

VOCATION AFRICAINE DU MAGHREB ARABE

Abdelaziz BENABDELLAH

Membre de l'Académie
du Royaume du Maroc

La fonction propre, l'originalité du Maroc, c'est d'être, à tous les égards, le lien et l'attache entre l'Europe méditerranéenne et l'Afrique tropicale. «Ignorer, soit ce qui lui est revenu par le Sahara, soit le rayonnement de son action à travers le désert, c'est le mutiler et se condamner à ne pas le comprendre» (1). On a déjà observé «que toute l'Afrique du Nord s'orientait économiquement et politiquement, selon des bandes sud-nord, des régions subtropicales à la côte méditerranéenne. Dès lors, le Maroc devait être ici le point de départ ou l'aboutissement de tous les grands mouvements sahariens» (De la Chapelle).

Profondément engagé dans la masse africaine, le Maroc occupe une position clé qui surplombe deux des secteurs les plus actifs et les plus civilisés du monde : la Méditerranée et l'Atlantique. Le Maroc qui, pendant plus d'un millénaire, a porté l'étendard de la civilisation musulmane, demeure toujours un point de contact entre deux mondes et un «lieu géométrique» essentiel pour les rapports internationaux.

La mission africaine du Maghreb s'est donc concrétisée dans une irradiation atteignant jusqu'au Niger, au Sud, et jusqu'au Nil, à l'Est. Déjà, sous les Almoravides, l'Empire Maghrébin englobait Alger et le Sahara jusqu'au Soudan, celui des Almohades s'étendait de la Castille à Tripoli, «unissant l'Occident musulman, pour la première fois, sous le même Pouvoir». Le prestige mérinide s'affirmera, plus tard, à la fois au Soudan et en Egypte. Une grande partie de l'Afrique noire vivra, sous l'égide chérifienne et à travers un régime pachalik, jusqu'en 1893. Bref, le Maroc a toujours été «le

noyau et la force vive» des plus grands Empires qui s'étendirent jamais sur les terres africaines du Couchant. Ce rôle éminent que l'«Empire Fortuné» n'a cessé d'assumer, jusqu'à une époque récente, a été d'autant plus réel qu'à partir de l'année 1250 après J.C., date à laquelle l'Egypte elle-même tomba sous la domination turque, «il n'y eut plus d'Etats arabes politiquement indépendants qu'au Maghreb» (Max Vintejoux). Le Maghreb est le seul Etat africain qui, surmontant les cahots d'une évolution mouvementée, a su conserver intactes, depuis la Conquête Arabe, son intégrité territoriale et sa pleine indépendance. Un fait reste inouï, dans les annales des nations, à savoir que le Maghreb est toujours parvenu à «sceller jusque dans l'anarchie, son unité politique» (L. Provençal).

«Le plissement alpin - fait remarquer l'Encyclopédie Hachette - a affecté l'Afrique du Nord qui connaît, ainsi que l'Afrique du Sud, un climat de type méditerranéen ; le reste du Continent, suivant la latitude, jouit d'un climat tropical ou équatorial, étant traversée en son milieu par l'équateur». Dans ce contexte, deux régions désertiques ; au Nord, le Sahara et au Sud le Kalahari - De grands fleuves dont la Moulouya, le Nil, le Congo et le Niger, drainent le Continent dont l'islamisation, après la Conquête Arabe (VII^e siècle ap. J.C.), constitue l'élément moteur dans l'histoire de l'Afrique noire - C'est la «balkanisation» du continent, avec les séquelles du Colonialisme depuis le XVI^e siècle, qui a faussé ce cours spontané de l'histoire. C'est l'O.U.A., esquissée à Casablanca, puis édiflée, dès 1963, qui essaie de faire remonter le courant à cette masse désagrégée et de réharmoniser les

(1) Jan Céliér, communication au VI^e Congrès de l'Institut des H.E.M. 1930.

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years ago. This has made the religiously inclined associate language with divine power. Another more tangible characteristic of Arabic has been its ability to outlive any other of the many languages of the region. From the Northern African countries of Morocco and Mauritania to the mountains of Iraq, Arabic has endured many hardships and contests with other languages. It has come out victorious. Moreover, this language has, more than any other factor, remained a constant force in the area and has become a melting pot for the numerous ethnic, national, and religious groups.

I said that I have not been able to reach a satisfactory answer to this tantalizing question : the common characteristics possessed by the language and its speakers. Nevertheless, we can look at the answers offered by some thinkers, if only to gain more insight into the interaction between the language and the speakers. I have chosen the theories of two prominent figures in the Arab world. The first, Professor Muhammad Al-Mubarak, is a conservative religious leader and former politician. The second is Zaki-Al-Arsouzi, teacher by profession and secular philosopher by education and bent of mind. There can not be two persons whose ideologies are as diametrically opposed. Yet they seem to find similar things in Arabic, and they seem to associate the language and the speakers by the same common characteristics (51).

For one thing, both these men recognize that the Arab awakening and the struggle for self-realization can not be achieved without a complete resurrection and revival of the Arabic language (52). Self-Knowledge and self-fulfillment for the Arabs depend largely on a knowledge of the language. For there exists a clear similarity between the Arabs and their language. The similarity is even seen in the social structure of the nation and the structure and sounds of the language (53). One of these characteristics is the closeness to nature of both the people and the language. Arabic is pure because it has not drifted away from its origin, which is nature : «Thus we can attribute the Arab's yearning for the ideal to his language's inclination to transcend the boundaries of reality and drift towards an ideal nature...How else can we explain the appearance of 24,000 prophets in the Arabian Peninsula, except by this mutual inclination

towards the ideal in the Arabic word and its speakers? (54).

