

Journal of legal and social studies

Issn: 2507-7333

Eissn: 2676-1742

**Title in English Applying Functional Grammar Concepts in Teaching Arabic
Grammar - Selected Topics–**

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Date of send: 04 /03 / 2026	date of acceptance: 01/05/2026	Date of Publication: 01/06/2026
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Abstract :

Teaching and learning Arabic grammar is one of the most challenging problems that has faced language studies in the past and present, given that traditional teaching methods have been characterised by excessive abstraction and numerous logical ramifications that have burdened learners and distracted them from the primary purpose of language, which is communication. From this perspective, this research seeks to present a innovative approach that draws on the concepts of 'functional grammar' as developed by Simon Dik and its Arabic applications by Ahmed al-Mutawakkil and others, to be used in the teaching of Arabic grammar. The research aims to re-examine selected grammatical topics (such as nominal and verbal sentences, objects, adverbials, and substitutes) in light of their communicative and semantic functions, going beyond the purely formal dimension of inflection, thereby contributing to bridging the gap between rules and usage and transforming grammar from an abstract cognitive burden into an effective tool for building communicative competence.

Keywords: functional grammar, language teaching, Arabic grammar, communicative competence, pragmatic function, Simon Dick, Ahmed Al-Mutawakkil.

Introduction

Arabic language education, especially grammar lessons, faces a recurring crisis manifested in poor educational outcomes and learners' inability to apply grammatical rules in natural communicative contexts. Many educational researchers and linguists have pointed out that the separation between 'grammar' as a set of standard rules and 'language' as a tool for social communication is at the heart of this crisis ¹, For centuries, traditional methods of teaching grammar have focused on 'correct structure' and 'correct expression,' neglecting the functional and communicative aspects that make speech meaningful and purposeful.

In this context, functional grammar theory stands out as one of the most important contemporary linguistic theories that has restored consideration to the function of language in communication, arguing that 'the structure of language is governed by its communicative function' ² Therefore, formal rules are not an end in themselves, but rather a means to achieve communicative purposes between the speaker and the addressee. Based on this view, the use of functional grammar concepts in teaching Arabic grammar is of great importance, as it allows learners to understand 'why' a sentence is constructed in a certain way, and not just 'how' it is expressed.

This research focuses on the main question: How can functional grammar concepts and their communicative statements be used to facilitate the teaching of Arabic grammar rules and overcome its dry, formal nature? This question branches out into sub-questions about the nature of the functional approach to central grammatical topics and its impact on the development of linguistic ability.

THE FIRST TOPIC: Definition of Functional Grammar

Functional Grammar (FG) is a linguistic model developed by Dutch linguist Simon Dik in the late 1970s and further refined in the 1990s. This theory is based on the fundamental premise that language is a tool for social communication and therefore its structure cannot be understood in isolation from its function ³, It thus differs radically from formalist approaches (such as Chomsky's generative grammar) that study language as an abstract system independent of context.

Al-Mutawakkil defined functional grammar in the context of Arabic studies as a theory that aims to describe and explain language based on communicative competence, whereby the linguistic ability of the speaker is viewed not only as the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences, but also as the ability to use these sentences appropriately in specific communicative contexts⁴ ,The

functional approach is concerned with the distribution of functions among linguistic elements and the determination of their tasks in the process of language use based on communicative contexts and conditions of discourse.

This approach has made pragmatics a fertile field and a key component of theory, bringing the study of language out of the abstract educational isolation that portrayed it as a formal system of dry rules and into the breadth of living usage.

THE SECOND TOPIC: General concepts in functional grammar theory

Functional grammar theory is based on several fundamental principles and concepts, the most important of which can be summarised as follows:

First: Communicative Competence: The grammatical correctness of a sentence should not be the sole focus of learners' attention. Rather, it should be accompanied by questions that determine the success or failure of the message in the communication process, such as: Why was this phrase said? What purposes does it serve? How appropriate is the phrase to the context (Hymes, cited in Dik, 1978)?

Second: The three levels of analysis: Simon Dik identified levels for analysing linguistic structure that interact with each other:

- The pragmatic level: determines the relationship between the discourse and the speakers and addressees in the context of communication (functions: subject, predicate, focus, axis).
- The semantic level: clarifies the semantic roles of the elements (functions: agent, recipient, instrument).
- The syntactic level: determines the formal relationship between the elements (functions: subject, object).

This order gives priority to the pragmatic dimension, as functional grammarians believe that syntactic structure (grammar) is often a reflection of semantic and pragmatic requirements⁵

THE THIRD TOPIC : Language teaching and the need for a functional approach

Those working in the field of language teaching are constantly striving to find an integrated teaching theory that overcomes the difficulties faced by learners of their mother tongue or a second language. There is always a significant gap between abstract linguistic rules and their use in communication. As Halliday

points out, language learning is ‘learning how to mean,’ not merely memorising formal patterns.

