

ARABIC LANGUAGE & ITS INFLUENCE ON SOCIETY & CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Language is more than just a means of communication. It influences our culture and even our thought processes. During the first four decades of the 20th century, language was viewed by American linguists and anthropologists as being more important than it actually is in shaping our perception of reality. Anthropologists define culture as “a complex whole that includes knowledge, ideas, art, law, morals, customs and any potential habits acquired by man as a member of a particular culture.” Culture is constituted by traditions, beliefs, values, norms and symbols, shared to varying degrees by members of a particular community.

Arab culture refers to the culture in the countries in which the official language is Arabic. The west officials and scholars used to call them "Arab countries" of Western Asia and North Africa. Understanding the Arab world is today of vital importance. Arabic is the fifth most widely spoken language in the world. It is one of the official languages of the United Nations and the religious language of a billion and a half Muslims, as well as of millions of Christians and Jews. It is the living medium of a vibrant contemporary literature and culture. Political and economic developments in the Arab world and parts of the Middle East, like the internationalization of businesses and professions around the world, have made understanding, speaking, reading, and writing Arabic an increasingly valuable skill. Arabic is a language with a rich literary and cultural heritage that deserves to be studied in its own right. Language, literature, gastronomy, art, architecture, music, spirituality, philosophy, mysticism etc. are all part of the cultural heritage of the Pan-Arab world.

As a result, the Arabic Language has a wide influence on the world culture and societies. This paper attempts to study the influence of Arabic culture, particularly Arabic language, in Society and Culture by tracing its growth and development and to examine the factors responsible for its survival in a difficult terrain. This work has traced out the relation between the Language and Culture as well as the importance of the Arabic Language in the world cultural heritage.

KEYWORDS: Arabic Language & Its Influence on Society & Culture

INTRODUCTION

The power of language to reflect culture and influence thinking was first proposed by an American linguist and anthropologist, Edward Sapir (1884-1939), and his student, Benjamin Whorf (1897-1941). They said that language predetermines what we see in the world around us. In other words, language acts like a polarizing lens on a camera in filtering reality--we see the real world only in the categories of our language.

The **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis** stated that the way we think and view the world is determined by our language. Instances of cultural language differences are evidenced in that some languages have specific words for concepts whereas other languages use several words to represent a specific concept. For example, the Arabic language includes many specific words for designating a certain type of horse or camel. To make such distinctions in English, where specific words

do not exist, adjectives would be used preceding the concept label, such as quarter horse or dray horse.

From the time of inception, the effect of Arabic language cannot be over-emphasized in all human strata, even before the birth of Islam to Arabian Peninsula, its linguistic landscape and substance has been functional and applause. On this, AmiduSanni in his study asserted thus: Until the third decade of the 7th century, Arabic was confined to the Arabian peninsula, but with the introduction of Islam, the language began to have extensive influence far beyond Arabia; and with the Arabic Qur'an, the linguistic landscape of the world was set to change, at any new community that accepted the faith had a priori, to learn some Arabic. Since the Qur'an is inimitable and untranslatable. It has to be learnt in the original Arabic by every faithful, regardless of his mother tongue.

This pronouncement gives an incisive illustration about the significance of Arabic in the world of languages, as a standard language of communications, which was later reformed and safeguarded by the virtue of Islam. Thus, the necessity to learn more of the principle of linguistic prowess of Arabic language beyond its narrow status become more complex. It is pertinent to state succinctly that Arabic language is the youngest of the Semitic group of language, other language that fall in to this class include Hebrew, Tigre, Aramaic, Greez etc. But marvelously, Arabic outlives them all, because most of these languages have been declined and neglected, than few languages that do thrive in its primitive form as at present like Syria, Hebrew and etc. Hebrew being one of the Semitic family as suffered untold neglect for centuries before and after the appearance of prophet Isa known as Jesus Christ (peace be unto him), and during the days of Greek and Roman power.

One thing to be understood in this paper is to investigate on how Arabic is survived its way in multicultural societies and influenced on world culture, despite the severe menaces that obstructing its way in global world.

Language

Language is a communication of thoughts and feelings through a system of arbitrary signals, such as voice sounds, gestures or written symbols or such a system including its rules for combining its components, such as words or Such a system as used by a nation, people or other distinct community; often contrasted with dialect or *a system of signs, symbols, gestures or rules used in communicating*. Language is the ability to acquire and use complex systems of communication, particularly the human ability to do so, and a language is any specific example of such a system. The scientific study of language is called linguistics.

