

INTERNATIONALITY OF UN. LANGUAGES : A MULTIFACETED COMMUNICATION PROCESS*

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INTRODUCTION

Language is an important component of national identity and a warrant for continuity. Distinctive races have almost always borrowed their names from their spoken languages, although they may be of different ethnic origin⁽¹⁾, such is the case of Arabs, French, Germans, etc. Nations have disappeared with the evanescence of their languages or vice-versa.

At a certain point of time, some languages have acquired superiority by force or for knowledge purposes, either because of military or economic power or scientific advances. They were imposed but they have always encountered resistance in a way or another. Yet, and with this sense of preservation, man has long dreamed of a single language in order to remove the linguistic barriers, especially with the development of sophisticated means of communication facilitating the rapprochement between different people all around the globe. Thus, « international communication – an indisputable desideratum – does not presuppose, let alone prescribe, a single international language. But it has long been held as virtually axiomatic that this would constitute the ideal basis »⁽²⁾.

The idea of an artificial language came to the forefront as it was deemed by scholars and philosophers to be a good remedy to the babelism.

Descartes was the precursor of « metalanguages » and artificial languages⁽³⁾. On 20 November 1629, he wrote in a letter about this « philosophical » language, « une langue universelle fort aisée à apprendre, à prononcer et à écrire et, ce qui est le principal, qui aiderait au jugement, lui représentant si distinctement toutes choses, qu'il lui serait presque impossible de se tromper »⁽⁴⁾.

* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation.

Leibnitz pursued this grandiose task.

Then came Jean-François Sudre, with his « musical universal language », Solrésol, elaborated from 1817 to 1866. In 1888, Henderson put forward an « Anglo-Latin » version (Latin with English grammar). He afterwards proposed an « Anglo-Franca » language. Then came the idea of esperanto, conceived by Polish doctor Zemenhof, and which is building upon existing languages. But, it has been criticized and attacked by its adversaries and has not been able to find a large audience. It has no practical base, as living languages stem from real life and needs and build upon them for survival.

A plethora of artificial and semi-artificial languages⁽⁵⁾ was concocted, sometimes with ludicrous and amusing names, such as carpophrophilus and astegoniagraphianek !

Also, Ogden and Richards came forward with the « basic » language⁽⁶⁾, considered to be a simplified version of English or a philosophical language based on English.

All these schemes were doomed to failure from the outset. Some languages, such as Hebrew, have seen resuscitated. A Year of Hebrew language in Israel has been proclaimed as of October 1989⁽⁷⁾.

Other national languages became prominent for nationalistic obvious reasons, and are seriously competing at the local level with well-established international languages such as English and French.

This two-pronged attempt to instore a *lingua franca* and to promote a multitude of national languages is evidently paradoxal and oscillates between the ideal of easy access and communication and the exigency of preservation, the richness of multiplicity and the jeopardy of unicity.

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On another occasion, Chomsky reiterates the same view about such influence. (Al-Muzainy, 1989).

The influence of the Arabic tradition is believed to be very old. Al-Haj Saleh (1972) argues that there is strong evidence that the notion of « language creativity » was introduced to Europe by Silvestre de Sacy, a French scholar, who was knowledgeable in Arabic. It is probable that Humboldt who was de Sacy's student learned about this concept and Chomsky, who has made the notion of creativity or generativeness explicit, has certainly been under the influence of Humboldt's work.

Until recently few efforts have been devoted to a re-examination of the Arabic linguistic contributions in order to assess them in light of modern theories. Arabic linguists are presently under the influence of the western views and have done little to give this tradition a broad dimension through appropriate and effective means (Al-Saleh, 1973). The efforts in this regard, have been very limited in scope and subject and they have been, somehow, unknown for non Arab scholars except for the orientalist and specialized scholars.

Reconsideration of the Arabic tradition will certainly reveal important and useful facts about it. This will eventually help us modify the attitude towards certain issues. For example, Sibawaih's *Al-Kitab* has been thought to be suffering from some organizational shortcomings. This is probably due to the seemingly disorganization of the subject matter. Concerning this issue Al-Nassir (1985 : 12) notes that :

Although there seems to be clear division of the subject matter investigated, there are frequent references and discussions of various areas in different points. But nevertheless there are clear indications that he had a certain plan in his mind when he wrote the book. When a point that concerns phonetics appears while he is discussing syntax or morphology, he will discuss it very briefly and add it will be fully covered later on its own section.

