AABHATH Review
ISSN: 0834-2170
EISSN2661-734X

Volume: 11 / N°: 1 (2026), p 861-869

Arabic Linguistics in the Light of Western Thought: Paths of Influence and Adoption

Wafa naouri * Ziane Achour University, wafa.naouri@univ-djelfa.dz.

Received: 11 /03/ 2026 Accepted: 08 /04/ 2026 Published: 07 /06/ 2026

Abstract:

This article explores the concept and development of Arabic linguistics and examines the influence of modern Western linguistic thought on the study of the Arabic language. It begins by clarifying the meaning of linguistics and its equivalents in different languages, emphasizing its role as the scientific study of language and the systems that organize its structure. The study also highlights the efforts made by Arab linguists to establish Arabic linguistics as a modern academic field by introducing contemporary linguistic theories and adapting them to the analysis of Arabic.

The article further discusses the interaction between the classical Arabic linguistic heritage and modern linguistic approaches, particularly the descriptive, foundational, and interpretive trends. It sheds light on the contributions of several Arab scholars who played an important role in developing modern linguistic studies of Arabic. This interaction has enriched Arabic linguistic research and opened it to modern scientific methodologies while preserving the unique features and richness of the Arabic language. The study concludes that the development of Arabic linguistics reflects a continuous dialogue between the Arabic linguistic heritage and contemporary linguistic thought

Keywords: Arabic Linguistics; Linguistic Thought; Western Linguistics; Descriptive Approach
Jel Classification Codes: XN1, XN2.

*** wafanaouri,**

1. INTRODUCTION

Arabic linguistic studies have undergone significant transformations since the early twentieth century, largely due to the interaction between Arab thought and modern Western linguistics. This intellectual exchange contributed to the development of research methodologies in the Arabic language and enriched the analysis of linguistic phenomena with new concepts and approaches that go beyond traditional methods in studying grammar, phonetics, and semantics.

The research problem lies in the challenge faced by Arab scholars in reconciling the rich Arabic linguistic heritage, spanning centuries, with modern approaches derived from Western studies, particularly descriptive, generative, and transformational methodologies. The central

question of this study is: To what extent has Western linguistics influenced the development of modern Arabic linguistic thought, and what role have Arab scholars played in adapting and integrating these methodologies?

Before delving into the concept of Arabic linguistics, it is important to consider the history of the term in other languages. In French, it is known as *Linguistique*, and in English as *Linguistics*. In Arabic, translations vary: in most of the Levant, the term *'Ilm al-Lughah* ("Science of Language") is used, while in some Maghreb countries, the term *Al-Lisaniyyat al-Alsuniyya* ("Linguistics") is preferred. Despite these differences in terminology, the core meaning remains unified: the scientific study of the Arabic language in terms of its structure and functions, as emphasized by the founders of general linguistics.

Since then, Arab linguists have undertaken the foundation and consolidation of modern Arabic linguistics, dedicating significant efforts to transferring Western methodologies and adapting them to the Arab context. These scholars devoted a substantial part of their work to presenting these theories to the Arab reader, ensuring an organic connection between Western linguistic thought and Arabic linguistic practice.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To clarify the emergence and development of modern Arabic linguistics.
2. To analyze the influence of Western linguistics on Arabic studies across different methodologies.
3. To highlight the contributions of prominent Arab scholars in integrating Arabic linguistic heritage with modern Western approaches.

The methodology of the study relies on historical and comparative analysis, reviewing both Arab and Western literature, with a focus on primary sources from Arab scholars who contributed to the transfer and adaptation of Western linguistic theory, while emphasizing descriptive, foundational, and interpretive approaches.

Through this framework, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and balanced view of the interaction between Arabic linguistic thought and Western linguistic schools, while maintaining scientific rigor and academic precision in addressing this phenomenon

2. Arabic Linguistics: Concept and Emergence

2.1 Definition of the term and variations in Arabic translations

Before addressing the concept of Arabic linguistics, it is useful to refer to the equivalents of this term in other languages. In French, the discipline is known as *linguistique*, while in English it is referred to as *linguistics*. In Arabic, however, different terms have been used depending on the scholarly and regional context. In the Mashreq, the field is often called ʿIlm al-Lughah (the science of language), whereas in the Maghreb the term al-Lisaniyyat is more commonly used. Despite these differences in terminology, they all point to the same fundamental meaning: the

scientific study of language, focusing on its structure, its internal organization, and the relationships that govern its elements.