Human language has the properties of productivity, recursivity, and displacement, and relies entirely on social convention and learning. Its complex structure affords a much wider range of expressions than any known system of animal communication. Language is thought to have originated when early hominins started gradually changing their primate communication systems, acquiring the ability to form a theory of other minds and a shared intentionality. This development is sometimes thought to have coincided with an increase in brain volume, and many linguists see the structures of language as having evolved to serve specific communicative and social functions. Language is processed in many different locations in the human brain, but especially in Broca's and Wernicke's areas. Humans acquire language through social interaction in early childhood, and children generally speak fluently when they are approximately three years old. The use of language is deeply entrenched in human culture. Therefore, in addition to its strictly communicative uses, language also has many social and cultural uses, such as signifying group identity, social stratification, as well as social grooming and entertainment. Languages evolve and diversify over time, and the history of their evolution can

be reconstructed by comparing modern languages to determine which traits their ancestral languages must have had in order for the later developmental stages to occur. A group of languages that descend from a common ancestor is known as a language family. The Indo-European family is the most widely spoken and includes languages such as English, Russian, and Hindi; the Sino-Tibetan family, which includes Mandarin and the other Chinese languages, and Tibetan; the Afro-Asiatic family, which includes Arabic, Somali, and Hebrew; the Bantu languages, which include Swahili, and Zulu, and hundreds of other languages spoken throughout Africa; and the Malayo-Polynesian languages, which include Indonesian, Malay, Tagalog, and hundreds of other languages spoken throughout the Pacific. The languages of the Dravidian family that are spoken mostly in Southern India include Tamil and Telugu.

Language and Culture

Language is more than just a means of communication. It influences our culture and even our thought processes. Languages, understood as the particular set of speech norms of a particular community, are also a part of the larger culture of the community that speaks them. Languages differ not only in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, but also through having different "cultures of speaking." Humans use language as a way of signaling identity with one cultural group as well as difference from others. Even among speakers of one language, several different ways of using the language exist, and each is used to signal affiliation with particular subgroups within a larger culture. Linguists and anthropologists, particularly sociolinguists, ethno linguists, and linguistic anthropologists have specialized in studying how ways of speaking vary between speech communities.

Linguists use the term "varieties" to refer to the different ways of speaking a language. This term includes geographically or socioculturally defined dialects as well as the jargons or styles of subcultures. Linguistic anthropologists and sociologists of language define communicative style as the ways that language is used and understood within a particular culture.

Because norms for language use are shared by members of a specific group, communicative style also becomes a way of displaying and constructing group identity. Linguistic differences may become salient markers of divisions between social groups, for example, speaking a language with a particular accent may imply membership of an ethnic minority or social class, one's area of origin, or status as a second language speaker. These kinds of differences are not part of the linguistic system, but are an important part of how people use language as a social tool for constructing groups.

However, many languages also have grammatical conventions that signal the social position of the speaker in relation to others through the use of registers that are related to social hierarchies or divisions. In many languages, there are stylistic or even grammatical differences between the ways men and women speak, between age groups, or between social classes, just as some languages employ different words depending on who is listening. For example, in the Australian language Dyirbal, a married man must use a special set of words to refer to everyday items when speaking in the presence of his mother-in-law. Some cultures, for example, have elaborate systems of "social deixis", or systems of signaling social distance through linguistic means. In English, social deixis is shown mostly through distinguishing between addressing some people by first name and others by surname, and in titles such as "Mrs.", "boy", "Doctor", or "Your Honor", but in other languages, such systems may be highly complex and codified in the entire grammar and vocabulary of the language. For instance, in languages of east Asia such as Thai, Burmese, and Javanese, different words are used according to whether a speaker is addressing someone of higher or lower rank than oneself in a ranking system with animals and children ranking the lowest and gods and members of royalty as the highest. The most obvious way language can have a direct

effect on a society and culture is the extent to which certain language can restrict or permit knowledge for certain populations.

Arabic Language and its Influence on the Society and Culture

The Arabic language is spoken today by over 250 million people in the Middle East and North Africa. A number of other native languages are also spoken in this part of the world such as Kurdish, Berber, and Mahri. Arabic is also used as a religious language by the world's Muslims, who total around one billion people. Arabic is therefore also learned to various levels of proficiency, as a venerated, liturgical language, by many Muslims mainly in Asia (e.g., Pakistan, Malaysia, China) and Africa (e.g., Senegal).