Moreover, the psychological development and association of the language can be seen in the Arabic pronouns and their antecedents. It is rather impossible to explain this idea in any language other than Arabic. Simply speaking, the Arab philosopher sees a natural sense inherent in certain sounds, and this theory, when applied to Arabic pronouns, shows a natural and logical association between the pronoun and the person it refers to (55). More realistic, if still not totally convincing, theories have been offered by two other well-known Arab writers. Abbas Mahmoud Al-Akkad sees the close association between Arabic and nature in the names of animals. He sees in the names some latent sense, which in turn means that the primitive Arab made these names up a long time ago; this is proof that the language is very old and that it has not changed very much. Al-Akkad sees the same tendency in Arabic pronouns (56). Both Al-Akkad and Subhi Al-Saleh claim for some Arabic sounds intrinsic meanings, and see that the words which contain these sounds are very often related to each other (57). Al-Arsouzi, moreover, sees the natural purity of the language in the names of the months, the days of the weeks, in the times of day, and in Arabic numbers. These are concepts which the Arab mentality has devised to fulfill itself. This is what he means when he describes the Arab mentality as pure and primitive, but immortal at the same time (58).

Whether these theories are correct or not, whether they can be measured by any scientific criteria without evaporating into thin air is not the point. What is important to realize here is the conviction that lies behind all of these theories : That the Arabic language has contributed, perhaps through rather mystical inspiration, to the formation of the identity of the Arab.

Perhaps the most eloquent statement on the subject is what Munir Al-Ajlani said addressing the conference of the Arab Academies : «No one can draw the line between the life of the language and the life of the nation, or between the future of the language and the future of the nation. They are both one inseparable entity (59).

51) Muhammad Al-Mubarak, *Linguistics and the Characteristics of Arabic*, Damascus (Second edition), 1964. And Zaki Al-Arsouzi, *The Complete Works*, Vol. I, Damascus, 1972.

52) Al-Mubarak, p. 231; Al-Arsouzi, p. 297.

53) Al-Mubarak, p. 228; Al-Arsouzi, p. 48.

54) Al-Arsouzi, pp. 49-50.

55) Al-Arsouzi, pp. 150-1.

56) Abbas Mahmoud Al-Akkad, *Thoughts on Language and Literature*, Cairo (Second edition), 1970, p. 16, 70 ff.

57) Al-Akkad, pp. 43-9; Al-Saleh, p. 147.

58) Al-Arsouzi, pp. 140-2.

59) *Periodical of the Arabic Language Academy of Damascus*, January, 1957, p. 34.

courts of Henry VII and Elizabeth I. And the Roman ruins play an important role in Hardy's *Mayor of Casterbridge*, (44). The point can not be over-emphasized. Western culture has been carried down the centuries and across geographic boundaries not only by means of words. I once presented a picture of Raphael's «The Transfiguration» to a group of friends which included a Newzealander, an American, a German, an Englishman, and a Czech. Without knowing anything about the title, the painter, or the period of the painting, they all «read» the story of the painting. It «communicated» something to them, and even the least imaginative saw the theme and the ideas inherent in it.

To come back to the original point : Arab civilization has used one medium of expression, and its achievements have been carried along to the West and down to us via this same medium, mainly Arabic. The lack of any other representational medium of expression (45) and the dependence on language have resulted in this «delight» in Arabic. It is not sheer «delight in the complexity of its grammar». Undoubtedly the Arabs have developed great skill in writing beautiful verse and prose. At one time or another they developed great artistic skill in manipulating the language. The court poet, flatterer though he might have been, was the Western court painter, sculptor, masque writer and poet, all in one. Skill in manipulating the language was a must for him. And his efforts did not go unrewarded. The gifts showered by the Caliph or patron on poets and orators dazzle our imagination in this age when the Poet Laureate of Queen Elizabeth II earns the humble sum of a few hundred pounds a years.

Language, then, for the Arabs is religion, nationality, and the cultural heritage of the golden past. It has everything an Arab identifies with. Arabic reflects the civilization of the Arab nation. Taha Husein, the «Dean» of contemporary Arabic Literature, took this last function of language to the exclusion of any other. He said that language is neither a religious nor a national unifying factor. It is rather a container for Arabic civilization which

should be brought to perfection in order to serve its speakers (46). Othman Amin, on the other hand, called language the memory of mankind. It saves man's discoveries and achievements for future generations (47). This is especially true of the Arabic language. And this is the reason which makes many of the Arab linguists object to drastic changes in the language. For the Arabs of today can read and understand the language of pre-Islamic and early Islamic writers with as little difficulty as, say, an Englishman has in reading Shakespeare. The changes which English has undergone during 400 years are even greater than those which have occurred in Arabic in 1400 years. It is this stability in the language which has kept the Arabs in touch with their heritage. In the words of Jabra I. Jabra, «The obstinate maintainance of Arabic among the people themselves preserved their Arab identity (48).

IV

The question that remains to be asked (I don't think one can offer an accurate answer to a question of this nature) is : What is the common denominator in Arabic and the Arab identity? Teachers in schools and politicians on campaign trails have often called on the Arabs to try to maintain this identity. They have also pointed out that their language clearly shows that identity. The teacher of Arabic, says one manual, should, among other things, exhibit the nobility of character worthy of the language which he has undertaken to teach (49). An important part of his job is to give the right example to his pupils. A similar judgement is made by another pedagogue, only this time the advice is on how Arab children should be raised in order to become good Arab citizens : «They should be taught to believe in Arab nationalism, and to believe that Arabic is an international language which was deemed by God worthy of the message of Islam» (50). One clue to a possible answer to our question may be found in the rather obscure origin of Arabic and in its durability. For more than one scholar has admitted that Arabic in more or less its present form appeared fully-fledged some 1600

44) One should remember in this connection European religious and secular music, emblematic literature, and the great architectural feats of Europe, many of which were significantly built by men who were artists turned architects. We can see this communicative aspect even in Renaissance gardens which were meant to be imitations of the Garden of Eden in their perfect symmetrical design. Photography is of course a later development, but it is a communicative art in its own right.

