

## The Relationship Between Heritage and Modern Linguistics from the Perspective of Arab Linguists

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### Abstract:

Arabic linguistic heritage has posed a significant challenge in the Arab linguistic consciousness, primarily due to how to approach and preserve this heritage in the face of incoming linguistic knowledge. Consequently, while redefining the Arabic language based on modern linguistic theories, Arabic linguists have been compelled to adopt a stance towards this heritage. This has been done in light of the potential relationships they have established between heritage and linguistics. However, these relationships have not been unidirectional or consistent, but rather have varied according to the perspectives adopted by the linguists. How have these Arab linguists represented the relationship between these two achievements? And what are the controlling factors? This research paper seeks to address these questions.

**Keywords:** heritage, Arabic language, Western linguistics, incoming knowledge, linguistic theories.

### Introduction:

The study of language has a long history. Since the emergence of humanity, people have pondered the nature of language and sought to uncover its mysteries. Initial inquiries focused on the origin of language, how it came into being, and the relationship between words and things. In advanced stages, contemplation of this phenomenon resulted in a diverse and rich human linguistic heritage filled with various linguistic concepts, ideas, and opinions. Different human civilizations, both ancient and modern, have contributed to its development. This means that linguistics, in its modern scientific sense, represents, in fact, one era in the history of thinking about language, or a part of human linguistic thought that extends to pre-Christian eras. It also means that modern linguistics has a history like other sciences and knowledge and that history is the human linguistic heritage.

Therefore, the human linguistic heritage is present within the interests of major linguists as a history of modern linguistics, which, as we know, originated in the West. These linguists have had varying attitudes towards this heritage based on the nature of the relationship between it and modern linguistics, according to a purely epistemological/historical perspective. Those who based their position on the principle of an epistemological break between stages of scientific thought argued that the birth of linguistics dates back, at the most, to the nineteenth century, with historical and comparative studies. In this context, Bloomfield asserts that the scientific study of language did not begin until the nineteenth century (the age of historical and comparative studies) through conscious and extensive observation. Consequently, according to him, linguistics is still in its infancy. Thus, he negates the contributions of ancient linguistic thought throughout its long history.

On the other hand, those who based their position on the principle of continuity, which acknowledges the interaction between stages of scientific thought, both positively and negatively, and that knowledge is based on the principle of accumulation, as a series of successive stages, and that "science (in the broad sense) has its history, like people, and like intellectual and moral concepts. Scientists in every generation do not start from scratch, but rather work through and based on the situation inherited by their science, and inherited by science in general, in their culture and in their time." Based on this, they believe that the origins of linguistics date back to centuries before the birth of Christ. In this context, Robins says, "And the science of language today, like other branches of human knowledge, and like all aspects of human cultures, is a product of its past and is a material for its future." In the same context, Georges Mounin goes so far as to say that linguistics did not "suddenly appear in the nineteenth century, as a storm suddenly appears in a clear sky, but rather was preceded by previous opinions about language le language since at least ancient Egypt."

Perhaps this is what formed a positive attitude towards this heritage among a large number of modern linguists, especially the pioneers. Ferdinand de Saussure, the father of modern linguistics as some call him, did not deny the efforts of those who came before him. His relationship with them, especially the scholars of the previous three centuries, was "not based on absolute rejection or absolute acceptance, for Saussure benefited from all the ideas that supported his vision to the extent that he criticized the ideas that he did not

see any real value in understanding the linguistic phenomenon in its various dimensions and its complex formation". The efforts of his predecessors constituted a decisive step in the history of linguistics, on the basis that the methodological shift that Saussure himself sought "requires, according to methodological necessity, a retrospective evaluation of previous linguistic thought, aiming to determine the epistemological framework of the study across different periods". It is no wonder that the discovery of Sanskrit, comparative grammar, and historical linguistics paved the way for modern linguistics. His book contained creative ideas that had an impact on changing the course of linguistic study. Undoubtedly, de Saussure "did not reach those creative ideas that he disseminated in his lectures from nothing. The shadows of Whitney, Condillac (1715-1780), and Port-Royal are present in the text of the lectures, especially the concept of the arbitrariness of the sign ...". Chomsky, who brought about a radical change in modern linguistics, was influenced by rationalist thought; he returned in his conception of the nature of human language to the ideas of "Descartes" and "Port-Royal grammarians", and derived the idea of deep structure and surface structure from the ideas of the German thinker "Wilhelm von Humboldt". He acknowledges his influence by the ideas of these philosophers, and his book *La Linguistique cartésienne* is a clear acknowledgment of that.

