THE ARABIC LANGUAGE

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11
The Emergence of Modern Standard Arabic

II.1 INTRODUCTION

In 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte’s brief expedition to Egypt brought this province of the Ottoman empire into direct contact with Western Europe. This marked the beginning of a period in which European culture, at first primarily from France, but later from England as well, began to infiltrate the Arab world. At first, the reception of new ideas was promoted by the government: Muḥammad ‘Alī, who governed Egypt from 1805 until 1848, stimulated the translation of books and articles from French, mostly on technical subjects, but political and cultural topics were also included. In this way, the concepts of the French Enlightenment became part of the intellectual atmosphere of the country. The introduction of new political ideas stimulated the rise of Arab nationalism, which in the second half of the nineteenth century centred around the position of Arabic as the language of the Arab world. At the same time, the confrontation with Western ideas led to a debate about the compatibility of these ideas with the tradition of Islam, and, on a linguistic level, about the capacity of the Arabic language to express the new notions. In this chapter, we shall deal with four topics: the position of Arabic in the nineteenth century; the adaptation of Arabic vocabulary to the modern period; the reform of grammar; and the changes in the structure and phraseology of the language.

II.2 THE REBIRTH OF ARABIC

When the French conquered Egypt, the Egyptian writer al-Ǧabarti (d. 1825), who witnessed the invasion, wrote an account in which he informed his compatriots about the political situation in Europe and the relations between the European nations. For the first time, political notions and institutions that were alien to the Islamic point of view had to be described in terms that were comprehensible to a Muslim audience. Throughout the nineteenth century, Arabic translators were active as intermediaries who attempted to express the notions of one culture in the language of the other (cf. Ayalon 1987). It was, for instance, hard to find an Arabic equivalent for the European notion of ‘constitutional government’. In some translations, ‘constitutional monarchy’ became a malakiyya muqayyada (after the French monarchie limitée), i.e. a monarchy that was limited by laws, in the Middle Eastern context almost a contradiction in terms. The notion of man-made laws was equally difficult to grasp. The Middle East knew only a religious law (ṣarīʿa), sometimes complemented by temporary regulations by the ruler (qawānīn). For a long time, translators hesitated to use the
The term ḍustūr became the regular term for 'constitution'; originally this term had denoted a code, or a collection of laws. Once ḍustūr had been introduced as a term for the constitution, 'constititutional government' could be translated with ḥukūma ḍustirīyya.

It was equally hard to reproduce the idea of 'citizenship' in a society that consisted of a ruler and his subjects. Initially, the Arabic translators used the term raʿiyya 'flock, subjects' to indicate all people under a government, so that ḥuqūq ar-raʿiyya came to indicate the concept of 'civil rights'! Because of its connotations, this term was increasingly often avoided by the translators and replaced with the more neutral term šaʾb 'people', for instance in combinations such as ḥukūmat as-šaʾb bi-š-šaʾb 'government of the people by the people' and sawt as-šaʾb 'vox populi', and also in maġlis as-šaʾb 'people's assembly, House of Commons'. Only in the twentieth century, when the concept of watan 'fatherland' had become familiar, could a term such as muwatin for 'citizen' gain currency (Ayalon 1987: 43-53).

The representative character of the government in many European countries constituted another problem for a translator wishing to explain the structure of European society. One of the first terms to indicate a representative was ṭawālīl, originally a representative of the ruler or a mandatory. At first, this was the term used in combinations such as wukalaʿ ar-raʿiyya or maġlis al-wukalāʾ. At the end of the nineteenth century, it was replaced by nuwwab from nāʿib 'replacing'. In some cases, the choice of terms represented a deliberate attempt on the part of the rulers to manipulate the ambiguity of the terminology. When the term šūrā was introduced to indicate the institution of a parliament, this term had overtones of a consultative body (cf. the Ottoman meşveret), and in choosing this term rulers could emphasise the limited powers of the body concerned. An alternative term diwan had the same disadvantage – or advantage – of being closely connected to the sphere of influence of the ruler. In the end, the much vaguer term maġlis 'session' (or sometimes the European loan barlaman) seemed better suited to express the novel character of the new institution. This last example illustrates the process by which from a confusion of terms eventually the best term was selected, i.e. the term that was least contaminated with old concepts (cf. Rebhan 1986).

A complication in the study of the introduction of political terminology in Arabic in the nineteenth century is the fact that in many cases we have insufficient information about the exact path by which the terms were introduced. Neologisms invented by writers from the beginning of the nineteenth century such as al-Ǧabarī played an important part, but they were not the only source for the lexical innovations. In some cases, translators could go back to pre-Ottoman Arabo-Islamic sources, such as the terminology in Ibn Haldūn's (d. 757/1356) Muqaddima, from which they borrowed words like istībdād 'despotic rule' for 'absolutism', šūrā 'council to elect a caliph' for 'constitutional government', and fitna 'fight between Islamic factions' for 'revolution'. Most of these words were replaced later by more neutral, less Islamic terms (for instance, fitna by tawrā, originally 'unrest, stirring').

Some of the terms that were introduced into Arabic went through an
Ottoman stage. When in the second half of the nineteenth century the Young Ottomans formulated their ideas about government and political structure, they often borrowed words from Arabic that had not been current or did not have a specifically political meaning in Arabic. At a later stage, some of these terms were reintroduced into Arabic together with their newly-acquired meaning, for instance the words for 'government' ([hükûmet, Arabic hukûma] and 'republic' [cumhuriyet, Arabic şûmüriyya]. Other terms that Ottoman Turkish had borrowed from Arabic never became popular in the Arab world, for instance the term mabût [from Arabic ba'ata 'to send'] that was used for the representatives in the Ottoman Hey'tet-i Mebûsûn in 1876. Another example is the word millet [Arabic mîlî 'religious community'] that was applied in the nineteenth century by the Ottoman administration to other nations, but was replaced in the Arab world by 'umma.

