



COMPARISON BETWEEN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARABIC LINGUISTICS AND MODERN LINGUISTICS

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ABSTRACT

Arabic linguistics is a branch of science that focuses on the study of Arabic from various fields, namely phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Since classical times, Muslim scholars have developed linguistic theories that have contributed greatly to understanding the structure of the Arabic language. In its further development, Arabic linguistics began to interact with modern linguistic approaches, which offer more systematic and comprehensive analysis methods. Modern linguistics, which includes various branches such as structuralism, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and discourse analysis, provides a new perspective in understanding Arabic, both in theoretical and applied aspects. The influence of this modern approach not only enriches the study of Arabic linguistics, but also supports the development of language technology, translation, and Arabic language learning for foreign speakers. This article aims to examine the development of Arabic linguistics from traditional to modern perspectives and to explore the scope of modern linguistics that has an impact on Arabic language studies in the contemporary era. Through a descriptive and analytical approach, this article identifies the role of modern linguistics in expanding the scope of Arabic language studies, resulting in a deeper understanding of the structure and function of the language in various contexts.

Keywords: Arabic Linguistics, Modern Linguistics, Morphology, Phonology, Semantics, Syntax

ABSTRAK

Linguistik Arab merupakan cabang ilmu yang berfokus pada kajian bahasa Arab dari beragam bidang, yaitu fonologi, morfologi, sintaksis, dan semantik. Sejak masa klasik, para sarjana Muslim telah menyusun teori-teori linguistik yang berkontribusi besar dalam memahami struktur bahasa Arab. Dalam perkembangan selanjutnya, linguistik Arab mulai berinteraksi dengan pendekatan linguistik modern, yang menawarkan metode analisis yang lebih sistematis dan komprehensif. Linguistik modern, yang mencakup berbagai cabang seperti strukturalisme, sosiolinguistik, psikolinguistik, dan analisis wacana, memberikan perspektif baru dalam memahami bahasa Arab, baik dalam aspek teoretis maupun aplikatif. Pengaruh pendekatan modern ini tidak hanya memperkaya kajian linguistik Arab, tetapi juga mendukung pengembangan teknologi bahasa, penerjemahan, serta pembelajaran bahasa Arab bagi penutur asing. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji perkembangan linguistik Arab dari perspektif tradisional hingga modern serta menelusuri ruang lingkup linguistik modern yang berdampak pada studi bahasa Arab di era kontemporer. Melalui pendekatan deskriptif dan analitis, artikel ini mengidentifikasi peran linguistik modern dalam memperluas cakupan kajian bahasa Arab, sehingga menghasilkan pemahaman yang lebih mendalam terhadap struktur dan fungsi bahasa tersebut dalam berbagai konteks.

Kata Kunci: Fonologi, Linguistik Arab, Linguistik Modern, Morfologi, Semantik, Sintaksis

INTRODUCTION

Linguistics is a discipline that scientifically studies language, encompassing its structure, meaning, and use in communication (Fowler, 2022). In the context of the Arabic language, linguistics plays a crucial role, as Arabic is not only a means of daily communication but also a language of religion, literature, and science from classical times to the modern era (Aziz & Dinata, 2019). Arabic linguistics has a long history dating back to the early Islamic period, with scholars such as Sibawayh and Al-Khalil bin Ahmad formulating Arabic grammar rules based on systematic analysis (Alkiyumi, 2023). Over time, the study of Arabic linguistics has undergone transformations and has been influenced by modern linguistic approaches, including structuralism, semiotics, and sociolinguistics.

Modern linguistics has since evolved into a multifaceted and interdisciplinary field. It includes branches such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, while also branching into applied fields like psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, and computational linguistics. The introduction of empirical methodologies, such as fieldwork and statistical modeling, has transformed linguistics into a robust scientific discipline (Yule, 2019).

Modern linguistics itself has developed into various branches, including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, while also intersecting with other disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, and language technology (Peniro & Cyntas, 2019). The scope of modern linguistics is not only focused on theoretical aspects but also on its applications in various fields, including translation, language teaching, and discourse analysis in media and digital technology (Febriani & Anasruddin, 2020). In the context of Arabic studies, these developments have given rise to renewed interest in understanding the Arabic language not merely from a traditional normative perspective, but also from descriptive, analytical, and interdisciplinary frameworks that are responsive to contemporary linguistic phenomena.

