

**The Roots of Text Linguistics in the Classical Arabic
Scholarly Tradition**
**Les racines de la linguistique textuelle dans la tradition savante
arabe classique**

Dr. Zaoui Mohammed *

University of Ghardaia (Algeria)

zaoui.mohammed@univ-ghardaia.dz,*

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Abstract:

Textual studies came as an expansion of linguistic research to include the entire text, as text scholars saw that sentence studies did not go beyond that framework except in precise references to the deep semantic relationships that link sentences. Also, many syntactic phenomena were not explained convincingly within the framework of the sentence, so it was necessary to turn to the framework of a larger unit than the sentence in order to be able to judge these phenomena accurately, and this unit is the text.

Keywords: Roots, linguistic research, text, heritage study.

Résumé :

Les études textuelles ont élargi le champ de la recherche linguistique à l'ensemble du texte. Les linguistes spécialistes du texte ont constaté que l'étude de la phrase n'offrait que des indications subtiles sur les relations sémantiques profondes entre les phrases. De plus, de nombreux phénomènes syntaxiques n'étaient pas suffisamment expliqués dans le contexte de la phrase. Il est donc devenu nécessaire de considérer une unité plus large que la phrase pour évaluer précisément ces phénomènes : le texte.

Mots-clés : Racines, Recherche linguistique, Texte, Études du patrimoine

* Corresponding Author:

Introduction

The 1960s marked a pivotal stage in the emergence of a new cognitive trend that established the "text" as its primary object of study and analysis. This field came to be known as Text Linguistics. This movement emerged as a counter-reaction to previous methodologies that regarded the sentence as the fundamental unit of linguistic inquiry, viewing it as the largest possible linguistic structure. This traditional stance of "Sentence Linguistics" is most clearly embodied in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, who defined the sentence as a sequence of signs where each sign contributes to the overall meaning. Consequently, every sign within a sentence is linked to what precedes and follows it, a relationship of sequential connectivity he termed the syntagmatic.ⁱ

The epistemological shift from Sentence Linguistics to Text Linguistics represents a transformation in methodology, tools, procedures, and objectives. Text Linguistics has succeeded in reaching advanced analytical stages that Sentence Linguistics could not attain; it has defined the complex relationships linking words, sentences, and paragraphs across multiple levels. This qualitative leap was not merely a superficial adjustment of form and content but a comprehensive methodological overhaul involving its cognitive categories and operational mechanisms.

Due to the intersection of this field with numerous linguistic sciences, it is difficult to pinpoint its exact origins. It was not the product of a specific country or a single school, nor did it emerge from the work of a lone scholar. Rather, it resulted from the concerted efforts of various researchers with diverse orientations whose primary goal was to find a linguistic alternative that transcends the sentence level toward the text as a macro-unit. Khawla Talib al-Ibrahimi posits that Text Linguistics represents the fundamental shift that moved beyond linguistic studies based on the "structure" as a closed unit and the "sentence" as the basic unit of analysis, adopting instead the text—in its various forms—as the central unit of inquiry. This approach emphasizes the communicative

function that facilitates interaction among members of a linguistic community.ⁱⁱ

Regarding Western scholarship, Jack Richards defined it as a branch of linguistics concerned with the study of both written and spoken texts, emphasizing the manner in which the constituent parts of these texts are organized and interconnected to convey a meaningful whole.ⁱⁱⁱ From this, we can discern that this methodology is a linguistic sub-discipline that examines the text across three levels: syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic. It employs a set of tools to identify textual structures and uncover linguistic patterns and their modes of cohesion as linguistic units.

The text serves as the cornerstone of modern linguistic studies, representing the natural unit of linguistic communication. Communication does not occur through isolated words, sentences, or phrases; rather, it is achieved through broader and more comprehensive speech acts, primarily manifested in texts. The latter constitute the primary material for linguistic analysis and a common ground for all sciences, albeit with slight variations in analytical perspective and result extraction.