Language use is governed by many conventional semantic rules in different communicative contexts and situations, which has made it urgent to find an integrative theory between abstract rules and their use. In Arabic language teaching in particular, we find that an excessive focus on ‘grammar’ as an end in itself has led to the production of learners who are proficient in the theoretical rules of word endings but are unable to construct coherent texts or express their ideas accurately ⁶.

THE FOURTH TOPIC : Arabic grammar and learning difficulties

The complexity of Arabic grammar and its abstract teaching, without any connection to linguistic reality, has led to a widening gap between the language as it is written and as it is used. Ibn Khaldun was quick to recognise this problem when he distinguished between ‘the craft of Arabic’ (knowledge of the rules) and ‘the gift of the tongue’ (the ability to use the language). In his introduction, he states: ‘The art of language is not the same as the science of Arabic... Many grammarians who are skilled in the science of Arabic and well versed in its rules, if asked to write two lines to their brother or a loved one, would make mistakes’⁷.

This flaw observed by Ibn Khaldun is mainly due to the teaching method that made grammar a logic-based science instead of a descriptive and functional one. Grammar became, for students, a kind of ‘linguistic mathematics’ aimed at solving grammatical puzzles, which defeated the purpose for which grammar was intended, as defined by Ibn Jinni: "The refinement of Arabic speech in its use of inflection and other features... so that those who are not native speakers of Arabic may catch up with native speakers in eloquence"⁸.

THE FIVE TOPIC : Arabic grammar and inflection: concept and purpose

Inflection is one of the most important topics that enables learners of Arabic to use the language correctly, as it clarifies meanings. I'rab movements are not merely verbal embellishments, but symbols that decode meanings and clarify communicative purposes. As Tamam Hassan says, the i'rab sign is a ‘verbal clue’ that works together with other clues (such as rank and agreement) to determine meaning ⁹.

It is surprising to find calls for the abolition of inflection and the softening of word endings. In the sentence, ‘Muhammad hit Ahmad,’ the movements determine the agent from the object. If they were silent, we would have to rely

solely on word order, which would limit the flexibility of the Arabic language and its high expressive capacity in terms of focus and topic assignment for rhetorical purposes. Inflection is therefore a highly functional system, and its teaching must start from this angle: how does movement change meaning?

THE SIX TOPIC : Attempts to simplify grammar teaching: methods and criticisms

The call to simplify grammar is not a modern phenomenon, but appeared early on:

- Ibn Mada al-Qurtubi (d. 592 AH): He rebelled against the theory of ‘the agent’ that complicated grammar, and in his book ‘The Response to the Grammarians’ he called for the abolition of secondary and tertiary rules and a focus on what is useful for pronunciation ¹⁰.
- Rifa'a al-Tahtawi (d. 1873): He was one of the pioneers of the modern renaissance who called for simplifying teaching methods and linking rules to usage, influenced by what he saw in French curricula.
- Taha Hussein and Shawqi Daif: They called for the renewal of grammar and its purification from philosophical and logical impurities. Shawqi Daif presented his project in ‘Renewing Grammar’ to reclassify its chapters in accordance with contemporary usage¹¹.

Despite the importance of these attempts, many of them remained within the realm of ‘deleting sections’ or ‘relaxing rules’ and did not offer a comprehensive theoretical alternative that would rebuild grammar teaching on functional foundations, which is what functional grammar theory attempts to do.

THE SEVENTH TOPIC : Functional grammar and the vision of facilitating grammar teaching

Functional grammar provides a theoretical framework that can be effectively used to facilitate grammar teaching, not through random deletion, but through ‘functional reasoning’. Instead of telling the learner, ‘The subject is raised because it is the mayor,’ we say, ‘The subject is raised because it is the element to which the verb is attributed in the context of the conversation, and distinguishing it by raising it allows us the freedom to move it around in the sentence to focus on it.’

Daoud Abdo believes that language teaching should start from ‘function’ and move to ‘form’ and not the other way around ¹². Furthermore, applying Ahmad al-Mutawakkil's concepts of ‘pragmatic functions’ in the Arabic language opens up broad horizons for linking grammar to rhetoric and context, making grammar lessons more lively and convincing for learners.

