



A Comparison between the Arabic and English Languages

Basma Ahmad Sedki Dajani ^{a*}, Fatima Mohamad Amin Omari ^b

^aAssociate Professor, University of Jordan, Amman 11183, Jordan

^bAssistant Professor, University of Jordan, Amman 11183, Jordan

Abstract

This paper attempts to penetrate the recesses of the Arabic and English languages with a view to outline the historical development and evolution of the two languages and to compare the state of Arabic language and the language families of Europe in the past, present and future. The paper also deals with teaching of Arabic as a Foreign Language (i.e. to non-native speakers) and the difficulties that entails and the obstacles encountered in its written form, sentence structure and grammatical patterns.

© 2012 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

Keywords: First keywords, second keywords, third keywords, forth keywords;

1. Introduction

Arabic language is distinguished by its resilience and stability over more than 1,500 years, so that it may be the only language which has not undergone radical changes; since an educated Arab today is able to read books from classical times and ancient manuscripts with relative ease in spite of the differences in letter forms. In contrast, the situation among European languages is different in that a great deal of change has befallen them, especially now that the total number of officially recognized European languages has reached 41 in 45 countries. Now, most of these languages share a common origin, going back to the same linguistic roots, and differ superficially, with dialects resembling one another from one area to another. Such dialects today have become independent “languages” and correspond to their cultures exactly. This situation is due to the fact that Arabic language is inflectional for case, whereas most European languages are not. Most European languages have lost their inflectional/case system, while Arab language scholars have from ancient times, noticed and devoted books and chapters of books to “The Peculiarities of Arabic” and “Minutiae of Inflection” and “Systems” in the structure of sentences and other basic assets which belong to the deepest nature of the language[†] and have maintained their existence. It is true that the Arabic language has passed through tough times such as those recorded by Ibn *Khaldûn* in his *Introduction* and that the situation today is no better than it was in the past, since crises are still befalling Arabic as a result of being

* Basma Dajani. Tel.: +96-279-560-1610

E-mail address: bdajani@hotmail.com

[†] Al-‘Asad, {dr.}Nâsir Al-Dîn, 2003, p. 167.

affected by the general political and social situation in the Arab World and the external struggles between neighboring nations and internal struggles within them, and the prominence of tribal tensions.

The imposition of language dominance is one of the most noticeable methods of foreign colonialism, and this is the situation in which the contemporary generation of heirs of the Arabic tongue finds itself in, since various colonial linguistic manifestations have been imposed on them – directly or indirectly. There is nothing exciting or amazing in this dualism in linguistic usage in Arabic language – in particular, since the majority of world languages deal with this natural dualism and combine two different styles in the skills of conversation and writing. Even if there were a clear disparity, it is included beneath the “roof” of one language. And the spoken language in the northern part of every country, by way of example, differs in a marked way from the spoken language in its southern part.

European countries have begun a careful examination of the issue of dialectal differences and ambiguity of multilingualism among the language communities which live in one region since the founding of the European Union and their success in opening borders between member nations. Arabic, on the other hand, has – to this day – maintained its classical [3] formal form among the borders of all 22 Arab states so that Arabic books, newspapers and magazines from Mauritania in the west to the UAE in the east are printed in Modern Standard Arabic. Just as a Moroccan can converse with an Omani, and a Sudanese can understand a Lebanese. However, the situation would change completely if Algerians were allowed to put out their publications in dialects, which vary from north to south. It would instantly become problematic for citizens of the wide spread of the Arab World to share their local cultures or read their production entirely due to the lack of ability to understand them.

2. Modern European Languages

While European languages occur in their 41 present forms belonging to 11 language families, they receive in their origin, whence they branched out from their roots and produced differences in their forms. However, many of them are similar, the factor of historical influences stands out and the cultures are definitely close due to the role of the geographic factor. And these factors/members are:

The Germanic languages: spread in northwestern European countries and some Central European countries. They are spoken by inhabitants of the United Kingdom, Ireland, Iceland, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, the German-speaking area of Switzerland, Flanders in Belgium, Swedish-speaking areas of Finland, and Northern Tirol in Italy.

The Romance languages: spread through Southwestern European countries such as Italy, France, Portugal, and Italian-speaking areas of Switzerland, Wallonia in Belgium, and Romandie, the French-speaking area of Switzerland, including Romania and Moldavia in Eastern Europe.

The Slavic languages: spread through Central and Eastern Europe [and] spoken by inhabitants of Belorussia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Macedonia, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Montenegro, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine.