Etymologically, the Arabic root (n-ṣ-ṣ) denotes appearance, elevation, and manifestation. IbnManzur (d. 711 AH) noted that Nass (text) implies raising something. To "textualize" (nassa) a Hadith means to raise it or attribute it. Anything that is manifested is considered Nass. The term Minassa (dais/platform) refers to where a bride is seated to be seen. At its core, Nass signifies the utmost limit or end of something. Terminologically, despite the difficulty of establishing a single definition due to the diversity of linguistic schools, views vary significantly. One group of scholars considered the sentence the largest linguistic unit, while others—most notably Benveniste—distinguished themselves by removing the sentence from the category of language units and placing it within discourse units, thereby transcending the view that the sentence is the highest level of composition. Some scholars deny the text the status of a "linguistic entity," viewing it as a unit of use rather than a unit of system, while others treat it as a sequence of sentences.^{iv}

Although the text has become the bedrock of many linguistic sciences, achieving a comprehensive and exclusive definition remains nearly impossible. While researchers in Text Linguistics agree that the text is the macro-unit of analysis, they differ on its fundamental nature. Mohamed Hamasa Abdel Latif views the text as a linguistic message occupying a space and containing a set of vocabulary that creates a specific context pervading the entire message, alongside communicative and situational dimensions that grant the text the qualities of cohesion and interconnectedness.^v Text Linguistics is characterized by a broad vision, moving from general meanings beyond sentences to larger textual units. Its objective is to identify the mechanisms that link sentences into a cohesive semantic unit, thereby distinguishing what constitutes a "text" from what does not. It serves as a filter that reveals textual connectivity within a relational unit where parts coalesce to form a comprehensive whole.

IbnQutaybah (213 AH – 276 AH)

IbnQutaybah conducted an extensive study of the Qur'anic text as a scholarly rebuttal to critics who claimed that the "allegorical" or "ambiguous" (Mutashabih) verses of the Qur'an were incomprehensible or contradictory. This was in reference to the Divine Word: "As for those in whose hearts is deviation [from truth], they will follow that of it which is unspecific, seeking discord and seeking an interpretation" ^{vi}. Addressing this, he stated: "I desired to defend the Book of Allah, to protect it with luminous arguments and clear proofs, and to clarify for the people that which has been obscured for them" ^{vii}.

IbnQutaybah begins his work by presenting the critics' arguments and subsequently dismantling them. He relied on Prophetic Hadiths and classical Arabic poetry to support his claims, moving toward his own arguments with a clear methodology and objectivity. This approach represents an early cornerstone of scientific discourse in the Arab-Islamic heritage. In his analysis of the Qur'anic text, he approached several issues that are currently central to Text Linguistics, manifested in the following points ^{viii}:

A Holistic Vision of the Text: He maintains a comprehensive view of the entire Qur'anic corpus, refusing to present a definitive stance until he has surveyed all relevant verses across different sections of the Revelation.

Discourse on Repetition and Ellipsis (Al-Hadhf): He illustrates the linguistic efficiency of the Qur'an through verses such as: "And if it had not been for the favor of Allah upon you and His mercy... and because Allah is Kind and Merciful" ^{ix}. The implied meaning is: "If it had not been for the favor of Allah upon you and His mercy, He would have punished you." The phrase is omitted because the recipient (the listener/reader) possesses the contextual knowledge to infer it.

The Coherence of Qur'anic Subject Matter: This becomes evident in his response to those who alleged contradictions within the Qur'an. For example, critics pointed to the apparent tension between the verse: "So on that Day, neither man nor jinni will be asked about his sin" ^x, and the verse: "So by your Lord, We will surely question them all about what they used to do" ^{xi}. IbnQutaybah's resolution lies in the nature of the Day of Judgment itself, which Allah described as: "a Day the extent of which was fifty thousand years" ^{xii}. Different states and stages occur throughout this vast duration.

The issue of Textual Coherence (Insijam) is among the most vital topics IbnQutaybah addressed. He viewed distant Surahs and verses as a unified, harmonious whole. This is fundamentally a matter of Textual Discourse that could have led to a formalized theory of textual systems; however, the rhetorical (Balaghah) discussions of that era remained largely confined to the boundaries of the "utterance" (Kalam) ^{xiii}. Had the scope of inquiry in this area expanded further, the studies now known as Text Linguistics would have been the core of the rhetorical lesson at that time.

