

An Analysis of the Phenomenon of Asālat al-Lugha and the Paradigm of the Superiority of the Quraysh Vernacular

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Abstract

The present article analyzes the Quraysh-based conception of language, -an outcome of the Qur'an-centered linguistic and ethnolinguistic approach that shaped classical Arabic grammatical paradigms, -by examining its underlying ideological, sociolinguistic, and methodological assumptions from the perspective of modern linguistics. These paradigms are then examined through the lens of key concepts, including linguistic plurality, standardization processes, and the relationship between language and authority. A foundational component of the fundamental elements of the witness method in Arabic grammar pertains to *semāʿ* and *naqil* (auditory transmission and citation). A crucial component of *semāʿ* and *naqil* is spatial limitation. This doctrine, which entails the restriction of language material to a specific geographic region, is predicated on the premise that Arabic, in general and the Quraysh dialect in particular are transcendent forms of language. This concept has been articulated in linguistic studies through the construct *aşālat al-lugha*. In order to accurately determine the position of Arabic in the era when linguistic studies began, the understanding of dialect in that period was re-examined in the light of the data of modern linguistic studies. Following through the examination it was determined that a wide array of linguistic variations among the tribes, encompassing vernaculars, dialects and accents and other forms of linguistic diversity, were collectively designated as dialects during the period of compilation and editing. This convention was subsequently perpetuated by subsequent scholars. It was once again determined that the Arabs achieved a significant degree of linguistic unity during the early Islamic period and in the period preceding it. During this period, the notion that the linguistic variations among the Arabs were not sufficiently pronounced to be considered distinct dialects, and that these differences should instead be regarded as dialects, emerged as significant findings. The evaluation of the linguistic differences among the Arab tribes within the framework of the socio-linguistic definition of dialect and the approaches that suggest a new classification model for dialects have rendered this study a privileged one.

Keywords

Arabic Language and Rhetoric; Aşālat al-lugha; Quraysh; Dialect; Vernacular; Norm Language

Highlights

- The present study focuses on the concept of aşālat al-lugha that emerged during the compilation and codification period of Arabic vocabulary. The study explores the impact of this concept on linguistic activities.
- The comprehension of asālat al-lugha is predicated on the primacy of Arabic, in its broad sense, and of the dialect of the Quraysh in particular.
- From an earliest period of Arabic development, the Quraysh dialect was regarded to serve as the standard-setting model for the language.
- It is evident that at the time of Islam's emergence, the differences in dialect among the Arab tribes were not substantial enough to constitute a distinct dialect.
- In the domain of Arabic language studies, during the Tadwin period, the preponderance of idiomatic differences designated as dialects were in fact related to vernaculars or accents.

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Aşâletü'l-Luğa Olgusu ve Kureyş Şivesinin Üstünlüğü Paradigması Üzerine Bir Çözümleme

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Öz

Bu makalede, klasik dönem Arapça gramer çalışmalarına yön veren paradigmalardan Kur'an merkezli dil ve etnolinguistik yaklaşımın çıktılarında olan Kureyş temelli dil anlayışının arkasındaki ideolojik, sosyolinguistik ve metodolojik varsayımlar, modern dilbilim perspektifiyle değerlendirilmektedir. Bu paradigmlar dilsel çoğulluk, standartlaştırma süreçleri ve otorite-dil ilişkisi gibi kavramlar ışığında yeniden ele alınmaktadır. Kureyş dilinin bir lehçe olup olmadığı meselesi ve aşâletü'l-luğa anlayışıyla ilgili olan Kureyş kabilesinin dilinin üstünlüğü iddiasının tartışılması çalışmanın problemi oluşturmaktadır. Dil çalışmalarında Arapçanın lehçelerine ilişkin geleneksel yaklaşımın eleştirel bir yöntemle sorgulanması da tartışılan problemler arasında yer almıştır. Çalışmada nitel araştırma tekniklerinden alanyazın taraması kullanılarak derlenen veriler, eleştirel düşünme ilkeleriyle analiz edilmiştir. Arapça dilbilgisi kurallarına ilişkin tanık gösterme metodunun temel öğelerinden biri semâ' ve nakildir. Semâ ve naklin zorunlu bileşenlerinden biri ise mekân sınırlamasıdır. Derlenecek dil malzemesinin belirli bir coğrafyayla sınırlanması anlamına gelen bu doktrin, genelde Arapçanın özelde ise Kureyş şivesinin aşkın dil olduğu fikrine dayanır. Bu düşünce dil çalışmalarında aşâletü'l-luğa terkinde ifadesini bulmuştur. Dil çalışmalarının başladığı çağdaki Arapçanın konumunun doğru tespit edilebilmesi için, o dönemdeki lehçe anlayışı, modern dönem dilbilim çalışmalarının verileri ışığında yeniden sorgulanmıştır. İnceleme sonucunda, derleme ve tedvin döneminde şive, ağız ve aksan dâhil kabileler arasındaki her türlü dilsel farklılıklara lehçe dendiği görülmüştür. Sonraki bilginler de bu geleneği sürdürmüştür. Yine erken İslâmî dönem ve öncesinde Arapların dil birliğini büyük ölçüde sağladığı kanaatine ulaşılmıştır. Bu dönemde, Araplar arasındaki dilsel farklılıkların lehçe oluşturacak derinlikte olmadığı, söz konusu farklılıkların şive olarak nitelenmesinin daha isabetli olacağı düşüncesi elde edilen bulgular arasındadır. Arap kabileleri arasındaki deyiş farklılıklarının, lehçenin sosyo-lengüistik tanımı çerçevesinde değerlendirilmesi ve lehçelere ilişkin yeni bir tasnif modeli öneren yaklaşımları bu çalışmayı ayrıcalıklı kılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Arap Dili ve Belagati; Aşâletü'l-luğa; Kureyş; Lehçe; Şive; Norm Dil

Öne Çıkanlar

- Bu çalışma, Arap dili söz varlığının derleme ve tedvin döneminde ortaya çıkan aşâletü'l-luğa olgusu ve onun lengüistik faaliyetlere etkisini konu edinmiştir.
- Aşâletü'l-luğa anlayışı genelde Arapçanın, özelde ise Kureyş şivesinin üstünlüğü anlayışına dayanır.
- Erken dönemden itibaren Arapça için model dil, Kureyş şivesi olarak kabul edilmiştir.
- İslâm'ın geldiği dönemde Arap kabileleri arasındaki deyiş farklılıkları ayrı bir diyalekt oluşturacak derinlikte değildir.
- Tedvin döneminde Arapça dil çalışmalarında lehçe terimiyle anlatılmak istenen deyiş farklılıklarının çoğu, şive veya ağızla ilgilidir.

Atıf Bilgisi

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Introduction

Studies on the methodology of Arabic grammar began after the foundational efforts in linguistic analysis. By the late 2nd/8th century, significant efforts to establish the linguistic structure of the Arabic language had resulted in the formation of a substantial body of work. Although not explicitly named, the studies of this period were simultaneously concerned with Arabic morphology, syntax and their underlying methodology. An examination of the linguistic problems recorded by Sībawayh (d. 180/796) shows that Arabic linguistic studies had reached a considerable level of maturity. His work, *al-Kitāb* is not a methodological treatise per se, but it provides the basic principles of the procedures used to identify and verify linguistic rules. After Sībawayh, the combined study of language and methodology continued until the first quarter of the 4th/10th century. The initial indications of an independent methodology for Arabic grammar appear in the works of Ibn al-Sarrāj (d. 316/929). The first independent discussion on the methodology of Arabic grammar is found in *al-Khaṣā'is* by Ibn Jinnī (d. 392/1002). Following this, Kamāl al-Dīn al-Anbārī (d. 577/1181) authored the first independent work on the methodology of Arabic grammar. Later, al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) systematically organised all previous contributions, defined the boundaries of Arabic grammatical methodology. Subsequent studies in both the classical and modern, have largely adhered to the principles established by al-Suyūṭī.

