



Perceptions of Arabic Language Teaching Students Regarding Modern Standard Arabic and Arabic Dialects: A Metaphor Analysis*

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Article Information	ABSTRACT
Received: 23.05.2025	This study provides a comprehensive evaluation of metaphor analysis to understand the perspectives of students in Arabic Language Education regarding Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Arabic dialects. The study included 49 students enrolled in the Arabic language instruction program at Adiyaman University, employing the phenomenological method, a qualitative research strategy. Participants were directed to construct metaphors that depict MSA and Arabic dialects, and the justification for these metaphors was meticulously analyzed. The content analysis revealed that students perceived MSA as pure, orderly, universal, and challenging, while they linked Arabic dialects with diversity, complexity, socio-cultural connections, and profound meaning. The metaphors produced for MSA, such as "clean water," "mathematics," and "book," indicate that students perceive MSA as a structured, methodical, and academic language. In contrast, dialects were defined by metaphors such as "tree branches," "mosaic," and "soup," emphasizing their organic, multidimensional, and diverse nature. These metaphorical representations indicate that students regard MSA more formal but less practical for everyday use, while dialects are perceived as intimately connected to local and cultural settings, despite their lack of precise norms and greater learning challenges. The findings indicate that students of Arabic Language Education regard MSA as a more formal, structured, and universal means of communication; nonetheless, they encounter difficulties in understanding it. Conversely, although dialects are perceived as more adaptable, contextually pertinent, and practical for daily communication, their absence of established regulations and regional discrepancies renders them a tough domain for students to master. This study highlights the necessity for diverse teaching methods in the instruction of both MSA and Arabic dialects in the realm of Arabic Language Education. Educators are recommended to include students' ideas about these two language varieties into instructional activities to develop a more balanced and comprehensive educational framework.
Accepted: 06.10.2025	
Online First: 29.10.2025	
Published: 31.10.2025	
Keywords: Metaphor, metaphor analysis, modern standard Arabic, Arabic dialects	
doi: 10.16986/hunefd.1705133	Article Type: Research Article

Citation Information: Emekli, İ., & Yeşilyurt, A. (2025). Perceptions of Arabic language teaching students regarding modern standard Arabic and Arabic dialects: A metaphor analysis. *Hacettepe University Journal of Education*, 40(4), 295-305. <https://doi.org/10.16986/hunefd.1705133>

1. INTRODUCTION

Arabic is a rich language with various dialects spoken by millions of people all around the world. The difference between Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Arabic dialects emerges as an important research topic in terms of language education and communication. While MSA is widely used in official correspondence, education, and the media, dialects are prominent in everyday speech and local communication. This situation causes Arabic Language Education students to develop various perceptions and attitudes in the context of language learning and teaching. Within this context, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the official language across Arab countries and one of the six official languages of the United Nations. The majority of printed materials such as books, newspapers, magazines, official documents, and children's books published in Arab countries are written in MSA.

Dialects, on the other hand, refer to differences in the language spoken by individuals within the same linguistic community in various countries and regions (Aksan, 1987). Çıkar and Timurtaş (2009) stated that individuals living in different regions within the same culture develop different linguistic characteristics, especially in terms of the sound system, depending on their unique

* Ethical permission was approved by the ethics committee of Adiyaman University in Adiyaman, Türkiye and the ethical permission date and number is 23.12.2024-166.

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conditions, and that these different uses, which are subject to the official language, are called dialects used in daily communication.

Metaphor enables us to comprehend an object or phenomenon by associating it with concepts from a different semantic field; thus, it offers new perspectives and emphasises previously unnoticed features (Taylor, 1984). Therefore, it can be said that metaphors facilitate the understanding of complex objects, ideas, or phenomena. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) define metaphor as not only a linguistic expression but also an integral part of cognitive processes and a basic cognitive tool for human understanding. According to Ekici (2016), metaphors are commonly used in the learning process to explain concepts by associating them with unrelated concepts that hold personal significance. This facilitates new learning by allowing individuals to associate newly acquired concepts with those constructed in their minds through personal experiences. Merriam-Webster (2011) defines metaphor as the act of transforming a word, expression, or concept into a different but similar object or action. Moreover, it can be stated that metaphors are a significant outcome of individuals' creativity, observations, experiences, knowledge and cultural values (Ekici, 2016).

