

# The Paradox of Theory and Practice: The Case of Auxiliaries in Arabic

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## Abstract

Reviewing most traditional linguistics and grammar books about Arabic shows clear controversy over auxiliaries. There are indications of the use of verbs and particles which fulfill the function of auxiliaries, but they are not recognized as being such. They are classified under different word classes other than auxiliaries. Hence, there have been many recent attempts to validate the argument of the availability of auxiliaries in Arabic by researchers who signify their uses in rich corpora. Yet, many curriculum development committees prescribe textbooks which show no interest in investing the rational results of these attempts. These textbooks do not give word function the required consideration when discussing rules and generalizations. Modern linguists and textbooks designers should find a new perspective of word classification to facilitate the study and the practice in certain fields like translation, contrastive linguistics and error analysis. The nonalignment of linguistic theory and what is actually done in practice is one of the major causes of the errors in composition and translation between Arabic and English. The problem becomes more complicated when instructors have incomplete information or false beliefs via which they deepen the gap between theory and practice rather than bridging it. There is a need to assist learners and translation trainees with reliable training to master linguistic analysis and to select the best equivalents accurately and promptly which they need for successful career.

**Keywords:** Auxiliary, Word class, Textbook, Instructor, Translation, Error

## 1. Introduction

The aim of calling for auxiliary recognition as a class is not for approving the availability of this class and reclassifying it for the sake of presenting a new perspective for the traditional concepts. Actually, it is an attempt to invest the efforts made by some researchers to identify the difference between Arabic and English texts with and without the use of auxiliaries and how that may affect the meaning in composition and the translation. The argument is that Arabic speaking students' competence in using auxiliaries influences their performance in translation. And, that the confusion due to the paradox of theory and practice is a major source of the translation trainees' errors.

The translator's linguistic perceptions and skills are manifested in the native like appropriateness level of the target text produced. Instructors and teaching materials are strong factors in building these linguistic perceptions. When teaching materials fail to give the suitable training, they initiate erroneous basics of translation causing the variation in the levels of appropriateness. Tracing errors is a useful method to find out about the misconceptions affecting interpretation and application of language rules and generalizations.

For a text to satisfy the linguistic role of communication, it has to be cohesive and coherent. For Aljirjani (1904, cited in Allam, 2004) a text lacks cohesion if it does not justify the associations of its components. This gives each structure a role in the context and attempting deeper analysis gives each component a specific function that cannot be neglected.

Hardie (2009) supports the comparison of linguistic features as being interesting and has a great deal to contribute to educational research and practice. There are some modern researchers who did good work in contrasting auxiliaries in English and Arabic, however, their work is not well invested in educational fields. The new perspective includes classical and dialectical studies which can help translators and interpreters who deal with Arabic varieties.

## 2. Recognizing Auxiliaries in Arabic

Language by definition is 'a system of communication which consists of a set of sounds and written symbols which are used by people of a particular country or region for talking or writing' (collinsdictionary, 2019). Grammar rules of the majority of these languages put words in classes according to specific parameters to monitor and systemize their use in communication. English has two distinct word classes: (1) 'content word' class including noun, adjective, adverb and verb (i.e. full verb-form), and (2) 'function word' class including determiner, pronoun, numeral, preposition, conjunction, auxiliaries, and discourse markers (Leech, 2009). Whereas, Arabic has three word class: noun, verb and letter. Afash (2005) defines verbs as 'words which have meaning associated with tense' (p. 6). For letters he points out the context association in defining them as being words which have no independent meaning unless associated with a noun or a verb. So, letters can be called 'particles' following Leech (2009) in regarding English particles as 'words which are unique in function and cannot be readily classed with any other words' (p. 126).

Allam (2004) identifies two types of contexts; (1) *situational* including the speaker, the listener and the topic, and (2) *linguistic* including the adjacent components to the sentences. These contexts are used as variables to analyze the different functions of words which affect meaning and may change the meaning of the sentence as a whole. The meaning and function of some words and particles alter according to the context and the tense used. For instance, the Arabic particle *qad* when used with a verb in the past tense, changes the sentence into the present perfect, whereas, using *qad* with the present will indicate probability and uncertainty.

2. i. /*qad katba alwaladu darsahu*/ (past form *kataba* (wrote))

The boy has written his lesson.

2. ii. /*qad jaktubu alwaladu darsahu*/ (present form *yaktubu* (write))

The boy may write his lesson.

