



دور اللغة العربية في بناء المجتمع في العصر المعاصر

The Role of the Arabic Language in Building Society in the Contemporary Era

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المخلص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة دور اللغة العربية في تشكيل وإعادة بناء المجتمع العربي في العصر الحديث. تستكشف الدراسة العلاقة المعقدة بين اللغة والمجتمع، مع التركيز على التحديات التي تواجه العربية اليوم، مثل التفكك السياسي، والعولمة، وهيمنة اللغات الأجنبية واللهجات العامية. تبرز الدراسة دور اللغة العربية كعنصر موحد للهوية العربية والتراث الثقافي، وتناقش جدل المسؤولية عن تراجعها، هل هو في اللغة أم في إهمال تحديثها؟ تجادل الورقة بأن العربية تحتفظ بنظام مرن قادر على التجدد، شريطة بذل جهود واعية في التعليم، والإعلام، والسياسة. وفي الختام، تُقدم اللغة العربية باعتبارها ركيزة استراتيجية للوحدة والنهضة الحضارية في العالم العربي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة العربية، المجتمع العربي، الهوية، العولمة، التراجع اللغوي، اللغة والسياسة، التراث الثقافي، التعليم، الوحدة، السياسات اللغوية.



Abstract

This study examines the role of the Arabic language in shaping and rebuilding Arab society in the contemporary era. It explores the intricate relationship between language and society, focusing on the challenges facing Arabic today, such as political fragmentation, globalization, and the dominance of foreign languages and colloquial dialects.

The research highlights the role of the Arabic language as a unifying element of Arab identity and cultural heritage, and it addresses the debate on the responsibility for its decline, questioning whether it lies within the language itself or in the neglect of its speakers. The paper argues that Arabic retains a resilient internal system capable of renewal, provided that conscious efforts are made in education, media, and policy. Ultimately, the Arabic language is presented as a strategic pillar for unity and civilizational revival in the Arab world.

Keywords: Arabic language, Arab society, identity, globalization, linguistic decline, language and politics, cultural heritage, education, unity, language policy.



Introduction

Language is the vessel of civilization, the nucleus of identity, and the living spirit of a nation. It is the repository that holds thoughts, heritage, and values, and its vitality is a direct reflection of the society that speaks it. The Arabic language, which once represented the pinnacle of knowledge and intellectual flourishing, today faces a profound crisis that extends beyond its linguistic structure to the very heart of Arab existence. This article addresses a fundamental question that perplexes researchers and thinkers alike: Does the apparent decline of the Arabic language stem from an inherent flaw within the language itself, or is it a direct result of the political, social, and cultural circumstances of its speakers? Through a critical analysis of the current state of Arabic and an examination of its historical context, this study will argue that the crisis is not one of the language itself, but rather a reflection of the deep-seated fragmentation and systemic neglect affecting Arab societies, while also affirming the language's enduring power as a unifying force.

First: The Image of Society and the Anxiety of Language

1. Which Society Are We Talking About?

The aspiration of those who care deeply about the Arabic language is to witness its revival to full strength, capable of expressing life and its novelties day after day and era after era. It is the language of a nation that once created a glorious past and bestowed upon humanity countless contributions in science, civilization, knowledge, religions, philosophies, and illuminations across various fields.

Let us pause for a moment at the words of one of the contemporary masters of Arabic, Dr. Abdul Karim Khalifa, who said: "Let us ask ourselves: where does our Classical Arabic—our only language—stand? And where do our



scholars stand in this human procession of modern civilization? I find myself unwilling to answer this question, but whether I desire to answer or not changes nothing" (Khalifa, n.d., p. 14). Yet, his refusal to answer soon unfolds within his book into a detailed response, revealing the immense role that Arabic can play in our present time.

When attempting to answer the question of the role of Arabic in constructing the modern Arab society, a researcher is often perplexed: Which society are we truly speaking of? A society on the verge of disintegration? A nation scattered and fragmented? Are we speaking of all Arab countries together? And where is this unity? Are we speaking of each individual state? And has each remained a "state," or has it become mere fragments deliberately left behind by colonial powers that sought to dismantle and scatter them at will? Do we answer this question before the collapse, or after? Do we answer before we ask "where is the Arab nation heading," or only after we know? Questions multiply, adding layer upon layer to the Arab existential crisis and intensifying its dilemmas. Meanwhile, Arabic is expected to play its role in shaping a new Arab society, even as it inherits a series of setbacks reflected in reality, leaving those who care for it bewildered at how to stop this decline.

2. The Anxiety of Language and the Vortex of Questioning

This perplexity has become a vortex around which linguistic anxiety revolves, seeking ways to mend the fracture and restore Arabic's majesty and authentic image.

