

## Applying Universal Linguistic Properties in Language Instruction: A Comparative Study of Arabic and English

Khalifa BOUDJADI<sup>1</sup>, \*

<sup>1</sup> Arabic Language and Literature Department /Arts College,  
Al Wasl University, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. boudjad1@yahoo.fr

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### **ABSTRACT:**

#### **Keywords:**

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This research addresses the contemporary developments required for teaching the Arabic language in accordance with its evolving context. It starts by adopting contrastive linguistic tools as a framework for teaching and learning the Arabic language. Modern linguistic lessons, within what is known as linguistic universals, have demonstrated general linguistic facts shared among languages that can serve as successful starting points in the educational process. When teaching Arabic to non-native speakers, we build on linguistically established similarities, followed by providing foundational acquisitions. Subsequently, we introduce variations based on predetermined specific purposes. As for native Arabic speakers, it might be more beneficial to present linguistic curriculum from a contrastive perspective with the languages learners are proficient in. This enables them to develop common linguistic faculties, allowing for an approach between their second language and their native language, addressing numerous comparative questions across various linguistic models that foster proficiency and refine skills. The research aims to highlight the current linguistic need to capitalize on these contrastive linguistic concepts, teaching the Arabic language in diverse linguistic environments without divorcing it from an inevitable linguistic reality. The methodology will be descriptive, occasionally comparative, presenting various situations and models imposed by the linguistic reality in teaching Arabic from a contrastive linguistic perspective. This will be addressed in the following sections: (Introduction to Contrastive Linguistics), (Human Languages; Universalities and Linguistic Specificities), (Linguistic Commonalities in Contrastive Teaching), and the Conclusion.

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\* Khalifa Boudjadi

## **I. The Contrastive Linguistics**

Contrastive Linguistics is classified as a branch of Applied Linguistics, providing scientific and methodological answers to all issues arising from language interference, translation, and language instruction for non-native speakers. The effectiveness and utility of the contrastive approach have been confirmed, with the term "Contrastive Analysis" being more widely used than "Contrastive Linguistics." Some researchers have alternatively employed the term "Applied Contrastive Studies". Contrastive Analysis focuses on identifying similarities and differences between the native language and foreign languages as subjects of learning. Similarity and difference are not related to the ease or difficulty of learning, as much as they are linguistic phenomena, while the learning situation is purely psychological.

Contrastive Linguistics began at the end of the first half of the previous century at the USA, comparing two languages at their linguistic levels for educational purposes. It was based on a fundamental hypothesis stating that linguistic interference causes difficulties in learning new languages, whether positively or negatively. Contrastive Analysis addresses issues arising from language convergence in translation or foreign language instruction and anticipates challenges that language learners may encounter.

One of its benefits is contribution to classifying world languages into multiple families based on scientific foundations. Among the founders was Fries Waldo, who declared in 1719 that "the best material is that built on a scientific description of the language studied compared to a similar description of the original language".

Robert Lado later appeared in a book in 1799, in which this principle was adopted as a basis for contrastive analysis.

It later, became clear that preparing educational materials in languages requires the presence of their original cultures, especially with regard to teaching languages to non-native speakers, and this will contribute greatly to alleviating and overcoming learning difficulties. In the 1960s, a significant focus on the principle of error analysis emerged, whether syntactical or psychological, later becoming a methodology. It rests on three foundations: identifying errors, describing them, and explaining them. Distinctions became clear among three types of contrastive analysis:

1. Pure Contrastive Analysis: Involves studies comparing two or more languages, observing points of similarity and difference.
2. Error Analysis: Involves studies resulting from analyzing what arises from language learning or translation into it.

3. Descriptive Analysis: Involves descriptive studies of a language or a number of languages.

## **II. Human Languages; Human properties and Linguistic Specificities**

Let's start into linguistic properties in human languages, with the concept introduced by De Saussure over a century ago, where he distinguished between three terms in the concept of "language" (Saussure F. , 1985. P:26)

- Language is a universal, general, innate, and natural human phenomenon distinguishing humans from other creatures, making it a singular language associated with human diversity.
- Language is a social, specific, acquired phenomenon that distinguishes each society from another, resulting in linguistic diversity. There are around 7000 languages spoken worldwide today.
- Language is an individual, more specific phenomenon that distinguishes each individual from another, belonging to a linguistic community. Therefore, language is multiple and different depending on the individuals in linguistic communities.

