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Arabic Language: Historic and Sociolinguistic Characteristics

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Abstract: This study tries to highlight the historical development of Arabic throughout the centuries. It also presents some linguistic characteristics of Arabic with a slight comparison to Sana'ani Yemen Dialect. In addition, the study presents the diglossic situation of Arabic through discussing the social role played by both Modern Standard Arabic (henceforth MSA) and the different Arabic dialects in the Arab societies as well as the relationship between diglossia and education. Historically, the study shows that Arabic has been undergone different stages of development and progress over the centuries and the advent of Islam marks the real occurrence of Arabic as a standard language through the revelation of the Holy Quran which was revealed in Arabic. Such a remarkable turning point immensely contributed to transmitting Arabic from the unknown side of the history to be a world language. On the other hand, Arabic has unique linguistic characteristics which make it a distinctive language. Moreover, Arabic shares with other Semitic languages the root of pattern morphology which functions as a generator of Arabic words.

Keywords: Arabic; History; Sociolinguistics; Modern standard Arabic; Arabic dialects; Diglossia.

1. Introduction

Arabic is one of the World's major languages with roughly 300 million speakers in twenty two Arab countries. In 1974, Arabic was attested as one of the sixth United Nation's official languages alongside Chinese, Russian, English, French and Spanish.

As a Semitic language, Arabic possesses many unique linguistic characteristics such as writing from the right to the left, the dual number of the nouns which is not found in English, the two genders, feminine and masculine, beside the root, the most salient feature of Semitic languages. Extensively, Arabic philologists have studied the Arabic language in relation to the other Semitic languages in a bid to show the uniqueness of Arabic as compared to the other Semitic languages. Versteegh (1997) mentions that within the group of Semitic languages, Arabic and Hebrew have always been the most-studied languages. He shows that the reason is not only the familiarity of scholars of Semitic languages with the Arabic language and the relative wealth of data about its history, but also its apparent conservatism, in particular its retention of a declensional system (Versteegh, 1997).

It stands to reason that language is a living entity that always undergoes the different circumstances of life: change, development, modernization, disappearance and sometimes death. However, Arabic could have retained its unique features throughout the centuries despite some slight changes which happened due to the Arab contacts with non-Arabs causing emergence of new varieties along with Classical Arabic.

Turning to the position of Arabic, Arabic has a prestigious status not only in Arabic-speaking countries, but in all Muslim communities. Prestigious position as such goes back to the very early period of Islam where Arabic throughout that period remained the language of prestige that was used for all religious, cultural, administrative and scholarly purposes (Versteegh, 1997).

Undoubtedly, Arabic has an abundance of colloquial forms across the Arab World. All such varieties are originally derived from Classical Arabic. Consequently, a wide range of similarities has been noted between Classical Arabic and these different varieties in all linguistic levels.

2. The History of Arabic

Arabic has been regarded as a member of Semitic languages which include a number of languages in the Middle East and North Africa. It is originally generated from Afro-Asiatic languages which includes besides Arabic different languages such as Hebrew, Ethiopian and other languages. The first emergence of Arabic as a world language goes back to the seventh century CE.

The century of Islam diffusion that followed the death of Prophet Mohammed brought both Islam as a religion and Arabic language to the attention of a world that had possessed only the vaguest notion of what went on in the interior of the Arabian Peninsula (Versteegh, 1997).

In his argument about the Arabic emergence, [Farghaly \(2010\)](#) shows that Arabic language evolved from an obscure and non-prestigious language to a major world language after the Islamic conquests, the period after Prophet Mohammed' death.

Among Semitic languages, Arabic has been described as the most widely spoken with a number of over 330 million speakers according to the CIA report for 2008 besides being the sacred language of more than a billion Muslims around the world. It is the sixth most widely spoken language in the world and one of the six official languages of the United Nations. Of the 330 million native speakers of Arabic, many millions are Christians and few are Jews. However, the great majority of Arabic speakers are Muslims. Arabic is spoken not only in one variety but rather in different varieties across the Arab World.

During the second half of the seventh century, the world witnessed the foundation of the Islamic Arab Empire which by the beginning of the eighth century, it stretched from Spain to Persia. Such massive dominance contributed to the spread of Arabic as a sacred language being the language of the Holy Quran. In addition, several factors laid the ground for Arabic to spread out of the Arabian Peninsula ([Holes, 2004](#)).