45) The Arabs did have great architectural skill of course, but one should realize that the mosques and palaces they built were primarily utilitarian rather than artistic. Calligraphy is one of the arts developed by the Arabs, but here the expression depends on words. Music also in the Moslem culture depends on the verbal expression rather than the sustained epic-like compositions of the West.

46) Taha Husein, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*. Cairo, 1938, Vol. I, p. 49.

47) Othman Amin, *On Language and Thought*, Cairo, 1966, p. 51.

48) Jabra I. Jabra, «Arab Language and Culture.» *The Middle East : A Handbook*, ed. Michael Adams, London, 1970, p. 177.

49) Abed Tawfik Al-Hashimi, *The Arabic Language*, Baghdad, 1967, Vol. I, p. 6.

50) Ma'rouf Zureik, *How We Should Raise Our Children and Handle Their Problems*, Damascus, 1963, p. 9.

world. I do not yet know what has become of the matter, but I feel that the director's opinion will be more effectively swayed by the local popular demand.

The Arab theatre is going through the same type of crisis, and the effect can be decisive since drama is a very recent development in Arabic literature. One sees the same kind of strife between the advocates of free verse and the conservatives. Free verse tends to lapse into colloquial idiom at times; this, and the departure from traditional form, pose a threat to the efforts of keeping language pure and noble. Even songs and lyrics, which are usually the proper entertainment of the masses, face the same dilemma.

Um Kalthoum and Feiruz, to take the two most popular singers in the Arab world, have alternated between colloquial and standard in their songs. The preferences exhibited by the public are invariably guided by the type of language in a song. These are but few examples which show the effect of this linguistic dilemma on the Arab masses. Perhaps this tension lies at the basis of the uncertainty in the political, sociological, and economical spheres in the Arab world; the tension which results from the traditional admiration for eloquence opposed by the need for business efficiency and practicality. But this is a matter for the social scientists to prove or disprove.

III

The identification of Arabic with the national and religious character of its speakers is obvious. This has been amply described above. I fear though that in the process of underlining this identification one tends to throw out of focus an important factor which helps explain the enthusiastic devotion of the Arabs to the cause of their language. It is this factor which unites the conservative and liberal together in the struggle to revive the Arabic language, and it is to this point that we must now turn our attention.

The Moslem Arabs during their golden age made great contributions to human civilization, especially when the Western world (Christian by religion) was living its dark ages. The Arab contribution was twofold; they preserved and transmitted ancient wisdom, and they made great strides in the various branches of knowledge in existence at the time. Above all, they embraced Islam as a faith and advanced its cause over a considerably large part of the known world. For all these contributions, however, the verbal expression had been until the

beginning of the present century all but the only medium. This is the heart of the matter, and this, I believe, is the latent, sometimes even overt, reason for the Arabs' jealous protection of their language.

Language, as one modern scholar says, is «a system of human culture, in fact the most important system through which the others are principally reflected and transmitted» (42). Language is described also by another linguist, John Carroll, as a cultural «marker». Carroll points to an interesting idea when he adds that «the members of a culture are usually aware, consciously or unconsciously, of language as a cultural marker» (31). I propose that in the case of Arabic we can go one step beyond Smith's «system of culture» and Carroll's «cultural marker», and look at Arabic as «language as culture». Here is what I mean :

Islam, as it is well known, is basically an iconoclastic religion. According to *The Koran* and the teachings of the Prophet, there is only one God to be worshipped directly by all believers. There can be no intermediaries, no icons, no idols in the process of worship. And the means through which worship is carried out is words. Pure simple words ascending directly to the Almighty. Once when the believers showed signs of reverence for a certain tree under which Mohammed had received a pledge from his first followers, the second Caliph, Omar, ordered the tree to be cut down and forbade Moslems to worship in that spot. Until the beginning of the present century it was not a common thing to erect a statue in any Arab city. The thing was frowned upon because of the religious fear and disapprobation of idol worship. And until very recently the pictures of people or animals used as illustrations in school textbooks in one Arab country had a blank white stripe across them to indicate that they are inanimate.

This same idea applies to mosques and public buildings where the only artistic ornaments are either mosaic geometric designs or scriptural writings from *The Koran*. The important thing is that ornaments (or art in general) should not be representative of people or stories about people. This dearth of representational art can be fully appreciated by those who are acquainted with both the Arab and Western cultures. One tour of Paris, Rome or London will show the wealth of the representational art in Western civilization. Henry James' American, Christopher Newman, begins his Grand Tour rather reluctantly in the Louvre, but at the end of his European experience with stones and relics he learns the humanist lesson which the same relics taught the English gentlemen of the

42 Henry L. Smith, Jr., «Language and the Total System of Communication», pp. 102-116. *Linguistics*, Archibald Hill, ed., N. Y., 1969, p. 104.

43) John B. Carroll, *The Study of Language*, Harvard University Press (Fourth Printing), 1961, p. 112.

easily adaptable to the concepts and ideas of modern civilization. No limits should be drawn as to borrowing new words and terms from foreign languages. These words enrich the language and save the time and effort spent in finding Arabic equivalents and learning them. Arabic grammar should be simplified and some of the rules of grammar should be forgotten. Learners of Arabic, whether foreigners or Arab children, should not be burdened with the complexity of Arabic grammar. The problem of the language dichotomy can be solved, it is suggested, by either adopting a simplified standard to replace both, or by accepting the spoken Arabic of every Arab geographic area.

The most obvious defense of standard Arabic against the calls for the adoption of colloquial is that the standard has been the strongest unifying force in the Arab world. Louis Gray realizes that «one of the strongest factors in the process of amalgamation [in the Arab world] is possession of a common language, and dialectic variations form but minor barriers to the feeling of underlying unity (35). The idea is put in stronger terms by some Arab writers. «The target of these calls for reform,» says Professor Mazen Al-Mubarak, «is not the Arabic language, but the Arabs and their beliefs» (36). And another writer says that the defense of colloquialism is actually a call for ignorance and a crime against Arab nationalism» (37). The underlying thought among these writers is that the world is witnessing a general tendency towards unity, and it would be absurd to allow the various Arabic dialects to develop in time into different languages.

