

The Survival and Promotion of the Arabic Language in the Age of Science and Globalization

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Abstract:

Language death is a reality, and the world becomes threatened by the phenomena of linguistic genocide and the extinction of languages. The latter is very dangerous because it is likely to result in the disappearance of cultures and the loss of identities. Arabic is thought to be a sterile language that is useless for teaching science disciplines, and it is seen as unable to survive and thrive in the age of globalization. This paper evinces the factors that hinder the flourishing of Arabic and suggests ways to promote and spread the use of this language. The topic is worth investigating, especially that the Frenchification of the educational system has led to a great deal of controversy. My paper borrows from key research literature and the thoughts of well-established scholars in linguistics and language studies. It proposes solutions to empower the Arabic language, relying on the factors that have promoted the growth of English around the world.

Key- words: Arabic Language - Globalization- the educational system - the Age of Science.

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بقاء اللغة العربية وتعزيزها في عصر العلم والعولمة

الملخص:

إن موت اللغة هو حقيقة وقد أصبح العالم اليوم مهددا بظاهرتي الإبادة اللغوية وانقراض اللغات. هذه الأخيرة خطيرة جدا لأنها ستؤدي حتما إلى زوال الثقافات والهويات. إن اللغة العربية أصبح ينظر إليها على أنها لغة عقيمة وغير فعالة في تدريس التخصصات العلمية وأنها لا تستطيع أن تعيش وتناقل في عصر العولمة. تبين هذه الورقة البحثية العوامل التي تعرقل و تثبط ازدهار اللغة العربية و تقترح طرقا لتطوير و نشر هذه اللغة. إن هذا الموضوع جدير بالدراسة خاصة و ان موضوع فرنسة التعليم قد أثار الكثير من الجدل. يقتبس هذا المقال من امهات الكتب التي كتبت بالإنجليزية في هذا السياق و أفكار فطاحل الباحثين في اللسانيات و الدراسات اللغوية. يقترح المقال حلولاً لتقوية و تمكين اللغة العربية من خلال التطرق الى العوامل التي ساعدت على ازدهار وانتشار اللغة الانجليزية عبر العالم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة العربية - نظام التعليم - العولمة - عصر المعرفة.

Language, very much like human beings and cultures, is subject to extinction and death. According to David Crystal, "Languages have always died. As cultures have risen and fallen, so their languages have emerged and disappeared." (89). In the same vein, Ahmad Al-Issa and Laila S. Dahan states :

Today languages are becoming endangered at a very rapid rate, much faster than in the past. This is happening for several reasons including: globalization, economic markets, urbanization, and governmental language policies. When the planet loses a language, more than words are lost; ideas, traditions, identities, and cultural diversity also vanish.

Factors leading to language death: In fact, there are a lot of factors which might result in language death. One of these factors is the homogenization of cultures which is the result of globalization which aims at converting the entire world to one language and a single culture.

How people view their language is very important for its maintenance. A language that is denigrated and stigmatized is doomed to death. So, for a

language to survive, its speakers must have a positive attitude towards it. In this regard, Crystal writes: "If speakers take pride in their language, enjoy listening to others using it well, use it themselves whenever they can and as creatively as they can, and provide occasions when the language can be heard, the conditions are favourable for maintenance." (107). Unfortunately, many Arabs are ashamed of using their mother tongue. They associate it with backwardness, and they view it as a hindrance to development. Reality is that many Algerians have a complex of inferiority and a feeling of shame about their language. Herman M. Batibo maintains that one of the indicators of an endangered language is "attitude-related in that the speakers of a language develop a negative attitude to it and therefore become ambivalent in their loyalty and indifferent about teaching the language to their children" (64). Negative attitudes towards the mother tongue go back to the colonial times when the colonized tried to instill this sense of inferiority in speakers of the mother tongue. According to Crystal, "Early colonial contempt for subjugated peoples was automatically transferred to their languages, which would be described as rudimentary or animal-like. This was reinforced by the perceived primitiveness of a community's culture or technology, by comparison with Western standards; it was—and still is—widely believed that a culture which is technologically primitive cannot possibly have a richly complex language" (72-3). These unreasonable views have been transferred to many generations.