Al-Baqillani (383 AH – 402 AH)

Al-Baqillani emphasized a holistic perspective of the Holy Qur'an, asserting that the secret of its inimitability (I'jaz) lies in its unique stylistic consistency. He noted: "The Qur'an is inimitable in its style, which follows a homogenous pattern and path, without any breach, inconsistency, or

disparity between one Surah and another, one verse and another, or one subject and another. It remains perpetually unique in that style." ^{xiv}

Throughout his work, Al-Baqillani repeatedly points to the stylistic inimitability of the Qur'anic discourse, distinguishing it entirely from all other forms of expression. He argues that human speech is inherently prone to deficiency, disorder, and semantic inconsistency, explaining: "You see other forms of speech—unlike the Qur'an—falter in their flow, suffer from instability in their meanings, and exhibit great disparity in their methods... becoming muddled in their parts and aspects... whereas the Qur'anic system (Nazm) remains consistent in its similarities and differences, its junctions (Fasl) and connections (Wasl), its openings and conclusions, and in every path it takes." ^{xv}

Al-Baqillani maintains that the Holy Qur'an represents the pinnacle of eloquence (Bayan). It gathers all facets of beauty and structural integrity, characterized by a refined arrangement, aesthetic splendor, a pleasing impact on the ear, ease of articulation, and an immediate resonance of acceptance within the soul. ^{xvi} Furthermore, his discussions on the issues of Connection and Separation (Al-Waslwa al-Fasl), the proportional relationship between the beginning and end of a Surah, and the role of a Surah's introduction in its overall global cohesion and thematic unity are all concepts that hold a significant place in contemporary Text Linguistics. Al-Baqillani addressed these long ago by viewing the Qur'an through a holistic, macro-analytical lens.

In his treatise, he also treated the issue of "Systemic Arrangement" (Al-Nazm) and exquisite composition, stating: "Then look at it verse by verse and word by word; do you find it as we described in terms of its wondrous system and marvelous description? Every word, if taken in isolation, would be the ultimate in beauty and a miracle in indication... transitioning from one story to another, and from one topic to another, without any flaw occurring in the arrangement of one section after another, until the transition appears as a seamless connection through exquisite composition and eloquent revelation." ^{xvii}

He further explains the cohesion and harmony between verses despite their physical distance within the Surahs: "You find verses distant in location and remote in placement, yet this exquisite system has made them more harmonious than things originally joined together. It reveals transitions from argumentation to warnings, and from justifications to admonitions—diverse elements that harmonize through noble arrangement and distant parts that converge through sublime unification."^{xviii}

The frequent recurrence of terms such as Alignment (Rasf), System (Nazm), Unification (Dham), Harmony (Ta'aluf), and Convergence (Ta qarub) in his work—without relying solely on grammatical justifications for their order or semantic relations—indicates that Arabic rhetoric at that time was concerned with studying textual structures and their aesthetic functions. It focused on eloquent speech where meanings harmonize with words, investigating the impact on the recipient (listener or reader). This orientation is a distinct precursor to the features of modern Text Linguistics.

Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani (400 AH – 471 AH)

Any reader exploring *Dala'il al-I'jaz* (The Evidence of Inimitability) by Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani will find striking intersections with many concepts of modern Text Linguistics, such as Nazm (textual arrangement/system), Ta'liq (Attachment/Dependency), Ta'lif (Composition), Ikhtiyar (Selection), and Mawdi' (Positioning). Our focus here is to trace the roots of the Theory of Systems (Nazm), which stands on equal footing with contemporary Western linguistic theories. Indeed, the profound overlap between them suggests that these modern theories are fundamentally built upon the principles of Nazm; such a correspondence can hardly be coincidental. Consequently, we aim to map the key linguistic conceptions where Al-Jurjani aligns with modern text linguists.

For Al-Jurjani, Nazm does not pertain to isolated sentences as much as it pertains to texts, specifically since he defines it as the "system of speech" (Nazm al-Kalam). He emphasizes: "Know that if you reflect upon

yourself, you will realize with certainty—beyond any doubt—that there is no construction or arrangement in words until some are attached to others, and some are built upon others, making one the cause or connection of another. This is something no rational person is ignorant of, nor is it hidden from anyone." ^{xix} This process occurs by arranging words as "servants" to meanings, following them and adhering to the "meanings of grammar" (Ma'ani al-Nahw), without deviating from the established linguistic standards of Arabic speech. Furthermore, he argues that words are not merely placed side-by-side; they form a bond through "Grammatical Relations" without which speech cannot exist nor can discourse be understood.

