The Intricacy and Delicacy in the Historical Development of Arabic Language

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In memory of
       My beloved Mother, your sweet memory is
still in my mind … Thank you for everything …

PREFACE

The main linguistic tradition was created by the Arabs since in the seventh century, ending in the nineteenth century with the reception of Western linguistics. The issues in Arabic linguistics which recapitulated on some linguistic speculation were developed by Western linguists. Some scholars were of the view that there was a hidden Greek transmission into Arabic linguistics and terminology which were subsequently borrowed by traditional Arab scholars who started to describe their own language scientifically (academically). However, the speculation above has been rejected by some Muslim scholars who believe that the purity of Arabic linguistics such as the theory of Arabic syntax is totally free from any foreign influence. This book highlights some views of Muslim scholars on the originality of Arabic linguistics by traditional Arab grammarians who focus more on the grammatical approach in applying the method. The chapters of this book are arranged according to the historical and corpus linguistic chronology. The first chapters discuss the history of Semitic languages with the opening chapter gives a brief history of Semitic languages of which the Arabic language is believed to be the root. The remaining six chapters deal with various Arabic traditional linguistic elements such as syntax, morphology, semantic, declension and logic focus on the analogical approach method as the main ideas in exploring Arabic grammar. The author believes that the strength of this book is on the discussion of the issues. She cannot deny that there are many

scholars, either linguists or historians who have covered the above mentioned topic. However, based on her observation, deliberations or discussions from Muslim scholars point of views hailed from non-Arab region (Southeast Asia Region) do not exist.

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CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORY OF SEMITIC LANGUAGES

Introduction

Palestinian history has become one of the most obfuscated histories of today as a result of the stranglehold on the study of Palestine and the ancient Near East. Palestinian history has been denied a place in western academic discourse. This research approaches ancient Palestinian history based on linguistic theory, i.e. the analytical and critical study of ancient Arabic language. The question is how linguistic theories can contribute to reclaim the history of Palestine. It is assumed that a critical reassessment of the origin of Palestinian history is possible through the study of ancient Palestinian linguistics. An academic linguistic approach ensures that the study of languages is integrated into a larger context. It aims at introducing Palestinian history as a more readily accessible field of study no longer monopolized by exclusivist biblical studies.

When we relate Islamic literature to predating ancient eastern religions and history as major sources of reference rather than referring to Jewish and Christian sources, we have to investigate the authenticity of their views. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the development of Arabic ancient civilization, the researcher considers it essential to assess linguistic theories

CHAPTER 2

SPECULATIONS ON THE HISTORY OF ARABIC GRAMMAR

Introduction

This study aims to critically examine Ignaz Goldziher's allegations on the beginnings of Arabic linguistics. According to him, the Arabic short vowel symbols did not originate in the Arab world but were adopted from the Levant. The same he assumed in regard to the three different parts of speech, namely name (*ism*), verb (*fiʿil*), and particle (*harf*), which allegedly presupposed the knowledge of Aristotle's *De Interpretations* falsely attributed to ʿAli (Karrama llahu wajhah).[1] Goldziher explained this connection with the scholastic disputes occurring between the different theological schools in the first century A.H., with special reference to the dogmatic differences between the Murjiʿah and the Qadariyyah sects.

Theological debates on various doctrines were held at the same time by Eastern Christians based on the teachings of John of Damascus. In the eyes of Goldziher, these debates – based on the assumption that since they occurred in the same century – they had to be related, and furthermore, St. John of Damascus must have borrowed his ideas from Aristotle. Since no Arabic sources speak

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[1] Ignaz Goldziher, *History of Grammar Among the Arabs,* vol. 73, The John Benjamin Publishing Company: Netherlands, 1994, p.8.

of this connection, he raises his own suspicions, namely those Muslim sources refused to admit the borrowing of ideas from the Christians. This study serves the purpose of investigating his allegations in regard to the origin of Arabic grammar and syntax and of deciding the extent of his scholarly bias. The researcher adopts a theoretical and analytical approach based on linguistic studies. In order to arrive at a balanced judgment with regard to this conflict, the linguistic corpus, as well as the historical background of transmission is being analyzed.[2]

In 1868, Ignaz Goldziher obtained a grant from Eotvos Baron Jozthe, the Hungarian minister of Education and Culture for the purpose of analyzing Arabic manuscripts. He obtained his doctorate in Leipzig in 1870, followed by intense studies on his own which allowed him to attain a thorough knowledge of Arabic manuscripts. He earned a reputation of being the most learned expert in the field of Arabic sources.[3] Being a student of the renowned orientalist H.L. Fleischer,[4] Goldziher was drawn to the study of Arabic linguistics. As he him self recollected - "I was lured more by the historical then the factual (positivist) side".[5] This explicit interest of his in the historical aspect of literature remained one of the characteristics of his scholarly enquiry throughout his life.