To address the gap between classical and modern approaches in Arabic linguistic studies, this article proposes a comprehensive review of Arabic linguistics from a diachronic and synchronic perspective. The study aims to bridge the epistemological divide between traditional grammatical heritage (*turāth*) and modern linguistic theories by identifying points of convergence and divergence. A comparative analytical approach is employed to synthesize insights from both paradigms, providing a more holistic understanding of Arabic linguistic dynamics in contemporary scholarship (Pratama et al., 2024).

Several recent studies have attempted to address the development of Arabic linguistics within the framework of modern linguistics. Tayalati et al, explored the impact of structural linguistics on the analysis of Arabic syntax, revealing that classical syntax can be reinterpreted using transformational-generative grammar (Tayalati & Danckaert, 2020). Another study by Ahyar et al., examined how semantics and pragmatics in Arabic discourse analysis have evolved in political and media contexts (Ahyar et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Habib analyzed how sociolinguistic variation in Arabic-speaking communities reflects identity and ideology (Habib, 2025). In addition, Hizbullah et al., demonstrated the significance of corpus linguistics in Arabic morphology studies, especially in developing language-learning tools (Hizbullah et al., 2020). Finally, a study by Ahmad & Anwari discussed the intersection between Arabic linguistic theory and computational linguistics in the development of natural language processing applications (Ahmad & Anwari, 2024).

This article offers novelty by systematically mapping the trajectory of Arabic linguistics from its classical heritage to its integration with modern linguistic theories. While many previous works have focused on specific branches or isolated comparisons, this study uniquely contributes

by presenting a structured synthesis of historical continuity and theoretical transformation. The novelty lies in its attempt to position Arabic linguistics as both a rooted and progressive field, capable of adapting to interdisciplinary and technological demands of the 21st century.

The objective of this research is to provide a critical overview of the evolution of Arabic linguistics, focusing on the theoretical integration between classical frameworks and modern linguistic schools. The scope is limited to the analysis of key linguistic domains—syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and applied linguistics—within the Arabic context, based on a review of selected scholarly works and relevant textual examples. The study does not cover phonological or historical dialectological developments, as these areas require separate in-depth treatment beyond the scope of this article.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach, which is appropriate for investigating theoretical developments in the field of Arabic and modern linguistics. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of linguistic phenomena based on textual and conceptual analysis rather than numerical data (Musthafa & Hermawan, 2018). The primary data in this research are obtained through library research, focusing on scholarly sources such as classical Arabic linguistic texts, contemporary linguistic theories, peer-reviewed journals, and academic publications relevant to the subject matter. As Stanley states, qualitative descriptive research is suitable for examining language phenomena holistically through document-based data (Stanley, 2023). This method provides an interpretive understanding of the evolution and intersection of Arabic linguistics with modern linguistic thought.

Data collection was carried out through a systematic literature review that involves identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant texts and theoretical frameworks. Sources include traditional Arabic grammar (e.g., *Al-Kitāb* by Sibawayh), modern linguistic theories such as transformational-generative grammar, structural linguistics, and sociolinguistics. The analysis consists of three stages: (1) identification of key linguistic themes, (2) comparison between classical and modern theories, and (3) contextual interpretation based on linguistic domains such as syntax, semantics, and pragmatics (Ridder, 2014). This method enables the researcher to critically assess how modern linguistic approaches have influenced Arabic linguistic studies, contributing both to theoretical enrichment and to the development of practical applications in language learning, translation, and digital linguistics (Holes, 2018; Taha, 2021).

The findings of this study are expected to provide a detailed overview of the development of Arabic linguistics and how modern linguistic approaches contribute to expanding the study of the Arabic language, both in theoretical and applied aspects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Historical Emergence of Arabic Linguistics

The emergence of Arabic linguistics can be traced back to the formative period of Islam, where the study of the Arabic language—particularly its structural aspects—was referred to as the science of *nahwu* (syntax). This discipline primarily examines the morphological and syntactic behavior of word endings, especially vowel alterations (*i'rab*) based on syntactic function within a sentence (Al-Sharkawi, 2016).

Scholarly debates persist regarding the foundational figure of *nahwu*. Some historians assert that 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the fourth Caliph and cousin of the Prophet Muhammad, was the earliest contributor to Arabic grammar. He is credited with initiating the classification of Arabic words

into *ism* (noun), *fi'l* (verb), and *ḥarf* (particle), and he is reported to have instructed Abū al-Aswad al-Du'ālī to further systematize the grammatical rules.