From this perspective, linguistics approaches language as an integrated system governed by specific rules and relationships, rather than simply a collection of words or isolated grammatical rules. It examines the different levels of language—such as sounds, word formation, sentence structure, and meaning—in order to understand how language functions as an organized and coherent system.

Within the Arab intellectual context, scholars gradually adopted this scientific approach to language study. Arab linguists worked to establish Arabic linguistics (Hassan, 1990, p. 3) as a modern academic field by introducing contemporary linguistic theories and adapting them to the study of the Arabic language. They devoted significant efforts to presenting these theories and explaining their principles to Arab readers through research, translation, and academic writing.

As a result, Arabic linguistics gradually developed within a broader theoretical framework closely connected to modern linguistic thought. This interaction enabled Arab scholars to benefit from contemporary linguistic methodologies while continuing to explore the unique characteristics and richness of the Arabic language. In this way, Arabic linguistics became a field that brings together the classical Arabic linguistic heritage and modern linguistic approaches.

2. Arabic Linguistics: Concept and Emergence

The emergence of modern Arabic linguistics can be traced back to the return of Egyptian scholars from European universities, who began publishing their research from that period onward. If we assume that the beginning of modern Arabic linguistics coincides with the publication of the first books adopting Western linguistic methodologies, many studies point to Dr. Ibrahim Anis’s book "Phonetic Sounds" as a significant starting point. However, opinions differ regarding the precedence of this work, with some considering his other work, "The Book of Arabic Dialects," as the first reference that truly laid the foundations of modern Arabic linguistics (Al-Hashimi, 2004 ,p16 -18) .

The early transmission of Western linguistic thought to the Arab intellectual sphere corresponds to the initial direct contact with Western civilization. The Egyptian model provides a clear example of the evolving relationship between Arab scholars and Western linguistics. Egyptian universities engaged with modern Western linguistic studies from the early 1940s. The central figure in establishing this connection was John Robert Firth, Professor of General Linguistics at the University of London. Under his guidance, and through his students in Egypt, the primary linguistic current was introduced, initially influenced by French linguists such as Joseph Vendryes and Antoine Meillet, before the American linguistic approach was later adopted, particularly through Firth’s students who returned from the United States in the 1960s, most of whom were affiliated with English language departments in Egyptian universities (Al-Hashimi, 2004, p 17).

The rise of modern Arabic linguistic studies was closely linked to the broader intellectual climate that shaped Arab thought during the Arab Renaissance (Nahda) in the early nineteenth century. This era, marked by colonial interactions, represented a pivotal turning point, prompting major intellectual, social, and cultural reforms and a reassessment of Arab thought to keep pace with Western developments.

The Arab Renaissance played a key role in reviving the Arab literary heritage, reshaping the study of Arabic literature, and introducing new approaches to its analysis. During this period, Egyptian universities also experienced significant engagement with Western scholars interested in studying Arab culture in all its intellectual dimensions (Ghalfan, 2006, p. 134).

Collectively, these factors facilitated the transmission of Western linguistic thought into the Arab context, giving rise to the first indications of a linguistic discourse imbued with an Arab character. Hafez Ismaili Alawi discusses in his book *"Linguistics in Contemporary Arab Culture"* the main historical milestones that created an environment conducive to the Arab scholarly engagement with linguistics, including:

- The modern Arab intellectual renaissance and its associated transformations.
- The exploratory phase, which established linguistic norms and conventions.
- The early developments that shaped modern linguistic discourse.

Ismaili Alawi further notes that, despite differences in reception circumstances, there exist strong links among these phases, which allow us to understand the general climate that enabled the adoption of linguistic methodologies in Arab research (Ismaili Alawi, 2009, p. 20).

