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The Status of the Arabic Language among Languages, Methods of Teaching It, and Future Challenges

# The Status of the Arabic Language among Languages, Methods of Teaching It, and Future Challenges

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## Abstract:

Language, as defined by the linguist Abu al-Fath Othman ibn Jinni, is not only a tool for expressing purposes, but also a means of social communication, as described by linguist Simon Potter. It goes beyond that as it is linked to identity, especially when the language is a sacred heavenly script, like the Arabic language, the language of the Holy Quran, the clear book of the Muslims, the last of the heavenly books.

From this perspective, the security of the Arabic language requires openness and receptivity to everything new, and the utilization of the advancements in scientific research. It has occupied human thought since the beginning of linguistic awareness, becoming the focus of interest and study across ages, much like communication. Ferdinand de Saussure presented this approach when he studied language in isolation from speech and parole. He identified its characteristics and saw it as a human phenomenon that is difficult to subject to description and analysis. Its fields are diverse and heterogeneous, belonging to individual and social domains, attracting the attention of various disciplines—physical, physiological, psychological, and more."<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, it is impossible to find an accurate scientific definition for it. AymanKhaledAl-Darawsheh" says, 'Despite the ease of language and its flow on tongues, we face great difficulty in providing a precise and comprehensive definition. Thus, scholars throughout different eras have attempted, each according to their opinion, to formulate the most comprehensive and inclusive definition.'"However, in reality, it is a definition lacking comprehensiveness and general coverage, often limited to one or more aspects without grasping the overall essence of language and its nature and elements.

**Keywords :** The status ,Arabic language , methods of teaching , and future challenges.

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<sup>1</sup> -"Ferdinand de Saussure's Lectures in Linguistics, translated by Youssef Ghazi and Majid Al-Nasr, Algerian Printing Foundation, 1986, p. 46."

### Introduction:

The Arabic language is considered a crucial aspect of human behavior and a significant means of communication and understanding. It is unique to humans, distinguishing them from other beings, as it serves as a tool for handling things, thoughts, and people in a way distinct from animals relying on instinct. Humans have refined and cultivated this language to express their needs and demands, making it a means of communication and understanding with others. It is an essential and urgent tool for expressing human hopes and aspirations. While animals instinctively use language, humans, gifted with logic and thought, use it as a means of encompassing, comprehending, and communicating.”<sup>2</sup> The language, in this sense, is related to everything connected to human life. It grows and evolves with human development, as the enlightened thought derived from society gives language great cognitive momentum.

### The Status of the Arabic Language:

The more a language spreads and gains prominence, the more it influences its speakers in thought and action. It is considered a tool for preserving cultural and civilizational heritage, transmitting it from one generation to another to connect its links and allow the nation's children to experience and benefit from it. Our Arabic language has proven its ability to evolve, grow, and withstand to maintain its esteemed position. We find a significant interest in it, both among its speakers and non-speakers. A testament to this is the statement by Ferguson published in the British Encyclopedia about the Arabic language: 'The Arabic language, both in terms of the number of speakers and its impact, is by far considered the greatest of all Semitic languages.' It should also be regarded as one of the major languages in today's world,”<sup>3</sup> confirming what we have mentioned about the authenticity, rootedness, and esteemed status of the Arabic language among world languages. Being the language of the Quran, its greatness lies in the magnificence of the words of God revealed in its letters, containing profound vocabulary that expresses noble emotions and sentiments. Renan also states: 'One of the strangest wonders is the emergence of this powerful language to perfection amidst the deserts of a people. This language surpassed its sisters in the richness of its vocabulary and precision of its meanings, from the system of its structures. This language was unknown to nations, and from the moment it was known, it appeared to us in all the perfection stages without childhood or old age. Its significance can only be learned through its openings and victories, which appeared to researchers in their

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<sup>2</sup> -Refer to Dr. Helmi Khalil, "Studies in Language and Dictionaries," Dar Al-Nahda Al-Arabiya, Beirut, 1st edition, 1998, pp. 334/335.

<sup>3</sup> -Mahmoud Rashdi Khattar and others, "Teaching Methods for Arabic Language and Religious Education in Light of Modern Trends," 4th edition, 1989, p. 65.