Yet another category is constituted by those terms that were created independently in the Arab world to express Western political notions. At first, these notions had been borrowed together with the foreign word, for instance kûmûnizm or kûmûniyya for 'communism', or sûyîl or sûyîlist for 'socialist', but most foreign words were soon replaced by Arabic equivalents. Many of them were derived from existing roots or words through analogy (qiyyûs), e.g. ışîrâkî 'socialist' [from ışâraka 'to share'], which came to be preferred to ışîtîma'tî [from ışîtama'ta 'to gather'] and sû'yîliyya, which was coined in the twentieth century for 'communism' [from şâyî 'common [property]']. In most cases, the original European (English or French) term shone through in the selected root, but inevitably the Arabic equivalents introduced new connotations as well. The term ışîrâkî, for instance, suggests 'sharing', which underscores one aspect of socialism, the sharing of the means of production.

The new role of Arabic as a medium for political ideas naturally affected its societal position as well. During the centuries of Ottoman rule, Turkish had become the language of power and government in the Arab world, and although Classical Arabic had always remained the language of religion and to a certain extent, of culture, it had lost its function as administrative language of the empire (cf. also above, Chapter 5). The official status of Turkish in the Ottoman empire did not mean, however, that it was universally understood. In the Arab provinces, less than 1 per cent of the population actually knew Turkish. In practice, therefore, the local authorities and the courts had to have recourse to translators in order to facilitate contacts with the local populace. Most of the locally-produced documents were either in Arabic or bilingual.

When at the end of the nineteenth century nationalism began to emerge in the Arab world, it was invariably linked with the Arabic language, whether this nationalism was pan-Arabic as in Syria, or regional as in Egypt. The linkage between Arab identity and the Arabic language did not call into question the framework of the Ottoman empire and usually went no further than a request for improvement in the status of Arabic in the provinces. On more than one occasion, complaints were made about the lack of understanding between the local populace and the government's representatives, and local authorities often stressed the need to send officials who were familiar with the local language. In Egypt, the use of Arabic for administrative purposes had increased steadily throughout the nineteenth century, and at the end of the century most of the
official correspondence was carried out in Arabic. Nonetheless, any discussion in the Ottoman Parliament by Arab delegates about the position of Arabic immediately led to objections by those who felt that the position of Turkish as the official language of the Ottoman empire was threatened. In 1909, the use of any other language than Turkish in legal cases was explicitly forbidden, and in 1910 a request to the Ottoman Parliament to accept petitions written in Arabic was turned down.

The Arab Congress that convened in 1913 in Paris called for a measure of provincial autonomy within the Ottoman empire and at the same time claimed for Arabic the status of official language, both in the Ottoman Parliament and in local government. On the part of the central government, the loss of the Ottoman areas in the Balkans led to a renewed interest in the position of the Arab provinces. In 1913, petitions in Arabic in predominantly Arabic-speaking areas were allowed, and official decrees were published with an Arabic translation. Officially, Arabic was even accepted as the language of education and legal cases, but probably this new policy was implemented only in central areas such as Syria and Lebanon. None of these requests and measures should be construed as signs of disloyalty towards the central government; in most cases they were meant as support for the central government and as a means of strengthening the ties between the provinces and the capital.

The reaction to European ideas differed in the various Arab provinces. In Egypt, the period after the Napoleonic conquest was characterised by an emphasis on the special character of Egyptian society, history and culture. Some intellectuals even began to write about the Egyptian nation (watan) as something transcending the Muslim community (‘umma). The keywords of this development were modernisation and reform, albeit without a concrete programme, and always within the framework of the Ottoman empire. At first, these writers did not respond negatively to European culture, but in the course of the nineteenth century the increasing political presence and influence of the European countries (Tunisia 1881, Egypt 1882) and their special ties with the Christian minorities altered the attitude towards Europe. Thinkers such as Gamal ad-Din al-‘Afghani (1839–97) and Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849–1905) opposed British imperialism, while at the same time emphasising the need to reform Islamic thinking and education. In their view, this reform should not consist in the wholesale borrowing of Western notions, but in a revival of the old Islamic virtues: Islam was a rational religion and perfectly capable of coping with the new problems. European ideas could be helpful in some respects, but because of its inherent virtues Islam had nothing to fear from them. The term Nahda ‘awakening, revival’ is sometimes used to indicate the spirit of this period, in which some reformers expected Islam to experience a renaissance, after the dark ages of uncritical repetition of established doctrine (taqlid). In this view, an acquaintance with Western culture and ideas served as a catalyst for the revival of Islamic and/or Arabic culture.

In the Levant, the reaction to nationalism developed in a different way from Egypt. The Arab Christians in Greater Syria had never completely severed the ties with the Christians of Europe, and from the seventeenth century onwards there had been a constant interchange between the Maronites and the learned (often religious) institutions of Italy and France. For these Christians, the
problem of a conciliation between Islam and Western ideas did not pose itself, and they could adopt these new ideas without any risk to their own identity. For them as non-Muslims, an Islamic empire held no appeal, and they were apt to stress the separation between Arabic and Islam. While in Egyptian nationalist circles the role of the Egyptian nation was emphasised, Syrian nationalism owed a great deal to Arab Christians, which partly explains its more markedly pan-Arab flavour. In accordance with their views on the unifying role of language rather than religion, Lebanese Christians played an important role in the revival of Arabic studies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (for instance, Nāṣif al-Yāzīgī, 1800–71).