Where do the reasons for decline lie—within the people at large, or among politicians? Is it due to the presence of political will, or its absence? With researchers, university professors, students, or readers? With children, the youth, or the elderly?



Is the cause in the writings of so-called “writers”? In media—whether radio broadcasts, newspapers, or reports? In computers, most of which are still not fully Arabized, or in digital literature, interactive novels, and stories consumed eagerly by youth and even adults? Or perhaps in TV shows and films that neglect the language, stripping it of its essence—both linguistic and social—in favor of fabricated thrills that feed confusion rather than ground people in a serious and constructive presence?

Anyone who studies the condition of Arabic today is beset by concerns arising from multiple visible sources. Neglect, regression, and indifference persist. We continue to import foreign terminology instead of generating our own. We live estranged from our linguistic forms and frameworks in academic, literary, critical, intellectual, social, economic, and political discourse (Khalifa, n.d.). Both written and spoken forms suffer the same decline: the split between Classical Arabic, colloquial dialects, and a so-called “third language.” Not only is the Latin alphabet replacing Arabic script in many spheres, but Arabic itself is being replaced by foreign languages, often imposed as a condition of employment and institutional communication. This pursuit of Westernization and globalization promotes English as the “global language,” while Arabic vanishes from companies, institutions, markets, public spaces, transport, hotels, media, and online spaces dominated by non-Arabic content. This trend uproots the citizen from his environment, disconnecting him from his culture, traditions, religion, and values, leaving him estranged from his own village, neighbors, and family. Generations today face wars, crises, distortions of priorities, fabricated revolutions, and deliberate sabotage under the guise of reform—a deceptive and destructive game.



3. What Image for Arabic?

There is no doubt that Arabic is moving toward a state of de-formation^[^1], leading to fragmentation and destabilization of its linguistic structure—mirroring the instability of social and other structures—and estranging citizens from its mental and psychological horizons. Though voices rise to stop this, little changes. This shows itself in policies presented as “reform” but producing outcomes unsuited to Arab society, and in the activities of unqualified individuals whose leadership worsens linguistic decline. Politicians, their aides, and the administrators they appoint to institutions reflect poor linguistic performance and accelerate deterioration.

The same applies in academia: lectures delivered without linguistic rigor, language textbooks reproduced haphazardly under the guise of “renewal,” school curricula cobbled together by those close to decision-makers.

Educational reforms, as in Lebanon’s adoption of new curricula, have resulted in a diluted and shallow Arabic curriculum, relying on modern texts lacking depth, failing to equip students with mastery of their language. Similarly, the L.M.D. (License–Master–Doctorate) system implemented in universities lacks infrastructure and resources. Students are expected to learn in three months what previously took a year, leaving them with only superficial knowledge. The outcome: students graduate without genuine competence, compounded by declining reading habits and professors in non-Arabic fields who lack mastery of Arabic themselves. Thus, Arabic today appears blurred and unclear, signaling a present crisis and raising alarming questions about its future.

And yet, the hidden strength of Arabic—its inherent vitality—remains. With efforts in media Arabization, curriculum reform, terminology



standardization, and most importantly political will, Arabic can be rediscovered locally and across the Arab world.

4. What of the Arabs' Dismal Condition?

This leads us to another discussion: the condition of the society Arabic seeks to rebuild. It is no longer enough to speak of "statehood" in isolation, for the Arab world as a whole faces fragmentation, sectarianism, tribalism, fabricated nationalisms, foreign domination, and civil strife. Arab decision-making is compromised, institutions collapse, and foreign intervention abounds.

Amid this, we search for Arabic's role: a savior. Indeed, some thinkers are right to identify this role at this particular historical moment, for Arab society itself requires reconstitution. But linguistic revival is obstructed by the rise of colloquial dialects, revival of minority languages, deliberate wars to fragment the fragmented, authoritarian regimes clinging to power, and chronic crises—military, economic, cultural, and educational.

Can we truly ask about Arabic's future under the roar of warplanes, the thunder of cannons, and relentless invasions, as globalization and Western powers seek to occupy Arab lands, seize resources, and erase cultural and linguistic identity?

While the world enjoys the fruits of technology and information revolutions, Arabs remain mired in division, subjugation, and dependency. What fate awaits the nation?

Ibn Hazm once said: "Language declines when the state of its people declines, when they are conquered, displaced, or preoccupied by fear, poverty, humiliation, or service to their enemies. This leads to the death of thought, and perhaps the loss of their language, their lineage, and their sciences" (Ibn Hazm, as cited in Khalifa, n.d., p. 16). Does this not reflect



the Arab condition today? If the nation does not act to reform itself—through unity, self-reliance, mutual respect, and above all preservation of its unifying element, the Arabic language—what future awaits?

5. And Yet the Language Remains Fortified

There is no doubt about the vital role of Arabic in building and developing the nation. It remains the unifying element that can restore Arab identity, values, and presence (Arslan, 2011, p. 75).