When relevant literature is reviewed, it becomes evident that studies on metaphors within the scope of MSA and/or Arabic dialects are extremely limited. Research on MSA focuses on its declining use in comparison to various dialects (Muhammed, 2016; Uysal, 2016). Research on Arabic dialects covers a range of areas, including the linguistic analysis of a dialect, identification of its core features, analysis of its influence on MSA, investigation of Arabic teachers' and learners' attitudes toward dialects, and the design of materials for teaching dialects (Ağbaht & Suçin, 2024; Alan & Güler, 2007; Suçin, 2016; Şayır, 2023; Timurtaş & Çıkar, 2012).

This study aims to examine the perceptions of Arabic Language Education students regarding MSA and Arabic dialects through the method of metaphor analysis. Metaphors are regarded as powerful tools for understanding individuals' mental models and perceptions. Therefore, students' metaphorical expressions regarding these two forms of the language will provide valuable insights into their thoughts on language learning process and language policies.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

The study was conducted using a phenomenological design, which is a qualitative research approach. This approach provides a basis for examining familiar phenomena whose meanings are not fully understood. The study is based on the investigation of phenomena that we are aware of but do not fully comprehend (Annells, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). Phenomenological studies reveal the perspectives, judgments, experiences, and assumptions of individuals directly involved in this situation. The aim is to understand the meaning behind individuals' experiences and to uncover their essential nature (Ceylan Çapar & Ceylan, 2022; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017). Metaphor forms were used to understand students' perceptions of "Modern Standard Arabic" and "Arabic dialects". The research was conducted with students enrolled in the Arabic language teaching program at the Faculty of Education in Adıyaman University. The data were analysed using the content analysis method.

2.2. Study Group

The study was conducted during the spring semester of the 2024-2025 academic year with 54 students enrolled in the Arabic Language Teaching program at the Faculty of Education in Adıyaman University. The study group consisted of students from the second, third, and the fourth years of the program. The study group was determined using criterion sampling, which is one of the purposive sampling methods. The fundamental concept of this sampling method is the selection of individuals who meet a predetermined set of criteria. The criteria may be determined by the researcher (Coyne, 1997; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). In this context, it was preferred to select students from the second, third, and fourth years to ensure they had a deeper understanding of MSA and Arabic dialects. Based on these criteria, a total of 54 students were included in the study; 11 from the second year, 17 from the third year, and 26 from the fourth year. The data of five students who did not complete the forms correctly were excluded from the analysis. Thus, the analyses were conducted based on the data of 49 students.

2.3. Data Collection Instrument

The research data were collected through a metaphor form consisting of semi-structured questions prepared by the researcher. Semi-structured questions are a commonly preferred data collection method in metaphor research (Döş, 2010; Linn, Sherman & Gill, 2007).

Metaphors are one of the tools that educators can use to achieve various goals in all areas of education (Inbar, 1996; Arslan & Bayrakçı, 2006; Parks, 2010; Saban, 2008). Therefore, it is recommended that metaphor studies be used in research to reveal students' comprehension and perceptions in the educational process (Botha, 2009). Indeed, metaphor studies are considered a valuable qualitative data collection method for in-depth analysis of phenomena or events (Güneş & Fırat, 2016). The metaphor form applied to the students includes guidelines that covert basic explanations. In research, when metaphors are used as a data

collection technique, it is important to establish a clear connection between the metaphor's topic and source by using terms like "like/as". The conjunction "because" is used to reveal the reason behind the metaphor (Ekici, 2016). One of the sentences students were asked to compete was: "Modern Standard Arabic is like _____ because _____," while others was: "Arabic dialects are like _____ because _____". Each participant was asked to compare the given concepts to something else and provide a rationale for their comparison.

2.4. Data Collection Process

In the context of the research, the data collection process was conducted in accordance with a qualitative research design. The data were collected from students enrolled in the Arabic Language Teaching program at the Faculty of Education in Adiyaman University. A metaphor form was used in the study to understand the participants' perceptions of MSA and Arabic dialects. These forms consist of semi-structured questions aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the students' comprehension and perceptions. The sentences in the metaphor forms allowed students to express and justify their comparisons of specific concepts.