The paradigm of classical Arabic grammar studies not only codified the rules of the language but also served multifaceted functions, such as ensuring the correct understanding of the Qurʾān, grounding fiqh-based interpretations on solid linguistic foundations, and preserving Arab identity. In this context, it is evident that the paradigms underlying classical grammar studies carried not only linguistic dimensions but also epistemological, ideological, and socio-political implications. In the modern period, however, the question of how to address the problems within Arabic grammar and whether a paradigm shift is necessary—or even inevitable—in traditional grammatical studies has become a matter of debate within the Arab intellectual tradition. While some contemporary scholars have remained faithful to the theoretical framework of the classical period, others have proposed revisions and improvements to Arabic grammatical theory by comparing classical Arabic studies with modern linguistic approaches. A third group of linguists has argued for a complete departure from the classical paradigm and the construction of an entirely new grammatical system in light of modern linguistic findings. Setting aside those contemporary linguists who remain loyal to classical paradigms, scholars such as Ibrāhīm Anīs (d. 1977), ʿAbduh Rājilī (d. 2010), Tammām Ḥassān (d. 2011), Kamāl Bishr (d. 2015), ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Mahīrī (d. 2016), Murtaḍā al-Bāqir, Nihād al-Mūsā, Maḥmūd al-Saʿrān, Ḥāfiẓ Ismāʿīlī ʿAlawī, ʿAbd al-Salām al-Misiddī, Muṣṭafā Galfān, ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Fāsī al-Fihri, Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafā, and Maḥdī al-Maḥzūmī have undertaken efforts either to reconcile classical and modern studies or to propose a renewal of the Arabic grammatical system.¹ In addition, Western scholars such

¹ For the views of these linguists, see: ʿAbduh al-Rājilī, *Durūs fī al-Madhhab al-Nahwī* (Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍa al-ʿArabiyya, 1980); ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Fāsī al-Fihri, *Ḍarrāt al-Luġa al-ʿArabiyya wa-Handasatuhā* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadid al-Muttaḥid, 2010); ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Mahīrī, *al-Nazarāt fī al-Turāth al-Luġhawī al-ʿArabī* (Beirut: Dār al-

as Jonathan Owens, Kees Versteegh, and Buckley Ron² have also contributed views on the modernization of Arabic grammar.³

Language is not merely a tool of communication; it is also a marker of identity, culture, and social belonging. The internal diversity of languages reflects a multilayered structure shaped by historical, geographical, social, and political factors. This diversity necessitates a distinction between standard language and vernaculars. In traditional Arabic grammar, this distinction has often been explained through structural differences or geographic distribution, however, modern linguistics approaches this issue within a more critical and multidimensional framework. Especially after the 20th century, paradigms developed in modern linguistics have adopted a more critical perspective toward linguistic norms and standardization processes. Approaches introduced by modern linguistics—particularly within the context of sociolinguistics and language ideology—enable a critical reassessment of the normative paradigms that form the epistemological foundation of classical Arabic studies. Within this framework, this study interrogates the theological approach to language, the ethnolinguistic paradigm that prioritizes Quraysh identity, and the mythology of the standard language—each constituting part of the foundational paradigms of classical Arabic grammar. This study is not based on any single modern linguistic theory initiated by Ferdinand de Saussure (d. 1913)⁴ or those that followed; rather, it draws on the general findings of modern linguistics. Undoubtedly, the system of classical Arabic needs to be reexamined in light of the categories of modern linguistics, including theoretical linguistics, applied linguistics, historical and comparative linguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, and field linguistics. This signals a deep epistemological rupture and transformation. At the same time, this study does not dismiss the pursuit of a normative language, which is often a foundational requirement in studies related to the nation-building processes and language systems of various peoples. However, as Milroy (1999)⁵ also emphasizes, the standard language is typically based on an idealized variant and gradually diverges from actual spoken usage. The classical Arabic norms derived from the Quraysh vernacular were likewise largely shaped by literary language and sacred texts, marginalizing everyday language practices.

Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993); ‘Abd al-Salām al-Misiddī, *al-Lisāniyyāt wa-Uṣūṣuhā al-Ma’rifīyya* (Tunis: Dār al-Tūnisiyya li’l-Nashr, 1986); Ḥāfiẓ Ismā‘īlī ‘Alawī, *Lisāniyyāt fī al-Thaqāfa al-‘Arabiyya al-Mu‘āṣira* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Jadīd al-Muttaḥid, 2009); Ibrāhīm Anīs, *Min Asrār al-Lugha al-‘Arabiyya* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Injilī al-Miṣriyya, 1966); Maḥmūd al-Sa’rān, *‘Ilm al-Lugha: Muqaddima li’l-Qārī’ al-‘Arabī* (Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍa al-‘Arabiyya, n.d.); Murtaḍā al-Bāqir, *Muqaddima fī Nazariyyat al-Qawā‘id al-Tawlidiyya* (Amman: Dār al-Shurūq, 2002); Muṣṭafā Galfān, *Lisāniyyāt fī al-Thaqāfa al-‘Arabiyya al-Ḥadītha* (Maghrib: Sharikat al-Nashr wa’l-Tawzī’, 2006); Nihād al-Mūsā, *Ḥaṣād al-Qarn fī al-Lisāniyyāt* (Beirut: Mu’assasat ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Shūmān, 2008); Tammām Ḥassān, *al-Uṣūl: Dirāsa Ibtistimūliyya li’l-Fikr al-Lughawī ‘inda al-‘Arab al-Nahwiyyin* (Cairo: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 2000).

² For the views of these linguists, see. Buckley Ron, *Modern Literary Arabic: A Reference Grammar* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban Publishers, 2004); Kees Versteegh, *The Arabic Linguistic Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Jonathan Owens, *The Foundations of Grammar: An Introduction to Medieval Arabic Grammatical Theory* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 1988).

³ Esma Sağ Şencal, *Çağdaş Arap Dilcilerinin Dilbilim Karşısındaki Tutumları* (Istanbul: Marmara University, Institute of Social Sciences, PhD Dissertation, 2023), 120.

⁴ For detailed information, see. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Genel Dilbilim Dersleri [Cours de linguistique générale; Course in General Linguistics]*, trans. Berke Vardar (Ankara: Birey ve Toplum Yayınları, 1985).

⁵ For detailed information, see. James Milroy and Lesley Milroy, *Authority in Language: Investigating Standard English* (London: Routledge, 1999).

Arabic grammar (naḥw) has, since the early periods of Islamic civilization, developed not only as a linguistic discipline but also in close connection with religious, cultural, and epistemological dynamics. Beginning in the 2nd/8th century, grammar studies became systematized, particularly around the objective of preserving and correctly understanding the verbal structure of the Qur'ân. Therefore, the foundational paradigm of classical Arabic grammar is not merely the outcome of a linguistic effort focused on the internal structure of the language, but also the product of a multidimensional intellectual project shaped within the broader development of Islamic thought. Today, many of the concerns that once influenced the formation of the classical Arabic paradigm have largely disappeared. For this reason, there is a need for an epistemological transformation that will allow the natural structure of the language to be reexamined in the modern period. In the contemporary era, the epistemological transformation of Arabic was debated within two primary approaches. One group of linguists argues that Arabic should be reinterpreted based on the findings of modern linguistics and adapted to modern linguistic theory. Another group, however, contends that classical Arabic and modern linguistics are founded on entirely distinct and independent epistemological paradigms. Linguists in this second camp advocate for the complete abandonment of classical paradigms and the construction of a new Arabic grammar system grounded in the data of modern linguistics. In the metamodern age, solving the linguistic challenges faced by Arabic requires a multilayered epistemological shift—one that encompasses contemporary Arabic vernaculars, Arabic language pedagogy, the use of Arabic in the digital age, and other evolving linguistic systems. This study aims to examine the ethnolinguistic paradigm that prioritizes the theological approach to language and centers Quraysh identity.

One of the principles established in studies on the methodology of Arabic grammatical structure is the rule of spatial limitation. This doctrine emerged as a necessary condition for *semâ'* and *naqil* (auditory transmission and citation) and is based on the concept of *أصالة اللغة* (*aşâlat al-luġa*),⁶ which asserts the superiority of Arabic in general and the Quraysh dialect in particular as the standard language.⁷ The idea of *aşâlat al-luġa* is inherently based on the acceptance of a normative language. Since the early period, the Quraysh dialect has been recognised as this model language for Arabic. This understanding is also linked to the premise that there was no linguistic unity among the Arabs during the period of the emergence of Islam. However, whether a certain degree of linguistic unity existed among Arabs before and after the Qur'anic revelation, and if a common language can be identified, whether it was the Quraysh dialect, remains a matter of debate among modern scholars. Similarly, whether the Quraysh dialect qualifies as a “dialect,” the claim of its superiority, and whether sufficient evidence exists to support its exceptional status or what factors led scholars to accept this status are topics that continue to occupy linguists. To resolve these questions, which are the central problem

⁶ *Aşâlat al-luġa*: This term refers to the concept that, in general, the Arabic language and Arabs, and specifically the Quraysh dialect and the Quraysh people, are considered superior and chosen.