What might foster the death of a language is also its replacement as a foreign language as a medium of instruction in schools and the universities. So, the mother tongue might be used only in unimportant or less important domains like popular entertainment and the arts. This is called by the sociolinguist Joshua Fishman "folklorization" of language; in other words, "the use of an indigenous language only in irrelevant or unimportant domains" (Crystal 109).

-There might occur a steady erosion of Arabic if it is not used in the different aspects of daily life. If a language is not spoke, it is likely to die. Parents have to transmit standard Arabic to their children. In this way, they will be very familiar with it from the early years .

Preserving a language is very important for maintaining biodiversity. A linguist says that “just as the extinction of any animal species diminishes our world, so does the extinction of any language”(Qtd in Crystal 44.(

The Arabic language is threatened by French, the language of the colonizer, and not by English which is lingua franca and the global language. Unfortunately, Arabs are careless about their language. Each year, on the 26th of September ,Europeans celebrate the European day of languages. It is celebrated to protect the European languages from the immigrants of the third world who might tarnish them by not pronouncing them correctly. It is also said that the aim of this day is to remind people that their languages are in danger, and that they should act to protect it. There are even facilities which require servants and babysitters to be competent in the language to employ them .

One possible reason h=that might lead to the loss or the debility of Arabic is the fact that standard Arabic is not used except in schools or in academic writing. People, instead, use different dialects. In this regard, Ahmad Al-Issa and Laila S. Dahan write :

Another reason for the possible loss of Arabic is the nature of the language itself. Arabic does not have one dialect that everyone uses on a daily basis. Modern Standard Arabic, which is also known as classical Arabic or foos’ha, is used solely for the written word, news broadcasts, and religious issues. People in their daily lives certainly do not communicate in MSA. In many ways speaking in foos’hawould be tantamount to speaking Shakespearian English in contemporary society.

Sometimes the attempt to destroy the language comes from politicians and decision makers themselves. In this regard, John A .Morrow states: “In most Arabic-speaking countries, some secularized politicians or writers have advocated converting the regional dialect into the official language and relegating classical Arabic to ruin.(203)”

Arabic is seen, by its speakers and non-speakers, as the language of Arabs’ religion and their culture. But French is given a more privileged status, because it is seen as the language of modernity, science, and development. In fact, science disciplines at the university are taught in French, and Arabic takes a back seat in the sciences .It is discarded as backward, primitive, and useless in scientific disciplines .

Language derives its power from the power of its speakers. Its debility is due to the weakness of its people .Ibn Khaldoun said that “the dominance of language is through the dominance of its people. Its position among the other languages reflects the position of its country among the other countries”(764 , trans. mine). When the Islamic civilization was at the zenith of its development, Arabic was the language of knowledge, science, literatures, and arts. Sciences were taught only in Arabic, and research sources and documents were profusely available in Arabic in the European Universities in the 18th century. However, the status of Arabic has declined because the Islamic civilization becomes at a low ebb .

Some of the Arab countries are using French or English as a language of instruction in the universities under the pretext that Arabic is an impoverished language when it comes to science. Their claim is not reasonably sound, and it is not scientifically proved. In fact, Arabic is the richest language in terms of words and expressions. This is evident even in the Qur’an in which God says: “If the sea were ink for [writing] the words of my Lord, the sea would be exhausted before the words of my Lord were exhausted ,even if We brought

the like of it as a supplement”(Al Kahf 109). In Sura Of LuQman, God also says: “If all the trees in the earth were pens, and the sea ,with seven more seas to replenish it (with ink), the Words of Allah would never end.”(LuQman 27 .(

In fact, any language develops with the development of its sciences, arts, and literatures. Arabic was the language of science in the world for many decades. In the middle ages, which are known as the dark ages in Europe, the Arab-Islamic civilization reached its peak. So ,Arabic which was the language of science and thought, was taught in many European countries. Ken Hechtman writes :