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entirety without progression, remaining pristine from any flaw.”<sup>4</sup> This is the Arabic language that has been acknowledged by those not of its people as the greatest of languages, distinguishing itself with characteristics and influencing power over other languages, earning it a great status unlike any other language.

Allah, the Almighty, says in the clear revelation: 'Indeed, it is the revelation of the Lord of the worlds, brought down by the trustworthy spirit upon your heart, that you may be of the warners,'<sup>5</sup> in clear Arabic. He also said: 'And thus We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran’<sup>6</sup> and other verses that illustrate the sublime position of the Arabic language, which Allah, the Almighty, chose to be the language of the Quran, being a rich language unparalleled on this earth.

### Educational Principles of Language:

The fundamental character that distinguishes the educational process in teaching languages is the linguistic perspective derived from contemporary linguistic theories. This can be defined in the following principles that frame language teaching, including foreign languages and the native language:

#### The First Principle:"

"In this regard, it is worth noting that the linguistic principle stems from focusing on the spoken form of language (parlée langue) as a contemporary, living aspect of the linguistic phenomenon. In this context, a distinction should be made between the written and spoken linguistic systems, with contemporary linguistics emphasizing its focus on spoken language framed by the synchronic approach, which studies the communicative experience between the speaker and the listener.”<sup>7</sup> The written language, framed by the diachronic approach, is considered a representation of the spoken form of language. Consequently, it falls on the sidelines of the linguistic researcher's interests as it enters the historical framework of the linguistic phenomenon.

herefore, Bloomfield's school focused on the phonetic aspect, distinguishing between syllables, voiced and voiceless sounds, and their semantic relationships. Prague's school also concentrated on sound changes and their semantic relationships.”<sup>8</sup> This is supported by psychologists in their

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<sup>4</sup> - Zakaria Ismail, "Teaching Methods for Arabic Language," University Knowledge House, Alexandria, 1991, p. 139.

<sup>5</sup> - Surah Ash-Shu'ara (26:192/195).

<sup>6</sup> - Surah Taha (20:113).

<sup>7</sup> - Ferdinand De Saussure cours linguistique général Paris Ed Payot 1972 P 30/31

<sup>8</sup> -Knud Torged Structure imminente de la langue Française, librairie Larousse Paris 1965 P52

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studies related to language disorders, as they agree that the spoken language system and the written language system are two different systems.”<sup>9</sup>”

This may be justified by the fact that the linguistic phenomenon, in essence, consists of spoken sounds before becoming written letters, as writing follows pronunciation. Based on this, attention should be given first to spoken performance before focusing on written performance, as language education primarily aims at acquiring the skill of oral expression, considering it dominant over other language performances. It is essential to note that linguistic competence is manifested in two skills:

**Oral skill**, relying on spoken performance.

**Writing skill**, primarily based on the writing conventions of a specific language, ”<sup>10</sup>”When we separate spoken language from written language, it facilitates the learning process because language, in itself, was originally spoken before it was written.

### The Second Principle:

”This principle is related to the role played by language as a tool for communication used by members of the human society to fulfill the desire for engagement in social life.”<sup>11</sup>” The concept of the communicative function of language is itself the fundamental basis for the social perspective, as it reflects a set of social norms and customs represented by individuals in their spoken and written communication. In this regard, researchers in the field of language education focus on the social background with all its characteristics, starting from cultural surroundings to social traditions.

In this context, language education distinguishes between the native language and foreign languages in terms of selecting suitable curricula and methods that consider the social contexts surrounding the language as a subject of study. This is known as direct methods and audiovisual methods.”<sup>12</sup>” The content of the texts should reflect the social and cultural realities associated with the environment in which the student lives, and the choice of language should express these realities, to which the student responds.

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<sup>9</sup> -Denis Girard, *ibid*P 17. “Les psychologues du langage, de leur coté, dans leur études de cas pathologiques n'affectent que l'un des deux systèmes en laissant l'autre intact. Séparer l'orale de l'écrit c'est donc faciliter le processus d'apprentissage. “

<sup>10</sup> - "HoulahTalib El-Ibrahimi examines the method of teaching Arabic structures in Algerian secondary schools in the *Linguistics Journal*, Issue 5, 1981, p. 63."