Similarly, what is categorized as a simple nominal sentence in the present form cannot be accepted in the past form without the use of the verb *Kana* (was).

2. iii. /*Albaitu kabi:run*/ (present form)

The house is big

2. iv. /*Albaitu kana kabi:ran*/ (past form)

The house was big.

Traditionally, Arab linguists categorized functional words and particles according to the morphophonemic changes they cause when added to a noun, phrase, clause or sentence. For instance, the *kana* subclass of verbs are called 'incomplete' when they have no agent. This subclass precedes nominal sentences and changes the final short vowel of the main singular noun in the phrases that the final short vowel in the first noun is replaced with /u/ and /a/ in the second noun - the dual and the plural show other morphophonemic changes. The same verbs of this subclass are called 'complete' when they are governing verbs and have agents in the sentence. Alzamakhshari (n.d.) regards the concordance of the particles *qad*, *sa*, and *sawfa* as one of the characteristics of verbs in Arabic. However, the addition of *kana* subclass to verbal sentences to form the structure [*kana* + v + c] is not discussed like the 'incomplete' and 'complete' cases. The particles *sa*, *sawfa*, *qad*, *lamma*, *lan*, and *lam* are included in the group of particles which Sebawaih states that they are immediately followed by verbs only and no other component of the sentence is allowed in between (Alhamzawi, 2019). The redundancy of the function of these parts in verb phrases can be regarded as the seed of the problem of not recognizing Arabic auxiliaries.

Words and particles are examined thoroughly and categorized according to their form and meaning in certain contexts, while, their uses in other contexts is ignored completely. Aljirjani (1904, cited in Allam, 2004) studies noun-noun, noun-verb, letter noun and letter verb associations. He does not include verb-verb association in his study, however, he uses sentences which can be understood only by looking at how verbs are associated. This limited

analysis leads to losing the flexibility of words classification under content class and functional class.

Sinclair (1991, cited in Lehecka, 2016) emphasizes the importance of colligation and collocation as being the key to analyze lexical and grammatical elements with which the word co-occurs. Lahecka (2016) gives the lexical items their entity not only by meaning and form, but, more importantly, their preferred patterns of use at several levels of linguistic structure. The regular occurrence of some Arabic words and particles in certain syntactic structures makes them nominated to be the preferred partners amongst their near-synonymous words. For example, there is a list of words which indicate ability in Arabic but the most common word used is *yumkin* (can be) and its derivations.

To give reliable analysis of Arabic structures, there has to be a stable method of defining word classes. As early as the 70s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Arab linguists have provided valid observations about the functions of some words and particles like Alsamarai (1976, in Farhan, 2015). He assigns the function of English auxiliaries to some Arabic functional words and particles because they do not have independent lexical meaning, rather, they denote time and time relations. The definition of a word class is taken through a more reasonable trend by Leech (2009) who does not look for a single-line definition, instead, it is taken as a combination of form, function and meaning. Unconventionally, he places the three elements according to importance and puts function on top, then, comes form, last is meaning.

Applying the three dimensional definition to Arabic word classes, there will appear subclasses which can be recategorized into other word classes. Besides, some words will be validly taken under more than one word class. This is the same case like the English words which are found under more than one class be it a content word or a functional word. Hence, accepting the results of research work like Farhan (2015) and reclassifying variant Arabic verbs and particles as being of the auxiliaries will be reasonable. They will include (1) verbs like *kana* (was) in all forms for the progressive, (2) particles like *qad* for the perfect (have) as well as the modal (may), and the particles *sa/sawfa* (will) as future modals, (3) the complex structure of particles and verbs like [*qad+kana*] (have) for the perfect aspect and [*qad+yaku:nu*] (may be/may have) for probability and the perfect, (4) interrogatives like *halla* (would) as a modal.

### 3. Instructors and Textbooks

Language learners and translation trainees are expected to be negatively affected by the contradiction in teaching auxiliaries; the grammatical concepts taught are not matching the application in the corpus they are exposed to. Hardie (2009) observes the importance of the conscious, explicit emphasis on learning *how* as well as on learning *what* in educational settings. Also, he gives the teacher the role of being entrusted with the duty of imparting knowledge and understanding. Also, he regards the learner's stage of educational development more important than the subject being studied. The teacher has to be aware of his students' stage of educational development when presenting some aspects of language. In fact, the way a teacher understands and interprets knowledge is demonstrated in his performance and interaction with the learners. Students face difficulties if they are expected

to master incompatible principles or what exceeds their experience and educational development stages. Thus, the content and activities in textbooks should be coherent and designed to elevate class experience within the learners' limitations.