The first step of the data collection was determining the appropriate study group. A criterion sampling method, one of the purposive sampling techniques, was used, and a total of 54 students from the second, third, and fourth years were selected. However, five students who did not complete the form properly were excluded from the analysis, and thus the data of 49 participants were used in the analyses. The data collection process was carried out after obtaining permission from the responsible faculty members before the class session began. The use of terms such as "like/as" and "because" in the instructions and metaphor forms enabled participants to structure their comparisons logically.

2.5. Data Analysis

The data collected for the research were analysed using the content analysis method. Content analysis is considered one of the most fundamental and widely used analysis techniques in the social sciences (Litchman, 2010; Stemler, 2001; Weber, 1990; Wimmer & Dominick, 2000). According to Büyüközyurt et al. (2016), content analysis involves the systematic and objective extraction of certain characteristics of a given message based on predetermined principles. The core of this approach consists of the stages of category formation, classification and labelling of data and transforming them into a more theoretical form (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Leblebici & Kılıç, 2004; Merriam, 2008).

Stage 1: Identification, Elimination and Coding of Metaphors

In this stage, the metaphorical expressions produced by the participants regarding MSA and Arabic dialects were systematically collected and organized in alphabetical order. Before being included in the analysis process, the justifications provided by the participants for their metaphorical expressions were examined. Metaphors that lacked a logical basis or were not supported by a justification were excluded from the analysis, as they were considered incomplete in terms of semantic coherence.

After completing the data cleaning process, a frequency analysis was conducted based on the valid metaphors to identify which metaphors were most commonly produced. In this way, the conceptual frameworks emphasised by the participants were determined. In this study, the analyses were carried out on a total of 49 metaphor for MSA and 49 metaphors for Arabic dialects that met the validity criteria.

Stage 2: Development of Categories

In this stage, the metaphors produced by the participants were analysed using the content analysis method, and those with similar themes were grouped together under specific categories. The 49 metaphors related to MSA were grouped based on conceptual similarities, and highly representative examples from each group were directly quoted and presented in tables. The same process was applied to the 49 metaphors concerning Arabic dialects. Similar metaphors were classified within the defined categories, and the metaphorical expressions that best represented each category were elaborated in tables.

In this stage, the grouping process was carried out not only based on lexical similarities, but also by considering the conceptual framework, semantic domain, and cognitive associations presented by the metaphors. In this way, a more comprehensive evaluation was made regarding how the metaphors reflect the structural features of the language and the perceptions of its users.

Stage 3: Classification of Core Metaphors within a Conceptual Framework

In the second stage, a detailed analysis process was carried out in order to divide the groups into broader conceptual categories, while Arabic dialect metaphors are divided into four basic conceptual categories.

This process of analysis aims to develop a deeper understanding of how MSA and Arabic dialects are conceptualised, revealing how language shapes the cultural and cognitive world of individuals beyond just being a means of communication.

2.6. Reliability and Validity

In order to determine the reliability and validity of qualitative research, field experts should conduct an examination. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2018) drew attention to the importance of including direct quotes from individuals to ensure validity. In this direction, the metaphors of the study were examined and evaluated through interviews with field experts.

In the reliability calculation process, Miles and Huberman's reliability formula was used. According to this formula, a consensus of at least 80% among coders is expected (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). To calculate the reliability coefficient, the number of consensus was divided by the sum of consensus and disagreement and multiplied by 100: $[\text{Consensus} / (\text{Consensus} + \text{Disagreement}) \times 100]$. In this process, after consulting experts, the number of metaphors with consensus and disagreement was calculated. The reliability coefficient was found to be 98.18% $[90 / (90 + 2) \times 100 = 98.18\%]$.

The study revealed that the students developed a total of 98 metaphors, 49 for MSA and 49 for Arabic dialects. Among these metaphors, there was a disagreement about whether the metaphor "Istanbul Gentleman" should be written as a separate metaphor code or it should be included in "Istanbul Turkish", but experts agreed that this metaphor should be written as a separate code. In addition, as a result of the disagreement about whether the metaphor "River" should be included in the metaphor of "Water", it was decided to consider this metaphor as a separate metaphor. Apart from these two metaphors, a consensus was reached on the remaining 96 metaphors.