An alternative scholarly view identifies Abū al-Aswad al-Du'ālī (d. 67 AH) as the founder of Arabic grammar. The formal study of *nahwu* subsequently developed in the city of Basrah, particularly during the period between Du'ālī and al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī (d. 175 AH), who is renowned for authoring *Kitāb al-ʿAyn*, the first known Arabic dictionary organized phonetically, beginning with the letter ‘Ayn’. Another prominent early linguist, Ibn ʿĀshim al-Laythī (d. 79 AH), made significant contributions by introducing the diacritical vowel signs (*ḥarakāt*)—*fathḥah*, *ḍammah*, *kasrah*, and *tanwīn*—which replaced the earlier system of colored dots used to distinguish between similar letters in the Qur'anic script.

The early study of Arabic syntax was grounded in *qiyās* (analogical reasoning) as a methodological tool for formulating grammatical rules (*qawā'id al-nahw*), with a strong focus on explaining and preserving the correct *i'rāb* of words. During the Abbasid era, Arabic linguistic inquiry flourished further. Thinkers like al-Jāhīz (d. 256 AH) explored semantic theory, laying the groundwork for later Qur'anic exegesis and rhetorical analysis.

Defining Linguistics

Language functions as a principal medium for expressing thoughts, emotions, and information. It enables human interaction and the articulation of individual and collective intentions. According to the classical Arab grammarian Ibn Jinnī, language is “*al-ṣawt alladhī yutaqawwamu bihi al-qawm*,” meaning “the sound system by which a community communicates.”

Linguistics, derived from the Latin *lingua* (language), is the scientific study of language and its structure. It encompasses the systematic investigation of sound (phonology), word formation (morphology), sentence structure (syntax), and meaning (semantics and pragmatics). The term “linguist” refers to a scholar who engages in such study. Unlike language-specific research, general linguistics aims to develop universal principles applicable across languages.

Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss philologist, is widely regarded as the father of modern linguistics. His posthumously compiled work, *Cours de linguistique Générale*, remains foundational in contemporary linguistic theory (Harris, 2019). Saussure introduced three pivotal concepts: *langue*, *parole*, and *language*. *Langue* denotes a structured language system (e.g., Arabic, English); *language* refers to the innate human capacity for language; and *parole* signifies actual speech or linguistic performance. The concept of *langue* closely parallels Noam Chomsky's later notion of “linguistic competence,” distinguishing it from “performance” or actual usage.

In contemporary discourse, the term “linguistics” is broadly applied across various academic disciplines. Nonetheless, its core function remains the analytical and scientific exploration of language structure and function. Emphasizing deep understanding over surface-level learning is essential for the effective analysis of linguistic phenomena and error detection.

The Relevance and Applications of Linguistics

Linguistics plays a crucial role in advancing our understanding of language systems and their application in real-world contexts. It transcends the study of any single language and instead focuses on the general principles underlying human communication. It provides theoretical and practical tools for analyzing, describing, and explaining language in a structured and empirical manner.

Language acquisition represents the initial phase of linguistic engagement, whether it occurs in natural settings (first language) or formal educational environments (second or foreign language

learning). Children acquire language through interaction with their environment, while adults may engage in structured or informal learning processes (Li et al., 2024).

For literary critics and scholars, linguistic methodologies offer analytical frameworks to examine literary texts. Since language constitutes the primary medium of literature, understanding linguistic structures enhances literary interpretation and stylistic analysis.

In the field of language education, linguistic knowledge is indispensable. A comprehensive understanding of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics enables educators to teach effectively and systematically. It empowers instructors to diagnose and address students' language errors, including mispronunciations, syntactic inaccuracies, and semantic ambiguities (Nazir et al., 2019).

Lexicographers also rely heavily on linguistic principles to compile dictionaries. Phonological analysis aids in the accurate transcription of words, while morphological and syntactic knowledge ensures the precision and clarity of definitions (Dika et al., 2023).

Furthermore, textbook writers employ linguistic insights to tailor educational content to the cognitive and linguistic capacities of learners. Semantic knowledge guides the selection of appropriate vocabulary, while syntactic expertise ensures that instructional sentences are grammatically correct and easily comprehensible.

Scope of Modern Linguistics

Modern linguistics offers a comprehensive analysis of language through several core subfields: phonetics and phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. This typology marks a departure from traditional linguistic models, particularly those established in classical Arabic grammar, which typically commenced with syntax and *i'rab* (case endings), and addressed morphology and phonology subsequently (Pountain, 2019). Unlike traditional grammarians such as Sibawayh, modern Western linguists—particularly in American and European traditions—tend to analyze syntactic structures first before progressing toward phonological considerations.