Internationally, Arabs have been known as traders and migrants. These two factors, trading and migration, created a big size of opportunities of contact between Arabs and non-Arabic speakers in areas such as Iraq, Nile Delta in Egypt, Syria, and Palestine. It could be said that such a kind of contact established a strong base of familiarity with Arabic in such areas. Moreover, the spread of Islam in different parts of the world had far-reaching consequences for the development of Classical Arabic. In the wake of the spread of Islam, Arabic turned from being exclusive only to the Arabian Peninsula to be a dominant language of the Middle East and North Africa ([Comrie, 2008](#)).

2.1. Arabic in Pre-Islamic Era

Historically, Arabic belongs to the Afro-Asiatic family of languages which consists of over three hundred languages ([Abu-Absi, 1986](#)). Arabic and Hebrew are two unique examples of the living languages. In the early times, Arabic was found as an inscription in the Syrian Desert dating back to the fourth century. During this period, Arab tribes, who lived in the Arabian Peninsula and neighboring regions, had a thriving oral poetic tradition. [Ryding \(2005\)](#) indicates that because of the paucity of the written records, little is known about the nature of Arabic of those times, between the third and seventh centuries. He adds "the only written evidence is in the form of epigraphic material (brief rock inscription and graffiti) found in the Northwest and Central Arabia" ([Ryding, 2005](#)). Consequently, the literary treasure of poetry was not recorded and documented in a systematic written form until the eighth century, the period of advent Islam and revelation of Holy Quran. [Holes \(2004\)](#) asserts that "the only direct evidence we have of the linguistic structure of Arabic before the time the Prophet Mohammed (570-632) is to be found in orally composed and transmitted poetry" ([Holes, 2004](#)).

As far as the writing system of Arabic before Islam is concerned, Arabic writing system has undergone progressive changes over the centuries. Arabic script before revealing the Holy Quran occurred in form of inscriptions on rocks or stones.

Historically, the Arabic writing system is an adaption of Syriac and Nabataean scripts, both of which were derived from Aramaic ([Abu-Absi, 1986](#)). Abu Absi (*Ibid*) mentions that although this script was known to the Arabs in Pre-Islamic times, it acquired its sanctified status only after it was put into the service of Islam.

2.2. Arabic at the Dawn of Islam

As mentioned in the first section, Arabic does not evolve into the light of history until the sixth or seventh centuries AD, the time of Islam emergence. The advent of Prophet Mohammed and Islam colossally contributed to transmitting Arabic from the unknown side of the history to be a world language in presence of Islam. It is worth mentioning that at the beginning of the Islamic period, Arabic had two main sources, Quran and Pre-Islamic poetry ([Versteegh, 1997](#)). Such two sources were considered as the pillars of Arabic standardization and codification. They played a fundamental role in the development of Arabic. The Quran revelation constituted the cornerstone of Arabic development, particularly in terms of developing the written system of Arabic. Since Quran revelation, Arabic has not only been a language of poetry, but also permanently sacralized, as the chosen language of the Quran ([Ryding, 2005](#)).

Islamic Empire expansion, extended from the seventh to the twelfth centuries, was regarded as the turning point of Arabic language as it became an International language of civilization, culture, scientific writing and research, diplomacy, and administration ([Ryding, 2005](#)). Big bodies of scientific works, which have been regarded as references for many scientific fields in Europe, were written in Arabic. In the middle ages, Arabic was the leading language in the world and had been used as a language of wider communication. The Europeans rulers would have sent their children to Arab areas to study the different thriving sciences then. Thus, Arabic occupied an international position just similar to that of English at the present time. Many Muslim scholars of non-Arab origins such as Al-Bairouni (1048), the philosopher and physician Ibn Sina (1037) the historian Al-Tabari (923) and many others produced many works written in Arabic. Therefore, many scholars, Arabs, non-Arabs and even Christians, contributed to the development of intellectual life especially under the Abbasid rule (750-1258 A.D) when Arabic literature and different fields of sciences reached its golden age. [Hourani \(2002\)](#) states that Arabic was not only the language of religion but also a literary and scientific language in the Arab World.

Generally speaking, it could be asserted that the holy status of the Quran alongside the prestigious literary position of the Arab poetry helped in giving Arabic this high status and paved the road to the process of Arabic standardization.