3. FINDINGS

In this section, based on the analysis of the data obtained within the scope of the research, the findings reflecting the students' perceptions of MSA Arabic and Arabic dialects are presented. The themes and categories that emerged as a result of metaphor analysis were examined in detail and students' language perceptions were systematically evaluated.

During the study, the students who participated in the research produced a total of 98 different metaphors, 49 for MSA and 49 for Arabic dialects. The findings of the metaphors developed by the students for each idea were reported separately.

3.1. Findings Related to MSA

The metaphors and categories that students produce to describe the idea of "Modern Standard Arabic" are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Modern standard Arabic

Category	Metaphor	F	Student code
Purity	Water	7	S 3, S 5, S 17, S 26, S 31, S 37, S 40
	River	1	S 43
Difficulty	Sea	3	S 27, S 34, S 35
	Mathematics	2	S 7, S 19
	Ashura	2	S 9, S 47
	Thorny Rose	1	S 39
	A Grain of Sand in the Sea	1	S 29
	Chinese	1	S 6
Universality	Tree	2	S 13, S 44
	River	1	S 4
	Ocean	1	S 14
	Sun	1	S 23
	Threshing floor	1	S 22
	Plain chocolate	1	S 36
	Honey	1	S 41
Order	Teacher	2	S 46, S 49
	Straight road	1	S 8
	Main dish	1	S 10
	Book	1	S 24
	Government	1	S 30
	Building column	1	S 21
	The key piece of the puzzle	1	S 1
	Literature	1	S 11
	Family	1	S 15
	Qur'an	1	S 28
	A clean and tidy house	1	S 12
	Capital	1	S 25

Social and Cultural Structure	Istanbul Turkish	4	S 2, S 18, S 32, S 38
	Istanbul Gentleman	1	S 20
	Flag	1	S 16
Richness	Treasure	1	S 42
	Pomegranate	1	S 45
	Tulip	1	S 48
	The salt in the food	1	S 33
Total		49	

Table 1 provides an example of the process of categorising students' metaphors. It shows the concept provided in the study, the metaphor created for the concept, the category it belongs to, and the justification sentence. The categorisation process involves analysing the definitions of the written metaphors and the justifications provided by the students. Additionally, the table also shows the metaphors used by students to define the concept of "Modern Standard Arabic" along with their frequency values. It was understood that the students created a total of 49 metaphors. Moreover, the students produced a total of 33 different metaphors related to the concept of "Modern Standard Arabic".

Students were asked to develop metaphors to define MSA and explain these metaphors along with their justifications. The data were analysed using content analysis.

The findings obtained from the analysis of the metaphors are presented below:

Metaphor Categories and Examples

1. Purity

River: It is pure and clear.

Water: It has its own unique flavour and benefits, it is in the language of the Qur'an, and it is used as the official language in 25 Arab countries. (S 3)

- It is clear and straightforward; it gives you exactly what you seek. (S 26)
- It is pure and simple. (S 17)
- Classical Arabic is exactly what you see on the surface, the meanings of words do not change as you go deeper. Just like water, the surface and the depths are the same. Classical Arabic is just like that. (S 31)

2. Difficulty

Chinese: Writing it, reading it, and translating it are each a separate headache :) (S 6)

Mathematics: For me, Arabic is like a set of problems that need to be solved. It involves many steps, takes time, but it is enjoyable. (S 7)

Sea: It is so vast that once you enter it, you can never get out. (S 27)

Thorny Rose: It has a beautiful scent and appearance, but it is hard to touch. Similarly, Modern Standard Arabic looks beautiful from the outside, but when you try to learn it, you face many difficulties. (S 39)

3. Universality

River: It is the language of the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and prayer. (S 4)

Tree: Arabic is emerging as an increasingly widespread language across the world, but each region and area has its own way of speaking it. Amidst this rich variety, it is essential to find the most understandable form of speech and that role belongs to MSA. It is necessary for people to understand each other at a single point and for the world to learn Arabic more easily. :) (S 13)

Ocean: It has no bounds or shores. :) (S 14)