The language that is spoken by the native speakers of Arabic is usually referred to as "dialect" **لُحِيَّة**. The numerous dialects are purely spoken and are used in parallel to another form of the language that is primarily written but is also spoken in the media today. This co-existence of two forms of the same language to serve different purposes is known as

diglossia. This form of Arabic goes back to pre-Islamic poetry and is commonly referred to as fuSHa **لُحِيَّةُ الْبَدْرِ** (elegant or clear language) in Arabic. In English it is called Modern Standard Arabic, Classical Arabic and sometimes literary Arabic or Qur'anic Arabic. While these multiple designations in English seem to offer a breakdown of the different kinds of fuSHa that co-exist today, the Arabic designation sees the different types within a large continuum. This Standard

Arabic is standard in that it remains almost exclusively the only recognized language of literacy across the Arabic speaking world. It also enjoys a special position for Arabic speakers because of the large body of texts that has been produced in this form of the language particularly around the golden age of the Islamic civilization. In addition to the Islamic religious texts and the classical Arabic literary texts, major scholarly contributions to the fields of science, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, and sociology for instance were written in the middle ages in this standard Arabic language. Most students learning Arabic as a foreign language tend to get exposure to this standard written language first before they learn a dialect.

Educated speakers of Arabic do mix the standard language and their own dialects to varying degrees depending on the situation. While roughly four major regional dialects of Arabic spoken in the Arab world today have been identified, a multitude of dialectic variations can be noted even within one single country. The four regional dialects are divided into the following general categories: Arabic of the Maghreb (North Africa), Egyptian Arabic (Egypt and the Sudan), Levantine Arabic (Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine/Palestinians in Israel), and Iraqi/Gulf Arabic. These dialects can differ greatly from one another to the point of mutual unintelligibility.

In terms of language typology, Arabic belongs to the Semitic family of languages. Some of the members of this language family that are spoken today include Arabic, Aramaic (relatively small communities mostly in Iraq and Syria), Amharic (the national language of Ethiopia), Tigre (spoken in Eritrea), and Hebrew (spoken in Israel). There were many other members of this language family which have disappeared over time. These include, for example, Akkadian (spoken in ancient Mesopotamia), Phoenician (spoken in what is today Lebanon), and Eblaite (spoken in ancient Syria).

The Semitic languages first came to light in the Arabian Peninsula. Over the course of millennia these languages spread as different groups left the Arabian Peninsula, carrying their languages with them, into various parts of the Middle East and neighboring areas.

Beginning in the 7th century CE, the Arab Conquests (also known as Islamic or Muslim Conquests) carried

into almost all of the Middle East and North Africa, west into the Iberian Peninsula and all the way east to China. Over time, as the incoming Arabs intermarried with indigenous peoples mostly in the Middle East and North Africa, the Arabic language became the prominent language of these regions. While some of the native languages such as Kurdish (Iraq and Syria), Berber (Algeria and Morocco), Mahri (Yemen), and Jebali (Oman) are still spoken in this area, some languages have gradually shrunk. Aramaic, for example, the language that was spoken most widely in the Middle East before the Conquests, is still spoken in pockets in today's Syria and Iraq. In Egypt, the language that was spoken before the Muslims came was Coptic, a direct descendant of the Ancient Egyptian language. Today it only survives as a liturgical language of the Coptic Church.

As a result of the contact Arabic has had with other languages over the past 15 centuries, many languages of the world have borrowed words from Arabic. Persian (a member of the Indo-European language family) and Turkish (a member of the Altaic language family), for example, are replete with Arabic words. The very name of the language "Swahili," spoken in East Africa, is an Arabic word. Spanish and Portuguese have a large Arabic vocabulary (approximately 4000 words) dating back to the eight centuries of contact in the Iberian Peninsula under Muslim rule. English too has its share of words borrowed from Arabic - typically words starting with "al." Some of these words had been borrowed by Arabic speakers themselves from other languages. For example, the English word "alchemy" comes from the Arabic كيمياء. But the Arabic word itself comes from *Kemet*, which was the name of Ancient Egypt, literally meaning the dark, fertile soil irrigated by the Nile.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has briefly examined the growth and development of Arabic language and its influence on society and culture and it submitted that the spawn of Arabs and their language dwindled in mono-cultural boundary for many memorable years. It is of the fact that the relevance of Arabic language is not only restricted to the people spoken it as their mother language. Thus, it is globally applauded due to its effective recognitions and relevancies in to other cultures and all human strata. History shows that the place of Arabic language in multicultural society are very applaudive, especially after the emergence of Islam, when Islam spread beyond its domain to other continents like Asia, Europe, Africa, America and etc. Eagering to learn Arabic by people become noticeable for many reasonable factors: religion, trade, diplomacy and etc.

The paper recommends that the Central Government as well as State Govt. should give adequate recognition to Arabic language and Private Arabic Schools, Madrassas and provide manpower for societal reformation. It also calls on the Arabs countries to collaborate with Arabic institutions in India to really promote the language and raise it to the enviable position of one of the International languages in the world.

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