2.3. Arabic Standardization

Until the seventh century A.D, the world had known just little about Arab people or Arabic language (Versteegh, 1997). Arabic had been unknown before the advent of Islam and Prophet Mohammed. It was only a minor member of the Southern branch of the Semitic language family (Farghaly, 2010). Arabic was spoken only in the Arabian Peninsula. Aramaic was the predominant language then, and it was used as a 'lingua franca' in the region. However, native speakers of Arabic at that time spoke different dialects of Arabic varying socially and linguistically from a region to another. For example, the dialect of Mecca was regarded as prestigious as Modern Standard Arabic nowadays simply because it was the dialect of of Quraish (قبيلة قريش) which had an elevated position among other Arab tribes being the masters of the Arabian Peninsula besides its strategic location as a destination and crossroad for trading and exchanging goods. Furthermore, Mecca, the homeland of Quraish, was the housing of all idles worshipped by Arabs that time. Therefore, all Arabs had to come to Mecca for pilgrimage to worship their gods. More importantly is that Mohammed was a member of Quraish Tribe whose dialect has become the language of the Quran.

The grammarians agree that the first standardization process of Arabic dates back to the eight century. Farghaly (2010) indicates that the first codification of Arabic language was undertaken by early Arab grammarians in the eighth century. He adds that during such process of codification, the language of Quran was chosen, from among the other dialects, as a model of correctness.

The Arab grammarian's contributions to codifying Arabic were motivated by their worries about the purity of Arabic which started to have some corruption in spoken especially by lay people "*Lahnul Amah*", mistakes committed by illiterate people. Therefore, the Arab grammarians felt the real danger that threatens the purity of Arabic and this feeling created a belief that Arabic should have rules to define the "correct" ways of speaking and avoid what started to contaminate the beauty and purity of Arabic as a language of the Holy Quran and their wealthy treasure of poetry. Another reason of Arabic standardization is the massive expansion of the Islamic empire which triggered a wide range of cultural and linguistic intermingling between Arabs and non-Arabs from one hand and between Arabs themselves who speak different dialects from the other. Such contact with different linguistic varieties produced a linguistic divergence between what is regarded as a "Classical Arabic", the language of Quran, and other spoken dialects (Versteegh, 1997).

In a practical step towards Arabic development, Arabic standardization's task was entrusted to some renowned scholars such as Abu Al-Aswad Al-Dua'ali, Ibn Abihi and Sibawayh, a non-native Arabic speaker who is considered the father of Arabic grammar (Versteegh, Ibid).

In nineteenth century, Arabic has been renewed by the emergence of a new variety which has recently become the official language of all Arab countries. The globalization, internationalization, and Arabs' contact with the external world constituted a strong factor in introducing many political, technological, medical and technical terms to the Arabic dictionary. However, the exigencies of modernity have led to the adoption of these numerous terms which would have been mysterious to a classical author. Consequently, Modern Standard Arabic, which is a descendant of Classical Arabic, has been emerged and became the official language of twenty two Arab countries where it is used in the oral and written forms on all formal occasions. Farghaly (2010) mentions that many Arabists consider the evolution of Modern Standard Arabic as a rebirth of Classical Arabic.

3. Arabic Diglossia

Many scholars view Arabic as the most clearly representative example of diglossia. In his explanation of diglossia, (Ferguson, 1959) shows that diglossic speech communities have a High variety (H) that is 'pure' and very prestigious and a Low variety (L) with no official status. Some linguists view that diglossia in Arabic first appeared with the starting of linguistic deviation because of contact between Arabs and non-Arabs during the Islamic conquests.¹ Many scholars differentiate between Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic. They regard Classical Arabic as the language in which Quran was revealed and the Arabic texts of Pre-Islamic and early Islamic times were handed down (Versteegh, 2006).

On the other hand, there has been still a controversial argument among the sociolinguists about how many varieties are there in Arabic. Ferguson (1959) refers to two different varieties; the high variety (Classical or Modern Standard Arabic) and low variety (different vernaculars). In his article (1959) entitled "Diglossia" in the journal "*Word*", Ferguson refers to the diglossic situation of Arabic "where two varieties of a language exist side by side throughout the community, with each having a definite role to play" (Ferguson, 1959). Modern Standard Arabic functions as a high variety being used in the media, religious sermons, literary works and as most importantly as a medium of instruction, whereas colloquial Arabic functions as a low variety and is used for family talk, shopping, talk with friends and generally for people's day-to-day communication. Badawi (1973) mentions a multitude of linguistic levels of Arabic; *fushā al-turāt*, 'heritage classical', *fushā al-'aṣr* 'contemporary classical', *ammīyat al-*

¹Al-Qu'oud (2015). ʔal ʔizdiwādʔ ʔalluʔawībajnaʔalfuṣhāwalʔammijjahwaʔilādʔuh. <http://vb.arabsgate.com/showthread.php?t=447025>accessed

muṭaqqafīn, ‘colloquial of the cultured’, *‘ammīyat al-mutanawwirīn*, ‘colloquial of the enlightened (basically educated)’, and *‘ammīyat al-‘ummīyīn*, ‘colloquial of the illiterates’ (Badawi, 1973).