Interest in linguistic heritage was not exclusive to Western linguists. Arab linguists also placed great importance on the Arabic linguistic heritage. Their awareness of the significance of the intellectual contributions made by ancient Arab scholars and the outcomes of their endeavors in addressing Arabic language issues revealed a deep appreciation, not only for the scientific value of this heritage but also for its importance within the broader context of linguistic studies across different cultures and throughout history.

Furthermore, the interest in Arabic linguistic heritage in the modern era and contemporary times was not born solely from the openness to modern Western linguistics. It can be traced back to the beginnings of the Renaissance. Its presence within the Renaissance consciousness was problematic, as it was at the center of Renaissance questions. It occupied a significant space within the concerns of its scholars and intellectuals in the context of the intellectual debate surrounding the role of this heritage in renewing Arab culture. This is without forgetting the interest of Orientalists in explaining, interpreting, studying, verifying, and publishing this heritage. Meanwhile, Arab linguists' interest in this heritage was within the framework of establishing linguistic knowledge and localizing it within Arab culture, giving the linguistic heritage another dimension based on the confrontation between the two systems (heritage and modern linguistics) to avoid the dual knowledge situation that Arab culture had reached.

This confrontation takes place within the framework of the issue of originality and modernity. Therefore, the discussion focused on the function of heritage and its role in the project of renewing Arab culture and later shifted to examining the position and procedures of heritage in modern linguistic research. Regardless of the differences in these issues, they all represent the fundamental question that haunts Arab linguists: "What can we do with this vast and magnificent linguistic output, while at the same time priding ourselves on it as a human thought that truly deserves our pride?"

Linguists have had varied and differing stances on this central issue. Some have prioritized traditional linguistics over modern linguistics, advocating for originality. Others have prioritized modern linguistics over tradition. These two stances have given rise to a third position that seeks to legitimize the coexistence of both achievements within Arab culture. These are the reconcilers, who have tried to link tradition and modern linguistics by searching for similarities and common ground between the two achievements, aiming to reinforce one with the other.

There is another position based on trying to bridge the gap between the two achievements and manage the existing differences, to utilize the available resources of this heritage to enrich and enhance modern linguistic models. It can be said that these stances have, to a greater or lesser extent, controlled how Arab linguists approach the heritage, which can be classified into two types:

1. Exclusionary approach.
2. Foundational approach.

We argue that the starting point of these stances is always a "relationship with heritage." All Arab linguists who are active in Arab culture on a practical level, whether descriptivists, generativists, or functionalists, have always started by defining their position on the heritage. These positions are based, as we see it, on their view of the nature of the relationship between the two achievements, or rather, that heritage, in its relationship with modern linguistics, is the foundation for this knowledge and its localization within Arab culture.

However, this relationship has not been stable or fixed, but rather variable, differing depending on the attitudes towards this heritage. Arab linguists have not been able to organize and regulate this relationship in a way that contributes to the establishment of sound linguistic knowledge.

**The Relationship Between Heritage and Modern Linguistics from the Perspective of Arab Linguists:**

Linguistics found its way into Arab culture at an exceptional stage in the history of the Arab nation when it was seeking ways to renew Arab culture in its various aspects. This was accompanied by a conflict between the traditionalist and modernist currents regarding heritage and its role in the renewal project sought by the Arab nation, which formed what is known as the "problem of originality and modernity."

This situation had a significant impact on guiding the scientific discussion that the Arab descriptivists engaged in while establishing modern linguistics in Arab culture. This discussion revolved mainly around the functionality of linguistic heritage and its role in renewal. Thus, linguistics was presented in Arab culture as a cultural issue, where heritage was pitted against modern linguistics, requiring one to align with one side of the confrontation.