After the start of the First World War, the political conflicts between the provinces and the central government were phrased increasingly often in terms of the opposition Arabs/Turks. The Arab revolt of 1916 aimed at the establishment of an Arab kingdom to provide a home for all those of Arab descent who spoke Arabic. Although Arab thinkers often disagreed among themselves about the future form which their nation should take, they all agreed on its being an Arabic-speaking nation. It is true that in spite of efforts to realise a secular state in the Arab world, as Atatürk had done in Turkey, Islam remained the most important binding element. But, for most political thinkers, Islam was intrinsically and indissolubly connected with Arabic. Thus, for instance, Şâkıb ’Arslân (1896–1946) held that the community was defined by its religion, and since Arabs formed the core of the Islamic ‘ummah, Arabic was the true language of Islam, so that every Muslim had to learn Arabic. Arguing the other way round, Sāṭī’ al-Husřî (1880–1968) asserted that it was precisely language that defined a nation, and therefore, the Arab nation should include all those who speak Arabic. In this respect, he opposed both the Islamic nationalists, who wished to unite all Muslims, and the regional nationalists, such as the Egyptians, whose first priority was to obtain statehood for a geographically-defined nation.

11.3 The Reform of the Lexicon

The nineteenth century witnessed the development of a periodical press in Arabic, at first in Syria and later in Egypt as well. The first Arabic periodical was the Egyptian government newspaper al-Waqā’ī’ al-Miṣriyya (1828), established by Muḥammad ‘Alī. The involvement of Arab Christians in the publication of private newspapers ensured the emphasis on its Arabic character. The activities of language reformers in Syria, such as Fāris aš-Šiḍāq (1804–87) and Buṭrus al-Bustānī (1819–83), gave an impetus to the much-needed modernisation of the lexicon. Al-Bustānī, for instance, published the first modern large-scale dictionary of Arabic, al-Muhn, which borrowed heavily from the Classical dictionaries, to be sure, but nevertheless aimed at the incorporation of all exciting new ideas and concepts in an Arabic garb.

This is not to say that there was a consensus among Arab linguists about the best way to deal with the influx of Western notions into the Arabic language. Just as political thinkers differed in their ideas about Islam and Islamic civilisation and its relationship to Western/Christian culture, the language-reformers ranged from those who believed that in itself the Arabic lexicon was sufficient to express anything needed in this modern age, to those who strongly advocated
the wholesale adoption of Western words and a complete revision of the lexicon. The more careful approach of the moderates resembled the ideas of some of the political thinkers of this period. They maintained that in itself Arabic was the perfect language, but people had started to corrupt it. What was needed was a return to the purity of the Classical language.

In the process of modernisation of the language at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Arab Academies played a central part. Modelled after the great language academies of Europe – both the Academy of Damascus and the Academy of Cairo, for instance, were founded with explicit reference to the example of the Académie Française – their aim was to implement the ideas about the place of Arabic in the modern world that had become commonplace in the Nahda. During his short-lived reign in Syria, King Faysal expressed concern about the quality of the educational system and the preservation of the cultural heritage in the form of libraries, manuscript collections and museums. The Diwan al-ma‘ārif that was installed for this purpose came under the presidency of Kurd ‘Alī, who had been the founder of the National Library (Dār al-Kutub az-Zāhiriyya). In 1919, the second task of the council, the cultivation of the Arabic language, was entrusted to what became the first language academy in the Arab world. al-Maġma‘ al-’Ilmī al-’Arabī, nowadays called Maġma‘ al-Luġa al-‘Arabiyya bi-Dimāqṣ ‘The Academy of the Arabic Language in Damascus’.

From the start, the goal of the Academy was twofold: to guard the integrity of the Arabic language and preserve it from dialectal and foreign influence, on the one hand, and to adapt the Arabic language to the needs of modern times, on the other. The same two functions appear in the charter of the Academy of Cairo (Maġma‘ al-Luğa al-‘Arabiyya al-Malikī, since 1955 called the Maġma‘ al-Luğa al-‘Arabiyya), founded in 1932 by Fu‘ād I. In practice, the main function of the Cairene academy since 1960 has been the creation of new Arabic terminology, as well as the reform of both Arabic script and grammar. New terms are introduced through a complicated process of consultation and deliberation: they are proposed in the many subcommittees of the academy, each responsible for a specific field of knowledge, and after approval by the general assembly of the academy they are published in its journal. Usually the introduction of a new term leads to long and sometimes heated discussions in the proceedings of the Academy, and it may take years before a proposed term finally finds its way into the dictionaries and technical vocabularies of the Academy.

The academies of Iraq (al-Maġma‘ al-‘Ilmī al-‘Irāqī, established in 1947) and Jordan (Maġma‘ al-Luğa al-‘Arabiyya al-‘Urdunni, established in 1976) are of more recent date and of secondary importance in the process of language modernisation. It appears that the Iraqi academy concentrates more on the edition of Classical texts in an effort to contribute to the ‘iḥyā‘ at-turāq ‘resuscitation of the heritage’, whereas the Jordanian academy serves as an instrument in the arabicisation of education in Jordan. There have been some attempts to create a pan-Arabic association of language academies, but the national academies guard their independence and autonomy jealously so that cooperation on a higher level is at most a cherished ideal and does not seem to have led to any concrete results.

The most urgent problem of language reform was that of the expansion of the lexicon. In addition to their confrontation with European political ideologies at
the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Arab provinces were confronted by a host of new technical notions and objects, for which names had to be invented. The lexical expansion for political and technical terminology in this period parallels that in another period in which the Arabic language incorporated an entirely new vocabulary, that of the eighth/ninth centuries, when the translation of Greek logical, medical and philosophical writings required the invention of many new words (cf. above, Chapter 5).

