



Teaching Arabic Language: Towards a New Beginning that Stimulates Creativity

Basma Ahmad Sedki Dajani *

Associate Professor, University of Jordan, Amman 11183, Jordan

Abstract

This paper addresses the complex reality of the Arabic Language and the related lingering problems which appear on the Arabic cultural scene which include; the interaction of Arabic with foreign languages, the dominance of colloquial Arabic over the accepted standard practice and poor curricula presentation. It further identifies and addresses the historical component of such problems. The aim of the paper is to provide practical solutions to restore the splendour of classical Arabic within public and private forums, particularly in educational institutions and the media, this goal is to be achieved through advocating supportive policies and educational programs that encompass clear methodologies in the context of an integrated vision for Arabic language teaching.

© 2015 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

Keywords: Language, problems, methods, dialects, culture, modern standard.

1. Introduction

Language is the foundation of communication:

When talking about language in a society, and its rank among other languages, it is not an exclusive literary pursuit as lingual issues contain social, commercial, cultural, political, educational, academic, media, sport and entertainment elements. Lingual issues can never be separated from other issues, as it is impossible to remove one side of a coin - so they are correlative (Saussure's binaries: signified and signifier). Although the relationship between them is primarily arbitrary, language is the other side (of the coin) of thinking, communicating, building relationships, selling, buying, educating, teaching and entertaining. It is no longer only a reflective mirror or an innocent bowl - as Plato claimed in Cratylus' conversation (Hassan Walad Mohammad Al-Mukhtar: Al-Logha Wasilat Tafahom Am Saytara).

Moreover, it is impossible to talk about anything without talking about language; since religion, the sacred, politics, attitudes, orientation, belonging, love, and hatred "to be with or against," all pass through the lingual conduit first, and then can be comprehended by the receiver. Therefore, language is the foundation of agreement and the basis for the principle of disagreement (Louis Jean Calvet, tr: Hasan Hamza, 2008). This is what all religions

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

E-mail address: bdajani@hotmail.com

tell us; in the Bible, the differences between humans were mentioned several times: “And there appeared for them different tongues as fire, and it sat upon each of them, and all were filled of the Holy Spirit, and started to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave the utterance” (The Bible, Second Sanitation, 3-4). The Bible considers the tongues’ diversity – meaning the multitude of languages - as fire, and this is a clear manifestation of disagreement and difference in the narrative describing the Babylon Tower incident and subsequent events.

There are similar indications in the Qur’an that talk about the role of language, God allotted man/woman with language, and raised him/her in stages, when God taught Adam all names. Thus, studying human language takes us closer to the human core; the special features of the mind that belong to mankind (Chomsky in Suzan Gus & Larry Slinker, 1994). Although all languages have universal features such as the foundation, bases, function and that all consist of letters or symbols which are listenable, writable, readable, and can be gathered to make meaningful words and sentences; however every language has its unique elements and its own features that it can be identified and defined by (Karmi, 2009). Indeed, every society defines and recognizes itself by maintaining its language and promoting itself by disseminating it beyond that society's geographical borders. Strong societies spare no effort to make their language dominant, and wide-spread worldwide (Dajani A. S., 1986). Indeed, a link exists between language strength and cultural dominance, as was the case with the Arabic golden age of the Islamic civilization, which reigned supreme for a millennium, before its eventual decline which started four centuries ago, and is still ongoing.

God sent every one of his apostles with the mastery of the language of his people. God says:” And we did not send any apostle but with the language of his people. So that he might explain to them clearly” (Qur’an: Ibrahim, verse 4). The differences between peoples are manifested by the multitude of languages. God says:” And one of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colors; most surely there are signs in this for the learned” (Qur’an: The Romans, verse 22). This clearly demonstrates the aim of all religions; to get humans to meet and know each other in order to live together on earth.

God wants humanity to evolve through language, and societies to compete with each other within lingual circles. The Babylon Tower bears witness of that. Moreover, all languages are still attractive, and perhaps the increasing numbers of language students prove that languages continue to attract people wherever they are, and for whatever reasons they have.

A shining lingual memory:

With the spread of Islam to the east and the west, Arabs attained real success in benefiting from mastering more than one language. This was as important back then, as it is today in the global world in which we live. In the eighth century A.D., Arab Moslem scholars were famous for their in-depth knowledge of astrology, mathematics, chemistry and medicine. The founding of Bayt Al-Hekma in Bagdad at the beginnings of the ninth century A.D. was the culmination of a century of the translation movement that was embarked upon by the Khalifa Abd Al-Malik bin Marwan (646-705 A.D.) in Damascus in the seventh century A.D. (Saliba, 2007). The dominance of Arabic as the language of science lasted for almost a thousand years.