The calls for the adoption of a foreign language or the Latin Alphabet did not survive very long. Their futility was clear from the beginning. The question was asked : Would it be easier to teach the whole nation a new language than to teach them their own language? As for the Latin Alphabet, there are so many sounds in Arabic that have no Latin symbols. In both suggestions it would take at least two generations to effect a shift to the new system and then a few more generations to catch up with the native speakers of the new language (38). But the strongest argument against these theories is the fact that the entire cultural achievement of the Arabs would be lost to future generations and will, at best, be deposited in museums for archeologists and experts of extinct languages.

Opinions are about equally divided on the matter of borrowing foreign words. Those who object to any borrowing whatsoever argue that Arabic is one of the richest languages because of its derivative nature (39). On the other hand, there are those who allow no limits to be imposed on borrowing foreign words. In between, there are those who reverse with a little moderation the advice offered by wise old Polonius (40). The objectors to excessive borrowing base their opinion on the fact that foreign words can not be adapted to the various Arabic cases, moods, declensions and derivations. It is obvious that too many words which do not obey the rules will in time change the nature of the language.

For the Arab nation the present century can be truly called the century of crises. It has witnessed wars of independence, civil wars, political and social revolutions, efforts to unite only to be followed by disappointments, and many other drastic changes. At the heart of these crises, I believe, lies the linguistic dilemma. It is not only the Doctors and Academics who have been living this crisis and trying to solve it. They have been able to theorize about the problem with the controlled emotions of scholars, but the masses are unconsciously living the crisis and indirectly contributing to its agitation or solution. Language, as Anis Freiha says, «is more than a group of sounds...It is part of our psychological-spiritual structure. It is a complex psychological-psychological-social process» (41). Only a person who has seen or heard the late Jamal Abdul-Naser address the masses of the people (climbing to the heights of eloquence in his ungrammatical Arabic) can appreciate Freiha's emphasis on the compound epithet «psychological-spiritual-social». Naser was capable of using correct Arabic, in fact he did so on many occasions. But the applause on these occasions came from different quarters. This is a simplified picture of the dilemma; nevertheless it permeates the whole social structure. One time I translated a few English dramas and presented them to an Arab television station director to produce them on the little screen. The first question he asked me was whether I would mind if his staff adapted the plays to the local spoken Arabic. As an advocate of a moderately standard language, I tried to convince him that the media were the proper means of spreading a unified language throughout the Arab

35) Louis H. Gray, *Foundations of Language*, New York (Third Printing), 1960, p. 116.

36) *Towards Linguistic Awareness*, p. 9.

37) Abbas Hassan, *Language and Syntax*, Cairo, 1958, pp. 252-3.

38) See, *Towards Linguistic Awareness*, pp. 34-6.

39) These are Subhi Al-Saleh, Mazen Al-Mubarak, Sa'id Al-Afaghani, and Abbas Mahmoud Al-Akkad.

40) See especially the article signed by May : «The Development of the Arabic Language, » *Al-Muhtatf*, Vol. III, Oct., 1930, p. 249 ; and the article signed by Kilda : «Is it the Incapability of Arabic ? » *Al-Muhtatf*, June, 1924, p. 24.

41) *Towards a Simplified Arabic*, p. 36.

guage...And we believe in the urgency of the matter and the necessity for a solution. Our thought and desire for progress will not be freed from their fetters unless we first free our language from its fetters» (26). The idea is restated by an objective observer of the situation. Rom Landau states in *Islam and the Arabs* that «the majority have found it difficult to liberate themselves from classical Arabic, an Arabic that is comprehensible to the few educated only (27). The advocates of pure standard Arabic are just as alarmed at the prospects for the language. Says one scholar in a book significantly entitled *The Problems of Our Linguistic Life*: «Linguistic dichotomy is one of the most urgent problems in our life...It shakes our social structure (28). Others call for the establishment of a system of «Arabic scientific and specialized terms to enable the Arabs to translate the new findings and discoveries into Arabic. This would revive the language and the nation (29). Professor Muhammad Al-Mubarak puts the matter in a wider context when he says : «The most urgent problem faced by the Arab nation now is the linguistic problem. Can Arabic meet the needs of modern life ? (30).

Discussion of the problem continues on the official, academic and individual levels. In 1956 the League organized a joint conference for the Arabic Academies of Damascus, Baghdad and Cairo, which convened in Damascus in September. The President of Syria, Shukri Al-Kuwatli, presided over the opening meeting and delivered the Key Address. He enjoined the conferees to uphold the cause of the language which «had in the past protected and raised our nation and preserved our unity.» He added that this language had accompanied our struggle for independence step by step. «And now it is the duty of your Academies to help our language in its attempt to satisfy the needs of present progress» (31). In 1970 Professor Mazen Al-Mubarak read a paper entitled «The Role of Arabic Language in the Advancement of Higher Education» at a conference for the development of higher education held at Damascus University «Linguistic awareness,» he said, «is in one sense self-awareness», and to achieve this the whole

nation should realize its linguistic heritage (32). And in February, 1973, Professor Mohammad Kadri Lutfi of Riyadh University gave a public lecture on the methods of increasing the knowledge of Arabic. In the meantime, the Arabic Academies are at work correcting popular mistakes, (33) issuing lists of technical terms, and corresponding with various scholars seeking their expertise in their special fields.

It would take too long to discuss all aspects of the argument for and against Arabic which has been going on for almost a century. Therefore I shall list some of the objections voiced by those who seek to change or improve the present form of Arabic and the replies made in defense of the language (34).