However, this confrontation was not a constructive one based on both connection and separation simultaneously, but rather one of exclusion. The traditionalists excluded modern linguistics due to identity concerns, which is not the focus of our discussion here. Meanwhile, Arab descriptivists excluded heritage due to its lack of functionality, procedural nature, and inability to fulfill the renewal function they aspired to.

This is evident in what Abd al-Rahman Ayoub stated in his critical experiment. When he was tasked with teaching Arabic grammar at Dar al-Uloum, he said: "I saw that merely interpreting the statements of grammarians was a kind of intellectual rumination that was not befitting of the era we live in nor of our intellectual renaissance at this critical stage in the history of Arab culture. The complaints about Arabic grammar had reached a point where it was no longer possible to ignore, and people often talked about the need for a new grammar. Many thought that this merely involved rewriting grammatical theories in a modern style, but for me, the matter was deeper than that. Arabic grammar, like our traditional culture in general, is based on a kind of partial thinking that is concerned with the example before the theory..." It is clear that Abd al-Rahman Ayyoub considers the problem of Arabic grammar to be part of the problem of Arab culture as a whole, which he describes as traditional and, according to him, not befitting of the era we live in, nor responsive to the renewal project sought by the Arabs.

The descriptivists start from a general assumption that "traditional grammar is no longer considered a valid description of Arabic, nor a basis for its teaching and learning." Therefore, they adopted the criticism of Arabic grammar as a methodological approach to establishing modern linguistics in Arab culture and advocating for descriptivism. This is what Abd al-Rahman Ayoub expresses in his book "Critical Studies in Arabic Grammar," where he says: "... On the other hand, I feel that this attempt is a necessary prelude to an intellectual revolution that must mature before the minds of the new generation open up to objective linguistic research." This book is a clear call for adopting the descriptive approach based on objectivity and scientificity by criticizing ancient Arabic grammar, following the example of modern Western linguists.

The same applies to Tamam Hassan, who started by criticizing Arabic grammar in his presentation of the descriptive approach. He says: "I was inclined to study normativity and descriptivism when I saw that most people had doubts about Arabic grammar that they could not diagnose; if they wanted to diagnose this disease, they inadvertently turned to enumerating its symptoms, speaking about the details of grammar, not the core of the methodology, and there is a big difference between those who want to treat the philosophy on which its study is based. I thought about ancient Arabic studies, in terms of methodology rather than details, and made my thinking about it, enlightened by the methods of modern linguistic studies." The problem with Arabic grammar lies in its methodology, not its material, and here he is referring to the difference between his criticism and the criticism of the revivalists, which targeted the material, not the methodology. Therefore, he starts by criticizing the normative methodology adopted by the grammarians and presents the descriptive methodology as an alternative. In this context, he says, "I realized that the basis of the complaint is the predominance of normativity in a methodology that should, first and last, rely on description and that this normativity is evident in the method of treatment, as it is evident in the method of expression in the majority of books on grammar, morphology, and rhetoric, and only a few exceptions can be made."

This correlation between the call for descriptivism and the criticism of Arabic grammar reveals the Arab descriptivists' conception of the nature of the relationship between heritage and modern linguistics, which is a relationship based on the principle of opposition, where the descriptive approach stands in contrast to the normative/traditional approach. They "placed the concept of 'normativity,' as a characteristic of traditional grammatical studies, in a methodological and theoretical opposition to the concept of 'descriptivism,' which

is a characteristic of modern linguistics and a methodology advocated and adopted by Arab linguists". This conception is also evident in Tamam Hassan's book "Language Between Normativity and Descriptivism," which is based on the idea of the opposition between the two methods (normative and descriptive), as the discussions in this book reveal, "and built this opposition based on his assumption that ancient grammatical studies are normative studies that conflict, in their methodology, with the descriptive methodology that characterizes modern studies".