***The Uralic languages:** divided into two groups – Baltic-Finnic (Finno-Permian), spoken by the inhabitants of Finland and Estonia, and Ugric, spoken by the inhabitants of Hungary.

***The Altaic languages:** i.e. the Turkic languages, spoken by inhabitants of Turkey and Azerbaijan, [Northern] Cyprus, the Balkans [not a country!], and some nations of Islamic Central Asia.

The Baltic languages: found in the nations of the [Eastern] Baltic, spoken by inhabitants of Lithuania and Latvia.

The Celtic languages: spread among [a minority of] the inhabitants of Scotland, Wales, Cornwall (extreme southwest of the UK), the Isle of Man (a British possession), Brittany (in France), and Ireland.

The Greek language: spoken in Greece and Greek Cyprus.

The Albanian language: which branched off of the Indo-European languages.

The Armenian language: [not spoken in Europe!] considered one of the languages of the European continent despite a dispute over considering Armenia as belonging to Europe geographically.

The Ibero-Caucasian languages: OMIT – no real linguistic support.

ADD: Basque: A language isolate spoken along the western Spanish-French border with no known connection to any other language.

This amount of European languages and their shared use among this number of neighboring European countries, if it points to anything, points to the effect of the political factor and the creation of geographic borders to feed the desires of independence and national identity by means of the language factor. For language, first and foremost, is a part of humanity's national identity, and many of these languages sprang from the same roots, and they are close to each other to the extent that they are dialects descended from one single language. This explains the relative ease of mutual understanding among inhabitants of neighboring regions. It likewise explains how the number of official European languages has come to nearly equal the number of European countries today. It is possible that the Arabic language might have suffered the same fate in previous ages if not for the steadfastness of classical Arabic in the face of the dialects spread among the Arab nations and the strength of the effect of the factor of religious belief.

2.1. The Arabic Language and Globalization

The age of globalization today is helping greatly in the spread of languages and encourages modern generations to acquire the skill of learning more than one language and profiting from that materially, besides realizing the factor of social mobility. Conditions today are more facilitative for young people, male or female, to intercontinental travel with the goal of discovery and education. Just as economic conditions encourage movement and the search for better opportunities either abroad or at home. Consequently, the mentality of this generation is encouraged to learn more than one language and be ready to profit from it and through it, especially since Islamic Arab civilization encourages young people to advance and live valuable experiences and accomplishing one's best through learning and the broadening horizons in all fields.

The plurality of languages demands elevation in national identity towards nationalism and humanism. Often one notices that an Arab is encouraged to learn a second language and it may help him in the growth of this concept of good deeds in the Qur'an, which calls for the importance of teaching and mixing with a diversity of ethnicities, and urges travel throughout the widespread territories of God's country in search of wealth and a better living. The biography of the prophet also calls for learning the language of others and knowing their culture.

Then the role of cultural exchange via teaching the Arabic language to speakers of various languages came to the fore, and it was the arrival at the shared international human factors which control all languages and facilitate steps toward mutual understanding between the Japanese and African, the European and Asian, American and Australian, the Arab and Mexican. And the role of language as a medium among humanity for understanding, getting along and talking about shared matters took on form.

At times, globalization may produce negative effects on the shape of language and its specialty, such as now is happening to writing in English language, one of the most prominent, most widespread and dominant European languages, one which has become the language of the World Wide Web (i.e. internet) since, with the use of modern technology, speakers of this language have taken refuge in developing it and causing some of the changes in it in what is appropriate to the age of speed and the substitution of words by letters, symbols and numbers has occurred, such as 'for' becoming '4' and 'at' written as '@' and 'you' becoming 'u', 'are' becoming 'r', and 'to' becoming '2', etc., which might be to blame for the regression in the mastery of writing and lack of interest in good writing, spelling and may lead bit by bit to the spread of a new form of the English language and degradation in its original shape. Similarly, the use of word processor[s] and their ability to suggest the appropriate and correct word to fill a space led to the lack of the user of the word processor in accuracy in word choice when printing, especially in English.