3. Influence of Western Linguistics

Arab linguists were significantly influenced by Western methodologies in the study of the Arabic language, particularly during the early stages when Western linguistic thought began to permeate the Arab intellectual sphere. The descriptive approach played a major role in these initial studies, giving rise to numerous attempts to incorporate concepts from the then-emerging science of linguistics. Despite the proliferation of Arabic works on the subject, there has been debate regarding the first work of modern Arabic linguistics. Some scholars consider Ali Abdel-Wahid Wafi's book "Ilm al-Lugha" (Ghalfan, 2006, p. 136) **(**Science of Language**)**, first published in 1941, as the pioneering Arabic work in this field. In contrast, Fatima Al-Hashimi Bakoush argues that Ibrahim Anis's "Al-Usul al-Lughawiyya" (Linguistic Foundations)**,** published between 1941 and 1948, marks the true beginning of modern Arabic linguistics, as it applied modern structuralist methodologies to the description of Arabic phonetics (Al-Hashimi, 2004, p. 68).

Arab researchers endeavored to transmit and apply modern Western linguistic studies within the Arab context. Ali Abdel-Wahid Wafi was among the most prominent of these scholars, considering his book *Ilm al-Lugha* as the first systematic attempt to introduce modern linguistic studies in the Arab world. He emphasized that Western linguistic scholarship had reached a high level of scientific maturity, whereas Arabic studies faced significant challenges due to the absence of comprehensive works guiding readers to understand the boundaries of this emerging field and its connections with other human sciences, such as psychology and sociology. Wafi and other researchers also highlighted in their introductions the long-standing efforts they invested in

teaching the subject, asserting that their works represented the first serious attempts to establish modern linguistic studies in the Arab world (Ghalfan, 2006, p. 136).

3. 2 The descriptive approach

Brahim Anis is considered one of the pioneers of Arabic linguistic studies. His book, *Phonetic Sounds*, represents the first systematic Arabic attempt to describe the phonetics of the Arabic language using a modern methodological approach, drawing on the contributions of both classical and contemporary scholars. Anis employed descriptive and analytical methods, focusing not only on phonetics but also on the morphological, syntactic, and semantic structures of the Arabic language.

In the preface of his book, Anis highlighted the openness of Arab culture to European scholarship and expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to disseminate his work to researchers and students in Egyptian universities (Anis, 1975, pp. 5-6), and higher institutes. He emphasized that his goal was to introduce a part of linguistic culture to those engaged in Arabic linguistic research.

Anis focused on several key aspects in his descriptive methodology:

1. **Classification of Arabic sounds** according to modern phonological theory.
2. **Study of dialectal levels** and comparison with the science of Qur'anic readings, along with a description of the development of Arabic lexicon.
3. **Application of modern semantic theories** to word meanings, drawing on structuralist principles and comparing them with meanings derived from classical Arabic usage.
4. **Acknowledgment of the value of Western linguistic research** in advancing all aspects of linguistic studies.

Anis's style was distinguished by clarity and accessibility in presenting the book's data, making *Phonetic Sounds* a seminal reference in descriptive and analytical studies of Arabic. His work served as an inspiration for many Arab researchers in adopting modern Western methodologies while preserving the distinctly Arabic character of linguistic scholarship (Al-Bar, 2014, p. 196).

Abdel-Rahman Ayoub is considered one of the most prominent Arab linguists who enriched the field of Arabic linguistics. He relied heavily on Western methodologies, particularly the descriptive approach. His book, Critical Studies in Arabic Grammar (1957), is regarded as one of his most important works. In it, he critically examined Arabic linguistic culture and highlighted the partial traditional approach, employing a descriptive-analytical method to reinforce modern linguistic theories. The main objectives of his study included:

- Demonstrating the suitability of the descriptive approach for Arabic grammar.
- Analyzing the book Structural Linguistics Methods by Zellig Harris.
- Emphasizing the influence of "philosophy of logic" on Arab grammatical thought (Al-Bar, 2014, p. 190).

In his work, Ayoub advocated for adopting the descriptive method over purely philosophical

or logical reasoning, noting that classical Arabic grammar had been influenced by Indian structural thought as well as Greek logical philosophy in analyzing language and categorizing speech (Al-Malakh, 2000, p. 22). Key issues he focused on include:

Emphasis on rational and logical analysis.

Using semantics to describe linguistic phenomena and categorize parts of speech.

Highlighting the confusion between dialects and tribal distinctions (Al-Hashimi, 2004, p. 46).