⁷ Soner Gündüzöz, “Klâsik ve Modern Arap Literatürü Açısından İslâm Düşüncesinde Hakikat ve Mecaz Tartışmaları”, *İslami İlimler Dergisi* 8/1 (2013), 32.

of this research, it is necessary to determine the extent of linguistic differences among the tribes in the pre-Islamic period. What conclusions can be drawn when the languages spoken by Arab tribes are examined in light of modern linguistic research? Should the linguistic differences among the tribes be defined as dialectal variations, or is it more appropriate to categorize this diversity as differences in accents or vernaculars? These questions need to be addressed critically.

In the socio-linguistic definition of dialect, two factors are identified: one internal to the language and the other external. External factors arise from the social, cultural, and geographical changes experienced by a group within the same ethnicity, which in turn influence the internal dynamics of the language.⁸ These external influences deepen variations in the phonetics, structure and syntax of a language. As a result, the flow of communication between social groups within the same nation is partially disrupted. The linguistic clusters that develop within nations that share the same mother tongue are called dialects. Scholars argue that for a language to form dialects, it must undergo five interrelated and sequential processes: (1) the society speaking the language must experience geographical changes, (2) it must culturally differentiate from the main body and other groups, (3) it must have multiple vernaculars, (4) it must possess an alphabet, and (5) it must involve a decision-making mechanism. The formation of dialects begins with external causes, matures through the deepening of accent differences between linguistic groups and ultimately culminates with the decision of the relevant authority.⁹ For a dialect to exist it requires a superior language from which it has diverged, as well as the presence of prior linguistic unity.¹⁰ Dialects are shaped by the interplay of external influences and the integrative and disintegrative forces that underpin social structures.¹¹ A “vernacular” represents the branches of a language that separated at a certain historical point. While differences in vernaculars are not as profound as in dialects, they are more pronounced than those in accents. An accent refers to the variation in pronunciation of a language within the same country, usually distinct from the written language. Conversely, vernaculars are regional or national variations of the same language and can be observed in both spoken and written forms. Although these three terms—dialect, vernacular, and accent—are often used interchangeably in practice, it is crucial to observe their theoretical distinctions in linguistic studies. In Arabic, the distinctions among dialects, vernaculars and accents have not yet been definitively determined. Moreover, the terminology needed to deal adequately with these linguistic phenomena remains underdeveloped.

During the compilation and classification period of the Arabic language, the term لغة (lugha) was frequently used by linguists in a variety of contexts, giving it a broad range of applications in linguistic studies. In the early periods, phonetic differences at the word level, such as النُّحَاغ (al-nuḥāḡ), النِّحَاغ (al-niḥāḡ), and النِّهَاغ (al-neḥāḡ), were referred to

⁸ Commission, *Türkçe Sözlük* (Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu, 2005), 1303; Ali Akar, “Lehçe Oluşma Şartları ve Evreleri Bakımından Eski Türkiye Lehçesi”, *Türkiye Bilim Araştırmaları (TÜBAR)* 28 (2010), 18.

⁹ Akar, “Lehçe Oluşma Şartları ve Evreleri Bakımından Eski Türkiye Lehçesi”, 19.

¹⁰ Necip Üçok, *Genel Dilbilim (Lengüistik)* (İstanbul: Multilingual, 2004), 155.

¹¹ For the principle of integrative and disintegrative forces see. Üçok, *Genel Dilbilim (Lengüistik)*, 155.

using the term *lughā*.¹² Khalīl b. Aḥmad (d. 175/791), while analyzing the word *العُبر* (*al-‘ubr*), linked it to Hebrew and referred to it as *لغة اليهود* (*lughatü'l-Yehūd*), using the term to signify the language of a specific nation.¹³ Sībawayh used *lughā* to describe phonetic differences—such as sound changes omissions or additions¹⁴ between tribes as well as variations in syntactic structures.¹⁵ In the field of linguistics, this term was employed at times to denote the language of a specific population in a given region, independent of considerations of kinship or tribal allegiances. For instance, Abū ‘Amr al-Shaybānī (d. 213/828 [?]), while analysing the meaning of *الصِّيق* (*al-ṣīq*), noted that in the dialect of the people of Medina, this word referred to the red marking on the abdomen of bees.¹⁶ In this instance, the term does not signify a linguistic unity based on lineage but rather the language of a community united geographically. Similarly, al-Aṣma‘ī (d. 216/831), when discussing a poem by al-‘Ajjāj (d. 97/715-16), used the expression *لغة العجاج* (*lughatü'l-‘Ajjāj*) to describe the poet’s stylistic preference.¹⁷ Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), when referring to Persian loanwords in Arabic, used the term *لغة العرب* (*lughatü'l-‘Arab*) to signify the Arabic language as spoken by Arabs.¹⁸ As these examples illustrate, the term *lughā* was not yet established as a technical term during the era of intensive linguistic studies. It was used to refer to every level of linguistic variation, from phonetic differences to entire languages like Arabic and Hebrew. Another term frequently used to indicate variations in expression among Arab tribes was *لهجة* (*lahja*), which, like *lughā*, encompassed all linguistic differences. In Arabic linguistic studies, the term *lahja* often referred to variations in speech patterns, many of which relate to accents or vernaculars rather than full-fledged dialects.¹⁹ In the absence of methodological approaches and terminology to systematically categorise the subdivisions of a language, the interchangeable use of *lughā* and *lahja* in early linguistic studies is comprehensible. However, when the scope of the term *lughā* as used in foundational texts of Arabic linguistics is reassessed within the framework of modern linguistic studies, it becomes clear that *lughā* at that time did not correspond to the modern concept of “dialect.” Instead, it was used to describe subcategories of a language, such as accents or vernaculars. Even in modern studies on the linguistic map of Arabic, there remains a lack

¹² Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, *Kitāb al-‘Ayn*, ed. Maḥdī Maẓḥūmī - Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarrā’ī (Baghdad: Dār Maktabat al-Hilāl, 1980), 1/121.

¹³ Al-Farāhīdī, *Kitāb al-‘Ayn*, 2/130.

¹⁴ Abū Bishr ‘Amr b. ‘Uthmān Sībawayh, *al-Kitāb*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1988), 3/336.

¹⁵ Sībawayh, *al-Kitāb*, 1/71.

¹⁶ Iṣḥāq b. Mirār Abū ‘Amr al-Shaybānī, *Kitāb al-jīm*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī (Cairo: al-Hay’a al-‘Āmma li-Shu’ūn al-Maṭābi‘ al-Amīriyya, 1974), 2/182.

¹⁷ Abū Sa‘īd ‘Abd al-Malik b. Qurayb al-Aṣma‘ī, *Kitāb khalq al-insān*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Samarā’ī (Baghdad: Iraqi Academy of Sciences, 1963), 9.

¹⁸ Abū Muḥammad ‘Abdullāh b. Muslim Ibn Qutayba, *Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*, ed. ‘Abdullāh al-Jabbūrī (Baghdad: Maṭba‘at al-Ānī, 1977), 2/341.

¹⁹ Nuri Çorakçı, *Arap Dilinde Klasik Lehçeler ve Kureyş Lehçesi* (Konya: Necmettin Erbakan University, Institute of Social Sciences, Master’s Thesis, 2015), 15.

of clear terminology for distinguishing between dialects, vernaculars and accents. Scholars who accept the existence of a common language among Arabs during the period of Islam's emergence also acknowledge that the variations in expression among tribes were not deep enough to constitute separate dialects. Nevertheless, the term *lahja* is employed in the relevant studies. This indicates the ongoing need for a new classification model addressing the distinctions between dialects, vernaculars and accents in the historical development of the Arabic language.