The desire to learn Arabic increased during colonization movements and it further increased with the explosion of oil wealth in the Arabic territories. Later on, with the accreditation of the United States of Arabic Language, the desire to learn Arabic also increased. The lingual gambol which accompanied the information technology revolution and the spread of the World Wide Web (Internet) in the last decade of the twentieth century is another factor in the expansion of Arabic.

There is a strong relationship between the lingual policy and the power of financial and political institutions (Tolifson, 2007). Commercial and business people noticed that the lingual variety is an obstacle that faces business activity. They worked to link the world with a universal language, for example, English. Therefore many concepts, tools, and systems were enforced using the technocratic power of this promoted universal system. This group

compelled the world to submit to its vocabularies under the rules of selling and buying (Nabil Ali and Nadia Hijazi, 2005, p 305-309).

The Arabic language was, and will continue to be a main factor in understanding more of Islam, to communicate with the people of the Arab Islamic civilization and to work in this rich economic area. Therefore, at the beginning of the third millenary, universities and centers witnessed increasing expansion in the demand for learning the Arabic language. This increase raises the responsibility of Arab native speakers toward the language, to create new curricula and varieties of teaching methods; and related Arabic for non- native speakers needs a new curricula with interesting cultural materials and emphasis on the cognitive content, more than the lingual form.

Language Acquisition:

Teaching Arabic with other universal languages using new simplified methods attains communication, helps translation to regain its effectiveness and achieves the desired educational and social benefit. The language which is not spoken outside of its borders will become exclusive to its speakers, and that is what Arabs do not want within the context of globalization. Researching the process of language acquisition helps to recognize the ability of some members of a certain group to learn more than one language in different stages, while it may be difficult for another group to learn a second language or exclude the whole idea of learning more languages, after reaching a certain age.

The discussion about modern standard Arabic and colloquial Arabic is a critical issue. Arabic linguistic departments have witnessed a common social language which dominates communication; colloquial Arabic with its different shapes across the Arab nation. Modern standard Arabic is the dominant language in education, cultural and media exchange. Colloquial Arabic differs in every Arabic country and has variety of accents, yet Arabic speakers turn to use modern standard Arabic whenever they have problems in understanding each other. Although this proves the familiarity of colloquial Arabic in Arabic countries, it also asserts that modern standard Arabic remains the choice of the elites and educated classes.

The relationship between modern standard Arabic, colloquial and slang is one of the main issues today in the Arabic east and the non-Arab west. It is treated as if it is a new problem! In fact, Arabic language has been living with its various shapes of colloquialism since its inception. However, it is still the same language which is written, read, and spoken for more than one thousand five hundred years in almost the same way. So what is new?

Many Arab scholars wrote books to discuss the mistakes and faults which flow come from the locals' tongues: In the sixth century A.H. Imam Abd alRahman bin Al-Jawzi recorded in the introduction of his book "Taqweem Al-Lisan", that he had seen many of those who claimed to belong to science, speak with colloquial language"! This is the reason why he decided to fix the mistakes of both common, and specialist people. (Ibn Al-Jawzi, P 30) Some of the famous Arab linguists did the same and they analyzed the "mistakes" issue in their writings; for example:

- Al-Farra' in his book: "Al-Baha' fima talhan fihe Al'amma".
- Abu Obaid al-Qasem bin Salam in his book: "Ma Khalafat fihe Al'amma loghat Al-Arab".
- Abu Hatem Al-Sajestani, in his book:"Lahn Al'amma".
- Ibn Al-Sukkait's "Islah Al-Manteq".
- Ibn Qotaiba's:"Adab al-Kateb, included a chapter: Kitab Taqweem Al-Lisan".
- Abu al-Abbas Tha'alab's "Al-Faseeh", Abu Hilal Al-'askari: "Lahn al-Khassa".
- Abu Mansour Al-Jawaliqi: "Al-Mu'rab".

- Abu Mohammad Al-qasem bin Ali Al-Hariri: “Dorrat al-Ghawwas”.
- Abu Ahmad Al-‘askari’s book: “Sharh Ma Yaqa’ feh altasheef wal tahreef”.

The Arabic language, as all other languages, has one formal standard language which unites its nations and connects its followers. It is clearly presented within the main four language skills; reading, writing, speaking, and listening. It also has different informal forms of language in every country that is especially clear in two skills; speaking and listening. All languages around the world have multi levels that exist between the native speakers. Some languages are too dependent on its colloquial form, that it was developed as a formal language. This created a lingual pluralism in neighboring countries. For example, the official languages in the European Union exceed the number of the countries of that union. So, Europeans realized their need to increase the communication skills among the union. In comparison with other worldwide languages, Arabic is distinguished for continuing to be the official language of all its nations. There is a need however to increase the awareness of Arabic speakers, but acknowledge to keep their unity through it with the reality that colloquialism emerges from the standard Arabic, and that both are important.

