sa‘ran attributes some of these misconceptions to the existence of certain assumptions that are not universally applicable to all languages. These assumptions lack general validity, such as the traditional classification of words into nouns, verbs, and particles, which modern linguistic studies have challenged.

Another issue is the failure to distinguish between descriptive and historical approaches to language. When citing linguistic examples, scholars often rely on pre-Islamic, Islamic, and Abbasid-era texts, as well as those from the age of emirates, the modern era, and contemporary times. Additionally, studies frequently focus on loanwords, neologisms, and rare Quranic vocabulary without considering the linguistic changes that occurred throughout these successive periods.

The assertion of the brilliance and distinction of ancient scholars leaves no room for doubt—the Arabs understood linguistic phenomena and provided insightful explanations. A deep reading of the great linguistic heritage left by our scholars reveals their remarkable analytical, interpretative, and deductive skills.

Furthermore, we must reject the misconception that linguistics is a foreign discipline disconnected from our heritage or that it emerged in an entirely different intellectual environment. While linguistics may not have originated in the Arab world, it is undeniable that it has been influenced by contributions from various civilizations.

Scholars of Semitic languages played a role in formulating Arabic grammar for their own nations. Additionally, Orientalists who studied Islam and the Arabic language—regardless of their ideological orientations—have contributed to shaping an understanding of Arab thought across different fields.

Conclusion:

The modern and contemporary works in Arabic linguistics, whether they support and build upon classical studies, favor modern Western linguistic approaches, or strive to reconcile both traditions, deserve to be classified within a distinct field of their own. As long as they take Arabic as their subject of study, there is no harm in labeling them as Arabic linguistic studies.

The efforts of early Arab scholars were justified despite the absence of a formal methodology, just as modern scholars have been justified in their pursuit of both authenticity and innovation. As a result, their collective contributions have led to the establishment of a distinct discipline known as Arabic linguistics.

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