Sun: Unlike the colloquial Arabic, it is clear, explicit, and understandable, like the sun, bright and illuminating. (S 23)

4. Order

Straight road: When used according to its rules, the meaning becomes clear. (S 8)

Main Dish: Everything is organised and delicious, it has its rules. (S 10)

Book: It requires proper spelling. (S 24)

Government: It contains a serious and equally systematic structure. (S 30)

The column of a building: It is the backbone of Arabic, its essential element. (S 21)

The most defining and complementary piece of a puzzle: It is a common ground where dialects meet. (S 1)

Literature: I think Standard Arabic is clearer and more organized compared to dialects. (S 11)

Teacher: It is clear and understandable, teachers train people from all professions. From the politician in a country to the lowest-level government employee, every type of profession is shaped by the teacher, and everyone trusts them. With infinite trust and comfort, they surrender themselves to the teacher and feed from them. (S 46)

5. Social and Cultural Structure

Istanbul Turkish: It is the type that everyone can understand but cannot pronounce. (S 18)

Istanbul Gentleman: His grammar is very heavy, his speech is fluent, and in every aspect, he requires attention, but he looks incredibly beautiful to the eye. (S 20)

Family: It is the common point where all siblings come together, even if they have different temperaments and characters. (S 15)

Flag: Each country has its own flag, but it is unique to its nation. (S 16)

6. Richness

Treasure: All kinds of wealth are present and dazzling. (S 42)

Pomegranate: When you look at a word from the outside, only one thing is visible, but in eloquent Arabic, it has many meanings. (S 45)

Tulip: Even though it has a root, the thing we would call a branch is just one, and it is the tulip itself. (S 48)

The salt in the food: Without it, speech is incomprehensible. (S 33)

The metaphors derived from the above data reveal students' various perceptions and understandings of MSA. For instance, metaphors such as "Pure water" and "Water" emphasise the cleanliness and purity characteristics of MSA, while metaphors like "Chinese" and "Mathematics" express the complexity and difficulty of the language. Metaphors related to universality reflect the cultural and social ties of MSA, while those related to order and structure highlight the systematic and rule-based nature of language. Additionally, some participants have used the "Qur'an" as a metaphor or referred to it in their explanations of metaphors, which also reflects the perception of MSA as having a religious and sacred quality. Therefore, it is possible to say that students perceive MSA not only as a communicative tool but also as a religious heritage.

3.2. Findings on the Concept of Arabic Dialects

The metaphors and categories produced by students to define the concept of "Arabic Dialects" are presented in Table 2

Table 2.

Arabic dialects

Category	Metaphor	F	Student code
Diversity	Branches of the tree	8	S 4, S 26, S 35, S 37, S 43, S 44, S 46, S 49
	Salad	3	S 8, S 9, S 39
	Soup	3	S 3, S 10, S 11
	Ashura	3	S 5, S 22, S 34
	Garden	3	S 6, S 13, S 31
	Compote	2	S 21, S 15
	Puzzle	1	S 1
	Pomegranate	1	S 18
	Sea	1	S 28
	Menemen	1	S 36
	Pizza	1	S 38
	Clouds	1	S 40
	Limbs that make up the body	1	S 42
	Aquarium	1	S 47
	Mosaic	1	S 14
	Types of food	1	S 17
	Colour tone	1	S 20
	All five fingers	1	S 19
Sophistication	Maze	4	S 7, S 25, S 33, S 48
	Kumpir	1	S 41
	A messy house	1	S 12
	Blend	1	S 23
Social and Cultural Structure	Siblings	1	S 16
	Public	1	S 29
	Life	1	S 30
	My mother's knitting	1	S 4
Depth of Meaning	Chocolate	1	S 24
	Snowflakes	1	S 32
	Greeting	1	S 27
	Human structure	1	S 2
Total		49	

Table 2 presents in detail the metaphors developed by students regarding the concept of "Arabic Dialects" and the frequency values of these metaphors. According to the data, a total of 49 metaphors were produced, with 30 different types identified among them. This indicates that students have developed a diverse and unique perspective in understanding the concept of

“Arabic Dialects”. The variety of the metaphors reflects the students’ perceptions of Arabic dialects and their ways of comprehending the cultural, regional, and linguistic dynamics of these dialects.