The Arabic language, it is said, is too limited in vocabulary to convey the expanding number of technical terms which belong to the new discoveries and advances in all fields of knowledge. It is also too limited in its vision of life, having been used in a desert or semidesert area by people who have lost touch with civilization. Arabic script is too complicated and uneconomical for printing. It is also not easily adapted to the terminology which necessarily has to be borrowed from European languages. Arabic grammar is also too difficult and complicated, which makes standard Arabic difficult to learn by the Arabs themselves. But by far the most insurmountable obstacle which stands in the ways of progress in the Arab world is the existence of standard and colloquial Arabic side by side. How is an Arab to communicate his thoughts and feelings ? Standard Arabic will not do because neither the speaker nor the listener is versed enough in it. Colloquial, on the other hand, can be understood only by the members of a particular language region. In other words, the spoken Arabic of North Syria can not be understood by the Arabs of the Algerian mountain region.

To these and other problems various solutions have been suggested. Arabic should be abandoned altogether in favor of a European language. Arabic should be written in the Latin Alphabet to make it

26) *Ibid.*, p. 31.

27) Rom Landau, *Islam and the Arabs*, London, 1958, p. 210.

28) Amin Al-Khuli, *Language and Syntax*, Cairo, 1958, pp. 4-6.

29) Abdul-Fattah Al-Saidi and Husein Yusef Mousa, *Eloquence in Language*, Cairo, 1929, p. x.

30) Muhammad Al-Mubarak, *Linguistics and the Characteristics of Arabic*, Damascus (Second edition), 1964, p. 227.

31) *Periodical of the Arabic Languages Academy of Damascus*, Damascus, January, 1957, p. 18.

32) *Proceedings of the Conference on Higher Education*, Damascus University Press, 1970, p. 561.

33) On the individual level, one has only to look at the monthly issues of *Al-Adeeb*, where linguists publish lists of «popular mistakes».

34) For representative opinions in favor of change see : Anis Freiha, *Towards a Simplified Arabic*, Beirut, 1955; and Yusef K. Al-Haj, *The Philosophy of Language*, Beirut, 1956. On the conservative side, see : Mazen and Muhammad Al-Mubarak; Al-Afaghani; and Anwar Al-Jundi *The Arabic Language Between its Advocates and Adversaries*. Cairo, n. d.

stride which have been made after independence and the national efforts which went to the making of modern Egypt or Syria should indeed command the respect of others, especially the critics who are in the habit of drawing a camel and a stretch of desert and saying «this is Arabia».

The post-independence shock and bewilderment of the Arab nation is nowhere as evident as it is in the linguistic dilemma. For the language and its speakers the struggle was far from ended. Indeed it is still going on at the present time. Only now, the struggle for the revival and survival of Arabic is not against foreign powers. It is rather against the forces of change and the challenge of meeting the advanced world on its own ground with a language which had lost touch with the civilization of the majority of mankind. The advocates of change and progress vary in their theories and in the degree of change they call for. Some suggest that the Arabs should abandon their language altogether and use another language. English or French, they say. Others see that standard Arabic should be used as a medium of instruction in schools, but that colloquial Arabic will remain the everyday language of the masses. The advocates of the standard language to be used in all spheres of life are just as enthusiastic about their theory. But the one thing that all parties agree about is that the Arabs are faced with a grave language problem which may effect their entire future. As early as 1897 Ibrahim Al-Yaziji sounded the first ominous note. His analysis of the problem is worth quoting in detail because at that early stage he realized its implications for the entire nation :

There is probably not one among the intellectuals of our nation working for the renaissance who does not feel how little the language of our times serves the needs of the people. Dictionaries do not comprise enough expressions fulfilling the requirements of writers and translators; writing has become in many ways a difficult task and a gate which it is not easy to pass through.

This is the language which every one who has described it says is the richest of all in ability to express ideas, which can assimilate the most abstruse concepts and which is the most pliable in depicting meanings. But today it proves itself incapable when a writer wants to use it to describe his bedroom; he has difficulty in finding words for his simple, daily food, let alone words he would need to describe the palaces of great kings or the mansions of great and rich men, or the streets of a well-to-do city and all the vessels, furniture, materials, and all kinds of tools, instruments and aids of civilization to be found there. He will find no words for all these in this language. For, if

a Beduin had to describe all this he would stand there speechless and at a loss for words. The words that slip from his tongue must make sense in his heart and so it is not easy for him to express such things in language and he finds no way of putting them into words. He stands there like a dumb man who can see and distinguish things but who cannot speak about them except in sign language.

But what would one of us do if it occurred to him to visit a natural science or industrial museum and saw there how many names and designations there are for parts and for the whole of all sorts of animals, plants, and minerals? When he learns how many instruments, tools and other products of industry there are, how many individual parts and pieces they contain and how are distinguished by different forms and different uses, how can he express anything of all that in Arabic?

The reason for this is that language is the mirror of a nation, the image of its civilization, the expression of its society, the picture of its character and peculiarities and the register of all the knowledge, technique, and arts it possesses. It fixes everything that can be expressed in language, everything that can be conceived in the mind or all those ideas which touch upon their sensual life. Now, it is well known that the Arabs who first spoke this language were a people of the desert. Their houses were made of hair and leather, their materials consisted of matting and carpeting, their clothing of shirts and cloaks, their furniture of a hand-mill and a cooking-pot (23).

Since then awareness of this problem has increased as a result of the responsibilities of independence and the closer contact with the West. One of the most ardent advocates of change has been Anis Furthermore Freiha, Professor of Semitic Languages at the American University of Beirut. His alarm at the dilemma, but not his suggested solutions for it, is shared by many thinkers. For him, «The Arabic of today is the Arabic of Umru Al-Kais, Jarir, Nasif and Al-Yaziji. Life is progressing very fast, and the language tries to keep up with the new developments, but is doing so very slowly. I am afraid that Arabic will lag behind. This is the core of the problem. Time is going too fast, and our language is held down by the fetters of traditions and conservatism» (24). Furthermore, Freiha adds, there exists a dichotomy of language in the Arab world : There is the colloquial and the standard, «one for the ordinary affairs and the natural feelings, and the other for formal occasions.» The question he poses is very relevant : Which one of these two languages should we think and perceive with ? (25). «The most dangerous problem is this dichotomy of lan-

23) From an essay in the newspaper Al-Bayan, Cairo, 1897: quoted by Arnold Hottinger, *The Arabs*, pp. 180-1.