A major difference between the Classical period of the translations and the modern period is the degree of uniformity. At first, the translators of the Classical period had been free to create their own terminology, but, with the establishment of the translators’ academy by al-Ma’mūn, terminology in the ‘Greek’ disciplines such as medicine, philosophy and logic became increasingly uniform. In the twentieth century, even more so than in the nineteenth, the expansion of the lexicon was undertaken simultaneously in many different places. In the nineteenth century, one could say that the major centres, Egypt and Syria, were at least in touch with each other, and some of the people who worked on the modernisation of the language in Egypt had come from Syria. But in the twentieth century, every country undertook its own voyage on the way to the modernisation of the lexicon, and not even the Academies were able to unify the ‘national’ terminologies. In some fields, of course, the differences in terminology constituted an acute threat to the cooperation between scholars and scientists from the various Arab countries, for instance in the field of medicine and physical sciences, and for some of these technical disciplines pan-Arabic word lists were, indeed, compiled.

The following methods may be distinguished in the creation of new vocabulary:

1. borrowing of the foreign word
2. integration of the foreign word morphologically and/or phonologically
3. analogical extension of an existing root
4. translation of the foreign word
5. semantic extension of an existing word.

These methods do not represent successive stages in the creation of vocabulary: they are different ways of coping with the introduction of new notions in a civilisation. There is a certain tendency, however, to go through them successively, starting with the wholesale borrowing of foreign words, which are then gradually adapted to the structure of the language. The actual choice of a new word depends on many factors, such as the nature of the notion to be translated and the cultural and political circumstances. Often, a new notion is introduced in the form of a close approximation of the foreign word. Such foreign loans are usually printed in Latin letters between brackets or transliterated and written in quotation marks. Thus, one may find today in popular scientific texts word like ‘laser’ in Arabic transliteration, followed by the same word in Latin letters. A similar procedure is sometimes followed with proper names.

Although both in the Classical period and in modern times there were purists who strove for the complete elimination of all foreign loans from the Arabic language, most people were willing to admit them on the condition that they were adapted to the structure of Arabic, both in their phonetic shape (no foreign sounds and no combinations of consonants that are not allowed in Arabic) and
in their morphological pattern. In the Classical period, this procedure of arabicisation (ta’rib) was very successful, the number of unadapted words remaining minimal. In the modern period, the Academies adopted a restrictive policy, only allowing loans in scientific terminology. Many nineteenth-century political loans (such as the above cited kümünizm) were replaced eventually by Arabic terms, while purely scientific and technical terms (such as hīdrūkarbūn ‘hydrocarbon’, klūrūfūrm ‘chloroform’) retained their foreign shape.

The real controversy arose around the question as to whether or not foreign words could be used as productive roots for new derivations. In Classical Arabic, once a foreign word had been admitted and adapted, it behaved like any other Arabic word, but in the modern period the Academies tried to restrict new derivations to scientific terminology. While some people deplored this invasion of the Arabic language, preferring to leave the foreign words in their original shape in order to set them apart from the Arabic stock, others saw in arabicisation the best solution to preserve the integrity of the language. Once a foreign word was introduced, scientists soon derived words like tamağnut ‘magnetisation’ (from mağnaṭīs) and mubastar ‘pasteurised’ (from bastaara ‘to pasteurise’). But the powerful mechanism of root-abstraction did not stop at scientific terminology. Just as the dialects reanalysed foreign words and integrated them into their lexicon, writers did not hesitate to produce new derivations from accepted loans. Numerous examples for this procedure may be cited, e.g. the verbs talfaza, talfana from tilifizyūn, tilifūn; or the broken plurals ’af1am, bunūk from the nouns film, bánk. In spite of the resistance of the Academies, some of these derivations were commonly accepted.

Even those who admitted foreign loans usually conceded that at least in theory the most elegant solution was to replace foreign words with ‘pure’ Arabic words. In this context, the structure of the language was a relevant factor. In Germanic languages, the possibility of building compounds invites the speakers of the language to invent new combinations of existing words to express foreign notions and objects (neologisms). In Arabic, on the other hand, the possibility of using compounds was extremely limited, but the language had another device at its disposal for the formation of new words, the so-called qiyās ‘analogy’,

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>pattern</th>
<th>meaning</th>
<th>examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>mif'al, mif'āl, mif'ala</td>
<td>instrument</td>
<td>mīghar ‘microscope’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-iyya</td>
<td>abstract noun</td>
<td>ihtirāqiyya ‘combustibility’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fi'āla</td>
<td>profession</td>
<td>qiyāda ‘leadership’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fa’al</td>
<td>professional</td>
<td>sawwāq ‘driver’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fu’āl</td>
<td>disease</td>
<td>buwāl ‘diabetes’</td>
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Table 11.1 Approved patterns of word-formation in Modern Standard Arabic.
which consisted in the application of morphological patterns to borrowed or existing sets of radicals. In internal qiyās, existing roots were used for this purpose. In its efforts to regulate the formation of new words, the Academy of Cairo declared certain morphological patterns to be productive, meaning that they might be used legitimately to create neologisms (see Table 11.1).