My cousin and I:

In the discussion about colloquial verses standard Arabic, a key issue is how foreign languages compete with each other. Identity emerges from loyalty and responsibility, sharing the political, regional, cultural, and financial worries of the people. Communities that share the same language form a league and they unite to face other languages’ attacks. Foreign threats have spread, until it reached all levels of Arabic language; conversation is mixed nowadays with foreign vocabulary, Arabic writing has melted with English (writing in Latin letters especially in modern IT, as a means of communication). Others write English words with Arabic letters. Therefore, we read and learn (deformed) lingual levels between two languages (Arabizi), something like cooked meat, but not cooked enough to be eaten. There are in some electronic social communication pages such as “Facebook” and “Twitter” programs in Arabizi that widen the gap between the formal language and the native speakers.

I am my language:

Language is the key for identity with which a person can express himself/herself and present oneself to others. It is as Miller defined it: “A tangible gift and a live factor which forms society’s culture and thinking. So the society pushes it to the better or worse” (Miller, p.47). To make a language live and to progress, it has to be used in the right way. Arabic has to be looked at through its origins, and its teaching methods examined according to its main features in order to achieve the effective goals. The Arabic language has been negatively affected recently as a result of the different teaching methods which were transferred from other languages. So, teaching Arabic is a critical issue among linguists, educationalists and the public. They all discuss the causes and the methodological policies to reform the four skills of the language in order to regain its greatness, and to use it with its native speakers. Arabic language needs its own Arab spring, just like what happened in some Arabic countries; simplifying grammar, upgrading the common standard language of the media, press, and formal speeches.

To regain the shine of the Arab world, it needs to promote the Arabic identity, strengthen the relationships with the mother-tongue through linking the native speakers with the interesting and rich aspects of the language, and with the modern scientific foundations second; by updating teaching curriculums and teaching methods and teachers’ training. One of the most important issues is the alienation of the young generations of Arabs from using the four skills of their language. They are in need for pioneers who clarify the educational foundation and point to better methods of practicing the language.

The language weapon:

Ibn Khaldun indicated the effect of the victorious over the defeated; how the later imitates the victorious in shape, look, customs, and nowadays, in language. Using languages as a weapon is a sign of today's wars; as a form of ideological political colonization, and the ability to shake the basic structure of the target's social order through imposing the usage of the colonizer's language in order to destabilize the society's identity and to increase obedience. (Dajani A. S. P:175). That was the way of Japan with the Koreans, of Britain with its colonization and of France with Algeria. Although the stronger wins, still there is an important role for the society's desire to determine and to maintain its identity through language. Language often succeeds in imposing an ethnic identity to a social group as in the case of the Hebrew. (Yusuf Al-Hassan, a personal interview). Turkish and Hebrew, are examples of the effect of the political power to impose the language, even if it is a new language, and to establish its identity in the target society.

Language appreciation:

Language is like a living creature which grows and develops, and the systems of the language submit to logical rules. Arabic, like other living languages, keeps this logical system despite the variation of its levels. Arabic linguists did not trace the effort to clarify logic in syntax, morphology, and semantic systems in order to make it easier for native and non-native speakers. Teachers have to explain the grammar and discuss the basics of syntax through the three main elements in any sentence: verb, subject, and object. Then, the teacher proceeds in presenting syntax in a functional way that clarifies speech and achieves communication. That is what Ibn Hazm Al-Andalusi talked about – “to make students sink in the details of syntax distracts them from the more essential and there is no benefit from it”. So, he called to functionalize syntax in schools. (Olaiyan, p: 51-53). Teaching knowledge should always gradually present science according to a clear plan from the easy to the more difficult, to attract students in educational materials.

Mastering a language is heavily dependent upon the teaching method and not simply acquiring it. Arabs today need to realize the language value in identity, returning to their historical heritage and expressing themselves in a modern tongue that manifests eloquence and style to be able to uplift themselves.

Arabic needs a change in teaching methods for native speakers, as well as for speakers of other languages. It needs to modernise its methods in presenting creative and attractive content which goes along with the fast development in global world development. Ironically, the Arabic library is filled with great classical books that achieve this goal, but Arabs unfortunately are not aware of them. They do not know its lingual, intellectual, and scientific value because of bad choices and weak presentation (Ibn Khaldun, P: 561). Why don't students study Al-Aghany for Al-Asfahani which has attractive material, because it enriches the readers with its lingual content and the historical, literary narrative content. Students should know their rich history through such references and record their present in the same manner. Why is Ibn Khaldun's Muqaddimah not taught? It is considered to be the main reference for social studies. Also, why not open the door for a general competition among students in early educational stages to increase the awareness of creativity, encourage talents, polish them and accept the strange ones? (Ibn Khaldun, p: 561)

Moreover, why do young people not read classical Arabic love stories which satisfy their emotions with these stories, raise their lingual level with literary style, save them from the intellectual emptiness which results in a generation lost? Arab jurists of the Abbasid period were aware of their important social role and participation of writing on love and passion in a mild language to spread consciousness among the youth, by guiding them to express their natural emotions and not try to avoid this issue by neglecting them.