It is true sometimes that it was the tendency of some grammarians to express their views in an occasional manner ; that is to discuss one aspect of the problem on one occasion and to leave other aspects to other occasions supposedly for some good reasons. These, however, are

rare cases and we believe that when all the relevant ideas are rearranged, the early Arabic theories involving such cases will prove to be as valuable as their modern counterparts (Ameireh, 1983).

The arrangement of Sibawaih's book was not accidentally done. We assume that such arrangement rests on deep conviction that the description of a language follows a certain pattern beginning with syntax and ending up with phonology. Two observations may be made here. One is the fact that such arrangement coincides roughly with that of the earliest version of generative theory as proposed by Chomsky (1957). The other is that this arrangement is the reversed arrangement of the components of grammar as suggested by the structural linguists. Sibawaih's arrangement does reflect an insightful understanding of the way the components of grammar should be studied.

There are many interesting examples in the Arabic linguistic tradition which suggest, that the goal of Arabic linguistics was descriptive ; that is to describe the components of language precisely as they occur in the spoken language. To achieve this goal, a systematic and exact methodology was developed and applied rigorously. At this level, the Arabic and structural linguistics meet on common grounds. However Arabic linguistics seems to have attained an explanatory level or adequacy.

Al-Farahidi's (1965) attempts to determine the reasons for some linguistic phenomena should not be interpreted entirely within the logical context. In other words, his reasoning is best understood in the context of explanation. He was trying to discover the causes that shape the system of the language. It is evident that he avoided discussing arbitrary things about that system (Al-Muheiri, 1983). On the other hand, the Arab grammarians seem to have attempted to answer the question « how ? » in linguistic description and to explain the structural relations that exist among the linguistic units. For example, they have established the relationship between the forms « qāla » he said and its underlying form « qawala » (Abdu, 1973).

In conclusion, although the prescriptive mode influenced the grammarians' view during a certain stage, their attention was mainly directed to, using De Saussure's (1959 : 232) words « language studied in and for itself ». This is exactly how language should be approached and studied according to the most recent linguistic theories in our time.

is unfeasible because it requires detailed scientific knowledge of everything in this universe (Bloomfield, 1933).

Chomsky, being under the influence of structural linguistics in his early linguistic works, ignored the semantic component in his first model in 1957. However, he changed his mind by incorporating the semantic component in his 1965 model claiming that it is an interpretive, non-generative, component. Chomsky's characterization has been strongly rejected and criticized by a group of linguists called generative semanticists who claim that the generative component of grammar is semantics and there is no need to postulate a separate syntactic deep structure. (Lakoff, 1971). In the following section we will examine Al-Jurjani's theory of Al-Nathm.

It is interesting to find out that the Arab grammarians have handled the issue of syntax-semantics relationship in an impressive and original way. Al-Jurjani's contributions in this regard are remarkable. His theory of « Al-Nathm », that is arrangement, as demonstrated in his book entitled « Dalā'il Al-'ijāz », represents a unique treatment of syntax and semantics as interrelated and interdependent components. This theory has undoubtedly given a new dimension to the concept of syntax which has been echoed by the most recent theories of grammar. (Murād, 1986).

Al-Nathm theory briefly states that the « units of speech are both connected and caused by one another » (Al-Jurjani, 1961 : 416). Furthermore, according to Al-Jurjani « the position of a word in an utterance depends largely on its meaning... Arrangement of units is derived from the meaning in the first place » (1961 : 93).

There have been two modern evaluating views concerning this theory in light of modern theories. Mandour (1948) argues that Al-Nathm theory approximates to De Saussure's theory which views language as a system of rapports. The other view which is represented by Murād (1986) and Ameireh (1983) states that this theory is basically a generative one.

It seems that the former view lacks convincing evidence except for the notion of « relations ». Mandour's assessment looks superficial because it relies on the common relations that are found in De Saussure's and Al-Jurjani's theories. We have to bear in mind that De Saussure's « relations » are primarily structural and they operate on a linear level which make them different from the generative relations which take into account the role of meaning in the arrangement of speech units and they operate on a nonlinear level.