However, three popular varieties of Arabic coexist “side by side for each has a definite social usage” (Ferguson, 1959). They are as follow:

- **Classical Arabic (CA)**, which holds the most prestigious position among all Muslims across the world due to its religious and historical status being the language of both Quran and literary heritage of Arabs.
- **Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)**, which has been viewed by linguists as a modified edition of classical Arabic. It has emerged as a result of Arabs’ contact with the Western culture and the dire need of assimilating the new political, technological and technical terms that had not been included in the Arabic dictionary. It is the most widely used in education, mass media, religious sermons and official speeches. Unlike the vernaculars, “MSA is practically no one’s mother tongue, and good proficiency in MSA requires more than elementary education” (Bhatia and William, 2004).
- **Colloquial Arabic**, which is regarded as the mother tongue of all Arabs. It is painlessly and naturally acquired with no need to schooling or learning grammar as the case with MSA. Colloquial Arabic involves different Arabic varieties that are regionally divergent. Such varieties hold substantial differences among them in terms of Bedouin and Sedentary speech, the countryside and major cities, ethnicities, religious groups, social classes, men and women, young and old, educated and illiterate etc. Arabic dialects are the varieties used for the Arabs’ day to day communication.

Generally speaking, most scholars distinguish between Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Basically, MSA is based on Classical Arabic and most Arabs consider the two forms as two registers of one and the same language.² However, Classical Arabic is considered as the mother language of all spoken varieties all over the Arab World. It is far from clear that all Arabic dialects are originally originated from and based on Classical Arabic in all linguistic levels with a remarkable disparity from one dialect to another.

3.2. Diglossia and Education

Because it is characterized by the use of two varieties in complementary distribution, diglossia has its noticeable impact on the educational process. Maamouri (1998) draws our attention to the “low quality results” due to the diglossic situations in our schools and the linguistic distance between the various Arabic colloquial forms and MSA (*fushā*). He mentions that one of the consequences growing out of the dramatic diglossic situation in Arab schools could be “the growing use of the colloquial forms in formal and non-formal education and in other numerous daily activities” (Maamouri *ibid*: 68). Zughoul is another Arab sociolinguist who regards diglossia in the Arabic language as one of the significant linguistic issues confronting the Arab World and greatly affects the social, psychological, and educational aspects of the society. Because of diglossia and bidialectal variations exist in Arabic-speaking countries, “some educated Arabs find it difficult to carry on a conversation in MSA” (Kaye, 2001). On the other hand, Zughoul (1980) regards the high rate of illiteracy in any society as one of the most important reasons standing behind the expansion of the linguistic distance between MSA and its colloquial forms in the Arab World.

3.3. Status of Classical Arabic

Classical Arabic is understood to be the language that developed from the varieties of Bedouin tribes in Arabian Peninsula, as recorded in the pre-Islamic poetry (Ferguson, 1959). Due to Quran was revealed in Arabic, it has a sacred and prestigious position not only among the Arabs but rather all Muslims across the world. All Muslims around the world are required to learn Arabic to be able to carry out their religious acts properly.

Farghaly (2012) declares that despite its consistency over 1500 years, Classical Arabic is neither the native nor spoken language of any group; nor is it the language of the contemporary writing. Ennaji (2002) mentions that “the Muslim fundamentalists go even further to claim that only classical Arabic is worth teaching and learning because it reflects Muslim tradition, belief and values” (Ennaji, 2002). He confirms that Arabic is associated with identity, roots, cultural authenticity and tradition. Therefore, Classical Arabic is regarded by many scholars as the “real language” whereas the various colloquial dialects of Arabic are distorted forms of this pure language.

It is worth mentioning that the revelation of the Holy Quran in Classical Arabic along with the recognition of Arabic as the “Word of God” (*kalimatullah*) contributed to getting Classical Arabic a high sacred status among all Muslims irrespective of their regional affiliations and nationalities. Haeri (2003) reports that most classical languages disappeared: Sanskrit came to be replaced by the local regional languages of India such as Hindi, Urdu, Bengali etc, and Latin eventually gave way to the Europeans vernaculars, generation by generation, genre by genre, and domain by domain until even the Vatican stopped required it to be the language of prayers (Haeri, 2003).

