MOSLEM SCHOLARS' VIEW ON THE POSITION OF ARABIC WITHIN THE CLASSIFICATIONS OF SCIENCES

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Abstract: Systematic studies on Arabic language had taken place since the early classical age of Islam. Therefore, Arabic language and all its aspects became the first science developed by Moslem scholars. However, the scholars always sought to subordinate the study of Arabic philology and grammar and to limit the influence of grammarians over young men. And it is a fact that the scholars differed in viewing whether the Arabic is the subordinate to religious sciences or to foreign sciences. From the different argument put forward by the scholars, it is clear that their debates were closely related to the dichotomy of sciences that developed since the third/ ninth century.

Keywords: Arabic position, classification of sciences

In the history of Arabia, the first systematic studies and research began on Arabic language. Muslim scholars spent many years with the Bedouins in *al-Badiya* (desert) in order to learn their vernacular. These interests provided the first impetus for the emergence of Arabic as a rich scholarly language. Therefore, Arabic language and all its aspects became the first science developed by Moslem scholars.

The studies of Arabic were influenced much by the interests of Moslems in understanding and articulating the message of the Qur'an which was revealed in Arabic. Moslems believed Arabic to be the language of God, and those desiring to know God must learn Arabic. In addition, the Qur'an was not translated into other languages during the early centuries, and those converts who wished to accept and become practicing Moslems were inspired to learn Arabic fluently.
While understanding and articulating the message of the Qur'an provided the first impetus for the emergence of Arabic studies, the second came from political attempts of Umayyad Dynasty to make Arabic as the language of government, diplomacy and intellectualism throughout the vast Islamic empire. According to Stanton (1990:8-9), not only ordinary people but also some of the Umayyad princes spoke Arabic ungrammatically, and '*lahn*' occurred even in official correspondence. But the need for this was also evident from the difficulty of teaching the Qur'an to foreign converts, and from the danger to the sacred book of defective knowledge of the language by the Arabs themselves. Both evils provided strong reform.

The sharing of a common language throughout such a great landmass encouraged the transmission of learning from one end of the empire to the other. This evidence shows us that for many centuries Arabic language had an important role in uniting the different ethnic groups, nations, and even religions under one Islamic empire. Moslem scholars of the Middle Ages, however, differed in viewing the position of Arabic within the classifications of their studies; whether it is an ancillary to religious sciences or to foreign sciences. The present article discusses the different opinions put forward by the scholars.

THE CLASSIFICATIONS OF SCIENCES

In general, since the ninth century Moslem scholars classified sciences into three; Islamic/religious sciences, foreign sciences, and ancillary sciences. Religious sciences mainly consisted of all sciences derived from the two scriptures; the al-Qur'an and hadith, such as *'ilm al-tauhid*/theology, *'ilm al-fiqh*/jurisprudence, *'ilm al-tafsir*/Qur'anic exegesis, *ushul al-din*/the principles of religion, *'ilm al-qiro'ah*/the variant readings of the qur'an, *'ilm ushul al-fiqh*/the science of legal theory and methodology, etc. Foreign sciences mainly comprised of all sciences developed from Greek and Persian cultures, such as medicine, mathematics, philosophy, geometry, astronomy, alchemy, etc.

The ancillary sciences were those of Arabic language. These, according to al-Anbari (d.577/1181) were *nahw* / grammar; *lugha* / lexicology; *tashrif* / morphology; *'arudh* / metrics; *qawafi* / rymes; *sunah ash shi'ir* / prosody; *akhbar al 'arab* /arab tribal history; and *anshab* /arab tribal genealogy. Anbari then said that to these eight fields of *'ulum al-'adab* /literary arts, he added two others which he originated, namely: 1). *'ilm al-jadl fi-n-nahw* / the science of dialectic for grammar, and 2). *'ilm ushul an-nahw* / the science of grammatical theory and methodology. (Makdisi,1981:76-79)

Historically, the development of the three kinds of sciences was influenced by internal and external stimuli. During its early years, the qur'an and hadits comprised the basic course of Moslems' studies. To understand these two sources, Arabic language evolved into a complex tool for articulating ideas and abstraction to believers. According to Tibawi (1954:425-428), these internal stimuli had canalized the development of Moslems' studies, especially under the Umayyad, into two parallel streams: firstly, the purely religious studies of the Qur'an and hadits that were followed along with and aided by the new linguistic studies; secondly, the somewhat secular studies of Arabic language, poetry and legends. After a period of research, compilation and recording of the traditional sciences began on a large scale, the extent of these new studies covered the following new sciences. First, the auxiliary subjects of Arabic philology, grammar and lexicography, and then the main subjects of exegesis and traditions were systematized. Of these labors grew important off-shots notably genealogy, literary history and rhetoric on the one hand, and theology, jurisprudence, and Qur'anic criticism on the other.