As for the latter view, it is reasonable to say that its characterization of Al-Nathm theory as a generative one

is correct in general. However, we may add that this theory is closer to the generative semantics theory rather than to Chomsky's generative syntax theory.

Generally speaking, Al-Jurjani's theory resembles to a certain degree Fillmore's (1968) case grammar theory which recognizes a number of functional semantic relations among the elements of the deep structure. Cases such as the Agentive, Instrumental, locative... etc, are implied in Al-Nathm theory. Finally, McCawly's words concerning the role of semantics in grammar seem to reflect what Al-Jurjani had in mind when he described the syntax-semantics relationships. McCawly (1968 : 161) says that « a full account of English syntax requires a fairly full account of semantics to just as great an extent as the converse is true ».

D. - SYNTAX AND MORPHOLOGY

The description of word structure constitutes an important aspect of the syntactic description. Almost all syntactical descriptions include the discussion of morphological issues. Sibawaih (1966) devotes a good portion of Al-Kitab to the morphological component. Ibn Jinni (1954 : 1/4) asserts that « He who wants to know (describe) syntax has to start with morphology ».

According to Hassān (1974) the Arab grammarians have combined both morphology and syntax as if they were inseparable areas as they are demonstrated in Al-Alfiyyah. Morphology has sometimes been disengaged from syntax and treated as a separate area. The book of Al-Tasrif by Al-Mazini represents a good example in this regard.

IV. - GENERAL ASSESSMENT

Throughout the previous discussion, we have tried to shed some light on the foundations of Arabic linguistic tradition. As argued, those foundations were firmly established by the Arab grammarians with little or no foreign influence. The contributions of the Arab grammarians and the influence of the tradition have recently been acknowledged by some prominent Western linguists. Noam Chomsky (1982 : 73) the most influential linguist of this century, acknowledges this influence by saying that :

I was interested in the tradition of Arabic and Hebrew grammar of the medieval period and much of my own thinking about language actually was influenced by some of that work.

2. Language Infinitude

This is a central concept in generative grammar. Humboldt, a German scholar, was probably the first to use this concept in Europe in the last century. There have been some speculations that this concept was borrowed from the Arab grammarians. We will explain the source of these speculations later. Chomsky has made this concept explicit and has given it a new dimension in linguistics. According to Humboldt a language « makes infinite use of finite means » (Quoted in Chomsky 1965 : V).

There is compelling evidence that the Arab grammarians knew this concept and employed it in linguistic analysis. Ibn Jinni (1952/1) associates this concept with the notion of « Qiyās », that is analogy. According to him, new patterns or linguistic constructions may be invented on the basis of the already existing patterns or rules. Commenting on this approach to generativeness of language, Bakalla (1982 : 43) correctly notes that « Qiyās » has become « a means of generating descriptions of the competence of native speakers ».

Six centuries ago, Ibn Hisham (d. 761/1360) treated the concept of language generativeness in a revealing way. In his book entitled « Al-Mughni », he points out that there are « general rules that generate infinite structures » (1966 : 752). He identifies a number of rules and demonstrates how they function in the language.

3. Surface and Deep Structures

This is another basic concept in generative grammar since it was first proposed in 1957. A sentence has two representations (structures) ; one is a deep representation which includes all the syntactical information and it is generated by a set of phrase structure rules. The other is a surface representation which is the outcome of the transformational rules after they operate on the deep structure. Transformations result in reduction, rearrangement and insertion of structural elements.

The transformational process constitutes an important part in the Arabic syntax and morphology (Ayyoub, 1978, Hammoudah, 1982). There are many examples in the Arabic tradition that support this factual statement. The Arab grammarians were familiar with different types of transformations.

1. Reduction Rules

Sibawaih (1966 : 1/34) refers to this type of transformation and he notes that « this phenomenon is

well-known in Arabic ». Examples include the deletion of the subject in the sentence. Ibn Jinni (1952 : 2/360) points out that reduction « affects the sentence and single words ». He cites the verb « Qāma » « he stood up » which is related to the underlying form « Qawama ».