On the contrary, Classical Arabic could have retained its purity and linguistic features over 1500 years due to its religious status as a language of Quran being recited daily and mostly five times a day (in the prayers) by all Muslims across the world. Such constant use of Classical Arabic during the frequent religious sermons gave it away to be “eternal” in that it did not die away when its speakers ceased to use it in their day to day communication and instead they had recourse to the use of their various regional vernaculars. Moreover, every Friday, all Muslims are required to gather in the mosques of their localities to listen to the weekly-based oration (*Xutbah*) delivered in Classical Arabic. Thus, all factors cited above have helped Arabic preserve its dynamic practicality over the years.

²http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literary_language

3.4. Modern Standard Arabic

Modern Standard Arabic is the written language used for all Arabic books, newspapers, street signs, magazines, official documents, and business-related materials. Most educated Arabic speakers are able to use MSA as a “lingua franca” to communicate with one another regardless their nationalities or spoken native dialects. It is almost assimilated and intelligible by all Arabs because most of them have adequate exposure to MSA through media, printed materials, religious practices, and certain work-related or social situations. The Arab children also have a relative mastery of MSA because of learning this variety in schools as well as the frequent exposure to the cartoon films presented in Modern Standard Arabic. MSA is the written norm for all Arab countries as well as the major medium of communication for public speaking and broadcasting (Ryding, 2005).

However, the evolution of MSA dates back to the nineteenth century when it dropped some of the more archaic words and phrases and has added new technical and scholarly vocabulary as the times have changed. Versteegh (1997) considers the emergence of Modern Standard Arabic as a rebirth of Classical Arabic.

Because it is no one’s mother tongue, MSA should be acquired through formal education in schools just like Latin and Sanskrit and would be used in religious sermons, medium of instruction in schools and universities, mass media, newspapers and official speeches. It could also be said that Arabic is a symbolic feature of Arabs unity. Despite the disputes that may occur among Arab states every now and again, Arabic is the concerted element that unifies them linguistically being constitutionally the official language of all Arab countries from the Ocean to the Gulf.

4. The Emergence of Arabic Dialects

It can be seen from the above explanation that Spoken Arabic is the variety of day to day communication of over three hundred million people around the Arab World. Unlike MSA, Arabic vernacular is the Arabs’ mother tongue and acquired, as previously stated, innately without learning or formal education.

It has been asserted that the Arabic varieties are originated from the Classical Arabic or, according to some linguists’ perspectives, “corrupted forms” of Arabic. The argument about historical point of the Arabic dialects’ emergence has remained vague and controversial. However, there is quasi consensus among the linguists that Arabic varieties emerged as a result of the cultural and linguistic contact between the nomadic tribes of Arabian Peninsula speaking Arabic from one hand and people of the conquered regions during the expansion of the Islamic empire who had spoken different languages from the other hand besides the various processes of development to which Arabic has been undergone over the years. Versteegh (1997) reveals that “important changes occurred in the Arabic language as a consequence of its spread over an enormous territory and its contact with many different languages (south Arabian, Persian, Greek, and Berber). He indicates that the process of Arabic acquisition by a large number of speakers of other languages had a considerable impact on the language.

It can be concluded from the above historical description that the spread of Islam is considered as the pivotal factor that helped Arabic spread beyond the ancient small nomadic tribes who first spoke it. Consequently, people of the regions converted to Islam began reading the Quran and also started replacing their indigenous languages with Arabic. In this manner, Arabic slowly had become familiar in many regions. The leftovers of the traditional languages of these regions contributed significantly to shaping the Arabic language. Therefore, these slight changes marked the occurrence of the Arabic dialects.

5. The Linguistic Features of Modern Standard Arabic

As an Afro-asiatic language, the Arabic language differs enormously from the English language and other Germanic and Latin-based languages. Certain grammatical differences must be known before understanding the language. Unlike English, Arabic is written from the right to the left.

Orthographically, Arabic alphabet comprises twenty eight letters; consonants and vowels. Likewise, Arabic does not have upper or lower cases letters. The shape of these letters usually varies in accordance with their position in the word; whether they are an initial, medial, or final position. Arabic has twenty seven consonants, as the letter /*ʃ*/ is considered a semivowel, three short vowels /a,i,u/ and three long vowels /ā,ī,ū/.

As for the structure of Arabic, the basic word order for Classical Arabic is VSO, which successively means Verb, Subject, and Object. For example, the English sentence ‘Mohammed went to the school’ is rendered /*ḍahaba Mohammad ʔilāl-madrasati/ ‘Go Mohammad to the school’**, which is of course grammatically an incorrect English sentence. However, it is also possible to start the Arabic sentence with the subject for stylistic reasons (Comrie, 2008). On the other hand, Arabic dialects use the order SVO, subject, verb, and object. Like all Semitic languages, Arabic is characterized by the use of certain morphological patterns to derive different words from abstract roots usually consist of three consonants which form the basis of formatting numerous words from any given root (Abu-Absi, 1986).