De Saussure calls the human phenomenon as "language", and the social phenomenon as "language", and the individual phenomenon as "speech (Saussure F. , 1985)". In this context, it is useful to note the aspirations of linguistics over the past century, seeking commonalities among all human languages that reveals their communicative rules. Then we can extract the general laws governing various linguistic phenomena across different human societies. De Saussure says in his book's beginning, about the scope of linguistics:

### **“The scope of linguistics should be:**

- a. To describe and trace the history of all observable languages, which amounts to tracing the history of families of languages and reconstructing as far as possible the mother language of each family;
- b. To determine the forces that are permanently and universally at work in all languages, and to deduce the general laws to which all specific historical phenomena can be reduced; and
- c. To delimit and define itself. (Saussure F. , 2011. P:6)

From these forces and distinctive faculties of natural languages, some can be considered within the framework of universal principles governing human language, and others can be classified as universal processes associated with language development. These include:

### **III. Tense's Hierarchy of "Past and Future" in Tense's Expression:**

The tense, as a subject, holds great importance in natural languages, often surrounded by complexities and cultural and social content variations. Languages use differences grammatical structure and expression of tense, or methods of tense, by other word, to determine the specific tense's case. But they all return to a common origin of tense, on the two main directions: past–future. This mental division, distinctively characterized by Semitic languages, expresses complete or incomplete tense. It expressed the perfect tense “that which the event ended”, and the imperfect tense “that which the event did not end”, with a number of minor differences<sup>1</sup>. It may be appropriate "to consider that tense is divided into two parts: past and future, and between them there is a limit of separation, a present tense, as if it were the geometric point that has no length, width, or height, but is always directed toward the future" (Al-Aqqad, 1995). We can notice here that the triple division of tense, in Arabic (past, imperative and future) easily leads to a main dual division (past and future); where both the imperative and the present tense are indicating the situation connected to the present. And both of them are within the imperfect tense. This division is a philosophical construct based on purely logical foundations, explored by ancient philosophers and modern, investigating the presence of tense inside or outside the self of speakers (Al-Shams, 2007).

This general common property that links human languages has many differences, prompting each language or linguistic group to have its tense characteristics. It is as if the Semitic languages share a binary view of time in terms of completion or incompleteness. That's what the foundational and comparative studies on various Semitic languages has discovered, and explained many common sayings between the Arabic language and other Semitic languages. On the other hand, it differs in their approaches that determine tense; Such as morphological, grammatical, or contextual: “The diversity and complexity in expressing tense have been central factors in the ambiguity of literature that addressed tense in its Different practices” (Jahfa, 2006. P;11). Based on this principle, the differences between languages appear in expressing the tense, and between the pure contextual languages and formal languages, as well, “Tense remains linked to the rules that each language provides for its expression, as well as to the intentions of the speakers and the circumstances of the discourse. One of the rules provided by languages, for example, is to determine its own formulas and familiar or unfamiliar temporal expressions. Sometimes time is connected to the speaker's intention and implicit meaning within their speech, and other times tense cannot be determined except by what is dictated by the circumstances of the speech and communication”.

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<sup>1</sup> In In Arabic, for example: the imperfect includes the present and the future: what is existing, has not been interrupted, and what has not occurred. In Hebrew, the past tense is used to indicate the future, and the future tense for past. In Ashoyri, the perfect is used for the present and future.

#### **IV. Words and their Categories in human languages**

Among the common terms in human languages, there are the linguistic units or, as referred in Arabic, "Word Categories". In fact, Languages share major word categories, such as "Noun, Verb, and letter," but they differ in their categorization and division. Virtually, no language exists without nouns, verbs and letters. We are aware of the criticism directed at the recent triple division of words, as what Ibrahim Anis (1978), who made it more than three: Noun, Pronoun, Verb, Adjective, Adverb, Tool, Common Noun, and Proper Noun, Demonstrative Pronouns, and Connectors (Anis, 1978).