The external stimuli of the development of sciences became operational when Islam came into contact with Greek and Persian civilizations and absorbed considerable numbers of Christians and Jews. These contacts opened new horizons for material and intellectual adaptation and development. The greatest

reception and assimilation was from the Greek heritage. Translation of Greek philosophy and science was gradually followed by adaptations and commentaries. The introduction of the art of manufacturing paper greatly aided the process of duplication by copyists. (Tibawi,1979:28) The outcome was the cultivation of foreign sciences that was produced after the end of the third century, often with the active support of the Abbasid caliphs. The sciences covered a multitude of new subjects, such as philosophy, geometry, astronomy, music, medicine, and alchemy.

The development of sciences discussed above created tensions and presented challenges among Moslem scholars. This resulted in the dichotomy between two sets of sciences; the 'religious' and the 'foreign', that began to take place since the third/ninth century. Moslem scholars enumerated the religious and foreign sciences within two different classifications. Besides, the scholars differed in viewing the status of Arabic language as an auxiliary subject and its relation to the two sets of sciences.

MOSLEM SCHOLARS' VIEW ON THE POSITION OF ARABIC WITHIN THE CLASSIFICATION OF SCIENCES

Arabic language as an auxiliary subject

Since its early years, Arabic language had become an auxiliary subject. It was a preparatory to the Qur'an and hadits that comprised the basic course of Moslems' studies. Early studies and research on Arabic that gave birth to the science of Arabic philology or lexicography were carried out in order to make the teaching and learning of the Qur'an and hadits easier. Therefore, to understand the two sources, the Arabic language evolved into a complex tool for articulating ideas and abstraction to new believers.

According to Ahmed (1968:34), the study of the science of Arabic philology was later compulsory for every student irrespective of the purpose and the line of his studies. And the same holds true for Arabic grammar. In preparation for the study of religious sciences and jurisprudence, students engaged in the study of Arabic grammar, which included the study of syntax and composition as well as an introduction to prose and poetry. Such propaedeutic studies could be attained through private tutors or by attending the study circle of a grammarian.

However, Moslem scholars always sought to subordinate the study of grammar to the Islamic religious sciences and to limit the influence of grammarians over young men. (Stanton,1990:42-43) It was because the study and progression of grammar had received a great impetus from the introduction of Hellenistic learning into Islamic culture. Although the scholars accepted the supposition that grammar relied on Greek logic as a methodology, they also feared that too great an emphasis on grammar could lead to fascination with other Greek intellectual sciences.

In short, these facts bring out two interesting points. In Arabic the scriptures, the Qur'an and hadith, depended their understanding on a throughout knowledge of grammar. The other point is that the Qur'an, hadith and law were the most important subjects. Grammar, a term used to encompass the literary arts including poetry, was an indispensable aid to understanding the

language of the Qur'an and hadith, though subordinate to them, and to the law as a subject of the curriculum.

Moslem Scholars' View on the Position of Arabic Language

In the following, the opinions proposed by the liberal scholars who were interested much in foreign sciences, such as Ibn Butlan, al-Farabi, Ikhwan al-Safa (the Brethren of Purity), and al-Khawarizmi, are discussed first. And, then those proposed by the orthodox scholars who were concerned in religious sciences, such as al-Qabisi, al-Ghazali, Ibn Jama'ah, Ibn Taimiyah, and Ibn Khaldun are presented.