For those reasons, Arabic exhibits distinctive linguistic features on all different levels, phonological, semantic, morphological and syntactic.

5.1. Phonological Features of Arabic

As previously mentioned, Modern Standard Arabic comprises twenty eight letters representing twenty eight consonants, three vowels /a,i,u/. Both consonant and vowel sounds might be short or long. The long consonants

come with what is called in Arabic 'shadda' 'gemination' which remarks as a sign of emphasis, whereas long vowels are remarked with the letters *ا* (alif), *ي* (yā), or *و* (wāw).

Unlike English, Arabic does not have a /p/ sound, but standard pronunciations tend to devoice /b/ before a voiceless consonant, e.g. /xashab/ 'wood' → [xashap], /ħabs/ 'imprisonment' → [ħaps]. Likewise, Modern Standard Arabic does not have the sound /v/, but due to assimilation, a /v/ sound may occur in different settings as in the word /ħivḍ/ 'memorization' (Comrie, 2008).

It is of prime importance to mention that Arabic vowels function as a maintainer of the meanings of the words as well as a producer or a generator of different meanings of the same word. In Arabic, changing the vowels or geminating and duplicating the consonants within one word might produce series of words holding different meanings. For, example, from the two consonant and a vowel word /dʒad/, different words could be generated, such as:

- /dʒad/ with the short vowel /a/ → 'grandfather'
- /dʒid/ with the short vowel /i/ → 'seriousness'
- /dʒud/ with the short vowel /u/ → 'give generously' 2nd Sg. masc.
- /dʒadda/ with geminating the last consonant and adding a short vowel /a/ after → 'he worked hard'
- /dʒaddada/ with geminating and duplicating the last consonant and a short vowel /a/ after the geminated and duplicated consonants → 'he renewed'
- /dʒūd/ with the long vowel /ū/ → 'generosity'
- /dʒīd/ (Vernacular) with the long vowel /ī/ → 'a good person'

All Arabic vowels are marked by what is called in Arabic 'diacritics' which help in vocalizing words and understanding the real meaning of these words. For this reason, the Holy Quran is written in a diacritical form in order for understanding the accurate meanings of the Quran words. The absence of the diacritic may lead to derailing the meaning of the words and yet confusion in assimilating the whole sentence particularly in the written forms.

As far as the Yemeni Arabic varieties are concerned, The Sana'ani dialect is distinguished among Yemeni dialects by its use of the voiced velar [g] sound in the place of /q/, the classical Arabic *qāf* (ق), as well as its preservation of the Classical Arabic palatal pronunciation of *j* (also transliterated ġ, IPA transcription [dʒ] for the Arabic letter ج "jīm"). In these respects, Sana'ani Arabic (SA) is very similar to most Bedouin dialects across the Arabian Peninsula (Al-Huri, 2012). The voiceless dental stop phoneme /t/ is also replaced by the voiced counterpart [d] in intervocalic environment or in word-initial position followed by a vowel (Qafisheh, 1990). In addition, the dental stop /t/ has not been maintained in SA and replaced by /d/ in word-initial and intervocalic positions, as in /sulṭah/ → [sulḍuh] 'authority' and /d/ is replaced by /t/ and vice versa as in /daftar/ → [taftar] 'a notebook'.

It is also noticed that /s/ phoneme in SA is usually realized as the allophone [ʂ] as in: [ʂulṭah] 'authority', and /saṭr/ → [ʂaṭr] 'line', a general phenomenon of influence and articulation for the emphatic Arabic consonants /ʂ, ḍ, ṭ, ḏ/.³ SA also shares with other Arabic dialects in realizing the phoneme /n/ as a bilabial [m] before any other bilabial, a general case of assimilation of place. Sana'ani speakers, for instance, say [mimbaʂd] instead of /min baʂd/ 'afterwards' (Al-Huri, 2012).

5.2. The Morphological Features of MSA

The root of pattern morphology is one of the main salient features of Semitic languages to which Arabic language belongs. The root is a semantic abstraction consisting of two, three, or four consonants from which many words with different meanings are derived through the superimposition of templatic patterns (Holes, 2004).