Many believe Arabic can reunite the Arabs, not only because it is their national language, but because it is the language of the Qur'an, safeguarded across centuries, and the true essence of Arab unity (Arslan, 2011, p. 65). Thus, the wager on Arabic is central. Despite neglect, Arabic remains the language of life, destined for continuity. Even outsiders recognize its significance: the Tunisian newspaper Al-Sabah reported that former French president Jacques Chirac inaugurated the Festival of Arabic Culture and Language in Paris, affirming the need to engage with this “brilliant language” as a tool of civilization and human strength (Al-Sabah Newspaper, 1985).

This affirmation resonates with truth: Arabic was the foundation of strength at Islam's emergence and after, and it remains the sacred language of faith for its speakers (Quran, 9:33). The hope in Arabic endures in the Arab psyche, instilling resilience across generations. The Qur'anic promise—“Do not lose heart nor fall into despair, for you shall triumph if you are true believers” (Quran, 3:139)—sustains this confidence. Yet, reliance on divine promise must be coupled with work, not laziness: “And say: Act! For God will see your deeds, as will His Messenger and the believers” (Quran, 9:94).



The “good word,” as the Qur’an affirms—“To Him ascends good speech, and righteous work raises it” (Quran, 35:10)—remains the foundation. Words build.

6. The Power of the Word

Throughout history, the word has carried authority. In early times it was a form of magic; in later times it bestowed political and social power. Tyrants have always feared the power of speech, for even if silenced, the word itself remains a force.

Thus, those who wield the word are elevated: “God will raise those who believe and those given knowledge, by degrees” (Quran, 58:11). The prophets ruled through the power of revelation (Quran, 4:53), and the Arabs were granted their greatness through the “mighty Word” of the Qur’an (Quran, 62:2). This is the greatest wager upon Arabic.

Second: Who Is Responsible—The Language or Its Speakers?

Some researchers underestimate these foundations but acknowledge Islam’s favor upon the language. Still, a critical question remains: who bears responsibility for Arabic’s current condition—the language itself, or its speakers?

Writer Sherif Shoubashi argues: “The problem of Arabic does not lie with its speakers but within the language itself, which has not undergone modernization. Arabic today is a shackle on the human mind, preventing creative potential and limiting us from reaching the horizons of modern civilization” (Shoubashi, as cited in Ben Fadhia, 2008, p. 19). This view, however, absolves generations of negligence by Arab speakers themselves—citizens, scholars, rulers, and educational authorities alike. To claim the language itself is to blame—as though it compels speakers to err—is illogical and dismissive of the natural evolution of languages.



History tells a different story. A bishop of Cordoba once lamented: “The Arabic language has captivated us with its sweetness and eloquence. Few among us now read the Scriptures in Latin. Our youth know only Arabic literature, and when they read Latin texts, they mock them as worthless compared to the effort. Christians (Spaniards) have thus forgotten their language and mastered Arabic to the point of writing it more eloquently than the Arabs themselves” (Bin Nouman, n.d., pp. 193–194; Kafouri, 1948, p. 61). This testimony reveals Arabic’s extraordinary capacity to attract those who approach it, its richness and versatility making it fit for both religion and worldly affairs, enduring despite Mongol invasions, Ottoman neglect, and Western attempts to erase it.

Linguist Ferdinand de Saussure affirmed the reciprocal relationship between society and language: the social bond creates linguistic unity, and while external factors shape language, its internal system remains relatively stable (Saussure, n.d., p. 245). Borrowing words from foreign tongues, for example, does not alter the deeper structure of a language (Saussure, n.d., pp. 39-41). Thus, Arabic retains its internal core. While subject to external pressures and changes, it endures as long as it remains spoken by a living people.

Conclusion

The crisis of the Arabic language is, at its core, a crisis of its speakers. The challenges facing the language are not a result of any intrinsic deficiency in its structure or expressive capacity, but rather a manifestation of the severe existential dilemmas plaguing Arab societies—fragmentation, political instability, cultural erosion, and a lack of serious commitment from their leaders and institutions. As demonstrated throughout this article, Arabic has proven its extraordinary resilience and its inherent ability to adapt and



thrive, having survived periods of invasion and neglect. Its strength lies in its profound connection to the Arab identity and, most importantly, in its status as the language of the Holy Qur'an, which has safeguarded it across centuries. The path to the language's revival, therefore, does not lie in modernizing its forms alone, but in activating the will of its people. The future of Arabic is not a matter of linguistic reform; it is an act of collective will to rebuild society, restore a sense of unity, and invest in education, culture, and governance that respects and empowers the language. The challenge is immense, but the hope remains in the language itself, a sacred word that calls for action and promises a brighter future for a nation that chooses to reclaim its identity and its voice.



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