Below, the findings obtained from the analysis of metaphors are detailed, providing insights into the depth and breadth of students’ perceptions of dialects. These finding also include students’ personal, cultural, and linguistic perspectives on the concept of “Arabic Dialects”.

3.3. Metaphor Categories and Examples

1. Diversity

Puzzle: Similar to how different pieces come together to form a whole. Each piece is a dialect; the whole is Standard Arabic. (S 1)

Soup: A beautiful whole is created by mixing various ingredients. (S 3)

Ashura: A native language differs in terms of sound, structure, and word order due to historical, regional, and political reasons. (S5)

A large garden: It contains many dialects. (S 6)

Mosaic: It takes on different colours depending on the geography. (S 14)

Salad: There are many different and mixed Arabic dialects. (S 8)

2. Sophistication

Maze: It has many complex rooms, and it may take a while to find your way. (S 7)

Menemen (A Turkish dish with eggs and vegetables): It contains a lot of things. (S 36)

Kumpir (Baked potato with fillings inside): Each tribe and community has created its own dialect over time due to various factors. The number of dialects is as mixed and diverse as kumpir. :) (S 41)

A messy house: When it comes to Arabic dialects, the lifestyles of Arabs come to my mind. (S 12)

3. Social and Cultural Structure

Siblings: Although they have the same parents, each one has different temperaments, physical characteristics, and personalities. (S 16)

Public: Like the people, it contains a piece of different cultures, traditions, and histories in each. (S 29)

Life: As Arabic dialects encompass the languages used by all tribes, and the language of each tribe is different from the others, just as in life, there are different cultures among people, there are also cultural variations in dialects. (S 30)

4. Depth of Meaning

Chocolate: It has many varieties, and although it may seem like it has no concrete benefit to social life, it releases happiness hormones for those who know it, just like learning triggers this hormone. (S 24)

Aquarium: Each Arabic dialect can be said to represent a different fish in the variety of an aquarium. (S 47)

Snowflakes: They are similar to each other, but they are not the same. (S 32)

Greeting: “Selam” is a greeting commonly used in Arabic dialects. This word may have various variations in different Arabic dialects. For example, in Egyptian Arabic, it is “ahilan”, and in Levantine Arabic, it is “merhaba”. These dialects differences can reflect regional speaking styles and may cause some variations in communication among Arabic-speaking communities. (S 27)

The metaphors derived from the above data reveal the diversity and depth of students’ perceptions of Arabic dialects. For example, metaphors such as “Soup” and “Maze” highlight the complex and multifaced nature of Arabic dialects, emphasising that these dialects have a structure that poses challenges in understanding and learning them. On the other hand, metaphors like “Branches of a tree” and “Rose garden” imply that dialects go through a natural formation process and branch out while preserving their roots. These types of metaphors indicate that students’ perceptions of the structural and aesthetic aspects of Arabic dialects emphasise a sense of naturalness and diversity.

Additionally, the social and cultural metaphors used for Arabic dialects reflect the cultural richness and social significance of Arab societies. Through these metaphors, it can be understood that students grasp the importance and diversity that dialects carry in cultural contexts. The diverse structure of Arabic dialects across a wide geographical area and their social meanings are among the critical factors that need to be considered in the language learning process. As a result, the complexity and diversity of Arabic dialects should be evaluated as an important parameter in students’ language learning processes.

3.4. Student Opinions Regarding the Findings

In the study conducted, semi-structured interviews were held with 49 students to learn their perceptions of MSA and Arabic dialects. Later, a second interview was conducted with 10 students to analyse these data, and their comments were requested regarding why they might hold such views. Below the prominent options and findings based on these students’ evaluations are summarised.

According to students' evaluations, MSA is perceived as a difficult language to learn due to its intense grammar rules and complex grammatical structure. The highly systematic and rule-based nature of the language makes it a structure that operates within logic and order, but these rigid rules create a challenging learning process for students. MSA is described as a language that is rarely used in daily life and is preferred more in written texts and formal settings. Students view MSA not only as a means of communication but also as a carrier of cultural and religious heritage. As the language is based on Qur'anic Arabic and is the language of the Qur'an, MSA is attributed with sacred value. Therefore, the purity and aesthetics of the language are emphasised, and learning the language involves not only grammar rules but also cultural and religious dimensions.