2. Rearrangement Rules

Generally speaking, the Arab grammarians have discussed the notion of switching elements in the language. They have observed several types of rearrangement cases. Ibn Jinni (1952 : 2/382) treats this issue in more details. He cites the case of the predicate fronting, for example, « Qa'imun Akhūka », that is your brother is standing up. Other cases include the fronting of the object and the adverb.

3. Insertion Rules

Sibawaih (1966 : 1/32) cites the case of « Alba' Al-Za'idah », the additional « ba » element which is attached to the predicate in the sentence. It causes no significant change in meaning. For example ; « Laisa Zaidun bijabānin », Zaid is not a coward.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the Arab grammarians have dealt with the cases of ambiguous sentences as well as the paraphrases. They show how each set belongs to a common deep structure. (Al-Mousa 1980).

4. Marked Vs. UnMarked

This dichotomy was basically introduced to modern linguistics by the Prague school in the 1930s to account for some phonological cases. Chomsky has borrowed this notion and incorporated it in his theory. On the relationship between the marked and unmarked forms, Lyons (1970 : 17) notes that « the unmarked form is usually more general in sense or occurs in a wider range of contexts than the marked form ».

In fact, the Arab grammarians knew this concept quite well. Masculine and indefinite forms are primary (unmarked) and general, whereas the feminine and definite forms are secondary (marked) forms. (Sibawaih 1966 : 3/193), (Al-Mubarrad 1963 : 4/276).

C. — SYNTAX AND SEMANTICS

The relationship between these two components has been a major issue in modern linguistics. The structuralists have ignored meaning claiming that the study of meaning

originality and they echo old definitions. Sapir (1921 : 35) defines sentence as « the linguistic expression of a proposition ». This definition is largely derived from the Platonian's Logic. Bloomfield's (1933 : 170) definition of sentence which states that it is « an independent linguistic form, not included by virtue of any grammatical construction in any larger linguistic form » is an echo of the Arab grammarians' definition.

The following discussion will be devoted to a number of structural and generative concepts which we believe they were tackled by the Arab grammarians. We will also look into the relationships between syntax on one hand and semantics and morphology on the other in order to assess the early achievements of the Arab grammarians.

A. – STRUCTURAL CONCEPTS

1. Emphasis on Form

The Arab grammarians laid more emphasis on the form rather than on content in linguistic analysis. This is obvious in the distinction between masculine and feminine ; and singular, dual and plural. The inflectional morphemes « *ān* » and « *ūn* », for example, are used as key markers to classify the words into dual and plural forms respectively. Furthermore, the subject and object are determined according to positions (Ibn Jinni 1952 : 1/184).

2. Immediate Constituent Analysis

Sibawaih (1966) has effectively used this technique in the grammatical analysis. He divides the components of the sentence into units called constituents beginning with larger units and going down to the smaller units. This is, of course, based on the fact that each structural unit may be substituted by another unit regardless of the number of the components involved. According to Carter (1983), Sibawaih's grammatical analysis is similar to Harris's (1951) structural analysis. Furthermore, Carter points out that « We have to recognize the remarkable similarity between Sibawaih's goal and methodology and those of the twentieth century linguists » (1983 : 243). He adds that « Had Sibawaih been born in this century, he would have been ranked between De Saussure and Bloomfield » (1983 : 245).

3. Distribution

This concept is often associated with Bloomfield. Some Arab grammarians especially Sibawaih (1966) cor-

rectly observes the cooccurrence of same articles with certain words in the language. For example the definite article « *al* » co-occurs with the noun. Also, the cooccurrence of certain articles such as « *qad* » with the verb in general.

B. – GENERATIVE CONCEPTS

1. Linguistic Competence

Generative grammar has suggested that the object of linguistic description is the competence of the native speaker, not the performance. This shift has been motivated by good reasons which need not be discussed here.

The notion of competence has copiously been discussed by Ibn Khaldoun (d. 808/1406) in his treatise entitled « *Al-Muqaddimah* » (1981). He distinguishes between the subconscious knowledge a native speaker usually has about his language and what he actually performs. The native speaker knows how to use his language correctly and appropriately without realizing consciously all the grammatical details such as subject, predicate and grammatical cases of noun.