One of the prime topics of his research focused on investigating the origins of Arabic grammar. He published research on a number of important Arabic manuscripts in this field, such as *Al-muzhīr* by as-Sayūṭi, *Al-'alfāz* by Ibn as-Sikkīt, *Al-Insaf Fī Masāila al-Khilāf* etc.[6] Goldziher was one of the most influential Orientalists of his time, and his views were

Islahah Yaacob, Mauqif al-Mustashriqīn min al-luqhah al-Arabiyah: Goldziher anmūzajan, Critism mah, vol.33, no.129, February 2015, pp 11-37

ibid, p.1

Islahah Yaacob, 'Refuting the alleged transmission of Greek thinking concepts into Arabic grammar', Journal of Islam in Asia, No.1, June 2011, Intl. Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur.

Goldziher, History of Grammar Among the Arabs, Volume 73, p.45.

ibid, 1994, p.xiii-xiv.

which were, just like isolated concepts, neither true nor false. In order to explain the concept of convention, a scholar needed to study the history of a language and trace the introduction of new terms in the timely sequence and the circumstances under which they occurred.

In agreement with Goldziher, Versteegh[119] understands the debate over the origin of language being about whether speech originated in revelation or in the accord the Mu'tazilate theologists theories established in the first half of the ninth century C.E. under the sympathetic 'Abbasid Caliph al-Ma`mun. In the tenth century the Mu'tazilites had adopted the term *waḍ'* to indicate the established character of language. In this period many grammarians were Mu'tazilites, such as Ibn Jinnī, al-Fārisī, al-Zujjāj, Quṭrub and many others. However, the Mu'tazilate theologian 'Abbad Ibn Sulaymān (d. 864) claimed that there was a natural relationship between words and things,[120] which disagreed with Ibn Jinnī, who stated:

وَذَهَبَ بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَى أَنَّ أَصْلَ اللُّغَاتِ كُلَّهَا إِنَّمَا هُوَ مِنَ الأَصْوَاتِ المُسَوَّعَاتِ، كدوى الرِّيح، وحنين الرعدِ، وخير المادِ، وشحيج الحمارِ، ونعيق الغرابِ، وصهيل الفرسِ، ونتريب الظَّبِّي، ونحو ذلكَ، ثم وَلَدَتِ اللغَاتُ عَنْ ذَلِكَ فِيْمَا بعد، وَهَذَا عِنْدِيْ وَجْةٌ صَالِحٌ، وَمَذْهَبٌ مُسْتَقْبَلٌ [121]

Ibn Fāris tried to persuade his readers not to accept any Mu'tazilate rationalist ideas about man`s own initiative in this matter: "I say, the language of the Arabs is revelation and the evidence for this is the words of God 'He taught Adām all the names"[122] He added the following argument:

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[119] Kees Versteegh, *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought* 111, London: Routledge, p.107.
[120] Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Muzhir*, 2/47.
[121] Ibn Jinnī, *Al-Khasā`iṣ*, p.56.
[122] *Ibn Fāris (d.390h), Ṣāhibī, ed. Sayyid Ahmad Saqar,* Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1977, p.6.

The proof for the correctness of our point of view is the unanimous agreement of the scholars about arguments based on the language of the Bedouin, whether they agree or disagree about something and on their poems. If language were really an institution and a convention, they would have no more rights to argue on the basis of their language, then we would have to argue on the basis of contemporary speech.[123]

His view was further supported by Abūlafia, who referred to the authority of his predecessor when concluding that all language arose due to convention, the only exemption being the Hebrew language.[124] Goldziher had a point when noting that the concept of revelation or convention in language had not been discussed by Muslim scholars, although the topic was preserved in ancient texts. However, it must not be forgoten that the era of transmission set on much later, and the linguistic corpus in the hands of Abū Aswād al-Du`alī, Abd ar-Rahmān Hurmūz, Naseer Ibn 'Asim, 'Anbāsah Fīl, Maymūn al-Aqrān, Abū Ishāq al-Haḍrāmī and Abū 'Amrū Ibn Alāq contained no mention of these questions. Versteegh concludes that the absence of diachronic thinking in Arabic linguistics was partly responsible for this lack of interest in this matter. Muslim grammarians dealt with a fixed corpus and maintained that the language as they knew it would not change, and thus any hypothetical question as to its origin was of no relevance to them.[125] For the grammarians, however, the issue of the origin of language had never held much attraction, except for Ibn Jinnī who was, according to Versteegh, perhaps driven by his Mu'tazilate views, views which other scholars such as Ibn Fāris warned his readers not to adopt.[126]

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[123] Ibn Fāris, *Sāhibī*, p.7.

[124] Moshe Idel, *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abualfia*, p.13.

[125] Kees Versteegh, *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought* 111, p.113.

[126] *Ibid.*, p.43.

Arab corpus linguistics. The purpose of this book is to present fresh materials which will helpfully bring about further support of the theory. Chronology, the book presents the Arabic linguistic thinking before Prophet Muhammad`s time (PBUH), then after the revelation of the Quran where the observation was based on the achievements of medieval Muslim scholars in depicting the first 200 years of Islamic culture, the so-called formative period. Actually, the continuous progress of modern Western studies in the early Islamic culture has hardly affected the scenario of revolutionary theories with the effect of abandoning the former views from Medieval Muslim scholars. Recently, the theories have been questioned from different angles as mentioned earlier. Thus, this book attempts to reconcile and harmonize the contradictory views among Muslim and Western scholars.

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