THE EITH TOPIC : Pragmatic functions in functional grammar

Functional grammar is characterised by its precise distinction between three layers of functions, the most important of which in the context of Arabic language teaching are pragmatic functions, which link the informational structure of the sentence to the context of the discourse. The most prominent of these functions are:

- **Topic:** This is the entity that the speaker defines as the subject of the conversation, known as given information. From this perspective, teaching the topic goes beyond simply being ‘the noun at the beginning of the sentence’ to become ‘the starting point of the conversation’.
- **Focus:** This is the new or most important information in the sentence that the speaker wants to convey. In Arabic, focus is often manifested through fronting and back-fronting or through restrictive particles (إنما, إلا).
- **Tail and Theme:** These are functions that fall outside the basic meaning of the sentence to clarify or set the context.

Teaching these concepts helps learners understand complex grammatical phenomena such as ‘fronting and back-fronting’ and ‘omission and mention’. The fronting of the object before the subject in a sentence such as ‘Iyaka na'bud’ (We worship you) is not merely grammatically permissible, but is a communicative necessity for the purpose of focus assignment ¹³.

THE NINE TOPIC: Applications of functional grammar theory in grammar lessons

Let us now move on to the practical side: how can we reformulate the teaching of certain aspects of Arabic grammar based on these functional principles?

A. Subject and predicate (nominal sentence)

Traditionally, the subject is defined as ‘the noun stripped of the verbal elements of attribution.’ This is a negative and formal definition. Functionally, the nominal sentence should be taught as an ‘informative structure’ consisting of a referent (the subject of the conversation) and an attribute (the predicate). In the example, ‘The fifth year class at Abdelhamid Ben Badis School...’, if the speaker pauses, the listener will feel that something is missing because the informative function has not been fulfilled. When the speaker says ‘...are distinguished’, the function is fulfilled.

Functional teaching focuses on the concept of ‘benefit’ and ‘complete meaning’ (Communicative Value) before focusing on the grammatical sign. This is in line

with Ibn Malik's definition: 'The news is the part that completes the benefit.' Students should be trained to create sentences that achieve new benefit for the addressee, rather than stereotypical sentences such as 'the sun is shining.'

B. The verb and the subject (the verbal sentence)

In functional grammar, the verbal sentence is seen as representing a 'state of affairs.' The verb is the heart of the sentence that determines the number of 'arguments' required. The verb "slept" requires one argument (the subject), while 'gave' requires three arguments (the giver, the recipient, and the gift).

Teaching the subject should not be limited to 'who performed the action' (a semantic definition that may not be correct in cases such as 'Zayd died'), but rather it is the fundamental element to which the event is attributed for communicative purposes. In Arabic, the subject has pivotal characteristics that make it the strongest element, and therefore it deserves to be raised.

C. The object

The object is the element on which the effect of the event falls and completes the transitive verb in the mind of the recipient. In the functional approach, the object is taught as a 'focal' element that is often the focus of the speaker's attention. When we say, 'David killed Goliath,' the mention of 'Goliath' is necessary to complete the mental image of the event. The teaching of other objects (absolute, for the sake of, in it) must start from the fact that they are 'satellites' that add temporal, spatial or explanatory information to the main event, and are not merely 'waste' that can be dispensed with, as they may be the main purpose of the speech (e.g. 'I was silent on Thursday' – the focus here is on time).

THE TEN TOPIC: Adjectives and Adverbials: functional differentiation

Adjectives and Adverbials are almost one and the same, posing a challenge for learners. The traditional rule, 'sentences after indefinite nouns are attributes and after definite nouns are Adverbials,' is purely formal. Functionally, differentiation must be based on the nature of the restriction:

- Adjective (attribute): Its function is to restrict, clarify or specify the 'subject' in a relatively fixed manner (restriction of the subject).
- Adverb/Circumstance: Its function is to restrict the 'event' by indicating the state of its subject at the time of the action (restriction of the event/state).

In the sentence, 'Zayd came quickly' (circumstance), speed is a restriction on coming and is not an inherent attribute of Zayd. Whereas in 'Zayd the generous came' (attribute), generosity is an inherent attribute of the subject. This semantic-

functional understanding makes it easier for the learner to distinguish between ‘I saw a man riding’ (adjective because the noun is indefinite, and the description specifies it) and ‘I saw the man riding’ (circumstantial because the noun is definite, so the description restricts his state at the time of seeing).

D. Substitution

Substitution is a purely pragmatic function, often used for the purpose of ‘clarification’ or ‘correcting the pragmatic course’. In the example: ‘The lion man came’, the context determines the function. If the intention is to make a comparison, it is an adjective. If the intention is to correct a mistake (as in the case of a mistake substitution), intonation plays a decisive role. Functional grammar is concerned with these prosodic features, which are ignored by traditional written grammar.