<sup>11</sup> -Girard Denis, *ibid*, p 17 un deuxième principe important est le rôle que joue la langue comme instrument de communication entre individu d'une même communauté linguistique: elle facilite le besoin de communication >

<sup>12</sup> -Girard Denis, *ibid.*, p 17/18

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**The Third Principle:** This principle is related to the inclusiveness of actual speech performance, as all aspects of the speaker's body come into play to achieve the practical realization of the linguistic event. This is affirmed by linguists and psychologists interested in the linguistic phenomenon who acknowledge that language use involves the physical aspects of the speaking individual and the listener. Physiologically, for example, hearing and speech perception are primarily involved. <sup>13</sup> "Physiological participation in classical speech, including gestures, supports the meanings of spoken expressions, thereby achieving levels of communicative interaction in all its dimensions.

In this context, language teachers and researchers in the field of education focus on explaining physiological behaviors based on learners' readiness to acquire linguistic skills and identifying physiological language disorders.

**The Fourth Principle:"**

"It is characterized by the distinctive features of each linguistic system, typically defined by linguists in the three levels: phonetic, syntactic, and semantic, with their effectiveness being linked to the social context. <sup>14</sup> "From this perspective, the successful teaching process requires those overseeing pedagogical practices to directly integrate learners into the social context of the language, considering its dimensions and levels that distinguish it from other languages. There are some methodological differences related to the psychological and sociological perception of learners. In the case of teaching a foreign language, for example, models of the native language may intervene to facilitate the communicative process between the teacher and the learner. This task is legitimate in pedagogical practices in emergency situations that may hinder the communicative process. It becomes apparent that what applies to the native language also applies to teaching a foreign language.

**Language Teaching Methods:**

A closer look at the transformative path of language teaching and learning aims to show that it has adopted various methods throughout its broad and continuous history. Each method has acquired its characteristics and principles. Salah Abdel-Majeed believes that teaching methods are fundamentally based on psychological foundations, especially cognitive theory. The psychological foundations of this theory are the basis that explains many language teaching methods today. Some linguists consider this theory better than any previous one in explaining the process of language comprehension and teaching, whether it is a national or foreign language <sup>15</sup>. However,

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<sup>13</sup> -"Ahmed Hassani: Studies in Applied Linguistics in the Field of Language Education, University Publications Department, 1996, p. 132."

<sup>14</sup> -Besse H pouquier grammaires et didactique des langues hâtier Didier, Paris, 1991 p206

<sup>15</sup> - Salah Abdel-Majeed Al-Arabi, "Learning a Living Language and Teaching It: Between Theory and Practice," Lebanon Library 1, 1981, p. 10.

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it does not negate the benefit of other theories such as behavioral and cognitive theories. We take from each what seems to us to be useful without bias towards one of them.”<sup>16</sup>”

The search for the relationship between learning theories and teaching methods is of utmost importance, and discovering the principles upon which a theory is based helps in finding the best teaching methods. Methods are the result of theories, so it is essential to distinguish between theory and method. Eugenie Madaan highlighted the difference between learning theories in their content and teaching methods, stating that these theories are more conceptual and accurate than teaching methods. In other words, these theories are more insightful and precise than teaching methods and mean...”

By description, the first method aims to explain, while the second seeks application, attempting to identify the necessary procedures that can be recommended in practice. Its content addresses the curriculum and the social framework in which learning takes place.”<sup>17</sup>”

This illustrates that theories clarify how teaching or methods of teaching skills are carried out in a clear and explicit manner. These theoretical foundations are then put into practical action to solve learning and teaching problems.

In this context, educational practices emerged to implement these theoretical foundations and move them from the realm of theoretical consideration to practical application. We will focus on the most important methods, results obtained, and criticisms directed at each method.

### **Grammar-Translation Method:**

This method is a blend of two approaches: the memorization and rules method and the grammar-translation method. Most scholars trace the origin of the first method, the memorization and rules method, to the Greek and Roman eras, where the Romans were fascinated by ancient African civilization and decided to transfer African heritage to their own civilization. Roman rulers made it a practice to draw from Greek knowledge, and they learned the Greek language. Thus, the memorization and translation method became the most suitable and effective way of learning for them.