24) Anis Freiha, *Towards a Simplified Arabic*, Beirut, 1955, pp. 16-17.

25) *Ibid.*, p. 18.

because some of them were not versed in the correct uses of their language. It is related that one of the professors, Dr. Sami Al-Sati, had a friend rewrite his lectures for him in correct Arabic; then he studied them carefully before going to class. (19)

The greatest difficulty that was surmounted by these pioneers was finding the accurate Arabic equivalents for the medical terms, new and old, which they were adapting from foreign sources. For this they had to fall back on the golden age of Arab civilization and consult the works of men like Avicenna and Al-Razi. They also coined pure Arabic terms when their sources were not sufficient (20). But the task was tremendous, as one can imagine, and behind it was the awareness that Arabic was good enough to convey the new sciences if the Arabs were worthy of learning them. There was the belief that the language and the people who spoke it were one unified whole. If the language was allowed to become incompetent, an important part of the people would be lost. There was also the pride in the past achievements of the Arabs in all fields of knowledge (21). We know these ancestors by their great contribution to civilization, most of which came down to us in Arabic. In the first issue of the Medical Journal which was put out by the staff of the College, the President of the University and Dean of the Medical College, says that the principal aim of the Journal «is to offer a service to our noble Arabic language which had reached great heights of achievements at the hands of the old scholars and scientists. (22)»

If most of the Arab countries were able to resist the attempts to render Arabic obsolete during the first half of the century, the Northern African Arabs had a much harder time doing so. Tunisia and Algeria, for example, had been French occupation for a long time, and the French had openly declared that Algeria, at least, was part of France. It is almost a miracle that French efforts lasting from 1830 to 1962 to establish French as the only language in Algeria resulted only in bitter resistance and obstinate clinging to Arabic. During those 130 years only French was allowed in schools and in any matter that had to do with the government or with business and commercial transactions. Ties with the Arab world were severed by strict measures which were meant to cut Algeria off from its Arab past. But Arabic was secretly taught in the mountains where the rebels maintained their strongholds. And there was the role played by religion; in the mosques Arabic was the language of

worship and of what religious lessons were overlooked by the French. The struggle can not be justly summarized in these few lines, but if there is one example of the identification of Arabic with the national character of the people and with their efforts for self-realization it is this: When Algeria was about to gain its independence, Ahmad Ben Bella, one of the liberation leaders both on the battle-field and at the negotiation table, was asked why he insisted so strongly on the Arab character of Algeria when he himself did not speak Arabic so well. He simply answered : «because I want my children to have the chance to learn their language.» A chance of which he was deprived.

When Syria became independent in 1945 there were many signs of jubilation, and language was not the least important field in which independence was celebrated. Only a few days after the evacuation of French troops, the present writer remembers the mass burning of French books in Shuhada Square in Damascus. The act was admittedly childish, and there were a few voices of reason heard from among the crowd, but in its spontaneity it was an expression by the masses of the advent of linguistic independence as part of national sovereignty. The hostile attitude which appears every now and then in some Arab cities towards foreign Information Centers and Councils; the official decrees which forbid the use of foreign names on shops and businesses; the changing of foreign names of street to those of national heroes; the ridicule of affectatious use of foreign words in everyday conversation; these are only a few of the many signs which still reveal an identification with the national language and a means of defending it against the encroachment of foreign languages.

Independence came to most of the Arab countries in the 1940's and 1950's. But after the period of jubilation there came the inevitable shock which newly-independent nations experience when they suddenly have to face the world on their own feet. The Arabs were far from prepared for the task. The Arab world had been governed by foreign powers for about 400 years, and the various forces of occupation were not interested in coaching their subject provinces in the principles of self-government. let alone prepare them to deal with the outside (and much more advanced) world. So the Arabs found themselves rather unexpectedly standing on their own feet, and they had to cope with the problem of catching up with the train which they had missed 500 years before. The

19) Al-Afaghani, p. 131.

20) *Idid.*, p. 135.

21) Bashir Al-Azme', *Ibid.*; and, Shawkat Al-Shatti, «Reply to : The Arabic Language and the Sciences,» *Al-Ma'rifa*, April, 1966, p. 40.

22) Al-Af ghani, p. 138.

trictions on the teaching of Arabic. In 1880 Riad Pasha had some difficulty finding a competent candidate to fill a position at the Official Gazette because a good knowledge of Arabic was required (13). Ironically, the job was finally given to Mohammad Abdo who was to play an important role in the religio-nationalist movement.

This in bare outline was the situation of Arabic at the turn of the century. It is not surprising therefore that all of the movements which were basically concerned with partial or total independence called for the revival of Arabic and its reinstatement as the official language in the Arab world. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century secret meetings were held in Damascus, Beirut, and other Arab cities for the purpose of teaching Arabic to those who were deprived by authorities of learning their own language. Even in Istanbul, young Arabs (either studying there or on official assignment) formed secret organizations to learn and teach Arabic. When the first Arab Conference of Paris was held in June, 1913, representatives from throughout the Arab world and from the America's demanded that Arabic be considered one of the official languages of the Othoman House of Representatives because many of the members came from the Arab Provinces. They also demanded that Arabic be declared the official language in the Arab Provinces. It is significant that in the ensuing treaty which was signed in Istanbul by a representative of the Conference and the Othoman Government the first two items dealt directly with the right of the Arabs to learn and use their own language freely. The first item said that teaching on all levels in the Arab Provinces should be conducted in Arabic. Item Two stipulated that higher officials should have a knowledge of Arabic(14).