THE ELEVEN TOPIC : Grammatical Dependents from a functional perspective

Dependents (adjectives, emphases, substitutes, conjunctions) are usually studied as grammatical affixes that follow what precedes them. From a functional perspective, they are communicative strategies for ‘modifying’ information:

- Emphasis: a pragmatic function to remove perceived doubt in the addressee.
- Conjunction: a mechanism for linking and sharing judgement or chronological order.

Integrating the functional dimension means teaching ‘emphasis’ not as a separate lesson, but within the context of ‘how do you emphasise your words and remove doubt?’. This links grammar to the skills of persuasion and argumentation.

THE TWELFTH TOPIC : The impact of functional grammar on the development of communication skills

Adopting a functional approach to teaching grammar brings about a qualitative shift in educational outcomes, transforming learners from ‘rule memorisers’ to ‘language users’. Applied linguistics studies indicate that learners who study grammar in functional contexts are better able to:

1. Produce cohesive and coherent texts.
2. Take into account the status of the addressee and choose the appropriate register.

3. Employ fronting and back-shifting for precise semantic purposes.

This directly ties into Halliday's definition of linguistic competence as 'the ability to act linguistically' (Halliday, 1985).

THE THIRTEEN TOPIC : Classroom applications of functional grammar

To apply this vision in practice in the classroom, the following is suggested:

- Rely on complete texts: Instead of isolated, contrived sentences, rules should be extracted from real texts (articles, stories, dialogues).
- Focus on meaning: Start by asking about meaning (Who did the action? Who was affected by the action? How did it happen?) and then move on to the grammatical term (subject, object, adverbial).
- Contextual exercises: Replace 'underline the verb' exercises with 'rewrite the sentence to focus on the object' or 'fill in the blank with the appropriate word' exercises.
- Use of intonation: Train students to perform sentences vocally to highlight grammatical meanings (interrogation, exclamation, separation of subject and predicate).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that Arabic grammar teaching is in dire need of a radical methodological review that restores its communicative function and brings it out of the realm of excessive abstraction into the realm of practical use. The application of functional grammar concepts, as established by Simon Dick and applied in Arabic by Ahmad al-Mutawakkil, has proven to be highly effective in making difficult grammatical concepts accessible to learners by linking grammatical structure to the speaker's intentions and the context of the discourse.

This study has demonstrated that grammatical rules only acquire their true value when they become tools for constructing meaning and achieving linguistic interaction. Focusing on semantic and pragmatic functions helps to overcome the difficulties associated with numerous branches and formal differences, and gives learners a coherent view of the linguistic system as a system for producing meaning.

Therefore, renewing grammar teaching methods in light of the functional approach is not a pedagogical luxury, but rather an urgent educational necessity imposed by the challenges of the educational reality and the weak linguistic level of students. In this way, Arabic grammar can regain its original role in serving eloquence and forming a conscious and effective linguistic ability that achieves

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- ¹ Abdo, Al-Rajhi ,*Towards a functional approach to teaching Arabic*, (Dar Al-Ulum Foundation(1979) , p. 23
- ² Simon Dik , *Functional Grammar*, (1978) , p5.
- ³ Simon Dik , *Functional Grammar*, (1997) , p1.
- ⁴ Ahmad , Al-Hamouz, *Towards a functional approach to the Arabic language in the approach of Ahmad al-Mutawakkil*, (Dar Jarir for Publishing and Distribution,(1985),p 15.
- ⁵ Ahmed, Al-Mutawakkil ,*The functional approach in Arabic linguistic thought: Origins and extensions*, (Dar al-Aman,(2006), p30.
- ⁶ Daoud Abdo, *Towards functional Arabic language teaching*, (Dar Al Nour, (1979),p18.
1979, p. 18
- ⁷ Abed Rahman,Ibn Khaldun, *Introduction*, p. 546
- ⁸ Ibn Jinni, *Al-Khasais* ,M. A. al-Najjar, Ed,(Dar al-Kotob al-Masriya), p34.
- ⁹ Tamam Hassan, *The Arabic language means its structure*, (Dar al-Thaqafa,(1994),p 18.
- ¹⁰ Ibn Mada al-Qurtubi, *Al-Rad 'ala al-Nahwiyyin* (S. Daif, Ed.). (Dar al-Ma'arif, (1982),p 45.
- ¹¹ Sawki,Daif, S. (1982). *Renewal of grammar*.(Dar al-Ma'arif,(1982),p12.
- ¹² Daoud Abdo, *Towards functional Arabic language teaching*,p 50.
- ¹³ Ahmed, Al-Mutawakkil ,*The functional approach in Arabic linguistic thought: Origins and extensions*,p67.