In the examples of qiyās given here, the construction of the new term is original, but in many cases the meaning of the foreign word determines the selection of the radicals. In such cases, we speak of a loan translation [calque, Lehnübersetzung]. Combinations of words that serve as set expressions are usually modelled on a foreign example. The Arabic expression for ‘satellite’, for instance, qamar šināʾī (literally ‘artificial moon’) is probably a translation from French (or Russian?). Even when the Arabic expression does not have a direct foreign equivalent, the English or French term shines through, for instance in the term for ‘heading’, laʿiba l-kura bi-r-raʾs (literally ‘to play the ball with the head’), in football terminology. Loan translation also accounts for a large number of idiomatic expressions and metaphors, especially in the language of the media. In the course of time, such translations become part of the Arabic phraseology and are no longer regarded as foreign. The most frequently-quoted example of a loan expression is laʿiba dawran ‘to play a role’. Another example of loan translations is a variation in the use of prepositions under the influence of foreign idioms, e.g. iltaqā iltaqā maʾa ‘to meet/to meet with’, and the development of syntactic calques, such as māʾ ʾiḏā to translate English ‘whether’, e.g. saʾala māʾ ʾiḏā.

The most highly-regarded device for the expansion of the lexicon in Arabic, albeit not necessarily the most successful one, was the semantic extension of an existing word by giving it a modern meaning. Attempts to revive old Bedouin vocabulary in the search for new words were seldom successful, probably precisely because they had fallen into disuse and were therefore unfamiliar to the average speaker. One example of a term that did succeed is that of the word for ‘train’, qitār, originally meaning ‘caravan’. But the associated word hadiya ‘lead-camel’ was never accepted for ‘locomotive’ (which became qāṭīra instead). Revived words owed their success mostly to the efforts of one author, for instance garida ‘newspaper’ (originally ‘strip of palm-leaf used for writing’) and maḡalla ‘journal’ (originally ‘codex, book’), introduced by aš-Šidyāq and al-Yaẓī, respectively. Many of the proposals of the Academies, however, never gained general acceptance because they were regarded as too artificial, for instance, gammāz ‘swift-footed [ass]’ for ‘tram’ (remained trām), or ʿirzīz ‘sound of thunder’ for ‘telephone’ (remained ʿilīfūn, although ḥāṭif, a Classical Arabic word meaning ‘unseen man whose voice is heard’, is becoming increasingly frequent).

In spite of the extreme productiveness of the nominal and verbal patterns of the Arabic language, the lexicon-builders kept looking for additional means of lexical expansion. In most Western languages, the use of Latin and Greek prefixes and suffixes provides a powerful means of expanding the scientific lexicon, which is absent in Arabic derivational morphology. At an early stage, combinations with the negations lā- and gayr- were used to coin equivalents to Greek terms with the privative prefix a-. In modern times, these served as a model for the introduction of prefixes into the Arabic lexic, at first only with the negations, e.g. lā- (lā-nihāʾī ‘infinite’, lā-ʾadriyya ‘agnosticism’), gayr- (gayr-ṣārīt ‘illegitimate’, gayr-mašrīt ‘illegal’). Later, several prepositions were used in this
function, e.g. ṣibh- (ṣibh-ğazırā 'peninsula', ṣibh-rasmī 'semi-official'), qab-(qab-tārīḥ 'prehistory'). Morphologically, these words behave as compounds: from lā-nihā'ī we may derive, for instance, the substantive al-lā-nihā'īyya 'the infinity', in which the article precedes the entire combination.

In Classical Arabic, there was a limited possibility of deriving new roots from combinations of words (called naht), usually delocutive verbs from nominal expressions, e.g. basmala 'to say “in the name of God” (bi-smi ʾllāhi)', or hamdala 'to say “praise be to God!” (al-hamdū lillāhi)', or adjectives from compound names, e.g. ḥanaftī 'belonging to ‘Abū Ḥanīfa', or ʾabqaṣī 'belonging to ‘Abd al-Qays'. In modern times, initiatives to use this method of coining new words in the creation of scientific vocabulary became so popular that in 1953 the Academy of Cairo felt compelled to issue a ruling. According to the Academy, the method of naht was admissible only in scientific language, and the resulting terms had to be transparent. Words like fahmā'iyātī 'carbohydrates' (< fāhīm 'carbon' + mā' 'water') and ḥalma'a 'to hydrolyse' (< hallala 'to dissolve' + mā' 'water') satisfied these conditions. Likewise, combinations with kahra- 'electro-', e.g. kahra-magnātīsī or even kahrātīsī 'electromagnetic', kahra-ri' awī 'electro-pneumatic', kahra-kīmiyātī 'electro-chemical', and ṣibh- 'pseudo-' found favour with the Academy.

Generally speaking, however, the attitude of the Academy vis-à-vis compounds was conservative, and most proposals were deemed to be contrary to ‘the spirit of the Arabic language’. Words like ʿarbarīgīl 'quadruped' (< ʿarba 'four' + rīgīl 'foot'), qatgara 'laryngotomy' (< qat' 'cutting' + ḥangara 'throat'), or sarmana 'somnambulism' (< sayr 'going' + manām 'sleep') met with disapproval. Even more extreme proposals, such as mutamāṭir 'polymer' (< mutamāṭil 'homogeneous' + mutakāṭir 'multiple') or musgānāhiyyāt 'orthoptera' (< mustaqīm 'straight' + ġanāh 'wing') were rejected outright, because of their lack of transparency. On the other hand, adjectival compounds have become relatively common, e.g. šarq-awsātī 'Middle Eastern', rāʾsmaṭī 'capitalist', barmāṭī 'amphibian' (< barr + māṭī), 'umamī 'UN-' (< al-'umam al-muttahida), mā fawqa l-banafsāgī 'ultra-violet', tahta l-ʾahmar 'infra-red'.