Arabic has not been immune to these negative effects which is shown on the written shape of the language, since modern studies have verified that modern Arabic is taking the creation of new ways of writing which represent the spoken form, since "the language of advertising in some of its linguistic uses in addition to distinct auditory impressions of some used words and expressions, and that in addition to visual written types which express the extent of the sound and its length, which may differ from its customary length in familiar classical Arabic forms in written style" []

2.1.1 Teaching Arabic Grammar

Is teaching Arabic to speakers of other languages easier than teaching English as a Second Language? Aren't Arabic letter[s] written as pronounced and the written letters pronounced as they are written? [2] And aren't reading and writing the most important things that distinguish an educated from an illiterate? The mastery of this new language – which differs completely from the Latin [based] languages spread worldwide – by non-Arabic speaker is perhaps

easier and more logical to the serious scholar who can master these two skills in a short time compared with other languages. There are attempts on the part of some non-native scholars of the Arabic language to spread the judgment of the intense difficulty of learning it, justifying that by depicting the syntax and grammar of the language as an obstacle that hinders speed in understanding it. Similar is the case among some native speakers of the Arabic language, who represent their problem in the weakness in the style of presenting grammar in the basic teaching levels and the lack of encouraging them in instructional styles which serve in its understanding, rather, it's as if there were something which calls for the aversion of students to grammar and staying away from understanding the importance of case endings (*i3rab*).[4] Perhaps many workers in teaching the knowledge of the Arabic tongue haven't taken up the role required of them in presenting grammatical/syntactical rules in the way that **Ibn Khaldun**, for example, explained and clarified it in his *Introduction*. [5] And before him, Al-Jâhiz, who called for the theory of gradualism in teaching [academic] fields. And this matter has been explained by many scholars of Arabic, such as **Ibn Hazm Al-Andalusiyy**, who warned against students' getting immersed in grammatical details in which there is no benefit, and called for making grammar pedagogically within the framework of functionalism. [6]

This is considered the most outstanding problem in the Arabic language in confronting European languages in that most of those languages have begun to avoid concentration on the importance of teaching grammar and put forward the spoken language in official written form, while “**fuSHa and faSiHa**” Arabic cannot be assigned vowels without familiarity with the grammar rules for the sake of specifying the meaning. Grammar in the German language, for example, was important until recent times, and German scholars of Arabic showed their interest in understanding Arabic grammar and comprehending it, and its similarity to their grammar. And this is a frequent phenomenon which is represented in the similarity who studies a new language to his native language.

Presenting Arabic grammar as a classroom subject to speakers of other languages is facilitated by presenting a grammar rule through its morphological form and its syntactic function in the sentence, i.e. through the text and focus on the sentence containing the syntactic rule. And with repetition of a clear model by the student without getting immersed in functional titles which make comprehending them difficult. The best thing, first of all, is to present a simple sentence and ask the student to create examples in accordance with it. This was the way which was followed for a long time to teaching English and spread it so that the learner accepts the way of which the grammar and structures are offered to him without spending efforts in a search for the reasons. There are many rules were taken for granted should be taken into consideration and the answer with respect to it is difficult to the question: “Why is it thus?” And God have mercy on Imam Al-Kisâ'iyy. [1]

Abu Hayyan Al-Tawhidiyy presents an enjoyable philosophical discussion on the eighth night between Abu Sa3îd Al-Sayrâfiyy and Abu Bashâr Matta bin Yûnis Al-Qanâ'iyy in the presence of the vizier Ibn Al-Furât about Greek logic and Arabic grammar [2]: “And Abu Sa3îd questioned his opponent, saying, ‘Does it lie within the power of Aristotelian logic to show us the meanings of the [Arabic] letter/sound *wâw*?’ And Matta said to him, ‘This is grammar and has nothing to do with logic!’ And Abu Sa3îd answered him that logic is grammar, and grammar is logic, and if meanings were universal between nations, there would be neither a Greek nor Hindi language; rather, the difference in the language in which every people expresses such meanings, then there would be no alternative to the study of language, and Abu Sa3îd gives an example of the sounds in Arabic: *wâw* and *bâ'* and the sound *fâ'* to each of which are judgments which Arabic grammar rules, and they are not a result of Greek logic, from which it is clear that the logician must study the language by means of which thought is possible. Grammar touches on meaning(s) and the matter is not limited to pronunciation.” [3] It is true that the study of grammar is an elementary to understand the language, for “rhetoric/eloquence is realized in word order, i.e. its style and expression, and the order is nothing but links of words with each other and an order one after another in a special order in conformity to the rules of grammar, and it is an expression of the meaning that the meanings and the syntactic rules.” [4] And writers in the rich legacy of the Arabic language have left books to clarify this matter; among which is “*Dalâ'il u l-'i3jâzi*” (Miracles Signs) by ‘**Abd Al-Qâdir Al-Jirjâniyy**, who declares the importance of putting words in the correct place, and that is one of the things that distinguishes the Arabic languages among other languages. As Al-Jirjâniyy says, “Rhetorical lies in meaning and pronunciation together because it is the significance of a word suiting its meaning in a stylistic way. And if rhetorical skill is the secret behind *'i3jâz* (the divine uniqueness of the Qur'ân), then the secret of rhetorical skill is grammatical order.