Some students compare MSA to a vast sea without boundaries or an ocean that is difficult to explore. Each newly learned word or grammatical structure reveals once again how deep and expansive the language is. This reflects the enchanting nature of the language while also highlighting the difficulty of the learning process. The aesthetic and poetic aspects of the language indicates that it carries artistic and cultural value beyond being merely a means of communication. The strict rules and complex structure of the language lead some students to compare MSA to challenging and intricate fields such as Chinese or mathematics. However, this difficulty also reveals the logical and orderly nature of the language. Students state that MSA functions as a coherent system governed by order and structure, and is therefore learnable. The universality and cultural connections of the language make it significant not only in the Arab world but also globally.

According to students' evaluations, Arabic dialects are perceived as natural, aesthetic, and dynamic structures. The absence of a specific set of rules, curriculum, or dictionary for the dialects makes them difficult to learn and understand. The fact that each region, even each city, has its own unique dialect leads to a multifaced and complex puzzle. Dialects represent the living and ever-evolving aspect of language. Students are aware of the social and cultural significance of dialects and describe them as a festival or a vast universe reflecting the region's cultural richness, social life, and emotions. Each dialect embodies the character, experiences, and cultural heritage of the society to which it belongs.

The difficulty in learning dialects stems from the fact that they have emerged through an aesthetic and natural formation process. This diversity, which arises as a result of the natural evolution of language, enhances its richness and beauty. However, the lack of a standardised curriculum or resources makes learning and understanding dialects more challenging. Students believe that dialects are indispensable in practice due to their frequent use in daily life and their crucial role in communication. The complex and multifaceted nature of dialects leads students to view them as both fascinating and intellectually stimulating challenges. As reflections of regional differences and cultural diversity, dialects address the aesthetic and natural aspect of language in a balanced manner. Students point out that dialects are more than just tools of communication. They are essential elements that shape cultural identity and strengthen social bonds.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

4.1. Comparative Analysis of Findings on MSA and Arabic Dialects

In this study, participants described MSA using metaphors such as "pure water", "clear water", and simply "water", indicating cleanliness and purity. These metaphors accentuate that MSA is associated with cleanliness, purity, order, universality, and difficulty. Within this context, MSA is perceived as a formal, rule-governed, and universal language; however, it is also emphasised that it is difficult to learn. In contrast, in Yeşilyurt's (2017) study, MSA is highlighted for its unifying role and is portrayed as a clear language that brings the Arab world together. It is described as a guiding and beautiful language that enables mutual understanding among Arabs. Stadlbauer (2010), on the other hand, notes that in the Egyptian context, MSA and Classical Arabic are associated with social status and symbolic value. Therefore, the participants' association of MSA with elements of order reflects this symbolic perception as well.

Additionally, in this study, the fact that some participants associated MSA with the "Qur'an" reveals that they view it not only as a means of communication but also as a religious heritage. This indicates that MSA is perceived as a language bearing sacred and spiritual value. This perception parallels the view expressed in the studies of Stadlbauer (2010), Yeşilyurt (2017), and Haeri (2000), which state that MSA is associated with religious heritage and that both MSA and Classical Arabic are considered cultural and spiritual symbols linked to Arab nationalism.

For dialects, in this study, metaphors such as "puzzle", "soup", and "ashura" were used, expressing complexity and diversity. These metaphors reflect the more diverse, flexible, and complex structure of dialects. In Yeşilyurt's (2017) study, however, the depiction of dialects with dynamic elements such as "high-speed train" and "smartphone" does not quite align with this perception of diversity. In el-Hakami's (2023) study, attitudes toward Saudi dialects are seen to be associated with regional and social contexts. This is consistent with the finding from this study that dialects are perceived as a structure reflecting social and cultural connections.

Additionally, this study highlights that Arabic dialects are defined by complexity, diversity, naturalness, and social-cultural connections. Therefore, it is stated that Arabic dialects have a functional structure in daily life and reflect regional differences. In Yeşilyurt's (2017) study, however, it is emphasised that Arabic dialects contribute to speed and diversity. Dialects are seen

as a value that accelerates communication and adds richness and beauty to the language, although it is also stated that they may partially hinder communication.