Ibn Khaldoun seems to have good awareness that competence constitutes the object of linguistic description (Zakariyyah, 1986). It is our contention that if he had made this notion more explicit by introducing the concept of generative rules, Ibn Khaldoun would have been the Chomsky of his age. Praising Ibn Khaldoun's views in this regard, Blanc (1975 : 1275) asserts that his views « are original and penetrating ».

The closest Arabic term to linguistic competence is « *Saliqah* », « *tab'* », or « *Sajjiyyah* ». It is acquired during the early months of childhood in a form of internalized rules. Ibn Jinni (1952 : 1/237) refers to the notion of competence through his grammatical descriptions. He points out how a native speaker of Arabic, based on his linguistic knowledge, may judge the level of acceptability of different usages.

There is no least doubt that Al-Farahidi's insightful characterization of linguistic competence has made him a forrunner in this field. He observes that linguistic performance is carried out according to internalized knowledge of the language. He explicates this view as he says that « The Arabs use language according to *tab'* and *sajjiyyah*. They unconsciously know the rules of their language as well as the causes that motivate their structured speech » (Al-Zajjaji, 1973 : 65-66).

language put forth in an attempt to account for a certain range of linguistic phenomena... The central fact to which any significant linguistic theory must address itself is this : a mature speaker can produce a new sentence of his language on the appropriate occasion, and other speaker can understand it immediately, though it is equally new to them.

It is noteworthy that such ambitious characterizations are new and associated with N. Chomsky, the founder of generative theory. The earlier view, that is the structural view, is different in terms of subject matter and goal of linguistics. The structural view is very much concerned with classifying the data. In this regard, Block & Trager (1942 : 8) say that the linguist's aim is to « analyze and classify the facts of speech... in such a way as to account for all the utterances of a social group ». The generative theory is best described as a hypothethic-deductive theory which utilizes data to test the already constructed hypothesis. There have been serious disagreements between the two theories concerning their empirical validity (Dering, 1973). All the controversial issues raised by the two theories will be ignored as we refer to either theory later.

The chief purpose of this section was to outline some of the widely adopted views in the linguistic theory is general in this century in order to test the linguistic descriptions made by the Arab grammarians. We will find out that such grammarians have strived hard to construct an adequate theory of the structure of Arabic which combines some structural and generative assumptions and eventually meets all the scientific levels of analysis. Thus, it may be fair to describe this tradition roughly as a structural - generative model.

III. - CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

1. Definition of Syntax

The definition of « Nahw », that is syntax, as given by the Arab grammarians shows their profound knowledge of the subject. Beside its traditional definition which is concerned primarily with correct and incorrect issues in the structural usage of language, syntax, as demonstrated by Al-Jurjani (d. 471/1078) involves the specific arrangements of Linguistic units in the utterance according to their meaning (1961). We will return to this issue later in the work.

On the other hand, syntax studies the structural units of speech not only in a linear level, but it deals with all relevant and functional aspects of the sentence. In other words, syntax is concerned with the underlying structural relations among the units in the sentence (Ibn Jinni, 1952). In fact, Arabic syntax is a broad area which comprises sound, structure, and meaning. It further focuses on the relationships between language and thought and form and meaning (Al-Rajhi, 1979).

Another precise, but brief, definition of syntax which takes into account its abstract nature is the one which was proposed by Ibn Al-Anbari (d. 577/1181). He states that syntax is specifically « Ma'qul min Manqul » (1960) which may roughly be interpreted as « explanation being based on observation ». We think that this definition is close to modern definitions which try to go beyond the traditional views.

2. Definition of Sentence

It seems that the Arab grammarians were aware of the significant role of sentence in linguistic analysis. Therefore, they tended to define it at the beginning of their studies (Al-Muheiri, 1966).

The Arab grammarians should be credited for their big achievements in the definition of sentence. They certainly preceded modern grammarians in this regard. Sibawaih (1966 : 1/23) points out that a sentence consists of two parts ; namely « Al-Musnad » and « Al-Musnad Ilayh » which stand for the modern terms « topic » and « comment ». Ibn Jinni (1952 : 1/17) notes that a sentence is « the basis of any speech and it consists of an independent meaningful utterance ». Accordingly, an expression such as the Arabic verb « Sah » which means « to silence » in the imperative form is considered a sentence regardless of the deleted elements. This description is in compatible with the modern notion that the verb is pivotal in sentence structure. Finally, Ibn Ya'ish (d. 643/1245) shares Ibn Jinni's views on this issue. (??? : 1/18)

The above attempts are important and original. They differ from the classical attempts such as the Aristotle's definition which states that a sentence is a « significant speech of which this or that part may have meaning as something, that is altered but not as expressing a judgment of a positive or negative character ». (1973 : 121).