It also appears in Abd al-Rahman Ayoub's book "Critical Studies in Arabic Grammar." When distinguishing between ancient linguistic study and modern linguistics, he refers to "the existence of two schools of thought in study; one begins with the part and ends with the whole, as a builder does when he places one stone on top of another until he ends up with a complete building, and the second looks at the complete building and builds it stone by stone, without moving any of the stones from its place in the building. The first is the work of one who constructs something, while the second is the work of one who describes its construction, without interfering in anything. This difference between one who builds the building and one who describes it is the same difference between the traditional linguistic school - including the school of Arab grammarians - and the modern analytical linguistic school that describes the linguistic structure without separating its parts from each other.

Undoubtedly, this conception of the nature of the relationship between the two achievements, based on the principle of opposition, made their approach to heritage an exclusionary one based on excluding heritage in favor of modern linguistics and presenting the descriptive method as an alternative to the normative method, following the example of Western linguists who were convinced to "be describers of the linguistic phenomenon, not philosophers of it.

Al-Fasi al-Fahri's conception of the relationship between heritage and modern linguistics is grounded in an epistemological principle that acknowledges separation and divergence. This is because heritage and modern linguistics are two distinct intellectual systems or paradigms, each with its own intellectual, civilizational, and cognitive contexts that produced it. Consequently, "confronting ancient linguistic thought with contemporary linguistic thought leads to a kind of historicity and anachronism, as it forces us to judge a thought that arose in specific knowledge and technological circumstances by the measure of an era in which science and technology have reached results that no longer allow us to accept the analyses of the ancients in their entirety." He argues that the concepts, opinions, and analyses presented by ancient grammarians are no longer suitable for approaching the Arabic language. "The descriptive apparatus available to the ancients has no advantage in describing Arabic, but is rather inappropriate in many cases." According to him, no one can "infer that the theoretical beginnings presented by the ancients regarding inflection, for example, are indeed what is suitable for describing the Arabic language (...). It is not enough to know only what exists in the heritage, but we must go beyond it to something else, and this something else is what current scientific research has reached." The linguist, according to al-Fasi al-Fahri, is a product of their time and must transcend this heritage to embrace modern linguistics. In other words, the linguist, in his view, "does not say something that has been said or repeated before.

Based on this, al-Fasi al-Fahri presents heritage as a theory or intellectual system among his interests in dealing with linguistics. There is no methodological or logical necessity, according to him, that compels us to return to the thought of the past and its classifications to address a particular matter.

However, this conception quickly changed with the reconcilers; that is, the linguists of heritage who sought to link heritage and modern linguistics, or what is called "linguistics of heritage" in the literature of Arabic linguistic writing. This linking project aimed to reformulate the relationship between the two achievements from the perspective of the descriptivists and some generativists, a relationship that, as we have previously noted, is based on the principle of opposition or divergence, leading them to exclude heritage in favor of modern linguistics. This relationship, with the new trend towards linking and reconciling heritage and modern linguistics, transformed into a relationship of containment based on the principles of similarity, correspondence, and analogy. Therefore, this conception can be considered a response to the Arab descriptivists, specifically to their critical project of Arabic grammar and their exclusionary approach, which declined after the openness to the transformational generative theory that restored the credibility of some issues rejected by the Arab descriptivists, most notably the theory of the deep structure with its philosophical roots. Also, Chomsky's return to Western philosophical heritage, which he benefited from in establishing the transformational generative theory, as explained in his book "Cartesian Linguistics," refuted the claims of the non-procedural nature of heritage and its inability to perform the function of renewal, which motivated Arab linguists to return to their heritage. Hossam al-Bahnasawi says, "The book 'Cartesian Linguistics' served as a

living example of the interest of modern linguists in the need to return to linguistic heritage, to show the convergence between some of its neglected aspects and modern linguistic concepts. In this book, Chomsky was able to identify many elements that represent the convergence and agreement between the data of his transformational generative theory and the rules established by 'Descartes' in what is known as the rules of Port-Royal." Following Chomsky and other linguists such as Laoroua, Lipski, Georges Mounin, Kristeva, and Robins, who linked ancient and modern linguistic thought, Arab linguists tried to follow in their footsteps and began searching for similarities and common ground between the two achievements.