During the pre-Islamic and codification periods, the linguistic differences among Arab tribes are more accurately understood as dialectal variations or local accents of a standard language, rather than full-fledged dialects. In light of the findings of modern linguistics, it can be concluded that the linguistic variations of the Quraysh and other tribes should no longer be classified as dialects. For this reason, this study prefers the term "Quraysh vernacular" over "Quraysh dialect". If the Quraysh vernacular were to be classified as a dialect, it would need to meet the criteria required for linguistic differences to qualify as dialects. In this context, for the Quraysh vernacular to be recognized as a dialect, the existence of a superior public language would be essential. Moreover, the Quraysh tribe would have been subject to considerable geographical displacement. This, of course, would entail linguistic differentiation and socio-cultural separation from the dominant population and other groups. Furthermore, the development of a distinct alphabet and various regional accents specific to the Quraysh vernacular would be necessary for it to be classified as a dialect. If one were to discuss dialects in the context of pre-Islamic Arabic, it would be more appropriate to look for such phenomena in the process of separation from the Semitic linguistic parent body. Arabic, after diverging from its parent language and transitioning beyond the dialect stage, established itself as an independent language. By the time of Islam's emergence, Arabic, as the independent language of the Arab people, had undergone its first dialectal phase. Over a long historical period, Arabic split into two primary dialects: the Northern and Southern dialects. The Southern dialect subsequently disappeared from historical records, thereby enabling Northern Arabic to achieve a superior status by the time of the Qur'anic revelation.²⁰ Thus, by the 7th century, linguistic differences among Arabic-speaking groups were at the level of vernaculars or accents.²¹ Islam reinforced the position of this public language, a position that was solidified with the revelation of the Qur'an. Consequently, Qur'anic Arabic emerged as a standard superior language and has maintained its strong position as such up to the present day.

Arabic underwent its second dialectal phase after the advent of Islam. The traces of this second phase must be sought in the expansion of Islam through conquest and its spread to different regions. Standard Arabic, as a public language, spread to different geographical areas after Islam. Due to factors such as geographical and cultural differentiation, variations in accents and idioms deepened, leading to gradual separations from the linguistic core. Over time, these divergences intensified, giving rise to new dialects of the higher form of Arabic. Modern studies of Arabic dialectology reveal this

²⁰ Bayyūmi al-Şibā'ī, *Tārīkh al-adab al-‘Arabī* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-‘Ulūm, 1932), 45.

²¹ Tammām Ḥassān, *al-Uşūl* (Cairo: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 2000), 99.

historical reality by identifying the main dialects of the language. Today, Arabic is commonly divided into five dialects: the Egyptian dialect, the Levantine dialect, the Iraqi dialect, the Maghrebi dialect and the Gulf dialect. However, the Qur'an-centred religious language that emerged after the revelation of the Qur'an served as the guarantor of a common language and alphabet among the Arabs. This language, also known as Standard Arabic, remains the common medium of education, science and culture in countries where Arabic is the official language. Given that the linguistic differences among contemporary Arab populations do not completely prevent mutual intelligibility, and taking into account the common alphabet, educational standards and cultural language, it is necessary to re-evaluate the classification that divides Arabic into five dialects. Within this framework, all deviations from the superior language among Arab nations and communities can potentially be classified as vernaculars or accents rather than as distinct dialects. To describe linguistic differences among Arabs living in different geographical regions, it is more appropriate to use the term *lakna* (لكنة), which refers to pronunciation or accent and emphasizes the phonetic dimension of language variation, rather than the terms *luġa* (لغة) or *lahja* (لهجة). In reference to Arabic dialects, the term *lahja* (لهجة) should be used in cases such as *lahjat al-janūb* (لهجة الجنوب) (Southern dialect) or *lahjat al-shamāl* (لهجة الشمال) (Northern dialect), while for vernacular or accentual differences—such as *laknat Quraysh* (لكنة قريش) (the Quraysh accent) and *laknat Tamīm* (لكنة تميم) (the Tamīm accent)—the term *lakna* (لكنة) should be preferred.

1. The Concept of Aşālat al-Luġa

Since the earliest efforts to delineate the structural characteristics of the Arabic language, the issue of identifying reliable sources has posed a significant methodological challenge. The establishment of universally recognised linguistic rules necessitates clear and robust criteria against which their validity can be assessed. However, defining such criteria inherently involves methodological complexity. In addressing these challenges, early-period linguists made substantial efforts, confronting two primary concerns: the collection of linguistic data to serve as a foundation for analysis and the formulation of a methodological framework for interpreting this data. The former demanded practical fieldwork, while the latter required theoretical rigour. The challenge of collecting linguistic material in the field is evident, particularly when dealing with Arab tribes dispersed across the desert. This challenge was further compounded by the nomadic nature of these tribes. These challenges, which would later influence the methodologies of linguistic schools, led linguists to limit their sources as a practical response. Consequently, in addition to alternative methods, the concept of *aşālat al-luġa* was adopted as a condition in linguistic compilation activities. *Aşālat al-luġa* is a concept that represents the classification of the languages spoken by Arab tribes according to their degree of superiority and strength. Within this framework, the Quraysh dialect is posited as the most refined language. This understanding differentiates the language spoken by members of the Quraysh tribe from other dialects, attributing a sense of nobility to it. In the early period, this selective approach to linguistic material was later

formalised by al-Anbārī (d. 577/1181), who established a theoretical basis for the idea, asserting that linguistic transmissions that do not adhere to rules determined by tribe, location, and time cannot be used in the identification of language rules. The chaos and difficulties caused by the source problem in language studies rendered the Quraysh dialect, which was readily available, advantageous in comparison to other tribal dialects. This advantage enabled the Quraysh dialect to gain prominence and serve as a foundational source for Arabic linguistic studies.

The geographical isolation of linguistic sources was considered a precautionary measure to minimize the risk of linguistic corruption, based on the idea that the collected material should represent pure and unadulterated Arabic. This geographical limitation as a compilation method was influenced by the concept of تنقية العرب (tenqiyetu'l-‘Arab),²² which can be described as a movement to purify the Arabic language. Two key factors determined the approach to geographical limitation. The first of these was the principle that the tribes and individuals providing linguistic material must have no contact with other nations or cultures, which could potentially corrupt their language. Consequently, the condition of geographical isolation was associated with the contrast between desert life and settled life. Tribes living in the desert or in proximity to the Bedouin lifestyle were considered to speak pure and therefore fasih (eloquent) Arabic. On the other hand, the language of Arabs living a settled life was thought to have lost its purity. The second factor was the physical position of tribes in relation to the Quraysh tribe. The Quraysh were considered the linguistic centre, and proximity to or distance from this centre was regarded as a determining factor in the eloquence (fesahat) of a tribe's language. Accordingly, linguistic material from tribes such as Tamīm, Asad, Qays, Hudhayl, Ghatafān, Kināna, Khuzā'a, Thaqīf, and Ṭayy were deemed suitable for istishhād (linguistic citation). However, the languages of tribes such as Ghassān, Rabī'a, Juthām, Lahm, Taghlib, Iyād, ‘Abd al-Qays, Namir, Quḍā'a, Azd, Thaqīf, Banī Ḥanīfa, The Yemenite Arabs, the urban population of Hijaz, and Arabs from regions like Yamama and Ṭā'if were considered corrupted and thus unfit for istishhād.²³ The primary motivation for confining language to a geographical framework was the preservation of linguistic purity, although other factors, such as political and tribal rivalries, also played a role. The defensive stance adopted against the concept of linguistic corruption served to reinforce the notion of the Quraysh dialect's superiority.

Geographical isolation significantly contributed to the rapid development of linguistic studies and the establishment of foundational texts of the Arabic language during a period and in a region where conditions were challenging. This phenomenon served to ameliorate the ambiguity and disorder that previously prevailed with regard to the issue of linguistic sources. While the principle of geographical limitation had a positive

²² Tanqiyat al-‘Arab: This perspective, which can be described as “pure linguistics,” considers the language of Bedouin Arabs as the normative ideal. It is a movement that, within the framework of linguistic purification, places reservations on the new. See Soner Gündüzöz, *Arap Düşüncesinin Büyübozumu* (Samsun: Etüt Yayınları, 2011), 36.