Usually, within one semantic domain all methods to coin new words are used simultaneously, even though there is a tendency to go through certain stages. A few examples from modern vocabulary may illustrate the coexistence of different methods in the creation of a set of terms. In football terminology, all foreign terms have been replaced by Arabic words:

calque by extension

darba

partial calque

murāqīb al-ḥutūt

compound calques
darba rukniyya, ḥurra,
al-marmā, al-ġazāt
ḥāris al-marmā

neologisms

marmā
iamrīr

‘kick’
‘linesman’
‘corner (kick), ‘free kick’, goal kick’
‘penalty (kick)’
‘goalkeeper’
‘goal’
‘pass’
paraphrases

\textit{la’iba l-kura bi-r-ra’s} ‘to head’

semantic extension

\textit{tasallul} ‘offside’ [lit. ‘infiltration’]

\textit{muḥāwara} ‘dribble’ [lit. ‘to trick someone in a debate’]

This example also shows that it may be difficult to classify a new term. The word \textit{marmā ‘goal’}, for instance, could be regarded as a neologism (‘place where one throws’), or as the semantic extension of an existing term, meaning ‘target’.

In computer terminology, the wish to go with the times and appear sophisticated competes with a tendency to purism that leads to the replacement of the English terms by neologisms. The omnipresent \textit{kumbyūṭur} (or similar transliterations) seems to be on the way out, and it is very possible that the actively-promoted \textit{ḥāṣūb ‘calculating machine’} will, indeed, win eventually. Some Arabic computer terms have already become current, such as \textit{munāsiq al-kalima ‘word-processor’, šāša ‘computer screen’} and \textit{bank al-ma‘lūmāt ‘databank’}.

Finally, the example of modern linguistic terminology in Arabic demonstrates the opposition between the purism of the Academies and the attitude of modern linguists. There is no consensus on the name of ‘linguistics’ itself. In the Eastern Arab world, \textit{‘ilm al-lūga} is quite accepted, but linguists in the Maghreb object to the traditional term and replace it by \textit{‘alsuniyya or līsāniyyāt}. The official Arabic equivalent of two central notions in modern linguistics, ‘morpheme’ and ‘phoneme’, is in the form of a paraphrase, \textit{‘unsur dāl ‘signifying element’} and \textit{wāḥda sawtiyya ‘phonetic unit’} [word list of ALECSO]. But most linguists simply transliterate the English terms, \textit{mūfrīm and fūnim}. One linguist (Mseddi 1984) coined completely new terms, \textit{saygām (containing the element sīgā ‘form’)} and \textit{sawtām (containing the element sawt ‘sound’)}.

Both vocabulary creation and regional variation are factors that have contributed to the gradual modification of the Classical language, so that it can no longer be regarded as identical with the modern variety of the language, usually called Modern Standard Arabic. Ideologically, of course, the modern language is still the same as the language of the Qur’ān and the Classical period, but in practice it is easy to see that there are differences, not all of them lexical. On the one hand, this is because many of the idiosyncrasies of the Classical language have become obsolete. Thus, for instance, one seldom finds in a modern text the intricate constructions with verbal nouns that are quite common in Classical texts. Similarly, some categories have become obsolete, e.g. the energetic \textit{yaktutbanna}. On the other hand, the modern language has developed new grammatical devices, in particular in the language of the media, which is heavily influenced by European languages. One of the most characteristic features of this language is the extensive use of verbal constructions with the dummy verb \textit{qāma bi-} as a substitute for active verbs, e.g. \textit{qāma bi-ziyāra} instead of \textit{zāra ‘to visit’}. In passive constructions, the verb \textit{tamma} is used as a substitute, e.g. \textit{tamma tawqīr‘ al-ittifāqiyya} ‘the agreement was signed’, instead of a passive verb. Other characteristics of the language of the media include the limited use
of the coordinative particle fa- and its replacement by wa-, and the extensive use of expressions like wa-dālika, kull min in enumerations.

In literary prose, the differences between Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic are much less marked because authors tend to classicise their style, both in syntax and in the selection of the vocabulary. In some cases, however, the use of colloquial language, particularly in Egyptian literature, may create a new difference. The choice of informal registers is a further source of variation between the Arab countries as well. But lexical differences are responsible for most of the regional variation in Standard Arabic. In spite of the fact that the Standard Arabic language is regarded as the most powerful symbol of Arab unity, and in spite of the unifying work of the Academies, one immediately recognises a Moroccan text from an Egyptian text or a text from the Gulf states. Partly, this variation is caused by differing local traditions in the creation of new vocabulary. Partly, it is also a result of the different colonial history of the regions involved. In North Africa, for instance, there is a natural tendency to look at French examples and model the text, even on the level of syntax and stylistics, on a French example. One finds, for instance, al-wazīr al-‘awwal (← French premier ministre) instead of the usual term ra‘īs al-wuzara‘, ḥuqūq (← French droits) instead of rusūm. Stylistic expressions include sāni l-muwazzafīn (← French hauts fonctionnaires), waḍi‘a fi l-isti‘māl (← French mettre en usage), bi-‘unwān (← à titre de), and the use of prepositions with verbs like tahādat a ma‘a (← French s’entretenir avec). In some cases, North African phraseology was not directly inspired by French, yet differed from that in the Arab East, as in the choice of the dummy verb waqā‘a in expressions like waqā‘a naṣr al-bayān ‘the publication of the declaration took place’, where Eastern Arabic would use tamma or ġara. In Arab countries without a French colonial past, English usually replaced French as a model. In Egypt, for instance, France and French had been the model for most attempts at modernisation in the nineteenth century, but after the First World War, this role was taken over by Britain.