Despite the diversity of justifications for reading heritage in light of modern linguistics and searching for similarities and correspondences, these studies are generally based on a general conception of the nature of the relationship between the two achievements. This is a relationship of containment based on the principle of similarity, correspondence, and analogy at the level of many ideas, concepts, and terms, as the Arabs were able, according to them, "to discover many of the secrets of the linguistic phenomenon that humanity did not discover until recently, thanks to the flourishing of linguistic sciences at the beginning of the twentieth century." Many books on Arabic grammar from our linguistic heritage also show "a precedence in many linguistic issues and topics that were reached by modern linguistic research methods, whether these were the descriptive structuralist methods, which dominated linguistic studies for a long time since the Swiss linguist Saussure established his linguistic data in the early twentieth century, or these were the transformational generative methods, the most recent and most accurate linguistic methods, which gained great fame and popularity in the last quarter of the twentieth century." Therefore, many Arab linguists were engaged in searching for the origins of modern linguistic concepts in this heritage, considering historical precedence and considering that it contains many of these origins. This is revealed in many diverse studies, all of which concluded that the heritage contains various modern linguistic issues, including "immediate constituent analysis." The data of immediate constituent analysis "are some of what the Arab grammarians sensed from inflection and derived from it, to the extent that it is almost self-evident to those who study Arabic." Some concluded that the "transformational aspects « in Arabic grammar » are, in fact, the majority, because there are common origins between the two methods, the most important of which is that Arabic grammar - for the most part - is based on a rational basis." This includes the phenomenon of deletion, the issue of the general, the original, and the derivative, and it is acknowledged in another place that "the Kufic school was known for being descriptive (...) and that the early grammarians tended to deal with phenomena on a formal basis, which is a principle of descriptive grammar.

Kamal Bishr goes on to say that "selection and addition together constitute what can be considered an equivalent to the idea of 'system' in Abd al-kaher al-Jurjani." We cannot dwell here on mentioning the various opinions that state the existence of similarity, correspondence, and analogy between traditional and modern linguistic concepts, all of which start from a general conception that the heritage contains many of the issues that modern linguistics has come up with. Therefore, this trend was based on the need to "re-read the Arabic linguistic heritage and compare it with the results of modern linguistic study to prove precedence, similarity, or superiority.

In contrast to the previous two conceptions, we encounter a third conception of the nature of the relationship between the two achievements, which is a relationship of extension or a relationship between origins and extension. This is the direction of Ahmed al-Mutawakkil in his project "Building a Functional Grammar for the Arabic Language". Like other Arab linguists, Ahmed al-Mutawakkil was concerned with answering "the haunting question for the functional linguist: What can we do with this vast and magnificent linguistic output, while at the same time priding ourselves on it as a human thought that truly deserves our pride?" Therefore, reading the Arabic linguistic heritage has been linked to his foundational project, as he states: "The project of the functional approach in Arabic linguistic research is a project with two inseparable and complementary parts. In addition to studying the phenomena of the Arabic language and trying to explain them from a functional perspective, functional researchers in Morocco, such as al-Mutawakkil (1977, 1981, 1982, 1989) and al-Zahri (1998), sought to re-read the Arabic linguistic heritage, grammar, rhetoric, principles of jurisprudence, and interpretation." Thus, his project does not stop at the limits of treating the issues of the Arabic language and studying it in terms of phonology and morphology, lexicon and semantics, standard and colloquial, but also seeks to "build bridges to connect functional linguistic research with the traditional counterpart of meaning, viewed as a whole in terms of grammar, rhetoric, linguistic jurisprudence, and principles of jurisprudence and interpretation." In doing so, he seeks to avert the conflict between the two systems (linguistic heritage and modern linguistics) and refute the claim of divergence that some descriptivists and some generativists relied on, which necessitated them to exclude this heritage in favor of

modern linguistics. He says, "The idea that modern linguistics is a new science that is completely different from previous traditional grammatical studies, including ancient Arabic linguistic thought, became prevalent for a while in the literature of structural linguistics. Two interrelated factors contributed to the prevalence of this idea:

- ✓ The feeling of linguists of that era that they were coming, following Saussure, with something new that superseded what came before it
- ✓ The 'attack' of the supporters of the old, who were resentful of the novelty of linguistics and considered it to be nothing more than a 'terminological alternative' to the ancient linguistic study, which had proven its sufficiency over the centuries.