In this study, metaphors such as “Chinese”, “mathematics”, and “sea” were used to express the complexity of MSA. This shows that students perceive learning and using MSA as a difficult process. However, in the studies of Yeşilyurt (2017) and el-Hakami (2023), MSA is evaluated as a regular language, with no indication of difficulty found. In Haeri’s (2000) study, while the complex structure of Classical Arabic and MSA and their reflection of traditional teachings are highlighted, it is stated that dialects are more easily accessible in daily communication. In this context, it is understood that dialects are perceived as less formal and more flexible; this aligns with the expression of their complexity through metaphors such as “maze” or “a messy house”, as well as their flexible structures in social interaction in this study.

The unifying role of MSA in wide geographical and cultural contexts is reflected in this study through metaphors such as “river”, “ocean”, and “sun”. This indicates that MSA is perceived as a language that is widely used in different cultures and facilitates cultural integration. In the studies of Stadlbauer (2010) and el-Hakami (2023), however, it is stressed that MSA has a pan-Arab unifying power and is seen as a modern language used in international context. On the other hand, the use of metaphors such as “branches of a tree” or “rose garden” to express the local and regional diversities of dialects reveals that dialects are perceived as a structure reflecting local identity and social connections. Furthermore, the perception of Arabic dialects as a complex structure in this study, compared with the view in Yeşilyurt’s (2017) study that Arabic dialects are seen as a factor that partially hinders communication, also suggests that native Turkish speakers may hold a negative perspective toward Arabic dialects.

In conclusion, the perceptions of MSA and dialects in this study show a significant difference. While MSA is perceived as a more formal, rule-governed, and structured language, dialects stand out as more dynamic and flexible communication tools that represent social and cultural diversity. A comparison with the studies of el-Hakami (2023), Haeri (2000), Stadlbauer (2010), and Yeşilyurt (2017) reveals the different functions of MSA and dialects in both educational and social contexts. It is concluded that both forms of the language are indispensable in different contexts and enrich language learning with both their spiritual and social dimensions. Additionally, based on the data obtained from Suçin’s study, both students and faculty members have indicated that learning Arabic dialects, provided that priority is given to MSA, would be beneficial.

4.2. Limitations and Suggestions

These results suggest that different approaches should be adopted in teaching MSA and Arabic dialects within the scope of Arabic Language Education. The more formal and rule-based structure of MSA indicates that a more systematic and structured method could be beneficial in teaching processes. In contrast, the natural, diverse, and cultural characteristics of dialects require the adoption of a more flexible and culture-centered approach. In particular, activities that support students in understanding dialects in a sociocultural context are believed to contribute to the language education process.

One limitation of this study is the participants consist solely of students enrolled in an Arabic Language Teaching program. Future research could expand to include students from departments such as Arabic Language and Literature, Arabic Translation and Interpretation, and Theology. Additionally, studies that include teachers working in the Ministry of National Education and academics working in related fields could offer a broader perspective.

The metaphor analysis method used in this study provides a valuable perspective in understanding the participants’ perceptions of MSA and dialects. However, due to its subjective nature, it may not fully reflect the participants’ perceptions of MSA and Arabic dialects. This limitation could be addressed by research design supported by different methods to reach more comprehensive results.

Research and Publication Ethics Statement

This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards required for scientific studies. The study was based on voluntary participation, and the principles of confidentiality and anonymity were strictly adhered to. The participants in the research were provided with detailed information about the purpose, process, and use of the data and their consent was obtained.

Within the framework of ethical principles, the participants’ personal information was kept private, and the data were used solely for research purposes. During the process of data collection, analysis, and reporting, the principles of honesty and transparency were strictly observed. Prior to the commencement of the research, an application was submitted to the Ethics Committee of the relevant university, and Ethic Committee Approval was obtained following the necessary evaluations. The ethic approval number was stated during the application and included in the research report.

This research was approved by the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Adıyaman University, with the decision 166 and dated 23.12.2024.

Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article

Researchers contributed equally at all stages of the research.

Statement of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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