Arabic learning was widespread in medieval England from the 11th to the 13th century, and indeed beyond. Abelard of Bath, then one of the foremost scholars in Europe ,translated the astronomical tables of al-Khwarizmi from Arabic into Latin in the early 1100s. Two common mathematical terms entered the language in this way: algebra and algorithm. The latter word is taken from al-Khwarizmi’s name itself, while algebra comes from al-jabr, meaning “the reunion of broken parts;”

Among the great achievements made by Arabs is their development of the science of astronomy. In this respect, Ken Hechtman states: « If you look at a modern star chart, you’ll find hundreds of stars whose names derive from Arabic: Altair, Aldebaran ,Betelgeuse, Vega, Rigel, and Algol, to name a few [...]Beyond star names, many astronomical terms, among them zenith, nadir, and azimuth, also derive from Arabic.” Because the Arab-Islamic civilization was at its height in the middle ages, many scientific terms in English were derived from Arabic. Now, in the Arab world, it seems difficult to translate some Western scientific terms into Arabic, and this is partly attributed to the lack of professionals. If a group of scholars, for instance, join hands to develop mathematical terms in Arabic ,they may not find mathematicians to help them. One of the obstacles that hinder the creation of Arabic scientific terms

is the lack or absence of collaboration among the Arab countries. As Hussein M. Elkhafaifi explains ,

Another barrier to the creation of a standardized Arabic scientific and technical lexicon is the absence of any accord among the Arab countries with regard to terminology use or creation. In effect, each country is developing its own terminologies (if indeed development is taking place at all). The language planning situation reflects accurately the same lack of unity in other fields in the Arab world.(258)

Another major problem which stunts the process of Arabizing scientific disciplines is the opposition that comes from some academics. In this context, Hussein M. Elkhafaifi writes:

Unfortunately, some Arab universities, rather than championing the concept of all-Arabic instruction, have in effect thwarted efforts by the language planning agencies to provide a native language curriculum. In 1984, the University of Jordan refused to fulfill its commitment to the Jordanian Academy of Arabic to use certain science textbooks, which had been translated into Arabic by the Academy specially for their curriculum [...] This official rejection of an Arabic curriculum outraged the Secretary General of the Jordanian Academy of Arabic, who angrily characterized Arab universities as ‘the gatekeepers of foreign languages and the graveyards of Arabic.(64-263)”

How to promote and develop Arabic

Despite the fact that it has many haters, Arabic will never be buried in the course of time .

After 9/11, there has been an increasing interest in learning Arabic .

Speakers of Arabic should be proud of their language, and they should have positive attitudes towards it. According to Crystal, “Fostering positive language attitudes is, accordingly, one of the most important initiatives to be achieved in the task of language preservation .Languages decline when these

positive attitudes are missing. And in so many cases they are missing. The climate is against them, often for political reasons.(107)”

Developing the economy of the country is likely to promote its language as it was the case with Catalan in Catalonia .

Another way of spreading the language is through tourism as it was the case in Switzerland and northern Italy .

A language will be strengthened if it is used in the educational system. In this regard, Crystal states: “The role of a school in developing a child’s use of its mother tongue is now well understood ,following several decades of research and debate in educational linguistics.(181)”

Arabic might be promoted by use of electronic technology. The internet has a major role in developing a language and saving it from extinction .

People should possess a sense of commitment and responsibility towards their language. They should view their language as a part of their identity and as a means of strengthening their communion and union .

We have to Arabise science and education.

We have to use media and technology to teaching Arabic. This includes audio-visual tools, the computer, CD Roms ,E-learning,...etc .

Developing the Arabic language depends on its people’s will. A language will never develop if it does not find defenders and supporters. It will not flourish but only erodes when its speakers stigmatize it, oppose it, and sometimes fight it .

There should be strict rules which oblige people to use Arabic in all domains of life. Language policy should lessen the dominance of French, and it should encourage learning English, as a second language ,instead of French .

There is a need to create more technical and scientific terminology .

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