²³ Abū al-Faḍl Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī, *al-Iqtirāh*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥakīm ‘Aṭīyya (Damascus: Dār al-Bayrūtī, 2006), 22; Muṣṭafā Şādiq al-Rāfi‘ī, *Tārīkh ādāb al-‘Arab* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2000), 1/199; Sa‘īd al-Afghānī, *Fi uṣūl al-naḥw* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1987), 22.

influence on the establishment of fundamental rules of the Arabic language, it also paved the way for new linguistic challenges. This approach led linguists to deem the language of certain tribes as fasih (eloquent) while rejecting others. The hierarchical valuation of tribal languages resulted in the exclusion of some tribes' languages from linguistic reference, further widening the gap in pronunciation differences over time. This officially recognized understanding among linguists deprived certain tribal languages of the ability to serve as sources for linguistic material. Consequently, this exclusion had a significant impact on the grammatical analysis and interpretation of religious texts, particularly the Qur'an, giving rise to new challenges in understanding and elucidating their linguistic structure.

Notwithstanding the considerable endeavours of linguists during the compilation period, which entailed significant investments of labour, resources and time, the rules of the Arabic language were ultimately derived from an incomplete collection of linguistic material.²⁴ It is evident, if not inevitable, that gathering all linguistic data from a community and deriving universal rules from it is a challenging, if not impossible, task. This reality also applies to the formative process of Arabic grammar. Approaching the principle of geographical limitation within this framework is a more realistic perspective. During the period in which linguistic studies underwent significant growth and development, various factors compelled linguists to restrict their sources. These factors included the dispersal of Arab tribes across different regions, the uneven linguistic quality among tribes, the phenomenon of lahn (linguistic errors or deviations), and other challenges. Within this process of limitation, the central position of the Quraysh tribe was naturally prominent. However, attributing linguistic and genealogical superiority to Quraysh based on this centrality is incompatible with scientific objectivity.

2. The Basis of the Claim that the Quraysh Vernacular was the Superior Language

In order to circumvent the potential pitfalls of anachronistic errors, it is advisable to undertake a thorough examination of the chronology of accounts pertaining to the preeminence of the Quraysh vernacular. As far as can be determined, works written up until the late 4th/10th century do not explicitly present the linguistic differences among tribes in a hierarchical order. However, in the collections compiled by lexicographers during the compilation period and in works addressing Arabic language and grammar, the accentual variations of many tribes, including the Quraysh, are discussed. However, these works do not contain any explicit statements indicating that the language of one tribe was inherently superior to others. The praise or criticism found in these works is confined to the specific words or expressions under analysis and does not extend to an overarching judgement about the linguistic superiority of any particular tribe.

From the latter quarter of the 4th/10th century onwards, the notion of the superiority of the Quraysh vernacular in methodological studies has been based on specific accounts and interpretations by scholars. One such account is a narration attributed to the Prophet Muhammad: "I am the most eloquent in using the Arabic language among the Arabs because I belong to the Quraysh tribe and was raised among

²⁴ Muḥammad ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Najjār, *Ḍiyāʾ al-ṣāliḥ* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1999), 1/16.

the Banū Sa'd b. Bakr tribe.”²⁵ This statement has been used as evidence for the superiority of the Quraysh vernacular.²⁶ Similarly, an incident involving ‘Abdullāh b. Mas‘ūd (d. 32/652-53) is cited in this regard. When he recited the Qur’ānic phrase حَتَّى حِينَ (ḥattā ḥīn) in the Huzayl vernacular as عَتَّى حِينَ (‘attā ḥīn), it prompted a response from ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 73/693): “The Qur’ān was revealed in the Quraysh vernacular, not the Huzayl vernacular. Teach the Qur’ān to people in the Quraysh vernacular.”²⁷ This statement has been interpreted as affirming the superiority of the Quraysh vernacular. Moreover, an account has been preserved which details how Uthman ibn Affan (d. 35/656) instructed the committee entrusted with the task of compiling the Qur’ān to employ the Qurayshian vernacular in the event of any disagreement. This is widely regarded as further evidence of the supremacy of the vernacular.²⁸ Another account often cited is the claim that the Quraysh vernacular was superior to the speech patterns of other tribes, such as the عننة تميم (‘an‘anatu Tamīm) and the كشكشة ربيعة (kashkashatu Rabī‘a). It has been posited that these narrations lend credence to the hypothesis that the Quraysh vernacular was more sophisticated and distinguished than other dialects.²⁹

During the periods when Islamic sciences, particularly language and grammar studies, gained momentum, certain linguists emphasised the superiority of the Quraysh vernacular, attributing the status of Standard Arabic specifically to this tribe for various reasons. Despite the absence of any explicit mention in his own works, there is an account that Farrā’ highlighted the strength of the Quraysh vernacular in its ability to incorporate words from other dialects. According to this account, the Quraysh absorbed the standard expressions of other tribes, thereby enhancing the purity of their language and cleansing it of defects.³⁰ A report attributed to Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm al-Fārābī (d. 350/961 [?]) states that the Quraysh vernacular was the best at selecting fasih words, was easy to pronounce during speech, evoked pleasant feelings in listeners, and that Arabic was transmitted from them and modeled after their language. However, this information was conveyed by al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), who referenced al-Fārābī’s now-lost work, *al-Alfāz wa’l-Ḥurūf*.³¹ Subsequent studies often cited al-Suyūṭī on this matter. Ibn Jinnī does not explicitly declare the Quraysh

²⁵ In the sources, this narration, “أَنَا أَفْصَحُ الْعَرَبِ مِثْلَ أَبِي مِنْ قُرَيْشٍ وَنَشَأْتُ فِي بَيْتِ سَعْدِ بْنِ بَكْرٍ” also has variations using بَيْتٍ and عَتَّى instead. For more information, see Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Yahyā Tha‘lab, *Majālis Tha‘lab*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Egypt: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1960), 11.

²⁶ Abū al-Faḍl Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī, *al-Muzhir*, ed. Muḥammad Aḥmad Jād al-Mawlā Beg (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Maktaba al-‘Asriyya, 1986), 1/165.

²⁷ Ibn Qutayba, *Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*, 1/620.

²⁸ Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Commission (Egypt: al-Maṭba‘a al-Kubrā al-Amīriyya, 2001), “Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān,” 2, No. 4984.

²⁹ Tha‘lab, *Majālis Tha‘lab*, 81; Ḥasan b. Aḥmad Abū ‘Alī al-Fārisī, *al-Masā’il al-Baṣriyyat*, ed. Muḥammad Shāṭir (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-Madani, 1985), 1/361; Abū al-Faṭḥ ‘Uthmān Ibn Jinnī, *al-Khaṣā’iṣ*, ed. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Najjār (Egypt: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1957), 2/13; Abū al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad Ibn Fāris, *al-Ṣāḥibī fī fiqh al-lugha*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Baydūn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1997), 29; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Muzhir*, 1/167.

³⁰ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Iqtirāḥ*, 1/154; al-Rāfi‘ī, *Tārīkh ādāb al-‘Arab*, 1/63; Muḥammad Abū Shayba, *al-Madkhal li-dirāsāt al-Qur’ān al-Karīm* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Sunna, n.d.), 184.

³¹ Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Iqtirāḥ*, 1/47.

vernacular as the model language; however, he refers to accounts that highlight its eloquence (fasahat). In a similar vein, Ibn Fāris (d. 395/1004) acknowledges a consensus among linguists regarding the Quraysh's possession of the most eloquent and clear mode of expression. According to this scholar, the Quraysh's divine selection is evidenced by their residence in the sacred region, the emergence of the final prophet from among them, and the central position of Mecca and the Kaaba. One manifestation of this privileged status is the superiority of their vernacular over others. This privileged position also enabled the Quraysh to adopt and assimilate the linguistic refinements of other tribes into their own language. Like many other authors, Ibn Fāris illustrates the superiority of the Quraysh vernacular by citing examples such as 'an'ana and kashkasha.³² Al-Suyūṭī, who systematised the accumulated knowledge of Arabic grammar into a methodological framework, summarised the available evidence on the subject. Subsequent methodological studies have largely followed the outlines established by these accounts.