At first the Othoman Government stalled the nationalists for a while, then began a series of oppressive measures which culminated in 1916 with the public execution of scores of national leaders in Lebanon and Syria. However World War I put an end to Othoman rule, only to be replaced by French and British occupation after the War.

The Arabic language did not fair much better under French and British occupation. Within this space one can only look at a few examples of the policies of the occupation forces towards Arabic.

In Syria, Lebanon, Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria the French employed with varying degrees of success measures to encourage the teaching of French in as early as the grade, and of discouraging the teaching of Arabic. The constitutions of the occupied Arab provinces stipulated that French and Arabic the two official languages, (15) but practically all government business was conducted in French. Luckily, however, the Arabs by this time had become conscious of the dangers faced by their language. A flood of poems and orations were written in flawless standard Arabic and memorized even by the illiterate to be chanted during the demonstrations held against foreign occupation. On a more intellectual level, Arab Academies of languages were formed in Syria, Iraq and Egypt whose sole aim was to revive the Arabic language and save it from becoming obsolete. One of the monumental efforts begun at this time was Arabic Academy of Damascus whose establishing members were as devoted to the cause of the language as they were to the cause of their country's independence (16). This Academy helped translate the official terminology of the various government departments to Arabic (17). It also concentrated its efforts on the adaptation of Arabic to the new sciences and discoveries which the Arabs were facing for the first time. In this field another unparalleled effort was made by the staff of the newly established College of Medicine in Damascus. When the College was established in 1919 the general tendency in the Arab world was to use English or French as the medium of instruction in the scientific fields. But at this stage linguistic enthusiasm was at its height, and the new professors, whose own education had been pursued in Turkish or French, followed with stubborn determination the plan to use Arabic at the College. Now the faculty of Medicine in Damascus University is the only one in the Arab World that teaches all of its courses in Arabic(18). The seeds were sown by such devoted pioneers as Ahmad Hamdi Al-Khayat, Sami Al-Sati, Mohammad Jamil Al-Khani, Murshed Khater and their other colleagues. They wrote textbooks, compiled lists of technical terms, translated and edited Western basic sources, and executed the task of enriching Arabic with the first few medical dictionaries and glossaries. But above all they lectured in pure correct standard Arabic. This was not easy, especially

13) Munah Al-khouri, *Poetry and the Making of Modern Egypt*, Leiden, 1971, p. 18.

14) For the text of the treaty, see Sate' Al-Husry, *The Rise of the Concept of Nationalism*, Beirut (Fifth edition), 1964, pp. 240-1. And Frederik Zurcik, *The Arab Renaissance*, Damascus, 1949, p. 39.

15) *The Constitutions of the three Syrian States*, Damascus, Jabal Al-Drouze, and Latakia issued by the French Commissioner General on April 14, 1930, stipulated that Arabic and French are the official languages of these States.

16) See Mohammad Kurd'Ali, *The Chronicle of Damascus*, Damascus, 1926, Vol. IV, p. 77.

17) Al-Afaghani, pp. 100-117 for lists of terms which the Academy provided to the various government departments.

18) For a favorable view on this policy, Bashir Al-Azme', 'The Arabic Language and the Sciences,' *Al-Ma'rifa*, January, 1966, p. 13.

cite the authority and example of such men as Dante, Chaucer and the leaders of the Protestant Revolution. In the present case language has taken on a much more important role than it did in any other national movement. In the words of E. C. Hodgkin:

Although there are many different sorts of Arabs-between thebedu and the cultivator, and between the cultivator and the townsman, between the inhabitants of one country and another, two tremendously strong ties bind them all together. These are language and religion. They are the cement of the Arab World.

«It is hard to over-emphasize the importance of the Arabic language as a unifying force. The classical, written language is the same everywhere, and, though there are considerable differences in the spoken dialects, educated Arabs can understand each other when they meet, wherever they come from. Moreover, the Arabs do not simply use their language as a means of communication. They love it. They delight in the complexity of its grammar... Eloquence is a gift that the Arab have always prized above all others», (6)

That the Arabs love their language and «delight in the complexity of its grammar» is another interesting matter which we will deal with later. The unifying influence of the language has been recognized by many Arab thinkers and national leaders. Sate Al-Husry, one of the earliest Arab theorists on Arab unity and education, goes to the extreme of considering language the only unifying factor for any nation: «A nation is not a group of people who want to form a unified society. An Arab is an Arab whether he wills it or not. A nation has one common basis, which is language. The Arab nation consists of all those whose mother-tongue is Arabic. (7) «Other Arab writers repeat the same idea with varying degrees of emphasis. In a book entitled *The Arab Unity*, Izat Darwaza says that linguistic unity is one of the most important bases for Arab unity. Language, he says, is the life-source of our nation. (8), And Taha Al-Rawi simply reverses the statement: «The death of standard Arabic-God forbid-is the death of our nation. (9)»

Although the point may seem to be over-emphasized, yet in their own way these writers

were reacting to the continuous pressure and alien efforts which aimed at destroying the force of Arabic. These efforts began about the first few decades of the sixteenth century when Sultan Salim I ordered the Divans in the newly-conquered Arab provinces to be transferred to Turkish. From then on Turkish became the official language in the Arab world. Government business was conducted in Turkish; that language was also used as a medium of instruction in schools. Even Arabic grammar and literature were taught through Turkish, sometimes by Turks who spoke broken Arabic. The penalty for speaking Arabic in school varied from a whipping to dismissal for a few days (10).