2.1.1.1. The Social Factor and its Role in Language Choice

At this time, the Arabic language faces its own speakers turning their backs on it and running after mastering foreign languages, among which especially English due to its overwhelming dominance, at the expense of their ability in their mother tongue. However, the development of world events lately has led to greater receptivity by Westerners and Easterners to learn Arabic in great numbers, and their pursuit to travel and study it in Arab countries as a result of various political changes.

Upon a comparison of Arabic with English, it becomes obvious that there are many linguistic basics in English – especially in the similarity in pronunciation of letters despite differences in spelling – however, the language’s effective power is taken from the power of the control of its speakers over this present age, which has made its spread easier than other languages. And here stands out Ibn Khaldûn’s theory of the imitation by the conquered of the conqueror and their copying him in every way that brings them closer to him with respect to language, appearance and lifestyle. [2]

And these are examples of the difficulty of knowing the meaning of some English words due to their similarity of pronouncing them to other words with different meanings, which proves the importance of the role of general context for the composed sentence and the importance of speech in understanding the meaning of individual words:

where — wear	two – too – to
mean (adj.) – mean (verb)	I – eye
meat – meet	for – four
son – sun	right – wright – write
here – hear	night – knight
dear – deer	buy – by

One thing that attracts attention is the tendency of Arab families today to choose foreign language schools for their children starting at the primary level, schools that focus on the teaching of European languages in more depth than their presentation of Arabic in the curriculum with enabling pupils in it and training them to think in it as if it were their native language. And children receive encouragement from those around them to use that European language in a basic way during and after study hours, which affects the (nurture of their) growth in Arabic and their mastery of it in its standard *fuSHâ* form in an overwhelmingly negative way. And this has become one of the biggest problems that affect not a small percent of graduates of some Arab countries who find themselves insufficiently qualified in writing and expressing themselves in their Arabic language and face difficulties with it, which makes them take refuge to learn it all over again in advanced levels as if they were non-native speakers.

Thus, the individual’s language use points to the social class and milieu in which s/he was raised. Such diversity is a natural phenomenon in all languages, and no language can escape it, and there exist in English numerous dialects, such as Indian English, Australian English, New York English, and African-American Vernacular English. You may find in the same classroom British and Australian students socializing with American students, and the talk is about linguistic differences and the quantity of comments about points about certain words in this way or that; in fact, sometimes words are used that have ceased being used by the other group or whose meaning has changed completely among one of the groups. This is an area for reflection on the effect of the cultural and geographic factor on the use of the same language and the class perspective with the natural bias by every side group of their language. Similarly, the societies of the Arab World include/contain varied societies which have their unique points and cultures, yet they all move forward under the same banner of the Islamic Arab *‘ummah* and its civilization, such as the Berbers in the Maghreb, who make use of their own language and teach it to their children more in speaking than writing, while realizing the place of Arabic and showing a complete desire to study it and preserve its place. Or such as the Kurds in Iraq and the Assyrians in both Iraq and Syria, or the Circassians and Chechens in Jordan, or Nubians in Egypt and Sudan, and the Armenians in the Levant and Egypt, and Somalis and Djiboutians in their own languages alongside the Arabic language. Every one of these groups has its ethnic identity and its own language; however, they all hold to their membership in the shadow of Islamic Arab civilization and cling to the Arabic language as the main language in official communication and in writing.

It has been established scientifically that the natural child is capable of learning more than one language and comprehending it at an early age/stage without the effect on [his/her] ability to express and skill of speaking. It is

incumbent on the family to take advantage of the energy of childhood and teach their children what they can profit from realizing for their identity and teaching them their extended culture.