3. Critique of the Claim of the Quraysh Vernacular's Superiority

The tendency to base the belief that the Quraysh vernacular was the normative language on transmitted reports cannot be separated from broader discussions on the origins of languages. During the codification period, it is evident that linguists often operated under the influence of theological perspectives.³³ Ibn Fāris, who specifically addressed the origins of languages in the context of Arabic, emphasised the transcendence of Arabic while implicitly pointing to its sacred nature. He furthered the concept of Arabic's *tevkīfī* (divinely ordained) nature, tracing it back to Adam. This perspective asserts that Arabic was transmitted through successive generations by prophets of Arab ancestry, beginning with Adam, the first human, and culminating in its optimal form with the advent of the Qurayshi Prophet Muhammad. This theological framing situates the development and finalisation of Arabic within a divine narrative, further reinforcing the claimed superiority of the Quraysh vernacular.³⁴ The assertion made by Prophet Muhammad that he was a member of the Quraysh tribe and was raised among the Banū Sa'd b. Bakr tribe, in conjunction with the pronouncement that the Qur'ān was revealed in the Quraysh vernacular and written based on its linguistic style, is indicative of a historical reality. Nevertheless, these accounts do not imply that the entire Qur'ān was revealed in the Quraysh vernacular rather than the public language of Standard Arabic. At most, these historical facts indicate the proximity of the Quraysh vernacular to the superior status of Standard Arabic. To draw a theological conclusion from these accounts to attribute a transcendent mission to the Quraysh vernacular is inconsistent with the natural development of language. If the language of the Quraysh tribe is accepted as the purest form of Arabic, then the practice of sending children born in Mecca to wet nurses in order to learn the proper language must also be contextualised. The Prophet himself, when describing the eloquence of his speech, emphasised that his linguistic skills were acquired during his upbringing among the tribe of Sa'd b. Bakr.

³² Ibn Fāris, *al-Şāḥibī fī fiqh al-luġha*, 2/11.

³³ Gündüzöz, "Klasik ve Modern Arap Literatürü Açısından İslam Düşüncesinde Hakikat ve Mecaz Tartışmaları", 32.

³⁴ Ibn Fāris, *al-Şāḥibī fī fiqh al-luġha*, 14.

The narration that the Qurʾān was revealed in seven modes (aḥruf) is understood by most scholars to refer to the linguistic differences among various Arab tribes.³⁵ The philological content of the Qurʾān cannot be reduced to the Quraysh tribe alone. Those who are inclined to give the Quraysh language a transcendental status often claim that the Qurʾān was revealed in this language. However, from the early period there were scholars who held the opposite view. Scholars such as Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/687-88), Abū ʿUbayd (d. 224/838), al-Zuhri (d. 230/844), and Thaʿlab (d. 291/904) argued that the Qurʾān's revelation was not limited to the Quraysh vernacular.³⁶ The permissibility of reciting the Qurʾān in various qirāʾāt (readings) demonstrates that it was not revealed exclusively in the Quraysh vernacular.³⁷ Moreover, Arabs from different tribes who accepted Islam did not struggle to comprehend the language of the Qurʾān. The absence of any serious questioning or criticism of its expressions or vocabulary further confirms this understanding. Moreover, there is no evidence to suggest that those sent to propagate Islam, such as Muʾadh ibn Jabal (d. 17/638), encountered communication difficulties due to language differences when interacting with different tribes. On the contrary, historical accounts suggest that they were able to communicate effectively with the tribes they visited. Such historical evidence indicates that the Qurʾān was revealed in the shared public language of Arabic, rather than being confined to the Quraysh vernacular.

According to Subhī al-Ṣāliḥ (d. 1986), who has studied the position of Arabic within the Semitic language family and its historical development, Arabic had undergone significant development and had reached a mature literary form by the time of the revelation of the Qurʾān. He asserts that the Qurʾān encountered a highly refined language already in use among the Arabs at the time of its revelation. Al-Ṣāliḥ further argues that there was a linguistic unity among the Arabs at the time of the emergence of Islam. This linguistic unity, however, did not preclude the existence of accentual variations among the tribes and the general population. In his view, the Qurʾān identified and reinforced the common language used among Arab literati and poets, challenging them to produce something better. Through its revelation, the Qurʾān not only strengthened this pre-existing linguistic unity but also expanded its scope.³⁸ Similarly, Tammām Ḥassān (d. 2011) maintains that the Qurʾān was not revealed in a vernacular exclusive to Quraysh but rather in the eloquent Arabic (fasih) that constituted the shared linguistic heritage of the Arabs at that time.³⁹ As Ḥassān points out, Islam itself relied on pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. Understanding the Qurʾān, especially unravelling the meanings of obscure (gharīb) words and appreciating its literary features, required the use of this poetic corpus. It is noteworthy that the vast majority of these poems were composed by poets who did not belong to the Quraysh tribe.⁴⁰

³⁵ Abū al-Qāsim Shihāb al-Dīn al-Maqdisī, *al-Murshid al-wajīz*, ed. Walīd Musāʿid al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī (Kuwait: Maktabat al-Imām al-Dhahabī, 1993), 248.

³⁶ al-Maqdisī, *al-Murshid al-wajīz*, 241; Soner Gündüzöz, "Kur'an'da Yerleşik Gramer Kurallarına Aykırı Dil Yapıları ve Kur'an'ın Lehçe Haritası Üzerine Bir İnceleme (I)", *Nüsha* 2/6 (n.d.), 80.

³⁷ Gündüzöz, "Kur'an'da Yerleşik Gramer Kurallarına Aykırı Dil Yapıları ve Kur'an'ın Lehçe Haritası Üzerine Bir İnceleme (I)", 81.

³⁸ Subhī al-Ṣāliḥ, *Dirāsāt fī fiqh al-lughā* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li'l-Malāyīn, 2009), 59.

³⁹ Ḥassān, *al-Uṣūl*, 71.

⁴⁰ Ḥassān, *al-Uṣūl*, 82.

Accentual variations such as *عننة تميم* ('an'anatu Temīm)⁴¹ and *كشكشة ربيعة* (kashkashatu Rabī'a)⁴² are undoubtedly speech forms that deviate from the public language. Khalīl b. Aḥmad drew attention to this issue, stating that those who avoided 'an'ana and kashkasha spoke in a fasih (eloquent) manner.⁴³ Khalīl b. Aḥmad thereby established a criterion for linguistic eloquence, emphasizing that vernaculars deviating from the standard language remained localized and thus lacked fasahat. It is important to note that his observations do not mention the Quraysh tribe specifically. Instead, Khalīl referred to a general rule of fasahat applicable to all. The comparison between the Tamīm and Rabī'a vernaculars with the Quraysh vernacular concerning 'an'ana and kashkasha, as well as the assertion of the Quraysh vernacular's superiority, first appear in the works of Tha'lab. Tha'lab identified several speech styles, including *عننة تميم* ('an'anatu Temīm), *كشكشة ربيعة* (kashkashatu Rabī'a), *كسكسة هوازن* (kaskasatu Hawāzin),⁴⁴ *تَضَجُّع* (tezaccu'u Qays),⁴⁵ *عجرفية ضبة* ('acrafata Ḍabbe),⁴⁶ and *تلتلة بهراء* (taltalatu Bahrā'),⁴⁷ considering them defective speech forms. He emphasized that the Quraysh vernacular was more fasih than these styles.⁴⁸

Later, as a result of the geographical limitation principle, those who positioned the Quraysh vernacular at the center and granted it a distinct status often referred to Tha'lab.⁴⁹ However, it is difficult to derive a general rule from Tha'lab's accounts and those of others that would encompass the entire language. The discussion here involves a comparison of speech forms among tribes, with the Quraysh vernacular deemed superior. Scholars addressing 'an'ana and kashkasha limited their observations to these examples and refrained from making generalizations. For example, the languages of tribes such as Tamīm, Hawāzin and Qays - although not considered fasih in certain forms of speech - were still recognised as eloquent and included among the sources used for istishhād (linguistic citation). Ibn Fāris is among those who utilized this information.

⁴¹ It refers to the phenomenon where certain prepositions beginning with "أ" (hamza) are pronounced as "ع" ('ayn), such as saying "عَنْ" instead of "أَنْ". See Abū al-Faḥḥ 'Uthmān Ibn Jinnī, *Sirr ṣinā'at al-luḡa* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2000), 1/242.

⁴² It describes a pronunciation style where the letter ش (shīn) is added after the emphatic كَ (mutab kāf), as in saying "عَلَيْكَشْ" instead of "عَلَيْكَ" and "بَيْكَشْ" instead of "بَيْكَ". This form of speech is used by the Rabī'a tribe and some other tribes. See al-Farāhīdī, *Kitāb al-'Ayn*, 1/91.

⁴³ Al-Farāhīdī, *Kitāb al-'Ayn*, 1/91.