Syria was the hardest hit by these measures because the majority of the population was Moslem, thus they were excluded from the concessions given by the government to the Christian and Jewish minorities to establish their parochial schools and teach in Arabic or any other language they chose. The disastrous results of this policy were easily noticed in Damascus, where, we are told, at the turn of the century a person would be at a loss to find someone who could read or write a letter in Arabic for him. No more than one hundred persons in the city knew the rules of grammar, the Tradition, and the explication of *The Koran*. In the Biblical «Street Called Straight», which was at the time the longest and most prosperous market in Damascus, only four merchants had a working knowledge of the rules of bookkeeping-known at the time as Indian mathematics (11).

In Lebanon Christians had their own schools where Arabic was taught besides another foreign language-French, English or Italian depending on the religious denomination of the particular school. Moslems, however, had to go to public schools where they had to learn Turkish. This explains why most of the first Arab linguists and advocates of Arabic in Lebanon were Christian. The revival of Arabic owes much of its initial drive to the Bustani's, the Yaziji's and Shidyaks of Beirut (12).

The situation in Egypt was not different from that in Syria. The official language was Turkish, and the Othoman Government imposed many res-

6) E. C. Hodgkin, *The Arabs*, Oxford University Press, 1966, pp. 14-15.

7) Sate's Al-Husry, *Thoughts on Arab Nationalism*, Cairo, 1951, pp.44-5.

8) Izat M. Darwaza, *The Arab Unity*, Beirut, 1957, p. 50.

9) Taha Al-Rawi, *Thoughts on Language and Syntax*, Beirut, 1962, p. 86.

10) On the subject of Turkish linguistic policy in the Arab world see: Sai'd Al-Afaghani, *The Present Condition of the Arabic Language in Al-Sham*. Cairo, 1962: and Sate Al-Husry, *The Arab Countries and the Othoman Government*, Beirut (Second edition), 1960.

11) See Al-Afaghani, *The Present Condition of the Arabic Language in Al-Sham*, p.22 ff.

12) See Arnold Hottinger, *The Arabs: Their History, Culture and place in the Modern World*, The University of California Press, 1963, pp. 178-183.

Moslem Arab. But there is an added reason; one that is more profound in its implication. It is summed up in one line of poetry by the modern poet Hafez Ibrahim. It is interesting to know that this verse comes from a poem in which the Arabic language addresses itself to its speakers:

I have carried God's Holy Book, its sound and sense. The poet recognizes here the complete fusion of form and content. Indeed many of the advocates of Arabic regard the attacks leveled against their language synonymous with the attack against religion. As one Arab scholar puts it, "The attacks against Arabic do not aim only at its letters and sounds, nor at its grammar and syntax. They aim at the heart of our nation. The Arabic language is a superb example of the fusion of Arabic form with Islamic content. Therefore those people with evil designs, imperialists and others, have been behind all the calls for the separation of these two great forces.(3).

Arabic has been strengthened and stabilized by the power of Islam. The text of *The Koran* and the sayings of the Prophet have received arduous and continuous scholarly attention to save them from mutilation and distortion. This naturally resulted in linguistic studies which have given Arabic great benefits. In fact, the Arabs were the first linguists in the true sense of the word, and the aim of all early Arabic linguistic research was the annotation and explanation of religious texts. It is here that one may see the control exercised by religion over the possible drastic changes in the language. Even now when a grammarian or linguist wishes to prove a point about language he invariably refers to a text in *The Koran* or sometimes to a contemporary work. And conversely, to dispute a theory in grammar or usage, linguists usually plead the lack of early Islamic precedent.

At the heart of this jealousy over Arabic lies the religious feeling. Arabic has been identified with Islam, and the Moslem Arab finds in the language an expression of his beliefs, in fact of himself. His religious beliefs have been transmitted to him down the centuries in words, and no other means of expression is recognized by Islam such as one finds in the icons and artistic expressions which have become part of the Christian Church.

II

In the nineteenth century Europe witnessed the coming of age of the concept of nationalism.

3) Mazen Al-Mubarak, *Towards Linguistic Awareness*, Damascus, 1970, pp. 8-9.

4) At the First Arab Conference of Paris, speakers, Moslem and Christian, recognized that has unified all the Arabs is the national feelings and not religion.

5) *Towards Linguistic Awareness*, p. 27.

During the latter half of the century this new concept spread among the peoples who were ruled by the Othoman Turks. The movement ultimately led to the independence of those peoples who were not Turkish by nationality, and consequently to the breakdown of the Othoman Empire. The Arabs, however, were the last among those peoples to effect a complete separation from the authority of the High Porte. Strangely enough, the final thrust given the idea of nationalism among the Arabs came from the Turks themselves. Had the Arabs been given some freedom and partial self-rule, they perhaps would have remained for a longer time as part of the Empire.

When the Young Turks called for the realization of the national identity of Turkey (as against the emphasis laid heretofore on the religious character of the Empire) the Arabs hoped that the leaders of the new movement would be more inclined to respond favorably to Arab national demands. But more oppressive measures were imposed, and the Arabs felt more than ever that they had to revolt against the government which many of them had accepted as the successor to the Islamic Caliphate.

The struggle of the Arabs to preserve their identity against Othoman oppression had begun earlier. That struggle for self-realization and identification went hand in hand with the early movements to resurrect the Arabic language from a deplorable state. It was at this stage that Arabic became the symbol of self-realization and of the struggle against foreign domination. This was also the time when the identification emphasis shifted from a purely religious nature to a combination of national and religious factors.(4) A modern scholar, Mazen Al-Mubarak, says that the history of Arabic in modern times is the struggle against imperialism.(5) Thus the fate of the Arabic language has been linked with the struggle of the Arabs to establish their national identity. The story of the fight for independence and national integrity is long, and it might be well to start from the beginning, emphasizing only the place of the language in this struggle.

In modern history languages have played important roles in the achievements of various nations. One of the basic conditions for the achievement of national unity according to the French Revolution was the dissemination of correct standard French among all the people of France. And the Italian leaders emphasized the role of a standard language as a unifying factor for the Italian people. One could go further back in history and