Phonetics

Phonetics, a foundational subdiscipline in linguistics, investigates the physical and physiological characteristics of speech sounds. It encompasses the processes by which sounds are produced (articulatory phonetics), their acoustic properties (acoustic phonetics), and their perception by the auditory system (auditory phonetics) (Yoviyani & Mulyati, 2023). Articulatory phonetics studies the movement and coordination of speech organs such as the tongue, lips, and vocal cords. Acoustic phonetics focuses on measurable features of sound waves, including frequency, amplitude, and duration. Auditory phonetics, on the other hand, examines how the ear and brain perceive and process speech sounds.

The capacity to produce phonetic distinctions is intrinsic to human speech organs. Phonetic errors, which may arise from physiological constraints, first-language interference, or misarticulation, can significantly impede language acquisition. As such, phonetics plays a crucial role in language pedagogy by informing effective pronunciation instruction and remediation strategies.

Phonology

Phonology refers to the study of sound systems within languages and the rules governing their distribution and function. While phonetics concerns the physical realization of speech sounds, phonology addresses their abstract, functional roles in a linguistic system (Nandang S &

Kosim, 2018). Phonemes, the smallest contrastive units in a language, are classified into segmental phonemes (vowels and consonants) and suprasegmental phonemes (intonation, stress, and rhythm). Segmental phonemes are differentiated by the presence or absence of obstruction in the vocal tract during articulation, whereas suprasegmentals influence the prosodic features of utterances (Kosim, 2020).

Phonological analysis is pivotal in identifying how sound contrasts contribute to meaning. For instance, minimal pairs such as /b/ and /s/ in “bat” and “sat” illustrate the semantic importance of phonemic variation. Phonology thus operates at a systemic level, contributing to both linguistic theory and applied domains such as speech pathology and language teaching.

Morphology

Morphology is the linguistic study of word formation and the internal structure of words (Luthfan & Hadi, 2019). Central to morphological analysis are morphemes—the smallest units of meaning—which combine to create complex lexical items. Morphology examines how these units interact, undergo inflection, and reflect grammatical functions (Ruhmadi & Al Farisi, 2023). In Arabic, morphological structures (*tasrif*) are rich and pattern-based, with variations in word form (*wazn*) carrying distinct semantic and syntactic implications (Syafei et al., 2020).

Errors in Arabic orthography are often tied to morphological misanalysis, underscoring the close link between word form and linguistic competence. The study of morphology thus provides critical insights into language acquisition, lexicography, and computational linguistics, particularly in morphologically complex languages such as Arabic.

Syntax

Syntax, derived from the Greek terms *syn* (“together”) and *tattein* (“to arrange”), investigates the rules governing the arrangement of words into phrases, clauses, and sentences. It categorizes lexical items based on their syntactic roles and analyzes structural relationships among them. In Arabic, syntactic theory (*ilm al-nahw*) encompasses constructs such as *idāfa* (genitive construction), *jumlah* (clause), and *kalam* (speech unit) (Farid, 2020).

Arabic syntax also integrates features like case endings (*Harakāt*) and word order, which influence semantic interpretation and syntactic cohesion (Rini, 2019). Syntactic analysis plays a key role in understanding sentence-level meaning, error detection, and the development of natural language processing (NLP) systems.

Semantics

Semantics is the linguistic subfield concerned with meaning in language, encompassing lexical, phrasal, sentential, and contextual levels. Initially overshadowed by morphology and syntax due to its abstract nature, semantics gained prominence through Noam Chomsky’s integration of meaning into syntactic structures. Semantics in Arabic has historically been central to Qur’anic exegesis and rhetorical analysis, reflecting the language’s semantic density and cultural significance (Ardiansyah et al., 2023).

Modern semantics includes theories such as the contextual theory, proposed by John Rupert Firth, which posits that word meaning cannot be understood in isolation from its context. This theory underlines the dynamic and situated nature of meaning. Semantics also encompasses subfields such as semiotics and semiology, which study the relationship between signs and their meanings (Badrun et al., 2023). In applied linguistics, verbs are classified semantically into states, processes, and actions, reflecting their syntactic behavior and semantic properties (Effendi et al., 2024).

Contemporary semantic research emphasizes rigorous methodological frameworks and interdisciplinary approaches, contributing to lexicography, discourse analysis, and AI-based language modeling.

