

Arbitrariness As Seen By Arab and English Linguists

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ABSTRACT

language is both individual and social process .It is individual in the sense that it expresses one's thoughts and feelings .It is also social since its use demands , in most cases, a speaker and a listener. A pre-requisite for communication is existence of common ground on which the users of the language should agree.At present, Linguists realize that what is true of one language is not necessarily true of another .Thus each language is studied according to its logic. In other words, languages follow no universal logic. Each language provides an intricate system of symbols that dissects nature in its own way. It is found that every nation has satisfied in using its language as far as it achieves the individuals needs. Though languages have been found to be basically arbitrary. They are not based on logic as in the case of mathematical concept. It is hard to explain why this object or concept is given a certain name. Also if there are certain justifiable natural forms in every language , they cannot be regarded more than exceptions. Therefore, arbitrariness is the dominant Property of language and these exceptions support and reinforce that domination.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Written language

The human being has sought to create away to record his thoughts and feelings, he invents forms of written languages. The development of writing has past several stages going back a few thousand years. The researcher will discuss very ancient written forms which ending with written English and written Arabic, concentrating on the relation between the forms that use these languages and their meanings.

1.2 Forms of Writing.

1.2.1 Pictograms and Ideograms.

Lexically, a pictogram is a picture that represents a word or A phrase, while an ideogram or ideograph is a symbol that is used to represent the idea of a thing rather than the sounds of a word, such as Chinese Language. (Oxford Advanced learners' dictionary: ٢٠٠٠:٦٧٢).The distinction between these two kinds is the difference in the relation between the symbol and the entity it represents. The more picture- like forms are pictograms and the more abstract derived forms are ideograms.(Yule: ١٩٩٦:١٥)A conventional relationship must exist between the symbol and its interpretation. Therefore, these two forms have been arbitrarily stated. Nevertheless, arbitrariness is less in pictograms. For the relationship between the symbol and the entity or idea becomes sufficiently abstract in ideograms, for example an ancient Egyptian and Chinese languages. (Yule: ١٩٨٥:٩).

1.2.2 Logograms Writing.

Sumerian is a good example of logographic writing. This type resembling written system in modern languages like Chinese writing .Looking at these inscriptions ,we cannot decide to which objects they stand for .The inscriptions used by the Sumerians were produced by pressing a wedge-shaped implement into soft clay tablets .For example ,the following symbol →→▼ represents the sun.(ibid: ١١)

١.٢.٣ Rebus Writing.

In this form, the symbol for the sound of spoken word is used to refer to that entity and then comes to be used whenever that sound occurs in any word. These symbols are arbitrarily formed because they are initially based on no logical reasons. Such process can be found in Arabic language. For example, the letters of the word "باب" can be used to form many other words by adding other letters because of the existence of the first three letters, such as in the words "بابا" and "بابل". (الرازي:١٩٨٢:٣٩). On the other hand, Fromkin et al say when a graphic sign no longer has a visual relationship to the word it represents, it becomes a phonographic symbol, standing for the sounds that represent the word. A single sign can then be used to represent all words with the same sounds .

(Fromkin ٢٠٠٣ :٥٥٠)

١.٢.٤ Syllabic Writing.

Phonetically, a syllable is usually described as consisting of a center which has little or no abstraction to air flow and which sounds comparatively loud, before and after this center, there are greater abstractions to air flow and/or less loud sound.

(Roach:١٩٨٨:٥٧)

When a writing system employs a set of symbols which represent the pronunciation of syllables, it is described as a syllabic writing. The full use of a syllabic writing system does not appear until it is used by Phoenicians.

(Yule :١٩٩٦:١٢)

On the other hand , the word " يد " in Arabic language can be used as a syllable in other words , such as " يدبس " , " يدحر " which mean "run over" and " overcome" respectively . (الضامن.١٩٨٠:١٠٥) However, the word "يد" as well as the Phoenicians symbols were taken from Egyptian writing is arbitrarily formed.

١.٢.٥ Alphabetic Writing.

Lexically, the term " alphabet" means a set of letters or symbols in a fixed order for writing a language and its origin is from "alpha" and "beta" , the first two letters of the Greek alphabet.

(Oxford Dictionary:٢٠٠٠).An alphabetic writing is essentially a set of written symbols each represents single type of sounds. It occurred in the origins of Semitic languages such as Arabic, Hebrew, and the early Greeks. Then it passed to the rest of Western European via the Romans, Eastern, Europe and the Cyrillic alphabet which is the basic of writing system used in Russia today.