Various noun or verb forms in Modern Standard Arabic are created from these roots in different ways: by inserting vowels, doubling consonants, lengthening vowels and sometimes even by adding prefixes or suffixes in conjunction with the other methods. For example, from the Arabic root K-T-B meaning 'write' many words could be derived such as;

- kataba 'he wrote' (masculine)
- katabat 'she wrote' (feminine)
- katabtu 'I wrote' (feminine and masculine)
- aktub 'I write' (feminine and masculine)
- kutiba 'it was written' (masculine)
- kitāb- 'book' (the hyphen shows end of stem before various case endings)
- kutub- 'books' (plural)
- kutayyib- 'booklet' (diminutive)
- kātib- 'writer' (masculine)
- kātibat- 'writer' (feminine)
- maktab- 'desk' or 'office'
- maktabat- 'library' or 'bookshop' (Watson, 2002)

As we have seen, the above mentioned words all contain the group of three consonants K-T-B which is called the root. This root could be modified by either adding a suffix or prefix and sometimes infix, especially with verbs, to give another word and yet different meaning and this is typically Semitic morphological system (Ryding, 2005).

³ For more details about phonetic changes in SA, see Watson, (2002) 'The Phonology and Morphology of Arabic', Oxford University Press Inc., New York.

Basically, templates in Arabic and other Semitic languages are used for different purposes; morphological, grammatical, and lexical. The Arabic template CaCCāC denotes a practitioner of an action (Pereltsvaig, 2012) e.g. /fallāh/ 'a farmer', /ṭayyār/ 'a pilot', /xabbāz/ 'baker' ... etc. Template maCāCiC also may be used to form the plurals as in /maṭāʿim/ 'restaurants', /madāris/ 'schools', /masākin/ 'hostels' ...etc.

Unlike other languages such as English or French, Arabic consonants and vowels have special roles (Farghaly, 2010). Such consonants and vowels combine together in a particular pattern (as seen above) to form the Arabic word. Consonants represent a field of meaning whereas short vowels represented with diacritical marks carry a grammatical meaning such as tense, voice, and case. The change of the vowels triggers a new grammatical function of the derived word. For example, the pattern /a,a,a/ in /kataba/ 'he wrote' is the past tense and active voice, whereas the same root with another pattern of vowels such as /u,i,a/ in /kutiba/ 'it was written' would be past tense and passive voice.

In their morphological proximity to Modern Standard Arabic, Arabic dialects differ from one dialect to another in accordance with their historical background as well as their closeness to the Arabian Peninsula.

According to some linguists, Yemeni dialect is regarded as the most similar Arabic variety to Modern Standard Arabic. Palva (2006), indicates that the dialects spoken in the southern parts of the Arabian Peninsula, including Yemeni dialect, exhibit many archaic features not found in the more leveled dialects of the other parts of the Arabic speaking world (Palva, 2006).

In fact, many studies have carried out investigating Yemeni dialects in general and Sana'ani dialect in particular. In her study about Sana'ani Arabic, Watson (2006), mentions that Sana'ani Arabic has a rich inventory quadrilateral verbs on the template CaCCaC, which is more similar to MSA pattern, such as /kassara/ 'flagrantly broke' (3rd Sg. Masc.), /dammara/ 'destroyed' (3rd Sg. Masc.).

In a study of similarities and differences between MSA and Egyptian Arabic, Gadalla (2000) concludes that the difference between MSA and Egyptian Arabic are more phonological than morphological. Moreover, he found that the similarities between the two varieties' morphology is more than the divergence between them.

Unlike other Arabic dialects, Sana'ani use the classical interrogation tool /mā/ 'what' to ask about things. The examples below give more details;

Table-1. Negation in MSA vs. Sana'ani Arabic

MSA	SA	Gloss
/māqālalaka/	/māqallak/	'what did he say to you?'
/māfaʿalalaka/	/māfiʿillak/	'what did he do for you?'

5.3. Syntactic Features

It has been mentioned earlier that Arabic is described as being VSO (verb, subject, and object), with an alternate SVO order (Hewitt, 2006). Arabic subjects can occur in different positions: before the verb as in /ʔhmad kataba ddarsa/ 'Ahmed wrote the lesson' and after the verb as in /gābala ʔhmad munā/ 'Ahmed met Mona'. (Aoun et al., 2009). Variations in Arabic word order are often attributed to a rather vague "emphasis." Therefore, the difference between /zaydun māta/ 'Zayd died' and /māta zaydun/ 'died Zad', that the former implies or expresses a contrast between /zayd/ and another (unnamed) person, whereas in the latter the "logical emphasis rests almost solely on the 'verb' (Brustad, 2000).