The History of Traditional Arabic Linguistics

The history of Arabic linguistics can be categorized into two major periods: traditional Arabic linguistics and modern Arabic linguistics. The evolution of the Arabic language spans several significant historical phases, each contributing to its development and institutionalization in different contexts. According to Salim, these phases include (Salim, 2017):

1. The Jahiliyyah Period

This period marks the foundational stage of the Arabic language. During this time, language development was significantly influenced by activities such as Arabic language competitions held between the Quraysh and other tribes visiting Mecca, fostering a dynamic environment for linguistic growth.

2. The Early Islamic Period

The Early Islamic Period, beginning with the advent of Islam, continued until the establishment of the Umayyad Dynasty. The migration of Arabs to new territories facilitated the spread of Arabic and its assimilation into various regions, reinforcing its role as a dominant language.

3. The Umayyad Period

The Umayyad era saw the increased interaction between the Arabs and indigenous populations of the conquered regions. Arabic was designated as the official state language, which contributed to the widespread Arabization in multiple facets of daily life, including governance, culture, and administration.

4. The Abbasid Period

The Abbasid Period marked a further evolution of the Arabic language, with Classical Arabic (Fusha) being solidified as the principal language of administration, intellectual discourse, and cultural transmission.

5. Post-5th Century Hijri Period

Following the 5th century Hijri, Arabic ceased to be the primary language of political administration, though it retained its role as the language of religion. During this period, the Arab world became fragmented, with non-Arab rulers gaining control over various territories, influencing the linguistic landscape.

6. The Modern Arabic Period

The Modern Arabic Period was characterized by a revival of the Arabic language, driven by intellectual movements influenced by European thinkers. Arabic became a medium of instruction in educational institutions, alongside a growing movement focused on the preservation of cultural heritage.

The Development of Modern Linguistics

The development of modern linguistics is marked by the emergence of linguistic theories, schools of thought, and research movements that shaped the discipline as it is known today. The foundation of modern linguistics coincided with the end of the Renaissance, particularly following the publication of *Course de Linguistique Générale* by Ferdinand de Saussure, who is widely recognized as the father of modern linguistics.

The progression of modern linguistic theory can be broadly categorized into the following phases:

1. The Early Phase (The Underground Period of Semantics)

This initial phase, which lasted for approximately fifty years, is often referred to as the "underground period" of semantics, during which semantic studies were not widely acknowledged as a central focus of linguistic research.

2. The Second Phase

The second phase, beginning in 1883, saw the recognition of semantic studies, largely due to the work of Michel Bréal, whose seminal work *Les Lois Intellectuelles du Langage* (The Intellectual Laws of Language) introduced the term "semantics" as a distinct linguistic discipline, dedicated to the study of word meaning and semantic change.

3. The Third Phase

The early 20th century witnessed the rapid expansion of semantic studies. A key milestone during this period was the publication of *Meaning and Change of Meaning with Special Reference to the English Language* by Gustaf Stern in 1931. This period also saw the emergence of several influential linguistic schools, each contributing significantly to the development of modern linguistics. Notably, these include:

a. The Prague School

Key figures such as Vilem Mathesius, Nikolai S. Trubetskoy, Roman Jakobson, and Morris Halle were instrumental in distinguishing between phonology and phonetics and introducing the concept of morphophonology, which emphasized the relationship between morphological and phonological structures.

b. The Glossematic School

The Glossematic School, closely associated with Structural Linguistics in Denmark, also made significant contributions to the development of modern linguistic thought.

CONCLUSION

Arabic linguistics has a long history that dates back to the classical era, with significant contributions from Muslim scholars in formulating grammatical rules and linguistic theories. Alongside the advancement of knowledge, Arabic linguistics has been enriched by modern linguistic approaches, which offer more systematic and comprehensive methods of analysis.

Modern linguistics, with its various branches such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics, has provided new insights into the study of the Arabic language. These approaches not only help in gaining a deeper understanding of the structure and function of Arabic but also contribute to practical applications in education, translation, and language technology development.

With the interaction between Arabic linguistics and modern linguistics, the study of Arabic continues to evolve in various aspects, both theoretically and practically. Therefore, further research and exploration of modern linguistic approaches in Arabic studies should be pursued to enhance understanding and application in various academic and professional contexts.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

[YZA] contributed to the conception and design of the study, conducted the data collection and analysis, and wrote the initial draft of the manuscript. [MM], as the primary supervisor, provided guidance throughout the research process, contributed to interpreting the results, and reviewed and revised the manuscript critically for important intellectual content. [AS], as the advisory lecturer, offered strategic direction for the study, provided insights on the theoretical framework, and assisted in refining the manuscript for publication. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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