This method continued until the Renaissance era and the invention of printing, which highlighted the drawbacks of the old method, the memorization and rules method. The translation method then emerged as an extension of the previous method, focusing on memorizing language rules and inflections for the learner. It emphasized pronunciation, spelling,

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<sup>16</sup> - Same reference, p. 18.

<sup>17</sup> . Eugenie Madanat, *Educationalists: Frustration Alters Aggressive Behavior in Children* - Part 3 - Magdalawi 1996, p. 67

and the translation<sup>18</sup> of meanings from the foreign language to the learner's native language. Therefore, the role of presenting ready-made rules to the learner and the memorization of vocabulary meanings and their translation is limited. In this case, the learner becomes similar to a machine storing information, recalling it when needed, and returning the goods to their owners. The learner, in this situation, receives information through listening, stores it in memory, and memorizes it away from understanding and actual practice of the rules, making the lesson or material rigid and dry. This method received numerous criticisms, especially after the Czech scholar Jan Amos Comenius appeared in the 17th century and beyond.

Comenius (Joh Amos Comenius), through his book "The Gate of Languages," advocated for an alternative method he considered more successful and beneficial than the futile translation method. Some of the most notable criticisms include:

The translation method, with its concepts and foundations based on memorization of rules and translation from a foreign language to the learner's native language, impedes the acquisition of various skills, especially speech and pronunciation. Attention is focused on speech and pronunciation, considering that language consists of spoken sounds before becoming written. For example, Algerian communities abroad have acquired foreign languages orally after prolonged exposure to the foreign environment, even without proficiency in reading and writing. This indicates that speech and pronunciation precede writing and reading.<sup>19</sup>

The grammar-translation method is criticized for its focus on receiving and memorizing information without concern for understanding, turning the learner into a recording device that stores information without utilizing it when necessary.<sup>20</sup> This approach has a negative impact on the learner's role, leading to disinterest in the lesson. Its fundamental drawback lies in using the native language as an intermediary in teaching foreign languages, limiting the learner's role to receiving ready-made vocabulary with translations without considering factors aligned with the nature of language and the natural acquisition of skills. The methodology of this method can be summarized as follows:<sup>21</sup> 1. Presenting the lesson in the native language (learner's original language) with minimal use of the target language. 2. Introducing vocabulary in isolation without incorporating it into coherent sentences. 3. Elaborating on presenting complex grammatical and morphological rules.

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<sup>18</sup> - Salah Abdel Majeed Al-Arabi, the previous reference, p. 37/38.

<sup>19</sup> - André Martinet, *Eléments de linguistique général*. Armand Coulin p 8

<sup>20</sup> - Reform by Salah Abdel Majeed Al-Arabi, the same reference, pages 40/41.

<sup>21</sup> - Mohammed Watas discusses the significance of educational tools in the teaching process in general and language instruction for foreigners in particular, from pages 190 to 192. Walid Al-Anani's "Applied Linguistics and Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers" in Oman: Dar Al-Jawhara, 1st edition, 2003, pages 81-82.

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4. Starting to read ancient texts in early stages of the curriculum.

5. Lack of emphasis on the implicit meaning or the message conveyed by linguistic structures, presenting them as patterns for linguistic analysis.

6. Relying on a single teaching approach, translating unrelated sentences from the target language to the native language.

Neglecting pronunciation.”<sup>22</sup>”

From what we have mentioned, it becomes clear that this method is based on teaching language by understanding grammatical rules. This enables students to apply them in sentences and texts, especially in reading and writing. However, it deprives language of its social nature, presenting it as a rigid language governed by grammatical correctness, far from realism and functionality, although it conforms to the rule. Its focus on reading and writing skills neglects the oral aspect, except when confined to translating texts from the native language to the target language or vice versa.

## **B. Direct Method:**

This method emerged in the late 19th century in France. It is characterized as the natural method for language teaching, resembling the learning of the national language by providing a communicative environment, dispensing with translation, and linking vocabulary and symbols through representation, images, and correct pronunciation, with learners repeating this pronunciation. Here, auditory-visual use is emphasized. It also emphasizes oral and auditory exercises to enable learners to recognize the phonetic system of the new language and distinguish between functional and non-functional units. Regarding grammar, it relies on the student's thinking and understanding. The teacher adopts an inductive approach, ”<sup>23</sup>” where the teacher deduces clear linguistic rules from the given examples.