⁴⁴ It refers to a speech style where the س (sīn) replaces the كَ (mukhāṭab kāf), as in saying "أَبُوسْ" instead of "أَبُوكَ" and "أُمُسْ" instead of "أُمُكَ". See Ibn Qutayba, *Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*, 2/405.

⁴⁵ Tazajj' refers to a type of imāla (vowel inclination). However, there is no record indicating which letters or words the Qays tribe used imāla for. See Tha'lab, *Majālis Tha'lab*, 80 (Fn. 1).

⁴⁶ 'Acrafe is a term related to phonetics. However, no information has been found regarding the specific type of sound phenomenon it represents. See Tha'lab, *Majālis Tha'lab*, 80 (Fn. 1).

⁴⁷ It refers to the pronunciation of verbs such as "تَعْلَمُونَ" and "تَفْعَلُونَ" with the ت (tā) carrying a kasra vowel, as in "تَعْلَمُونَ" and "تَفْعَلُونَ". See Ibn Jinnī, *al-Khaṣā'is*, 2/13.

⁴⁸ Tha'lab, *Majālis Tha'lab*, 80.

⁴⁹ Ibn Jinnī, *al-Khaṣā'is*, 2/11.

However, he also relayed an account from Abū ‘Amr ibn al-‘Alā’ (d. 154/771), stating that the most eloquent Arabs were from the upper Hawāzin (Ulyā Hawāzin)⁵⁰ and lower Tamīm (Suflā Tamīm).⁵¹ Moreover, in the information attributed to Abū ‘Amr, there is no mention of the eloquence (fasahat) of the Quraysh vernacular.⁵²

Scholars who argue that the Quraysh vernacular was not methodologically superior to others in establishing and verifying the rules of the Arabic language claim that the linguistic data attributed to the Quraysh dialect were in fact derived from a supra-dialectal public language. These scholars criticise the idea that the Quraysh vernacular was a distinguished or elite language. They claim that this claim of linguistic superiority stems from the association of the historical, geographical, political, economic and religious advantages of the Quraysh tribe with the language they spoke.

It is not possible for all members, poets and writers of a tribe to speak flawlessly, nor can their language be entirely defective. Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) argued that the correct use of language and eloquence (fasahat) cannot be restricted to a particular group. According to him, the eloquence and rhetorical quality of a language cannot be limited to a particular time or place. In every era and region, there are individuals who use the language correctly and those who do not. Therefore, the correct approach is to collect linguistic material from individuals of all times and places, provided their language is eloquent and correct.⁵³

Ibn Jinnī attributes the reluctance to gather linguistic material from individuals in contact with other cultures to the perceived corruption in their language. However, he asserts that if individuals whose language remains uncorrupted and whose eloquence (fasahat) is intact can be identified, their language would also be valid as evidence (ḥujja), just like that of the desert dwellers. Conversely, if linguistic flaws are found in the speech of those living in the desert, their language should not be considered either. Ibn Jinnī lamented the conditions of his time, complaining that scarcely any Bedouins with eloquent speech remained.⁵⁴ In making this assessment, he emphasises that fasahat is not confined to a particular time, place or tribe; rather, the correctness or incorrectness of language is a characteristic of individuals.

The concept of geographical limitation, which influenced the methodologies of the Basran and Kufan schools,⁵⁵ produced negative outcomes, particularly in the formulation of grammatical rules. From its inception, the tribal chauvinism present in the cities of Basra and Kufa gradually evolved into political rivalry and eventually into scholarly partisanship. Under the influence of this rivalry, the confinement of the standard language to a geographical framework led to the establishment of some rules in Arabic

⁵⁰ The designation Ulyā Hawāzin encompasses the Hawāzin tribe from the ‘Adnānī lineage and its branches, including the Sa’d b. Bakr, Jushaym b. Bakr, Naṣr b. Mu’āwiya, and Thaḳīf tribes. See Ibn Fāris, *al-Ṣāḥibī fī fiqh al-lugha*, 32.

⁵¹ The term Suflā Tamīm refers to the Tamīm tribe from the ‘Adnānī lineage and its seven branches. See al-Maqdisī, *al-Murshid al-wajiz*, 245.

⁵² Ibn Fāris, *al-Ṣāḥibī fī fiqh al-lugha*, 32.

⁵³ Abū Muḥammad ‘Abdullāh b. Muslim Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shi’r wa-al-shu’arā’*, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Ma’ārif, 1967), 1/63.

⁵⁴ Ibn Jinnī, *al-Khaṣā’iṣ*, 2/5.

⁵⁵ Ḥassān, *al-Uṣūl*, 38.

grammar based on incomplete inductive reasoning.⁵⁶ The Basrans' overconfidence in their own derived rules, and their tendency to reject linguistic phenomena that did not conform to these rules, contributed to the division of the tribes into those whose language was accepted and those whose language was not. Although the linguistic variations among the tribes were all eloquent (*fasih*), the Basrans sometimes resorted to over-interpretation (*ta'wil*) of forms that did not conform to their rules. When over-interpretation was not possible, they either labelled such phenomena as irregular but acceptable (*shādh maqbul*) or dismissed them as linguistic anomalies arising out of necessity. As a result, although there was no doubt about the Arab identity or the eloquence of certain individuals, their language was considered defective. This led to a significant amount of linguistic material being discarded. In contrast, the Kufans adopted a more inclusive approach, using all available linguistic material related to the Arabic language without making tribal distinctions. They valued every piece of linguistic information that reached them. However, the Basrans' selective approach ultimately prevailed over the Kufans. The principle of geographical limitation manifested itself by excluding certain tribes from linguistic consideration, further reinforcing the restrictive methodology of the Basrans.⁵⁷

According to Subhī al-Şālih, while Arabs spoke within their tribes and families with their distinctive dialects and accents, they used the superior language of Arabic (*fushā*) for literary works and interactions with other tribes. He notes that early linguists focused primarily on standard Arabic, the language of the Qur'ān. Although they acknowledged the eloquence (*fasahat*) of other vernaculars, they did not devote much time to studying them. The author asserts that during the period of the emergence of Islam, the language of no single tribe was more eloquent than that of another. By the time of the revelation of the Qur'ān, it is reasonable to conclude that a unified Arabic language had already been established, reflecting a linguistic consensus among various tribes.⁵⁸

Tammām Ḥassān argues that the vast majority of the linguistic material used in early studies came from tribes other than the Quraysh, and that there were relatively few poets and narrators from the Quraysh tribe itself. He concludes that the Quraysh style was not the sole source of Arabic grammar.⁵⁹ According to Ḥassān, those who claim that the Quraysh dialect held a dominant position, influenced the language of other tribes, and played a decisive role in defining proper Arabic usage have not provided sufficient evidence to substantiate their argument. On the contrary, the historical evidence for eloquent Arabic (*fasih*) dates back to figures such as Imru' al-Qays (d. circa 540).⁶⁰ From the Jāhiliyah to the Istishhād Period, the poets and literati who produced works used the public language, Standard Arabic, with minimal inclusion of their tribal dialects. According to Ḥassān's research, the linguistic differences among Arab tribes during the Jāhiliyah and early Islamic periods did not have the depth required to constitute distinct

⁵⁶ Najjār, *Ḍiyā' al-şālih*, 1/13.

⁵⁷ Najjār, *Ḍiyā' al-şālih*, 1/19.

⁵⁸ Şubhī al-Şālih, *Dirāsāt fī fiqh al-luğa*, 60.

⁵⁹ Ḥassān, *al-Uşûl*, 72.

⁶⁰ Ḥassān, *al-Uşûl*, 73.

dialects. These differences were limited to a small number of words and grammatical rules. Even within the linguistic material transmitted from the Quraysh, there are expressions that do not meet the criteria for fasahat and were not widely used. Moreover, the existence of accepted Qur'ānic readings (qirā'āt) that differ from the Quraysh vernacular shows that the Quraysh dialect cannot be regarded as the sole representative of eloquent Arabic.⁶¹

With the establishment of the Islamic society, tribalism (asabiyyah), which had already diminished to some extent, resurfaced during the Umayyad period. This revival manifested in language and literature, as tribes began to take pride in their poets and sought to promote them. This resurgence, which coincided with a period of accelerated linguistic studies, likely influenced the elevation of the Quraysh vernacular's status, a factor that should not be overlooked in understanding its prominence.