(Yule:١٩٩٦:١٣)In all the previous forms, a conventional relationship should exist between the symbol and its interpretation and underwent several modifications to fit the requirements of the spoken languages described.Symbols in alphabetic writing are used to represent consonant and vowel sounds. Vowels are sounds in which there is no obstruction to the flow of air as it passes from the larynx to the lips. Consonants are the reverse .The fact that different contexts and positions in which particular sounds can occur. The difference in the distribution of vowels and consonants makes different alphabetic writings.(Roach:١٩٨٨:١١)However, the consonant sounds are more important than vowel sounds in some alphabetic languages like English because consonants form skeleton of English words and give them their basic shape and English speaker could read and understand the English forms without vowels. (O' Conner:١٩٨٤:٢٤)

١.٣ Written English.

English writing is formed originally as an alphabetic writing system. Though such system can be based on a correspondence between a single symbol and a single sound type, mismatching between the form of written English and the sounds of spoken English took place. The case is that, the influence of the conventions regarding the writing representation of words derived from forms used in writing other languages like Latin and French and the inaccurate decisions about English pronunciations represented in writing forms by the early Dutch speakers.

(Yule: ١٩٨٨: ١٤)

١.٤ Written Arabic.

There is a disagreement among the Arab linguists about the origin of written Arabic. This is because of rarity of ancient Arabic forms.

(المسعودي: ١٣٤٦: ٢٧٥)

Arabs had known writing before Islam: therefore, they used it in the ancient Arabic poetry. Accordingly, there are two main ancient Arabic forms, the first is called "نبطي" "Nibtian" which was the writing system of Aljezira, the second one is called "المسند", "Al_Musned" which was used by Arab people in Yemen. The most important Written Arabic forms were engraved on the tomb stones of their ancestors. These forms were separate Arabic letters. Therefore, Arab linguists have not considered these separate letters as Arabic written language, because Arabic letters are connected to each other in forming words (الضامن: ١٩٨٠: ١١٨). The first connected written forms had been written in ٢٥٠ AD. It contains readable sentences, these forms were used without dotting.

(وافي: ٢٠٠٤: ٧٨-٨٤)

When Islam came, Arab needed writing to write Glorious Qur'an. In order to control reading and writing correctly, especially after matching with other nations, they used a process which is called dotting. This process added to the Arabic written language arbitrariness by an Arabic Linguist Abu Alaswad Al_du'eli. This process was adopted officially till now.

(الضامن: ١٩٨٠: ٣٧)

١.٥ Language Sources.

In order to clarify the meaning of arbitrariness, it is useful to go back some thousand years to discuss certain theories and opinions that relating to language source. These theories and opinions should be manipulated contrastively between Arabic and English languages.

١.٥.١

The Divine Source.

This theory was adopted by some Arab Linguists concerning the origin of Arabic language. Those said that Adam wrote languages like Arabic and Cyrillic on the clay tablets. They also said that Arabic form was found by Ismael after the flood. Others said that Arabic form was invented in Yemen and then entered Iraq and used by Arab people in Hujaz.

(الضامن: ١٩٨٠: ١٠٧) (مبارك: ١٩٨٦: ١٣٥)

١.٥.٢

The Natural Sound Source.

In the fact, all modern languages have some words with pronunciation that seem to echo naturally and occurring sounds that could be used to support this theory. In English words like cuckoo, splash, buzz, and hiss, etc, represent this kind. Such words are called onomatopoeia, for example, the name of a cat is derived from its sound in ancient Egyptian and Chinese languages.

In Arabic, some linguists like Al faraheedi adopted this theory. He said that the Arabs say "صرصر" which is a verb used to indicate the Sound of eagles. They say "دوي" for the sound of air when there is a storm, "هزيم", for the sound of the thunder, "خرير", for the sound of water when falls from a height, "شحيح", for the sound of monkeys, "تعيق", for the sound of the black bird (raven), "صهيل", for the sound of horses and "سليل", for the sound of deer.

(مبارك: ١٩٨٦: ١٦)

Generally, Arab linguists divided imitating sounds in Arabic language into; imitating human sound and imitating animal sound. The first kind like "التمطق", the sound when somebody tastes food that made by tongue, "الددنه", for mumbling, "الهمهمه", for the sound of breathing, "الأنين", for the sound made by a patient like granting. The second one like, "الفحيح", the hissing of snakes, "تقيق", the sound of frogs, "نغاء", the sound of sheep, "زئير" The sound of lions. "عواء" The sound of the wolf, "نباح", the sound of dogs, "مواء", the sound of the cat.