In addition, the Arabic scientific mind is rich in previous examples in mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology that deserve to be presented and taught, and in motivating new methods that honour these language scholars of historic periods. We should recognize the Arabic language's ability to explain thoughts, creativity, and spread these ideas in other contemporary languages.

Thus, teaching methods must be motivated by creativity and science, using the mother tongue and encouraging translation.

Conclusion:

Language crisis is not limited to misspelling, or grammarian vowel pointing to problems, rules' setting, mother tongue corruption, and the spread of solecism. The Arabic language suffers from deficiencies, weakness, and shortages on the levels of phoneme, word, structure, text, and the general context extended from the educational curriculums in schools and universities which reach the news and family media in addition to cultural, health, art programs, Arabic movies, dubbed movies, and translated movies. It affected news-prints, yellow and white journals, scientific, and cultural books, novels, stories by famous authors and beginner books, official meetings, public and private circles, salons, academics, universities, ministers, scholars, artists, businessmen, technicians, doctors, engineers, and poets that all experience similar issues. This general weakness is not created by language origins or from the language itself for sure, but it is the general atmosphere, the dominant policy, and the extreme weakness which has affected the speakers of Arabic for a long time. It is a general deterioration that attacks the weakness of the defeated, so pumping blood into them will be in vain, but if he/she regains their health by standing up, getting ready, taking their place, and predictively defending themselves, victory will be closer. Language condition and its alternative face, which is identity, the synonym of nationalism, and its Islamic participation, is the natural condition that we do not have to diagnose, because of the clearness of the condition! It is the condition which indicates who must work, according to the saying "who has the advice, has to work" (Ibn Khaldun, P: 230). So, language and people need to work and bring about reformation, with a real desire and a firm political decision, and to be supported with systems and recommendations that are based on a clear system of rules that considers every lingual weakness that touches the national, domestic, and religious condition. This is not a hypothetical solution, but it is the factual solution, which was proven by experiments and implementation, for example, the Turks with the Turkish language, Malaysians with Malay, and the Jewish with Hebrew.

References

- Ali, Nabeel and Ndia Hijazi. 2005, Al-Fajwa Arraqmiya Ro'ya Arabia limojtama' Al-Ma'refa, Alam Al-Ma'refa, August. Al-Asad, Naser Al-Din, Tahqiqat Laghawiya, Masa'el fi Al-Arabiya wa ta'alomha.
- Calvie, Luise Jan. 2008. The war of languages and lingual policy, translated by: Hassan Hamza, Arabic Organization for translating, Arabic Unity study centre, Beirut.
- Dajani, Ahmad Sidki. 1986. Hiwar wa Motarahat, Dar Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi, Cairo.
- Dajani, Ahmad Sidki. 2000, Arab wa moslimoun wa Awlama, Dar Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi, Cairo.
- Gus, Suzan and Larry Slinker. 1994, Second Language Acquisition, translated by Mohammad Sharqawi, 2003.
- Ibn Al-Jawzi, Taqweem Al-Lisan book, investigated by Abd Al-Aziz Matar, Dar Al-Ma'aref, Cairo, P:30.
- Ibn Khaldun. The Muqadimmah.
- Karmi, Hassan Saeed. 2009. Al-logha Nash'atha wa tatworha fi alfkr wa al-ste'mal, Ministry of culture, Jordan.
- Miller: 1861, about Joseph John, Language and Indentity, translated by: Abd Annour Khuraqi, Alam Al-Ma'refa, Kuwait, August, 2007.
- Mokhtar, Al-Hassan Wild mohammad, Al-logha waseelat Tafahom Am Saytara, In: Loghatuna Al-Arabia fi Khatar, Ara' wa Tawseyat Qabla Fawat Al-Awan.
- Oglu, Ihsan. E. 1999. The Ottoman State: History and Civilization, Part II. Istanbul, Turkey: Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA), p. 578-579.
- Olayan, Mostafa, Ibn Hazm and apparent Syntax, 1986, Al-Faisal Magazine v:110, Saudi Arabia, April/May.
- Saliba, George. 2007. Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Tolifson, James. 2007, Kitab Al-Syasa Al-Loghawia Khalfiyatha wa maqasdha, translated by Mohammad Khattabi, Morocco.
- The Bible, Prophets' works, second chapter 3-4.