As for Mahdi Al-Makhzoomi (1986) who made it more than that, and added to it Metonymy, Verb Tenses, Conditional, and style (Al-Makhzoumi, 1986). On the other hand, we found Tammam Hassan (1994) limits it to only seven categories: Noun, Adjective, Verb, Pronoun, (alkhalifa), Adverb, and Tool (Hassan, 1994). It is noted that other languages also employ similar divisions: Greek philosophers, for example, categorized words into three types: Noun, Verb, and Conjunction. Aristotle expanded on this, including Article, Syllable, Conjunction, Preposition, Noun, Verb, conjugation, and Speech such as: man, long, came, Muhammad/ noun with a general meaning, the adjective, the verb, and the noun itself. It is clear that there are three categories: a noun, a verb, and an adjective.

In the Latin languages, there is an agreement on the triple division known to the mother Latin: noun, verb, and letter. The noun refers to number, gender, and inflection, and the verb refers to the number of the subject and its place, the active voice, the passive voice, past, present, future, perfect, and incomplete, and the letter that has no conjugation from the above.

#### **V. Linguistic Structures/Sentences in Human Languages:**

The origin of this common property in human languages can be traced back to the specificity that distinguishes human expression from other expressive systems: the linearity. Speech is linear, meaning that only one phoneme/single sound can be produced at a time, and the repetition of the same sound is not possible when expressing oneself. It is also not possible to repeat the same sound if we want to express it. Rather, the phonemes and signs must differ on the linear axis for the meaning to be obtained. This major property that combines human languages; It is characterized by the grouping of word's categories, and form a semantic units that combine and succeed to achieve understanding, within language use. But there are a differences within categories, types, multiplicity, and order of sentences: where each language presents certain specific characteristics in its structure.

In this context, we can note that all human languages depend on the principle of syntax (suspension: connection between word's categories): as detailed by Abdul Qahir al-Jurjani (1988) in (Al-Dala'il Aliejaz) book, in the context of his definition of language system (Annadhm). He said: "It is known that language

system (Annadhm) only consist of the suspension of words with each other and the establishment of some by the cause of others” (Al-Jurjani, 1988. P:24) He further details the patterns of words and their suspension, stating: "And words are three: Noun, Verb, and Particle, and for the suspension between them, there are known methods, and it does not exceed three categories: the suspension of a noun with a noun, the suspension of a noun with a verb, and the suspension of a particle with both of them. (Al-Jurjani, 1988)"

## **VI. Grammar "Grammar of Languages":**

Grammar preserves the laws and systems of languages. All Human languages are not devoid of what preserves its rules. Al-Farabi (1931), in his classification of sciences, identified two types under the umbrella of "linguistic science": the first involves the memorization of significant words in a community and what they signify. The second is the laws governing those words” (Al-Farabi, 1931). The first section is limited to knowledge of vocabulary, while the second is the knowledge of the laws of words and their system, which is what we call: the science of grammar, as a general term for the totality of the laws of the language, or, let us say “global grammar, or general grammar.” So, it is the same grammar written by (Panini) in Sanskrit, (Aristotle) in Greek, Roman grammarians in grammar books, and Arabic grammarians starting from (Al-Khalil alfarhidi) and (Sibawayh). It is also the same grammar of philological linguistic studies among Westerners in the centuries preceding the establishment of linguistics, after the general and comparative grammar. And we can easily approach between the grammar concept and linguistics that emerged in the early 20th century.

Languages differ in grammatical systems, according to their linguistic characteristics. Grammar is the knowledge of the conditions of words in structures - a comprehensive grammar concept that was widespread in ancient centuries - and Arabic is concerned with explaining the functions of words in sentences based on apparent or estimated grammatical signs. These functions are evident through the patterns of relationship existing in sentences between words: “the relationship of a noun to a noun, or a verb to a noun, and so on.” On the other hand, we find relies on the distribution of words and their positions in sentences, often determining the object in the word with the accusative case and the subject in what takes the nominative case. This pattern is common and shared between English and Indo-European languages, Turkish, Korean, Japanese, and others. This topic is not new in the contemporary studies, Chomsky, for example, addressed it under the term "universal grammar", or “global grammar”: “seeking to understand general rules shared by all languages based on their common human nature. It encompasses principles, cases, and rules representing all human languages, as all humans share part of their linguistic knowledge, irrespective of their native language, and general rules from this feature.