(وافي: ٢٠٠٤: ١٣٧)

١.٥.٣

The Oral – gesture Source.

It makes a link between physical gesture and orally produced sounds. For example, the word good – bye means the movement of the tongue resembles the movement of the hand.

(Yule: ١٩٩١:٣)

Some of the Arab linguists think that the letter "غ" indicates darkness and words like "غم" means sadness and "غيم", means clouds and "غبن", means illusion in commercial dealing.

(مبارك: ١٩٨٦: ١٨)

Other Arab linguists think that some of the verbs in Arabic referred by their nature to some acts and nothing else. They say that the meaning of these verbs depends on two sounds of their three sounds. The third sound is used to specify the meaning of the verb. Therefore, the general meaning of separation in Arabic can be given by the sounds (ر،ف) resembling the consonant sounds /f/ and /r/ in English. If we add another sound that is to indicate the kind of separation or the tool that it is used. For example , the verb "فرض" means cutting a piece of wood , "فرص" means cutting silver "فرث" means cutting stomach . The meaning of clipping can be accomplished by the use of the sound "ق" and "ط" resembling /k/ and /t/ in English. By adding another letter, we can produce other verbs relating with the process of clipping. For example, "قطع" means cut, "قطف" means collect fruits, "قظ" means to clip a pencil, "فد" means to treat clothes. The two sounds that form the natural meaning of such verbs are closely imitating the sound of the action. Therefore, they say such use is not arbitrary. (الوافي: ٢٠٠٤: ١٣٧)

CHAPTER TWO

٢. Arbitrariness in some Branches of Linguistics.

This chapter is devoted to discuss arbitrariness in some branches of linguistics, such as phonology, semantics and morphology in which the researcher finds "arbitrariness" more apparent. Arbitrariness will be treated between Arabic and English languages contrastively.

٢.١ Arbitrariness in Phonology.

Phonology is essentially the description of the systems and patterns of speech sounds in a language (Yule: ١٩٩٦: ٥٤). Regarding our subject, it is found that arbitrariness can exist in phonetics. The term phonetics means definite patterns to the type of sound combinations permitted in a language. It is like the knowledge, the player has about rules of the chess game before starting playing.

(Roach: ١٩٨٨: ٣٥)

In English, We cannot find combinations like (ligorvig) ,(fslg or rnlg) , and there is no English word begins with the consonant sequence(zbf).

Every language has its own constrains on the sequence or the position of the phonemes.

Therefore, there is a set of consonant cluster allowed in English as well as other languages.

(Yule: ١٩٩٦: ٥٧).

In Arabic, we can find the sequences of sounds are not acceptable. Therefore, we can read the letters in the text "يس" in the glorious Qur'an as one word because such sequence is acceptable by the native speakers according to their phonological competence. On the contrary , the word "كهييحص" , which is also a text in Glorious Qur'an can be read as separate letters because we cannot pronounce such sequence smoothly or it would be a strange pronunciation. (عبدالتراب: ١٩٩٥: ١٥٨).

٢.٢ Arbitrariness in Semantics.

Semantic is the study of the meaning of words, Phrases and sentences, There are two kinds of meaning concerning semantics; conceptual and associative meanings. The conceptual meaning covers those basic and essential components of meaning which are conveyed by the literal use of a word. The conceptual meaning of the word "bomb" , for example, is an explosive object. While the associative meaning like (violence or harmful object or bloody attack , etc) can be felt especially in countries suffering such objects. Therefore, Semantics deals with conventional meaning conveyed by the use of words and sentences of a language. The meaning of words is initially stated arbitrarily. The conventional meaning means the development of reference of these words. Words may gains new meanings with the passage of time. On the other hand, we can find words lost their initial meanings to be used in new meanings, for example , thousands of words in Arabic lost their initial general meaning and change into new specific meaning , particularly after Islam . Words like "الصلاة" means praying , "الحج" means pilgrimage,