In Jāhiliyah poetry there is almost no trace of dialectal variation. This phenomenon has often been explained by suggesting that the poets used the Quraysh vernacular as a literary language, while using their tribal vernaculars in everyday speech. However, this explanation seems implausible given the educational, transport and communication conditions of the time. It would have been almost impossible for poets from different tribes scattered across the Arabian Peninsula to have a perfect command of the so-called Quraysh dialect, including its subtleties. This strongly supports the idea that the language described as the Quraysh dialect was in fact a common standard language used by all Arabs.

If the claim that the poetic language of the Jāhiliyah period was different from the language of the poet's own tribe is accepted as true, it would raise the question of whether the poet's tribe could understand his work. At the very least, some members of the tribe would struggle to understand their poet's language, but there is no evidence to support such a scenario. The eloquence of poets' language is not due to their use of a language other than their tribal dialect but rather reflects the inherent nature of poetry as a literary form. Another reason for the linguistic and stylistic superiority of poets is their exceptional skill in using language. Poets' mastery of expression, their ability to craft words and sentences with unparalleled precision, distinguishes them from ordinary speakers. Their linguistic superiority is not due to the fact that they use a language different from that of their society, but rather to their extraordinary talent for using the common language in an extraordinary way.

Methodologically, the Quraysh tribe was placed at the centre because of the principle of geographical limitation, but this rule also contradicted other established principles. Specifically, it was a procedural requirement that individuals and tribes providing linguistic material should not be accustomed to urban culture or in contact with other nations and their cultures. Given these criteria, the Quraysh, who were among the most trading and urbanised Arab tribes, had significant interactions with other cultures. Linguists adhered to this rule of procedure, and their preference was generally not to collect linguistic material from the Quraysh. During the 2nd/8th centuries, when linguistic compilation activities were at their most intense, Basran and Kufan linguists

⁶¹ Ḥassān, *al-Uṣūl*, 72.

relied primarily on sources from geographical regions such as the Najd, the Hejaz deserts and Iraq. These areas were predominantly inhabited by tribes such as the Tay, Asad, Qays, Hudhayl and Tamīm, who were not affiliated with the Quraysh.⁶² Al-Rāfi'ī also confirms that no significant linguistic compilation was conducted among the Quraysh.⁶³ This creates a difficult paradox: while the Quraysh vernacular was considered the most eloquent (fasih), little to no substantial linguistic material was collected from them. Furthermore, as a result of this rule, no linguistic material was collected from the Ghassānids or Lakhmids. However, during the Jāhiliyah period, many poets who lived in the courts of the Ghassānids and Lakhmids were never doubted for their eloquence (fasahat).

Conclusion

During the formative period of Arabic grammar studies, all levels of linguistic variation were referred to as *luğa*. In subsequent works, this term came to be understood as “dialect,” and it became customary to describe linguistic variations among tribes as dialects, as seen in the example of the “Quraysh dialect.” However, during the periods of compilation and codification, the term *luğa* primarily referred to differences in vernacular, accents, or pronunciation styles. It is comprehensible that linguistic variations were not yet distinguished by specific terminology during a period when linguistic methodology and terminology were not yet fully systematised. When the term *luğa* in classical linguistic literature is re-evaluated in light of modern linguistic studies, it does not correspond to the concept of “dialect.” Instead, *luğa* aligns more closely with vernaculars or accents, which are subsets of a language. The absence of precise terminology to distinguish between dialect, vernacular, and accent differences remains unresolved in studies on the linguistic landscape of Arabic. In this study, it is proposed that the term *luğa* (لغة) be used to refer to the dialects of Arabic, while the term *lakna* (لكنة) be employed to describe linguistic differences at the level of vernaculars and accents. As stated in the introduction, from the Jāhiliyah period to the era of Islam’s expansion through conquests, the linguistic variations among Arab tribes did not have the depth required to constitute dialects. However, when considering significant literary works of the time, such as poetry and oratory, these linguistic differences disappear, as poets and orators, regardless of their tribal affiliations, produced their works in Standard Arabic. Therefore, it is more consistent with linguistic evidence to classify these differences as vernaculars and to refer to them as *laknat Quraysh* (لكنة قریش) (Quraysh vernacular) and *laknat Tamīm* (لكنة تمیم) (Tamīm vernacular), rather than as *luğat Quraysh* (لغة قریش) (Quraysh dialect) or *luğat Tamīm* (لغة تمیم) (Tamīm dialect).

This study has determined that the Arabic language, following its separation from its Semitic parent body and subsequent transition through the dialectal phase to establish itself as an independent language, experienced two distinct dialectal processes in its historical trajectory. The first of these processes is characterised by a protracted period

⁶² Ḥassān, *al-Uṣūl*, 72.

⁶³ Al-Rāfi'ī, *Tārikh ādāb al-‘Arab*, 1/162.

during which Arabic underwent a bifurcation into two major dialects: Northern and Southern Arabic. With the disappearance of the Southern dialect from historical prominence, Northern Arabic emerged as a superior language prior to the Qur'ānic revelation. By the 7th century, linguistic variations among Arabic speakers were at the level of vernaculars or accents. Following the advent of Islam, Arabic underwent a second dialectal phase. The traces of this phase can be found in the spread of Islam through conquests and its expansion into diverse regions. Standard Arabic, as the public language, spread across various geographies in the post-Islamic period. The deepening of accentual and vernacular differences, leading to gradual separations from the linguistic core, was precipitated by factors such as geographical and cultural diversification. This process of diversification and divergence ultimately led to the emergence of numerous dialects, some of which are considered to be superior forms of Arabic. Contemporary studies in the field of Arabic dialectology substantiate this historical reality. In the contemporary era, Arabic is most frequently categorised into five primary dialects: Egyptian, Levantine, Iraqi, Maghrebi, and Gulf. However, given the existence of a certain degree of scientific, educational and cultural unity among countries where Arabic is an official language, it can be posited that these five dialects should be regarded as vernaculars, rather than dialects in their own right.

In the pre-Islamic era, linguistic unity was achieved among the Arabs, and the Northern dialect transcended the dialectal phase to become a shared supra-dialectal language. This language was not exclusive to the Quraysh or any other tribe but served as the common language of all Arab tribes. It was in this language that the Qur'ān was revealed, and it was also the language spoken by the Prophet Muhammad. This common language was authenticated through revelation and has endured to the present day under the names Standard Arabic, Fushā Arabic, or Qur'ānic Arabic. This fact, however, does not negate the existence of linguistic variations among different tribes. In the context of everyday speech, it is to be expected that different modes of expression exist among tribes, clans, and even families. Variations in pronunciation, the lengthening or shortening of phonemes, emphatic articulation, and the hardening or softening of sounds are linguistic phenomena known to differ even at the family level, the smallest social unit. This phenomenon persisted in pre-Islamic Arab society.

It can be said that the Quraysh vernacular did not play a special role in the construction of Arabic grammar. The claim of its alleged superiority can be traced back to a number of factors. These include the use of the Quraysh vernacular as the basis for the Qur'ān's script, the advantageous position of the Quraysh tribe compared to others, the affiliation of the Prophet Muhammad with the Quraysh, as well as geographical location, political influence, and commercial privileges. However, these factors are unrelated to the internal dynamics of the language. Instead, it is argued that non-linguistic factors played a more significant role in the perception of the Quraysh vernacular as privileged. Moreover, the attribution of theological transcendence to the Quraysh vernacular –or, indeed, to any other mode of speech– is incompatible with the natural evolution of language. The notion of transcendence specifically applied to the Quraysh vernacular has also been extended to Arabic in general, with some scholars even claiming a divine aspect to the language. The concept of aṣāletü'l-lughā (Authenticity of

the Language) has been identified as a contributing factor to the association of Arabic and the Quraysh vernacular with divinity, as discussed in the relevant section.

There is a need to re-examine the epistemological foundations of the classical Arabic grammatical system and to construct a linguistic structure capable of meeting the linguistic needs of the present age. This is only possible through a paradigm shift. In this context, the linguistic system of classical Arabic should be re-evaluated in light of the findings of modern linguistics -a contemporary discipline- and a new classification model should be developed that aligns with the metamodern era, which moves beyond postmodernism. In accordance with this new classification model, new reference sources and educational frameworks must also be developed.

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