Liberal scholars

Three major divisions of the sciences - the Islamic sciences, the philosophical and natural sciences, and the literary arts - that had developed in Islam by the middle of the third/ninth century was described clearly by the physician Ibn Butlan (d.460/1068). The inter-relationship of these three divisons may be best represented by a triangel turned upside down, with the first two divisions at either end of the upturned base, and the third division at the base of the triangle's down turned up. (Makdisi,1981:76) In this description, Ibn Butlan placed the literary arts as the subordinate of the Islamic sciences as well as philosphical and natural sicences, because they are at the lower subordinate angle with its two sides leading up to the two other sciences.

Al-Farabi, a noted peripatetic philosopher and educator of the tenth century, in his *Ihsa al-'ulum* (Enumeration of the Sciences) classified sciences as in the following:

1. Language (*'ilm al-lisan*)
2. Logic (*'ilm mantiq*)
3. Mathematics (*'ilm al-ta'alim*)
4. Physic (*'ilm al-tabi'a*)
5. Metaphysics (*'ilm al-ilahi*)
6. Politics (*'ilm al-madani*)
7. Jurisprudence (*'ilm al-fiqh*)
8. *'ilm al-kalam*

Al-Farabi presented this classification in a systematical order. He was among the first to compose an integrated curriculum. He enumerated Ilmu al-lisan (language) in the first place of his classification as a preparatory to foreign and religious subjects. He, then, listed foreign sciences - logic, mathematic, physic, metaphysics, and politics,- before religious subjects because he treated them as preparatory only to advanced studies in religion and jurisprudence.

Seen from this enumeration, it is clear that language must be mastered first before the other two sciences. The language deals with whole understanding of grammar (morphology, syntax, etc), literature, poetry, etc.(Stanton,1990: 46).

In the fourth/tenth century, Ikhwan al-Safa (the Pure Brethren), who edited a compilation of *Epistles*, enumerated Arabic language in the first place of its classification which resembles the enumerations of al-Farabi. The Brethren said that there were three kinds of knowledge that must be studied systematically:

1. Preliminary;
2. Religious or positive; and
3. Philosophical or factual.

The Pure Brethren placed Arabic language within the preliminary sciences that consisted of writing, reading, language, arithmetic, poetry and prosody, knowledge of omens and magic, crafts and professions. As a preliminary science, Arabic must be studied before the other two classifications; religious or positive and philosophical or factual. (Tritton,1957:132-133) This means that Arabic was a preparatory to religious and philosophical sciences and became the prerequisite of studying them.

Al-Farabi with his Enumeration of Sciences and the Brethren of Purity with its Epistles were among a few Islamic polymaths authored texts elucidating basic information about all areas of knowledge. A most useful encyclopedia of knowledge that appeared shortly after Hellenistc influences had reached their apogee was written by Abu Abdallah Al-Khwarizmi and was entitled *Mafatih al-'ulum* (the Keys of the Sciences). Evidence indicates that the Keys took final form sometime after 977 when the governance of Islamic lands under the Abbasids had reached a high level of sophistication and departmentalization. Al-Kharizmi's aim was to bring together a great encyclopedia of knowledge, skills, terms, and processes both essential and helpful to the ministers and secretaries in the *diwan*.

In The Keys of Sciences, al-Khwarizmi divided sciences into two major classifications of the sciences firmly entrenched in Islamic culture: knowledge indigenous to Islamic society and the Moslem faith, and knowledge absorbed from other cultures, primarily Hellenistic. In combining the two divisions in one corpus, al-Khwarizmi followed in the path of other great Islamic polymaths who had embraced Greek philosophy and sciences. However, in detail the curriculum set forth by al-Khwarizmi differed from that of al-Farabi and the Brethren of Purity in that it emphasized the practical nature of knowledge in performing one's functions as a minister or secretary. Besides, he enumerated Arabic grammar (nahwu) within the classification of religious sciences that consisted of six chapters:

Chapter I Jurisprudence
Chapter II Kalam
Chapter III Arabic grammar
Chapter IV al-Kitaba (art of secretary)
Chapter V Poem and prosody
Chapter VI History

This means that Arabic grammar become a part of religious sciences. Even though al-Khwarizmi enumerated foreign sciences as important subjects that an educated person in Islamic society was expected to master in depth, he did not treat the grammar as an auxiliary subject to the foreign sciences. The grammar was an auxiliary to jurisprudence and kalam. (Stanton,1990: 136-139)

From the above discussion it is clear that the liberal scholars were different in viewing the position of Arabic within the classification of their studies. While Ibn Butlan, al-Farabi and the Pure Brethren considered it as a preparatory to religious and non-religious subject that should be mastered

before studying them, al-Khwarizmi listed Arabic as an auxiliary to religious sciences only.