References

- Ibn Hazm and apparent syntax "Ibn hazm wa annahu alzahere", Mustafa Olaiyan, Al-Faisal magazine, edition 110, Saudi Arabia, April/May 1986, p. 51-53.
- "Adab alkateb", Ibn Qutaiba, Astudy of Mohammad Khalaf Allah Ahmad, Human heritage encyclopedia, Fourth section, p. 5.
 - Linguistic sounds , Dr. Ibrahim Anis, Egyptian Anglo library, 1984, Ed. 6.
 - Entertainment and delighting "Al'emta' walmu'anasa", Abu Hayyan AlTawhidi, A study for Dr. Zaki Najeeb Mahmoud, Human heritage encyclopedia, Fist section, page 792, Arabic company for printing, publishing and distribution, Cairo.
 - Linguistic investigations, Dr.Nasir addin al'asad, Arabic institution for studies and publishing, Beirut, 2003.
 - Arabic teaching in Andalusia and the ways of benefiting from it in teaching Arabic as a second language, Khaled Abu Amsha, MA research, Arabic language and literature department in International Islamic University, Malaysia, 1997.
 - The speech and the destinations: Press advertisement as a model, Fatima AlOmari, A doctorate research (a manuscript), University of Jordan, Amman, August 2006.
 - Signs of the miraculous nature of Quran, Abd Al.Qaher Al.Jarjani, A study for Dr. Ahmad Al.Hufi, Human heritage encyclopedia, fifth section, page 170.
 - Divan Hafiz Ibrahim, A study for Issa Mahmud Nasir, Human Heritage encyclopedia, fifth section, page 323
 - Letters causes letter, Ibn Sina, Investigated by Muhammad Hassan Attayyan and Yahya Mer Alam, Dar Alfekr, Damascus, 1983.
 - The Arabic "Al.Arabyya", The American league magazine for scholars of Arabic language, edition 35/2002, Humanities College in Briam Yang University, USA.
 - Standard Arabic is the language of Koran, Anwar Al.Jundi, Dar Alkitab Alobnany, School library, Lebanon.
 - Applied linguistics and teaching Arabic for its non-speakers, Dr.Waleed Al.Anati, Al.Jawhara for publishing and distributing, Amman, 2003.
 - Of Arabic present, Sa'id Al.Afaghani, Second Edition, Dar Al.Fekkr, 1971.
 - Linguistic research method between traditions and linguistics, Dr.Ali Zween, Dar Ashu'un Athqafyya alamma, Bagdad, 1986.
 - Nihad AlMusa ; Teaching Arabic in methodical visions, Dr.Waleed Al.Anati, Publications of the ministry of culture, Amman, 2005.
- EUR.AC research, Papers of Conference "Multilingualism across Europe" August, 24-26 2006. Bolzano, Italy.
- Van der Geer, J., Hanraads, J. A. J., & Lupton R. A. (2000). The art of writing a scientific article. *Journal of Scientific Communications*, 163, 51-59.
- Strunk, W., Jr., & White, E. B. (1979). *The elements of style*. (3rd ed.). New York: Macmillan, (Chapter 4).
- Mettam, G. R., & Adams, L. B. (1994). How to prepare an electronic version of your article. In B. S. Jones, & R. Z. Smith (Eds.), *Introduction to the electronic age* (pp. 281-304). New York: E-Publishing Inc.
- Van der Geer, J., Hanraads, J. A. J., & Lupton R. A. (2000). The art of writing a scientific article. *Journal of Scientific Communications*, 163, 51-59.
- Strunk, W., Jr., & White, E. B. (1979). *The elements of style*. (3rd ed.). New York: Macmillan, (Chapter 4).
- Mettam, G. R., & Adams, L. B. (1994). How to prepare an electronic version of your article. In B. S. Jones, & R. Z. Smith (Eds.), *Introduction to the electronic age* (pp. 281-304). New York: E-Publishing Inc.
- Van der Geer, J., Hanraads, J. A. J., & Lupton R. A. (2000). The art of writing a scientific article. *Journal of Scientific Communications*, 163, 51-59.
- Mettam, G. R., & Adams, L. B. (1994). How to prepare an electronic version of your article. In B. S. Jones, & R. Z. Smith (Eds.), *Introduction to the electronic age* (pp. 281-304). New York: E-Publishing Inc.
- Van der Geer, J., Hanraads, J. A. J., & Lupton R. A. (2000). The art of writing a scientific article. *Journal of Scientific Communications*, 163, 51-59.
- Strunk, W., Jr., & White, E. B. (1979). *The elements of style*. (3rd ed.). New York: Macmillan, (Chapter 4).
- Mettam, G. R., & Adams, L. B. (1994). How to prepare an electronic version of your article. In B. S. Jones, & R. Z. Smith (Eds.), *Introduction to the electronic age* (pp. 281-304). New York: E-Publishing Inc.