The novelty in this study lies in its focus on the skills of speech and pronunciation, and teaching letters as a starting point for reading, as it is considered the main nucleus in teaching the skill of speech. Therefore, this method emerged as a departure from its predecessors, as it reduced reliance on translation, thus dispensing with the intermediary language in foreign language teaching.”<sup>24</sup>”

Our study reveals that this method distinguished itself from others by emphasizing the oral aspect and employing the new language in suitable natural situations that assist learners in

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<sup>22</sup> - Refer to Walid El-Anani: Same reference, page 81

<sup>23</sup> - See Walid El-Anani: Same reference, p. 85.

<sup>24</sup> -See Mohamed and Tass: The previous reference, p. 193.

comprehension and recall. In addition, it avoids didactic methods and standard approaches in teaching grammar, instead adopting an inductive approach.

However, this method has not been immune to some flaws and criticisms. It is criticized for neglecting the explanation of studied grammar rules, even in a concise manner, which the researcher can hardly do without, as it helps to better grasp the language under study. Furthermore, this latter method, the Direct Method, overlooks two fundamental language skills in language teaching: reading and writing. The learner transitions from one linguistic pattern to another without leaving sufficient time and space for practice in a single pattern.<sup>25</sup>

### C. The Audiolingual Method:

This method emerged among structural linguists and anthropologists who conducted their studies on various languages spoken by Native Americans. It is named as such because it combines listening to the language first and then providing an oral response. The most impactful results of this method include:

1. Language is spoken, not written. The learner first acquires the skill of listening before starting to learn by reading printed materials, focusing on the spoken before the written.
2. Language is a set of habits. This principle is based on Skinner's theory of stimulus, response, and reinforcement.

- Teaching the language itself, not about the language, by training teachers to place the linguistic structure within its natural context and its real-world usage.- Emphasizing what the native speaker says, not the model example: It becomes clear through its focus on providing daily dialogue and natural dialects, relying on diverse multilingual dialog exercises.<sup>26</sup> The latter has emphasized teaching the differences and distinctions, especially in the areas of sounds and linguistic structures, as well as teaching the idiomatic expressions specific to the target language. From the mentioned five characteristics, we can deduce some features that distinguish this method, characterized by its reliance on simulation and presenting new material in dialogue. It also pays attention to grammatical explanations, vocabulary identification, and places significant emphasis on the pronunciation process. Additionally, it reinforces successful responses directly and encourages students to produce error-free language in terms of phonetic pronunciation. However, this method has not escaped criticism, particularly for relying on repetition and simulation without specifying the goal, making the learner akin to a parrot repeating what is said to him without understanding the meaning.

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<sup>25</sup> - See Walid El-Ghanai: Same reference, p. 86.

<sup>26</sup> -Refer to Walid El Ghonaimi, the same reference, page 87.

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This method neglects teaching the writing skill and focuses on the auditory aspect, making the learner feel a lack of confidence in learning the language due to reliance on oral training and neglecting the written aspect. ”<sup>27</sup>”Through these criticisms, we conclude that this method does not enable the learner to acquire linguistic proficiency, as it lacks a focus on teaching language using the reading and writing skills.

### D. Communicative Method:

This method emerged in the 1970s as a response to the shortcomings of the audio-lingual method, aiming to overcome the errors and deficiencies of the audio-lingual method from one side and surpassing the transformational shortcomings in focusing on the communicative-social aspect of linguistic usage from the other side. The communicative activity may represent the central axis in this method, with its ultimate goal and defined areas of focus.

Littlewood suggests that the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach can contribute significantly to the language teaching process. These contributions include:

1. Providing a complete application of function by distinguishing between skill training and application within the classroom.
2. Connecting the classroom to learners' goals, making the learner an active participant in the communicative process to achieve increasing success.
3. Focusing on activities, creating realistic language situations, caring for the learner, and providing opportunities for various roles rarely allowed by previous methods.”<sup>28</sup>”

However, this method has faced modification and criticism, including concerns about its focus on language functions and social situations, as well as challenges related to testing, with no specific choices to measure communicative skills.

In conclusion, the ultimate goal of language learning is achieving communicative competence and the ability to comprehend linguistic messages, whether evident through speech or by maintaining competence as a hidden mental activity under the learner's ability in speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

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