Orthodox views

Orthodox scholars in general placed Arabic language within the classification of religious sciences. Al-Qabisi (224-403/936-1012), a Tunisian scholar who was expert in jurisprudence, traditions, and education, classified sciences into two; compulsory subjects (*ijbari*) that mainly dealt with the teaching of the qur'an, and facultative subjects (*ikhtiyari*) that covered calculation, arithmetic, Arabic language, poetry, Arabic history, Islamic history and Arabic grammar. Al-Qabisi proposed this classification as he argued that, in Islamic education, teaching and learning should be directed to the development of students' characters and pragmatic skills.

Al-Qabisi enumerated Arabic language and grammar within the facultative subjects, but studying the language, according to him, was compulsory to every student. It was because he considered Arabic language and grammar as prerequisite subjects to the Qur'an, its reading, memorization, and writing. As a prerequisite to the compulsory subjects, studying Arabic and its grammar was then obligated to every students as well. In addition, al-Qabisi proposed that together with the Qur'an, Arabic language must be mastered first by elementary students in *maktab/kuttab*.(Nata,2003:29-30).

In the eleventh century, Al-Ghazali, (d.1111) a famous orthodox and mystical scholar, proposed another classification of sciences. Al-Ghazali classified sciences into two; important and not important. As a mystical scholar, al-Ghazali included philosophy and foreign sciences into not important subjects and considered them as harmful, while religious knowledge was important, incumbent on all or only on some. The religious knowledge had four categories; 1).primary, 2).derived, 3).introductory, and 4).complementary. Arabic language in all its aspects was categorized into the introductory subjects.(Tritton,1957:133) This means that the Arabic language was the ancilliary and prerequisite subject only for religious knowledge. It was an important aid in studying the knowledge.

As a famous scholar, al-Ghazali influenced much the educational thought of later scholars. An Egyptian syafi'ite scholar, Ibn Jama'ah (1241-1333), for example, classified the religious knowledge and linguistic into the basic knowledge that should be mastered by every student. In a systematic order, the basic knowledge consists of Qur'an, tradition, interpretation of the Qur'an, interpretation of tradition, principles of religion, principles of law, the special school of law, and the last was Arabic language including poetry and prosody. (Nata,2003:120)

The importance of mastering Arabic for religious sciences was also proposed by Ibn Taimiya (661-728/1263-1328), a contemporary of Ibn Jama'ah. Born among a well educated family in Harran Syria, Ibn Taimiyya, placed Arabic language as a preparatory subject to the revealed knowledge. He stated that mastery on Arabic language was a part of aqidah (Moslem's creed), and it was required in learning and faith. Therefore studying Arabic and using Arabic during lessons was *fardh al-ain* (individual obligation). (Nata,2003:149).

Ibn khaldun, a sixteenth century social historian, devoted several chapters in his *Muqaddima* to education, giving the fullest account of the subject in Arabic. He divides sciences into two; the orthodox sciences (*al-ulum al-naqliya al-wadhiya*) and philosophy (*al-ulum al-hikmiyya al-falsafiyya*). In this classification, Ibn khaldun places *ilmu al-lisan al-arabi* (linguistic) a prerequisite to the first sciences. The mastery on religious knowledge became possible after preparation in linguistics.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

From the above discussions, it can be concluded that first, since its early years, Arabic language had become an auxiliary subject. It was a preparatory to the Qur'an and hadits that comprised the basic course of Moslems' studies. Besides, Moslem scholars always sought to subordinate the study of grammar and to limit the influence of grammarians over young men.

Second, the different opinions of Moslem scholars in viewing the position of Arabic language whether it was subordinate to religious sciences or to foreign sciences was closely related to the dichotomy of sciences that occurred since the third/ninth century.

Third, during the early classical period, the Arabic language became the auxiliary subject to both religious and foreign sciences. It was an important aid in studying and understanding both sciences. However, during the latter classical period, as the study of philosophy and foreign sciences declined, the Arabic became the auxiliary to religious knowledge only.

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