"الصوم" means fasting , "الكافر" means atheist , "المؤمن" means believer ,have undergone such process. (لوافي ٢٠٠٤: ٣١٩). Arab linguists think that the utterance in the semantic references on two components, the approximately and the similarity. The word "الذقن" in Arabic means jawbone but it becomes beard because of the approximate in a place. The word, "العقيقة", means initially the hair of an infant in Arabic, then it becomes a lamb or other animal that sacrificed by the infant's parents when having their infant's hair cut. Such change in reference is justified by the approximately in time. The word "المجد", means initially the fullness of an animal stomach with food, but now it is used to mean the human fullness with generosity. Such change can be justified by similarity. (وافي:٢٠٠٤:٣١٦) There is another process in Arabic called "التضاد", which means the use of a word to refer to opposite meaning, i.e., to refer to two disparate things. Arab linguists justify such use to the sharing of utterance of one general meaning. Therefore, they say such words are applicable to be used to refer to both meanings. They called such process "المشترك المعنوي", for example, "القرء", which means menses that gives two opposite meanings "الطهارة" and "والحيض". The word "الزوج", means the husband. Others say that such use of words may be because those words have been derived from two different origins. Therefore, each word gives one meaning. According to what have been mentioned above, the researcher finds these processes as an indication to how arbitrary languages are!

٢.٣ Arbitrariness in Morphology

Firstly, the researcher will discuss arbitrariness in morphology in general, and then he deals with some elements of morphology trying to clarify arbitrariness, where he finds it more apparent, starting with derivation. Later on, suffix "ish" will be treated in English as an explicit instance of arbitrary suffixation. After that, the suffix "ياء النسب" in Arabic will be discussed for the same previous reason. Finally, the suffix "ي" in Arabic and " i " in English will be treated.

٢.٣.١ Arbitrariness and Morphology in General

Literally, morphology means the study of forms. In terms of linguistics, morphology means the type of investigation that analyzes all basic elements that are used in a language. A morpheme is a minimal unit of meaning of grammatical function. For example, the word "talking" contains two morphemes, " talk and ing " (Yule:١٩٩٦:٧٥).The question is that "how have these morphemes initially stated"?There are two kinds of morphemes in English; free and bound, the first one is a morpheme which can stand by itself as a single word. On the other hand, a bound morpheme is a morpheme that cannot normally stand a lone with meaning but it is typically attached to another form, like affixes in English language. When these two types or forms are used together, the basic word form is technically known as a stem. If we say that the combination of these two kinds is arbitrary, we can find some words in English cannot be free morpheme, such as in receive, repeat, and reduce.

(ibid:١٩٩٦:٧٦).

Free morphemes fall into two categories; lexical and functional morphemes. The former carries the content of the messages we convey, they are the open –class words, such as, noun, adjective, adverb and verb. While the latter contains the closed- system items such as, article, demonstrative, pronoun, preposition, conjunction and interjection. Bound morpheme can be divided into two types; derivational morphemes that are used to make new words, the stem "good" is changed from adjective into a noun by adding "ness". Bound morphemes consist of prefixes, infixes and suffixes. The second one is called inflectional morpheme which is not used to produce new words in English but indicates certain aspects of a grammatical function of words. They are used to show if a word is plural or singular, past tense or not, comparative or possessive form. They are fixed in number.

(Quirk:١٩٨٠:١٨)

A morpheme is not a segment of a word at all. Morphs are the actual forms used to realize morphemes. Morphs are also the phonological realization of morpheme; therefore, both the

morphemes and morphs are arbitrarily formed. The range and the frequent novelty of linguistics expression used in connection with arbitrariness may provide evidence for another property of human language, normally described as productively. Therefore, it is the arbitrariness that enables any language to cope with people's need. Derivation is one of the processes that show the extent of arbitrariness.

٢.٣.٢ Derivation

As we have said that bound morphemes fall into two kinds, inflectional and derivational. Inflectional morphemes cannot be used to produce new words in English and they are fixed in number, (ing, s, er, est, and ed). Therefore, using one of them closes off the word except the following examples, (excitedly, willingly, and interestingly). While derivational morphemes are affixes used to make new words. These morphemes can change the part of speech of the word and do not close off the word. They combine with word in an arbitrary matter. To form a noun from the verb "adorn", "ment" should be added and no other suffix will do. Whereas, the verb "fail", combines only with "ure" to form a noun "failure". Such suffixes are as follows (hood, acy, ism, ness, ment, age, y, ation, ship, dom, ist, ty, ly, full, ic, ance, etc).

٢.٣.٣ The suffix "ish" in English

The suffix "ish" in English is a derivational suffix; it has two meanings as well as function; like belonging to, e.g, Turkey, Turkish and having the character of fool, foolish. Depending on these examples, we can derive adjectives from nouns. (Oxford Dictionary: ٢٠٠٠:٧٢٠).