Tammam Hassan is considered one of the most prominent Arab linguists who enriched the field of Arabic linguistics with significant scholarly works. One of his important contributions is his book Research Methods in Language, published in 1955, in which he attempted to present modern Western linguistic research. In this book, he studied the linguistic structure according to the Western structural analysis approach while relying on the descriptive method to examine linguistic phenomena (Al-Hashimi, 2004, p. 44), also referencing the views and ideas of classical Arab linguists to connect modern approaches with the Arabic linguistic tradition.

In the introduction, Hassan explains the main reason for writing the book, noting that progress should cover all aspects of life, including political, scientific, economic, social, and other domains. He stresses that Egyptians of his generation should not be content with the present reality but must think critically and deeply about it. This motivation led him to attempt a systematic presentation of the different methods of linguistic research, leaving the assessment of his work to the reader. (Tammam, 2004, p. 50)

The key points of Hassan's methodological and theoretical orientation include:

A comprehensive descriptive study of Arabic grammar from all its aspects, combined with critical perspectives.

Identification of methodological parallels between Arabic linguistic roots and Western linguistic approaches, for instance, the alignment of Firth's contextual theory with the Nazm theory of Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, both emphasizing the role of context in understanding language structure.

In his book, Hassan advocates studying linguistic components through structural analysis, giving attention to concepts such as the phoneme and the function of the word. For syntax, he employs an analytical approach guided by pragmatic considerations, focusing on organizing linguistic elements based on form and function, drawing conclusions from structural analysis to interpret Arabic grammatical rules (Al-Bar, 2014, pp. 197-198).

3. 2 The foundational approach

The second major trend in modern Arabic linguistic studies is the foundational (ta'sili) approach, which posits that many insights reached by modern Western linguistics had already been addressed by classical Arab scholars. Proponents of this approach rely on a comparative method to connect Arabic grammatical theory with modern linguistic frameworks.

One of the most prominent figures in this trend is Nihad Al-Mousa, who compared aspects of Western grammatical theory with elements of Arabic linguistic thought. Other scholars, including Abdel-Rahman Al-Haj Saleh, Abdel-Qader Al-Muhairi, and in some works Michel Zakaria, focused on narrower comparisons, linking specific areas of Arabic grammar with

modern linguistic methods, especially generative grammar (Al-Malakh, 2000, pp. 241-242).

Al-Mousa emphasizes that studying Arabic solely from the classical perspective is incomplete. It is essential to revisit Arabic linguistic studies in light of modern linguistic developments, which help renew understanding of Arabic grammar, its concepts, foundations, and dimensions.

Al-Mousa also highlights an external normative constraint in classical Arabic grammar. For example, he analyzes Sibawayh's rejection of the expression "هذا أنت" (this is you). Sibawayh argues that the speaker need not point to the addressee himself because reference is generally directed to another entity. Al-Mousa explains that reference involves three elements: the speaker, the referent, and the addressee. While the addressee is essential, analytically, he cannot simultaneously serve as both referent and addressee in the same expression.

Abdel-Rahman Al-Haj Saleh is another prominent representative of the foundational approach. He believed in the existence of an authentic theory of Arabic grammar, rooted in the works of classical grammarians such as Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad Al-Farahidi and Sibawayh (Al-Malakh, 2000, pp. 247-249), and continued by later scholars. Al-Haj Saleh demonstrated this theory through two main methods:

Tracing the historical development of linguistic thought, from its earliest historical references to the modern period, noting methodological developments in each era.

Identifying theoretical foundations that classical grammarians established in Arabic grammar, then comparing them with modern linguistic findings, especially those of transformational linguistics.

3. 3 The Interpretive Approach

The interpretive approach was manifested in the works of several contemporary Arab linguists. Among its prominent representatives is Muhammad Ali Al-Hawali, who, in his book Transformational Rules of the Arabic Language, attempted to derive proposed transformational rules as an alternative to traditional grammar, aiming to explain and analyze the structure of many Arabic sentences in depth.

Mazen Al-Wa'ar also sought to design a modern Arabic linguistic theory by integrating three major approaches:

The traditional linguistic approach established by classical Arab grammarians.

The descriptive-classificatory approach proposed by the American semanticist W. L. Turcok.

The generative-transformational approach founded by Chomsky.

Additionally, Khalil Amayreh proposed a method that utilizes findings from contemporary linguistics, particularly the generative-transformational theory, which studies the Arabic sentence with strong attention to meaning.