In Modern Standard Arabic, common nouns could be definite or indefinite. They may be grammatically definite in three ways (Holes, 2004):

- by prefixing to them the definite article /ʔal/ 'the' e.g. /ʔal bayt/ 'the house', /ʔal madrasat-/ 'the school'.
- by suffixing to them a pronominal suffix /hu/ 'his', /hā/, 'her', /hum/ 'their' e.g. /kitābuhu/ 'his book', /kitābuhā/ 'her book', /kutubuhum/ 'their books'.
- by using them as a first element in the construct state when the second element is definite, e.g. /kitābu-lwaladu ḍḡādīdun/ 'the boy's book is new'.

On the other hand, they could be indefinite by suffixing to them /-an/, /-in/ or /-un/, according to their positions in the sentences and as well as the inflectional necessities e.g. /farasan/ 'a horse', /galamun/ 'a pen', /ṣāmilīn/ 'a worker'.

Negation is another syntactic feature of Modern Standard Arabic. The Arabic sentences could be negated by different tools. Five different particles are used to express sentential negation: the particle /mā/, the item /lā/ and its (temporally) inflected counterparts /lam/ and /lan/ and (variously inflected) forms of /laysa/ (Alsharif and Sadler, 2009). Both particles /lam/ and /lan/ are negation tools used exclusively in MSA and are not normally used in any of the Arabic dialects (Holes, 2004). The particle /lam/ occurs before the verb to denote the past e.g. /lam yaḍḡlis/ 'he did not sit', /lam taḡrab/ 'she did not drink'. Similarly, the particle /lan/ occurs before the verb but to denote the future, e.g. /lan yusāfir/ 'he will not travel', /lan tadrus/ 'she will not study'. /laysa/ differs in several respects from the invariant forms /lā/, /lan/, and /lam/. It occurs in two main contexts: in verbless sentences as illustrated as in /laysat hudā fī l-maktab/ 'Huda is not in the office' or in sentences with present tense interpretation as in /laysa ahmed yanāmu mubakkiran/ 'Ahmed does not go to bed early' (Benmamoun, 2000).

The Arabic varieties have different syntactic features, some are similar to MSA and others are relatively different. Sana'ani Arabic has its special syntax which differs from other Arabic dialects in a number of ways and bears a resemblance to other dialects particularly those in the Arabian Peninsula. SA syntax resembles MSA in many

aspects and retains, as mentioned, a lot of classical syntactic features such as /māʔ affʕal/. If Sanaʔanis want to show their astonishment and admiration of something, they use the form /māʔ affʕal/ pattern e.g. /māʔahlā assayyārih/ ‘What a beautiful car!’ (Al-Huri, 2012).

As far as the noun case is concerned, SA, like other Yemeni dialects and MSA, has three cases; singular, dual, and plural. The MSA dual nouns are formed by adding two suffixes, {-ān} in nominative cases and {-ayn} in genitive and accusative, to the end of the singular nouns, for instance; /walad/ → [waladān] (nominative) and [waladayn] (accusative & genitive) ‘two boys’. In SA, the dual number of the nouns is not used as much as in MSA, and even so just one form is occurred, which is the genitive and accusative form of MSA, {-ayn}, for both feminine and masculine in very rare situations as in /sanih/⁴ ‘a year’ → /sanatayn/ ‘two years’, /laylih/ ‘a night’ → /laylatayn/ ‘two nights’.

6. Conclusion

As have seen, Arabic Language has undergone different processes of development through centuries. It has been regarded as the only language among all other old languages, Chinese, Sanskrit, Greek and Latin, which still alive. Most of these languages disappeared or were replaced by the local regional languages (Haeri, 2003). Arabic has been viewed as the “Word of God” (*Kalam Allah*) and yet all Muslims whether Arabic or non-Arabic speakers are required to sanctify this language for its religious status. Such prestigious position paved the way for Arabic to maintain its purity and vivacity all over the years.

On the other hand, Arabic is a diglossic language wherein different varieties are used in different social situations (Ferguson, 1959). The most common varieties are Classical Arabic, the language of the Holy Quran and the legacy of the Arab traditional poetry, Modern Standard Arabic, the constitutionally official language of all Arab countries besides being used in media, education and formal speeches, and the Colloquial Arabic which is used in Arab’s day to day communication. Each one of the aforementioned varieties has its sociolinguistic role to play in the Arab societies. Linguistically, both Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic are much more similar than Colloquial Arabic which involves various varieties that vary from one another and from region to region in different linguistic aspects.

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⁴ In SA, the short vowel /a/ in all nouns ending in the sound /h/ is replaced by the short vowel /i/ with no effect on meaning.

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