The researcher believes that the suffix "ish", has been used initially not arbitrarily. If we utter this suffix in isolation, it will form a meaningful utterance in English as well as in Arabic. In English, it can be used after a statement to make it less definite, eg, (I have finished preparing the food. Ish, I just need to make the sause). In Arabic they use the word "صه" which means "stop talking", it has been adjusted informally into "أش" or "ش", to give the same meaning. As a suffix, "ish" is used in English to form disapproving utterance like "childish", "foolish", "babyish", those people having the character of such nouns or a thing that are suitable for such characters. When "ish", is used with countries, we have notice that it is used to form adjectives for countries arbitrarily; (Denmark, Danish, Finland, Finnish, Poland, Polish, Spain, Spanish, Sweden, Swedish, Turkey, Turkish, Ireland, Irish, England, English, Britain, British). All these countries, except England Ireland can follow another derivation a part from the use of the suffix "ish", as follows, (Denmark, Dane, Finland, Finn, Poland, Pole, Spain, Spani, Sweden, Swede, Turkey, Turk, Britain, Briton or Brit). In Arabic, people use a suffix called "ياء النسب", to produce such adjectives that the researcher will deal with in ٢.٣.٤.

٢.٣.٤ The Suffix "ي" in Arabic

Arab people use the suffix "ي", to form adjectives from nouns, it resembles the sound / i / in English. When forming such adjectives, one of the following meanings will exist such as, belonging to. The process is called "النسب". Sometimes, it is added to a noun without any morphological change. Other times, we have to delete some final sounds as well as letters in the written form following special rules. We have to change the final morpheme into others before the suffix in other time.

(الضامن: ١٩٩١: ٣٣٢-٣٤٠)

The use of the suffix "ي" in Arabic can be done grammatically only by following special rules. The rules have been prescribed by our ancestor arbitrarily and established by their conventional use. There are some exceptions in forming such adjective in Arabic, e.g, "مسلم → أسلام" which has been borrowed into English as the native Arabic speakers, forming and pronouncing the adjective "Muslim".

٢.٣.٥ A Comparison Between The Arabic Suffix "ي" And The English Added " i "

In English, there is no suffix resembles the suffix "ي" in Arabic. The letter " i " is added to some nouns to give them the pronunciation of the adjectives formed in their original countries. That means, they either borrowed the pronunciation of the Arabic suffix or borrowed

the adjectives themselves. However, the added " i " in English has been lexicalized as a suffix yet. The English added " i " is used with nine Arabic nationality nouns and three Islamic countries that use the Arabic letters in their languages and one Semitic language which is Hebrew (Bahrain, Bahraini, Iraq, Iraqi, Kuwait, Kuwaiti, Oman, Omani, Qatar, Qatari, Saudi Arabia, Saudi, Somalia, Somali, The United Arab Emirate, Emirati, Yemen, Yemeni, Afghanistan, Afghani, Azerbaijan, Azerbaijani, Bangladesh, Bangladeshi, Israel, Israeli).

(Oxford Dictionary ٢٠٠٠:١٥١٣)

The process of forming these adjectives shows the arbitrariness in using the added "i" not the one of the traditional suffixes that is used in such case, e.g., "ese" or (i) an. It also shows, how the English added "i" borrowed its arbitrariness from the Arabic suffix "ي" and other Semitic Language .

Conclusion

Arbitrariness is not restricted as far as language is concerned to the link between form and meaning. It also holds, to some considerable degrees, with respect to much of grammatical structure of particular languages. Languages differ grammatically one from another, e.g, the difference in the word orders which are formed more likely to be arbitrary. If this were not the case, it would be much easier to learn foreign languages than it is. While detecting this property, we have found some attractive opinions regarding the no – arbitrary nature of language. But we also found that it was difficult to believe such disproved claims. If there are some justifiable natural forms in every language, they cannot be regarded more than exceptions. On the fact, arbitrariness is the dominant property of language and these exceptions reinforce and support that domination. We find that languages meet and use terms about to be identical whenever no – arbitrary forms can be used. Such terms and uses are easier to be acquired or learnt by foreign languages learners. But these forms are too few and no more accomplish human being needs which are no more primitive. We can find ourselves using forms that we cannot justify their nature and have to follow what our ancestors prescribed. Yet, arbitrariness enables languages to be productive and every nation finds itself satisfied to use its language as far as it achieves the people needs and the conventional use gives such languages their approximate stability and reliability.

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