Therefore, the universal grammar represents the understanding that all languages adhere to structural dependency and morphemic properties, and the practical efficiency of language, not just its linguistic nature. So, the universal grammar defines the biological principles that constitute components of the human mind, which reigns over language (Nazir Al-Bahnasawy, 2004). The concept of universal grammar or "general rules" serves as a counterpart to specific grammar or "specific rules," which deals with the internal structures that distinguish each language from another.

## **VII. Common Linguistics in Contrastive Teaching**

One of the facts presented by contrastive linguistics is: to contrast between languages is very possible whenever they are close in their origins; Learning difficulties decrease in this case. More similar of languages means less learning difficulties. Among the most important results of comparative studies related to language teaching for more than half a century, is that the knowledge built on purposeful comparison between the learner's language and the second language is very useful and effective. The first step in constructing contrastive materials for language education involves specifying norms at the levels of phonetics, morphology, syntax, semantics, style, and pragmatics. Therefore, examining the commonalities among human languages before developing content for Arabic language programs or any other language is crucial. This provides learners with familiar educational contexts. For example, when teaching Arabic to native speakers, integrating Arabic language sciences into common linguistic contexts does not alienate them from other languages they acquire. Within the linguistic knowledge framework, they can distinguish the first language from second and third one.

This context also applies to learners who approach Arabic as a foreign language. They are not estranged from the general linguistic situation and human linguistic customs. It places them in familiar situations and linguistic habits, leading to sufficient proficiency in such conditions. On the other hand, beyond creating linguistic contexts, this approach promotes conscious learning. Learners receive, compare, balance, distinguish, and identify commonalities and distinctive points between languages. This potentially results in more efficient language acquisition. So, "raising awareness in learners sheds light on unconventional methods and inevitable obstacles they may encounter blindly. Consequently, this approach saves considerable effort and time. It is essential for teachers to be trained to recognize these methods and obstacles, knowing when to leverage awareness in favor of the learner" (Stevick, 1980).

At the end of this paragraph, we gather the most important linguistic commonalities to be considered in building the contents of Arabic language programs, as follows:

- Phonetic models in human languages: Phonetic phenomena are crucial since all natural languages articulate words phonetically, unlike other communication systems like sign languages or visual symbols. Phonetic values, meta-phonetic levels... are essential for language teaching.
- Arabic word categories, their characteristics, distinctive marks established by grammarians, and their construction in light of global linguistic concepts known to other languages. It is important to start with commonalities before differences when presenting linguistic knowledge.
- Syntactic structure in the Arabic language: It is built on the major concept of "structure" or "minimal semantic syntactic units." The types of structures in Arabic, both verbal and nominal, are based on a purely formal basis. The possibility of changing positions in Arabic syntactic structures is related to semantic purposes and communicative goals. Changes are associated with different semantic values based on the arrangement of words in syntactic structures. This is, because Arabic is not a model language, but rather a situational contextual language.
- Expressing tense in the Arabic language: Departing from the major category shared by human languages (the general axis of tense: past and future), temporal characteristics are then elucidated based on the nature of languages and their linguistic and communicative competencies. Emphasizing commonalities among languages in program formulation and curriculum content is essential to adjust educational materials effectively.
- All the above points are aimed at creating a contrastive learning environment without distinction between teaching Arabic to native or non-native speakers. This general principle only differs in terms of methods, content construction, and contexts.

### **VIII. Conclusion**

This research emphasizes that teaching the Arabic language, whether for native or non-native speakers, is in urgent need of investing the linguistic gains prior, immediate and expected to be acquired.

- Therefore, building the content of Arabic language programs in universities requires comparative knowledge with other languages. So, the learning takes place in live, confrontational situations, aware of linguistic differences.
- This vision allows learners to solidify their Arabic language knowledge, perceive it in its contrastive context with other languages, and consciously understand its position within that context. This approach gives a significantly supports the learning process.
- In the context of teaching Arabic to non-native speakers, starting from linguistic acquisitions and commonalities between the learner's first



language and Arabic, followed by treating Arabic as a foreign language, reduces effort and contributes to enhancing the learners' performance. It also aids in consolidating their new linguistic knowledge and practicing it from a contrastive perspective.

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