We also think that the structural definitions of sentence as introduced by Sapir and Bloomfield lack

historical source of linguistic thought. In it, Robins makes a general survey of the contributions of different nations. Arabic linguistic contributions are briefly described under the Renaissance period. We are unable to think of good justification for listing them under this period. We know that the first formal Arabic linguistic attempt, generally speaking, was initiated by Al-Farahidi and reached its peak during the eleventh century which is known as the golden age of Islamic knowledge and sciences. This age falls beyond the indicated Renaissance period. Occasional references are, however, made to the grammatical schools of Kufa and Basrah. Special reference is made to Sibawaih.

Although Robins (1967:98) acknowledges the phonetic accomplishments of Sibawaih and other grammarians when he says « He and other Arab grammarians were able to set out systematically the organs of speech and the mechanism of utterance », he seems, however, to have criticized or misinterpreted some aspects of their works. Robins (1967:98) points out that :

Their only serious observational failure lay in not diagnosing the mechanics of the voice-voiceless distinction in the consonants, though the division of them into two classes was treated as important and the consonants were correctly assigned to them.

We strongly disagree with the author because according to modern studies and analyses of the early Arabic sounds, almost all early descriptions were correct with the exception of some controversial aspects such as the voicing of the glottal stop /ʔ/. (Cantineau, 1966).

On the other hand, Robins (1967:99:98) has been unable to hide his admiration of the Arab grammarians' phonetic achievement, as he remarks that it was « Far more successful in terms of descriptive accuracy than that of the Greeks and the Romans ».

He goes on to assert that :

The Arab Linguists developed their own insights in the systematization of their language, and in no way imposed Greek models on it as the Latin grammarians had been led to do.

Given all of this, one is led to expect Robins' obvious acknowledgement of the role of the Arab grammarians in establishing and shaping the old and modern linguistic thought and to recognize the direct influence of the Arabic linguistic tradition on other nations that came into contact with the Islamic civilization. However, this is not the case. Robins (1967:6) says that :

In some important respects it is difficult to believe that European linguistics would be in the position it is today without the insights brought to it by linguistic work from outside Europe, in particular the work of the ancient Indian linguists on Sanskrit grammar and phonology.

Finally, we would like to emphasize that we also disagree with some modern linguists such as Anis (1975) and Bishr (1986) for their criticism of the Arabic tradition. They claim that such tradition lacks unity, consistent methodology and it confuses levels of analysis. They conclude that the Arabic analyses suffer from both scientific and theoretical validity. All of these claims will be refuted through the following discussions. We will argue that the Arab grammarians laid down reasonable assumptions upon which they based their description of Arabic. Their works were concise and systematic and they deserve every attention and consideration. They dealt with issues which have recently been treated by modern linguistics.

II. - THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

We think that an adequate description of a language is largely dependent upon a good theorizing about that language. Theorizing, in general, constitutes an essential part of our cognitive system. When a linguist writes a grammar of a language, he actually constructs a theory of the structure of that language. A theory as McLaughlin (1987:3:7) defines it is « a system of facts and laws » whose purpose is to « organize data, and help to understand... to summarize relatively large amounts of information via relatively short list of propositions ». He adds that « the theory is more than the aggregate of facts and laws, it gives each of them a new meaning ». (1987:3).

When a linguist describes a language, he theorizes and constructs hypotheses or guesses about the structure of that language. The hypotheses as we know, are tentative solutions to the linguistic phenomenon under investigation. Langacker (1972:19) emphasizes this point as he says : « However, tentative and sketchy these hypotheses may be, whether, they exist on paper or only in the back of the linguist's mind, they already constitute a partial theory of the structure of that language. » Chomsky (1970:7) summarizes the whole matter as saying that :

Linguistic theory is systems of hypotheses concerning the general features of human