We may conclude that Ta'liq (Attachment) is the interconnectedness of words, and their arrangement follows the arrangement of meanings within the soul, as words are "vessels" for meanings. From this link, Nazm is formed. In its general sense, Al-Jurjani's Ta'liq is very close to the concept of Cohesion in modern Text Linguistics. Moreover, the concept of the "text" is inherently present in Al-Jurjani's thought; textual construction is not merely the joining of words but a process of attachment where grammatical relations play a central role. Al-Jurjani states: "Know that in some speech, you see the excellence in its system and its beauty like parts of dye that are joined and arranged one after another until they multiply... yet you do not regard the author highly or judge them as skillful or masterful until the passage is complete and covers several verses." ^{xx}

Thus, a "Good System" requires the sequential joining of the text's constituent parts and the unity of the entire passage. Individual components have no value except in their union and homogeneity. This mirrors what Halliday and Hasan refer to regarding the semantic relations that weave a text together. Speech parts do not organize except through cohesion among them in specific positions and via defined means. Since Al-Jurjani grounded his study in the Qur'anic text, he was able to represent the true image of the text as found in contemporary studies. This is evident in his analysis of the verse: "And it was said, 'O earth, swallow your water, and O sky, withhold [your rain].' And the water subsided, and the matter

was accomplished, and the ship came to rest on the [mountain of] Judiyy. And it was said, 'Away with the wrongdoing people.'" ^{xxi}

Al-Jurjani comments: "The inimitability manifests to you, and what you see and hear overwhelms you, for you find that this apparent excellence and conquering virtue return only to the attachment of these words to one another. Beauty and honor only graced them because the first met the second, and the third met the fourth, and so on until the end. This virtue is the product of their interaction and the sum of their whole. If you doubt this, then reflect! Do you see any word among them that, if taken out from its sisters and isolated, would yield the same eloquence it provides in its place within the verse? Say 'Swallow' (Ibla'i) and consider it alone without looking at what precedes or follows it... then the correspondence of 'It was said' at the end with 'It was said' at the beginning... all of this is due to the wondrous cohesion (al-ittisaq al-'ajib) between the meanings of the words." ^{xxii}

Finally, Nazm for Al-Jurjani is governed by linguistic conditions, primarily the speaker's knowledge of the difference between the "Rules of Grammar" and the "Meanings of Grammar." For him, Rules are the morphological and syntactic laws required by the linguistic code—which, in this sense, is equivalent to *Langue* in Ferdinand de Saussure's framework. Meanwhile, the Meanings of Grammar relate to understanding the various nuances between, for instance, modes of the "Circumstantial" (Al-Hal), "Predicate" (Al-Khabar), or "Conditional" (Al-Shart). While predicates share a primary core meaning, each instance is unique in its specific context of usage—equivalent to Saussure's concept of *Parole*.

Hazim al-Qartajanni (608 AH – 684 AH)

Hazim al-Qartajanni represents a major milestone in the history of Arabic literary criticism. In his seminal work, *Minhaj al-Bulagha' waSiraj al-Udaba'* (The Path of the Eloquent and the Lamp of the Literati), he brought classical critical theory to fruition by proposing an essential framework for understanding the text in both form and meaning: the theory of Textual Cohesion. He viewed the text as a sequence of sentences

logically ordered from the whole to the part, governed by the mechanisms of cohesion (Al-Ittisaq) and the tools of coherence (Al-Insijam).

Al-Qartajanni distinguished himself with a holistic view of the text that set him apart from his predecessors:

"He was the first to divide the poem into distinct sections (Fasl), asserting that each has its own structural rules... and the first to recognize the vital link between the poem's opening (Matla') and what he termed the segments (Maqati'), which represent the conclusion that carries the final and lasting impression of the poem." ^{xxiii}

For a section to be cohesive and interconnected, Al-Qartajanni argued that its components—both phonetic and semantic—must be proportionate and exhibit a smooth flow, avoiding "flaccid weaving" where parts remain disjointed (a state where each verse stands in isolation). Furthermore, the style of each section must suit its purpose: "prideful" (Fakhr) poetry demands robustness and strength, while "amatory" (Nasib) poetry requires sweetness and delicacy. ^{xxiv} It is as if Al-Qartajanni envisioned words as interlaced threads; the strength of their tension creates a perfectly woven and durable garment. ^{xxv}

He devoted significant attention to diction, arrangement, and style, arguing that speech evokes pleasure and artistic utility in the recipient only when it is harmonious and devoid of dissonance. This harmony must align with the intended purpose, ensuring that the expression is suitable for the opening and progressively transitions from the important to the more important. ^{xxvi} Thus, the arrangement of verses within a section is governed by a pragmatic principle that considers the psychology of the audience, followed by a semantic principle concerning the relations governing the world of the text. These insights bring Al-Qartajanni remarkably close to the findings of Teun A. van Dijk and Robert-Alain de Beaugrand, who integrate semantic and pragmatic elements into their analysis of textual cohesion and synthesis.