Al-Fasi al-Fahri refutes these claims based on an epistemological perspective grounded in the thesis of development, as opposed to the thesis of discontinuity. From this perspective, he assumes that "modern linguistics is merely a phase in the development of a single linguistic thought that began when humans began to think about language and will continue as long as thought about language continues." Therefore, al-Mutawakkil attempted to prove that the Arabic linguistic heritage is fundamentally functional and defended the thesis that "traditional linguistic thought is fundamentally functional in terms of its concepts, methodology, and issues," and that "the relationship between modern functional study and this thought is a relationship of extension of an origin that allows for the inspiration and utilization of what can be inspired and utilized from it." Through his reading of the heritage based on a rigorous and clearly defined scientific methodology that rejects epistemological discontinuity and projection, he concluded that "the traditional theorization of meaning is a functional theorization in terms of concepts, methodology, and approach, achieving what the optimal functional theory allows the intellectual environment that produced it to achieve." Therefore, for him, heritage is a guided past that assumes three positions:

First, it can be considered a history of functional linguistic thought;

Second, it can be used as a reference for proof and argumentation;

Third, it can be a source from which to draw whenever needed.

Thus, he aims to bridge the gap between modern linguistics, represented by the "functional grammar model," and heritage, especially its semantic aspect, and to facilitate the existing difference between them. He makes this heritage a continuous past, meaning that this heritage is nothing but an important phase of human linguistic thought in its functional orientation, the relationship between them is a relationship of extension or connection and continuity. He, therefore, does not dispense with this heritage but rather utilizes it to enrich and strengthen the functional model with what is available from this heritage, considering its function as we have mentioned, because he is well aware of the limits of the epistemological difference between the two models. Therefore, he classified the Arabic semantic heritage as fundamentally functional to enable its activation in the present time and the utilization of concepts with procedural capabilities that are still valid in functionally approaching the linguistic phenomenon.

Al-Mutawakkil supports his doctrine with the work of major linguists such as Chomsky, Kuroda, Greimas, Kristeva, and Robins, who demonstrated "concretely that modern linguistics is merely a phase in the development of a single linguistic thought that began when humans began to think about language and will continue as long as thought about language continues." He is also supported by John McKenzie's praise and endorsement of this approach taken by al-Mutawakkil, who says: "Professor al-Mutawakkil's book (1989) aims to apply functional grammar as proposed by Simon Dik (Dik 1978) in analyzing the phenomena of standard modern Arabic (...). The book has additional importance derived from its attempt to integrate the proposals of ancient Arabic linguistic thought into the theory of functional grammar in a way that enriches both parties." Al-Mutawakkil has relied in his various works on the importance of the proposals of the ancients and the need to utilize them in describing the Arabic language according to the "functional grammar model" in a way that reflects his vision of the nature of the relationship between heritage and modern linguistics, driven by an epistemological awareness founded on the principle of continuity and connection.

#### **Conclusion:**

- ❖ The Arab linguists' engagement in redefining the Arabic language according to modern linguistic models required them to define their position on the heritage in a way that reveals their conception of the nature of the relationship between heritage and modern linguistics.
- ❖ Arab linguists have not been able to organize the relationship between heritage and modern linguistics due to the differences in starting points; some started from the issue of originality and modernity, which required the necessity of aligning with one of the achievements due to the relationship of conflict between them, or reconciling the achievements due to the relationship of

similarity and correspondence between many opinions, concepts, and terms. Others started from epistemological visions, some of which were based on the principle of epistemological discontinuity and thus acknowledged the relationship of divergence and separation between the two systems, while others were based on the principle of continuity and development and thus acknowledged the relationship of extension and connection.

- ❖ Arranging a possible relationship between linguistics and linguistic heritage requires, first, a conscious epistemological reading of the limits of the difference between them, and looking at this relationship by adopting specific epistemological foundations and situating it in the context of the history of ideas, or the history of Arabic linguistic thought, describing this heritage as a picture of this history or a phase of human linguistic thought.

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