The reintroduction of Arabic as the official language of the Arab countries also raised the question of its role in education. The poor standards of language instruction were a constant source of concern, and since the nineteenth century there has been a call for simplification of the grammatical system. Some scholars claimed that Arabic in itself was perfectly well suited to accommodate contemporary needs, if only it was purified from the corruption that had crept in. They believed that the main obstacle to the general use of the standard language in society was the failure of the educational system to reach large parts of the population. There was, of course, a logistical problem because of the lack of schools and teachers, but most specialists agreed that this in itself did not explain the lack of success in teaching Standard Arabic to those children who did attend schools. Even today, hardly anybody after graduation is able to write flawless Arabic, let alone extemporise in speaking, and there is a general antipathy towards ‘grammar’, even among those who advocate the use of Standard Arabic.

The two keywords in the discussion were ṭabsīt (taysīr) an-nahw ‘simplification of grammar’ and ṭabsīt al-luqa‘ ‘simplification of language’, but the distinction between the two notions tended to become blurred. In the 1950s, a grammatical text was rediscovered, which sparked off a renewed interest in the matter of grammar teaching. Ibn Maḍā‘ was a grammarian from Cordova (d.
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592/1196] who wrote about the refutation of the grammarians [Kitāb ar-radd 'alā n-nuḥāt], proposing the abolition of the concepts of 'amal 'governance' and qiyās 'analogy' from grammar. Among the scholars who occupied themselves with this text was the Egyptian linguist Sawqī Dayf, who maintained that this text was the solution to the problems of Arabic language teaching. With the abolition of 'amal and qiyās from grammar, he asserted, it should be much easier to teach Arabic. Abstract discussions among the Arab grammarians, some of which had found their way into the current textbooks for schools, did nothing to enhance the understanding of the language and merely served the theoretical interests of the grammarians. His proposal to replace the Arabic notions of 'nominal sentence' and 'verbal sentence' (cf. above, p. 80) with the Western concepts of 'subject' and 'predicate' could, however, hardly be called a major improvement. Other proposals, too, were terminological in nature only. They involved the introduction of a new notion of 'complement' (takmila), and the replacement of the traditional terms muḍāf and muḍāf 'ilayhi for the constituents of the genitive construction by the term maḡrūr bi-l-'iḍāfa. The success of these proposals has been limited.

Others concerned themselves with the simplification of the language itself, but in most cases this resulted in nothing more than a general plea for simplification without detailed proposals about the abolition of syntactic or morphological features from the language. Some scholars proposed to leave out the vowels of declension, which, however, leaves the declensional system intact, since in the sound masculine plural a choice must still be made between nominative -ūn and genitive/accusative -in. Others called for the simplification of the syntactic rules for the numerals to be replaced by the rules of the dialect. More extreme proposals, such as those of 'Anīs Frayha and Georges al-Ḥūri, involved the abolition of the feminine plural in the pronouns or the use of the masculine plural instead of the feminine plural in all parts of speech. Since none of these proposals was integrated into a comprehensive didactic concept, they have remained largely unproductive. Nowadays there are very few proponents of this road towards an 'easier language' (luga mu yazara).

The entire discussion about a simplified language has remained sterile, even when it was moved to a sociolinguistic level. In particular, in Egypt, it has become fashionable to hold that between the level of the standard language (fushā) and that of the dialect ('āmmiyya) there is an intermediate level, variably called al-luga al-mutawassita 'the intermediate language' or lugat al-muṭaqqafin 'language of the intellectuals' (cf. Chapter 12). This variety, many people assert, would fill the gap between the artificial standard and the lower levels of the language continuum. The best that one could say about this sociolinguistic approach is that it legitimises the informal standard speech of many educated Egyptians. More than speakers from other Arab countries, they tend to leave out most of the declensional endings and freely use a number of dialect expressions.

On the whole, the trend in written Arabic has been towards a stricter regulation of the level of speech, rather than towards an increasing flexibility in the application of the rules. At this point, a distinction should be made between the practice in Egypt and the Levant, on the one hand, and North Africa, on the other. In North Africa, the most pressing problem after independence was how to replace the dominant French language with Arabic, preferably at all levels of
society, but at the very least in education. As a consequence, simplification of
the Classical language was not an issue. Since Arabic and French had to com­
pete for the status of language of prestige, in the eyes of most language-reform­
ers it would be wrong to devalue the Classical language by debasing it with
dialect influence or with the abolition of grammatical rules. Discussions in
North Africa on arabicisation (ta'rib) concentrate on the introduction of Arabic
in domains where formerly French had been the dominant language, whereas in
other parts of the Arab world ta'rib usually means the introduction of Arabic
equivalents of foreign words, particularly in scientific language.

In recent times, various didactic projects have been set up for the compilation
of a basic word list for use in primary schools and for the composition of a basic
grammar that includes only the most frequent constructions of the standard
language. The essential vocabularies from Tunisia and Lebanon do not seem to
have had much impact on the various national educational systems. But there is
one project that was based on an explicit didactic and linguistic concept, the
Arabic version of the American children’s programme Sesame Street (Iftah yā
Simsim). In the memorandum prepared by the makers of the programme, three
categories of linguistic phenomena in Standard Arabic were distinguished:
indispensable features of Standard Arabic that were to be used in spite of their
absence in the dialect (e.g. the case endings); features that should be used
sparingly (e.g. the passive form of the verbs); and features that should be avoided
altogether (e.g. the superlative al-'afalu, the prepositions ka- ‘like’ and siwā
‘except’). In the language of the programme, these principles have been followed
rather closely. Moreover, the players, including the small children who play an
essential part in the Sesame Street concept, make remarkably few performance
errors in their use of Standard Arabic. On the whole, colloquialisms are used very
infrequently, and yet there is a certain informal quality in the discourse, achieved
mostly by the use of intonational patterns and interjections rather than the
introduction of grammatical and/or lexical items from the colloquial language.