Conclusion

Based on the preceding analysis, we find that the most modern methodologies—Text Linguistics and Discourse Analysis—are deeply rooted in our heritage. These modern approaches offer new tools for exploring internal structures and the rhetoric of cohesion, viewing the text as a holistic unit where parts are interconnected from beginning to end to form a single entity. The emphasis placed by ancient Arab scholars on the grammatical relations that link structures reveals a deep structure that cannot be grasped through isolated fragments, but rather through a network of relationships that present the text as an integrated whole.

ⁱSaid Hassan Buhairi, *Text Linguistics: Concepts and Trends*, Al-Mukhtar Foundation for Publishing and Distribution, Cairo, 2004, p. 30.

ⁱⁱ See: *Principles of Linguistics*, Casbah Publishing House, Algiers, 2000, p. 179.

ⁱⁱⁱ See: Sobhi Ibrahim Al-Fiqi, *Textual Linguistics between Theory and Practice*, Vol. 1, p. 35.

^{iv} See: Mohamed Al-Chaouch, *Foundations of Discourse Analysis*, p. 15.

^v See: *Parallel Creativity: Textual Analysis of Poetry*, Dar Ghareeb for Publishing and Distribution, Egypt, 2001, p. 15.

^{vi} Surah Al-Imran, Verse 07.

^{vii} Ta'wil Mushkil al-Qur'an (Interpretation of the Difficulties of the Qur'an), edited by Al-Sayed Ahmad Saqr, Dar al-Turath, Cairo, 2nd ed., 1973, p. 23.

^{viii} Nawal Lakhalf, *Coherence in the Holy Qur'an: Surah An-Nur as a Model*, PhD Thesis in Arabic Literature, University of Algiers, 2007, p. 104.

^{ix} Surah An-Nur, Verse 20.

^x Surah Ar-Rahman, Verse 39.

^{xi} Surah Al-Hijr, Verses 92–93.

^{xii} Surah Al-Ma'arij, from Verse 04.

^{xiii} Mohamed El-Omari, *Arabic Rhetoric: Its Origins and Extensions*, Afrique Orient, Casablanca, 1999, p. 145.

^{xiv} I'jaz al-Qur'an (The Inimitability of the Qur'an), edited by Ahmad Saqr, Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, 3rd ed., n.d., p. 205.

^{xv} Ibid., pp. 205–206.

^{xvi} See: Ibid., p. 276.

^{xvii} Ibid., p. 190.

^{xviii} Ibid., p. 194.

^{xix} Dala'il al-I'jaz fi 'Ilm al-Ma'ani (Evidence of Inimitability in the Science of Meanings), edited by Muhammad Abduh and Muhammad al-Shinqiti, Dar al-Ma'rifa, Beirut, 3rd ed., 2001, p. 54.

^{xx} Ibid., p. 75.

^{xxi} Surah Hud, Verse 44.

^{xxii} Dala'il al-I'jaz fi 'Ilm al-Ma'ani, p. 48.

^{xxiii} Ibrahim Khalil, Stylistics and Text Theory, Arab Institute for Research and Publishing, Beirut, 1st ed., 1999, p. 56.

^{xxiv} Minhaj al-Bulagha' wa Siraj al-Udaba' (The Path of the Eloquent and the Lamp of the Literati), edited by Muhammad al-Habib ibn al-Khoja, Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Beirut, 2nd ed., 1981, p. 288.

^{xxv} See: Mohamed Khattabi, Text Linguistics: An Introduction to Discourse Coherence, Arab Cultural Center, Casablanca, 1st ed., 1991, p. 151.

^{xxvi} See: Minhaj al-Bulagha' wa Siraj al-Udaba', p. 289.

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