Among the most prominent figures of this approach is Abdelkader Al-Fassi Al-Fahri, whose linguistic studies went beyond mere description and judgment to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the linguistic system. He addressed syntactic concepts such as case, agreement, ellipsis, deletion, and tense, as well as lexical requirements, including meaning, transitivity,

obligatoriness, verb forms, and sentence patterns.

Al-Fahri also developed the work of the American linguist Bresenan, who modified Chomsky's concepts in his book Aspects of the Theory of Syntax (1965).

In his study of fronting and postponement in Arabic sentences, Al-Fahri applied the referential linking theory to the sentence "Allah Ad'u" ("I call upon God"), where the object (the divine name) precedes the verb and the subject. However, when it moves to the right of the verb and precedes it, a new focus of meaning is created, a concept Al-Fahri calls "ta'bir" (focalization).

Focalization occurs through the combination of two positions: one within the projection and the other outside it, without leaving any pronominal trace in the sentence. The essential condition for focalization is that the focus must be governed by the verb, which is a principal component of the sentence (Al-Malakh, 2000, p. 255).

Classical Arab grammarians explained the fronting of the object in sentences like "Allah Ad'u" through rhetorical considerations, as discussed by scholars of ilm al-ma'ani (the science of meaning). According to them, this fronting is permissible because the object remains governed by the verb, retaining its accusative case under the effect of the verbal action.

to evaluate and interpret their implications, especially with respect to your original hypotheses Enter your results in this section, summarize the collected data and the analysis performed on those data relevant to the discourse that is to follow. After presenting the results, you are in a position.

3. CONCLUSION :

Western linguistic thought brought a genuine intellectual revolution in the study of language, transforming the traditional approach to analyzing linguistic phenomena and making it more scientific and precise. This shift marked the first major phase of Western influence on Arabic linguistics.

Through this study, several key findings have emerged:

A number of Arab researchers offered diverse perspectives on the study of the Arabic language. Among the most prominent are Abdel-Wahid Wafi, Ibrahim Anis, Abdelrahman Ayoub, Tammam Hassan, Ahmed Nihad Al-Moussa, and Abdelrahman Al-Hajj Saleh.

Descriptive linguists focused on re-examining Arabic grammar, emphasizing two main principles: innovation and renewal. This is evident in how some scholars integrated Arab linguistic heritage with modern Western approaches, while highlighting the contrast between the relative stability of Arabic linguistic studies and the dynamic, evolving nature of Western linguistics.

The influence of Western linguistics on Arabic studies is reflected in:

Scientific terminology: The emergence of numerous new linguistic terms to address linguistic phenomena, most of which were borrowed or inspired by Western studies.

Analytical and classificatory methodology: Adoption of new methods for classification and analysis at an abstract and interpretive level, differing from traditional approaches. Arab researchers, especially those influenced by generative and transformational theories, were inspired by Western analytical techniques, including tree diagrams, tables, the use of symbols, brackets, and mathematical or algebraic formulas.

This interaction between Arab linguistic thought and Western linguistics enriched Arabic linguistic studies, making research in the Arabic language more dynamic and aligned with modern developments in linguistic science.

5. Bibliography List :

- Al-Bar, A.-R. (2014). Manifestations of Western Linguistic Thought in Modern Arabic Linguistics. *Ishkalat fi al-Lugha wal-Adab Algeria* .
- Al-Hashimi, F. (2004). *The Emergence of Modern Arabic Linguistic Studies.* Cairo: Itrac Publishing and Distribution.
- Al-Malakh, H. K. (2000). *The Theory of Causation in Arabic Grammar between the Ancients and the Moderns.* Amman: Dar Al-Shorouq for Publishing and Distribution.
- Anis, I. (1975). *Phonetic Sounds* . Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Library.
- Ghalfan, M. (2006). *Linguistics in Modern Arab Culture: Excavations of Emergence and Formation.* Al-Nasr Company: Casablanca.
- Hassan, T. (1990). *Research Methods in Language.* Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Library.
- Ismaili Alawi, H. (2009). *Linguistics in Contemporary Arab Culture.* Beirut, Lebanon: Al-Kitab Al-Jadid Al-Muttahida.
- Tammam, H. (2004). *Research Methods in Language.* Cairo, Egypt: Anglo-Egyptian Library.