The Iftah yā Simsim experiment proves that it is indeed possible to use an
informal register of Modern Standard Arabic. It is true that in some Arab coun­
tries, in particular Egypt, the programme was criticised because it allegedly con­
tained too many colloquial items. But on closer observation it turns out that
this criticism was biased: the pronunciation of the ġism as [g] rather than [g] can
hardly be regarded as a regionalism, and the selection of lexical items in
any pan-Arabic programme will probably never satisfy everybody. The future will
have to decide whether or not the introduction of an informal register of Stan­
ard Arabic stands any chance.

FURTHER READING

The classic work on the period of the Nahda and the new ideas about the Arab
nation that were developed in this period is Hourani (1970). Information about
the linguistic question in the Ottoman empire is in Pràtor (1993: 67f., 164–72,
217f.). For the development of modern Arabic lexicography and its historical
roots, see Gàtje (1985); in his history of Arabic lexicography, Haywood (1965)
also deals with the activities of aš-Šidyāq and al-Bustānī; see also Sawaie (1987,
1990).
The role of the academies is discussed by Hamzaoui (1965, 1975) and Khafafii (1985); Ali (1987) discusses the various methods of word-formation and contains (pp. 146-8) a list of approved patterns of lexical creation. A large amount of material on the methods and activities of the academies may be found in the journals which they publish regularly, Mağalla Mağma' al-Luğa al-'Arabiyya bi-Dimaşq (Damascus, since 1921), Mağalla Mağma' al-Luğa al-'Arabiyya (Cairo, since 1935), Mağalla al-Mağma' al-'Imāl al-'Irāqī (Baghdad, since 1950).

On the development of Arabic vocabulary, see the studies of Monteil (1960) and Stetkevych (1970); a comparison with the translations from Greek in the Classical period is in Bielawski (1956). The examples of the emerging political terminology in the nineteenth century in this chapter have been taken from Rebhan (1986), Ayalon (1987) and Lewis (1988). The examples of football terminology are derived from 'Abd al-Gawad (1977); for linguistic terminology in Modern Arabic, see Shraybom-Shivtiel (1993) and Darir (1993), as well as the dictionaries of linguistic terms by Mseddi (1984) and R. Baalbaki (1990).

For the linguistic tendencies in the language of the media, Ashtiany's (1993) course of Media Arabic contains many interesting examples. The examples of French influence on Modern Standard Arabic in North Africa in this chapter were taken from Kropfitsch (1977, 1980) and Chaaban (1984).


On the possibility of composing transfer grammars of Arabic, see Kouloughli (1979). Ryding (1990) may be cited as a practical attempt at a mixed grammar; her solutions include the introduction of frequent lexical items from the colloquial [rāḥ, ḡāb, lāzim], the elimination of case and mood inflection, and the use of function words from colloquial speech [lissā, šā, miš, and so on]; cf. also Alish (1994). Another approach is that of Woidich and Heinen-Nasr (1995), who aim at an integration of the two language varieties by starting with the colloquial language, but introducing from the beginning lexical items from the standard language, and gradually mixing the two varieties, so that at the end of the first year the student has spoken skills in colloquial Arabic and written skills in Standard Arabic.

Within the range of strictly standard grammars and manuals for Arabic, a number of courses may be mentioned: Ziadeh and Winder (1957); Krahl and Reuschehl (1980, 1981), a comprehensive course, covering not only grammar but also stylistics, aiming at the training of interpreters of Arabic, Eastern European style, but available now in a revised non-socialist version; Fischer and Jastrow (1977), Fischer (1986) and Woidich (1985), intended for traditional departments of Arabic in Europe; Abboud and McCurus (1983; first published 1968), an audio-lingual approach with a large number of drills, intended for departments of Arabic in the USA.

Curiously enough, there are almost no reference grammars of Modern
Standard Arabic; the largest is Cantarino (1974–5), which is based on a predominantly literary corpus. Smaller surveys of the structure of the language are Beeston (1968), Pellat (1985) and Kouloughli (1994); a sketch of the modern language is given by Wild (1982). A comprehensive handbook on all aspects of Modern Standard Arabic is by Holes (1995a); although it is not a grammar in the strictest sense of the word, its systematic treatment of the structure of the language with extensive references to the existing literature makes this a very useful introduction to Modern Standard Arabic.

As regards dictionaries of Modern Standard Arabic: the Arabic–Arabic dictionaries, most of which were published in Lebanon, lean heavily on the Arabic lexicographical tradition. Buṭrus al-Bustānī’s Muhīt al-muhīt, which was compiled in the nineteenth century, is still available in modern printings (e.g. Beirut, 1987); under the auspices of ALECSO, ‘Alī al-Qāsimī edited al-Muʾgam al-ʿarabī al-ʿasāsī (Beirut: Larousse, 1989). Bilingual dictionaries were also published in Lebanon: English–Arabic (M. Baalbaki 1991); Arabic–English (Rohi Baalbaki 1988); French–Arabic (Hajjar 1983); Arabic–French (Mungid 1990). The number of Western dictionaries of Arabic is considerable, the best-known being Wehr’s (1952, 1959) Arabic–German dictionary, which was based on a corpus of literary and journalistic texts. Wehr’s dictionary was translated into English and expanded by Cowan (1961; approximately 28,000 items; the fourth edition of 1979 contains more than 40,000 items). The fifth edition of the original Arabic–German dictionary appeared in 1985 in a thoroughly revised version, containing approximately 50,000 items. Dictionaries with Arabic as target language include: German–Arabic: Schregle (1974; 45,000 items; also Arabic–German 1981–); French–Arabic: Reig (1987; also Arabic–French); English–Arabic: Doniach (1972).