#### 4. Problems of Translating Auxiliaries

Translation trainees commit errors while rendering a source text either by using inappropriate chunks or ignoring essential components like auxiliaries. Errors in translating auxiliaries indicate the trainees' failure in: identifying an auxiliary in a source text, recognizing its function, and using its appropriate equivalent. Then, the role of the teacher and the researcher is to detect the level in which the errors fall.

The translations of words vary according to the context, consequently they vary in the level of difficulty of finding their appropriate equivalents. Farhan (2015) classifies verbs into subclasses similar to the English auxiliaries. The subclass with the meaning 'to begin' does not fall in the auxiliary confusing area and is not likely to cause problems in translation. Whereas, the appropinquation word *Assa* -implies the hope of occurrence like the English modal *may*- can obtains a higher rank in difficulty. In addition, the functions of some particles are easily identified and matched with the appropriate equivalents such as *sa* (will) and *sawfa* (will). While, particles including the negative markers *lam* (used with the past) and *lan* (used with the future) need more attention to pick up the auxiliaries *did* and *will* with the negative marker *not*. The particle *qad* (have/ may) has two functions one of which is the perfect, that is more likely to be ignored. *Lamma* (has not) is a negative particle that shares *qad* (have) in the perfect function. The inappropriate translation of *lamma* (have not) as (did not) by Farhan (2015) reflects that translation of the perfective aspect suffers the most. Moreover, many translators take the safe side when translating auxiliaries by replacing them with adverbs indicating the meanings and the functions of the auxiliaries concerned.

Some translation departments prescribe good and reputed textbooks covering many useful issues for trainees. Yet, these textbooks do not state the possibility of using functional words and particles as well as lexical words to fulfill the function of English auxiliaries and to indicate aspects in Arabic. Ghazala (2014) and Najeeb (2005) will be taken as samples of this type of textbooks. The instability of word classification and translation in these textbooks creates confusion and causes errors in translating auxiliaries. They present auxiliaries under the function word class in English, while, Arabic words with the auxiliary function are scattered under different classes such as content words class and particles. The trainees cannot attempt systematic comparison between English and Arabic to find appropriate equivalents.

Najeeb (2005) follows a random method in translating English auxiliaries; using adverbs, auxiliaries, and lexical verbs without clarifying the reason for the variations. He provides linguistic descriptions according to the Arabic classification of particles and functional words in different sections in the book with no reference to the similarity in their function to English auxiliaries, however, the illustrative examples show reciprocal equivalents from Arabic and English. In his supplementary tables, it is left to the learners to go through the lists of equivalents trying to find out the logic behind the double appearance of the English

auxiliaries against different Arabic forms from different word classes. For instance, the progressive auxiliary 'be' is translated using the adverb *ala'an* (now) and the present perfect auxiliary 'have' into the adverb *tawan* (immediately), whereas the structure [functional verb + particle + adverb] *mazalat hatta ala'an* (still until now) is used for the present perfect progressive auxiliaries 'have been', and the structure [particle + functional verb] *rubama kana* (would have been) is used for the future perfect progressive 'would have been'.

There is no agreement between the linguistic analysis of Arabic word class in the theory section and the practical translation section in Najeeb (2005). He emphasises the importance of the occurrence of aspect and tense markers in English, but presents Arabic as a completely context dependant language. He states that Arabic has three tenses; present, past, and imperative, in addition to the future when the particles *sa/sawfa/lan* (will/will/will not) are used with the present, while English has sixteen tenses beside the imperative. He includes aspect as an element in the consideration of the different tenses in English, but, he ignores it completely in Arabic. The contradiction arises in the translation of the sample texts he provides in which he uses direct indicators of tense and aspect in Arabic. Learners will find sentences translated using verbs and particles which indicate aspects in Arabic as equivalents to the English auxiliaries. For example, in the translation of 'While he was bathing, the bell rang.' (*daqqa aljarasu baynama kana yastahim*) the verb *kana* is used for the English auxiliary 'was'. Following this example, he gives a note that *kana* (was) is used to indicate the progressive without referring to that in the theoretical sections. Similarly, in 'I ate the food that I had bought.' (*akaltu attaama allathi kuntu qad ishtarait*) he uses *kuntu* the past of *kana* with *qad* and flows it by a note that the structure [*kana* + *qad*] is used to indicate the completion of the action in the past. He goes on translating other examples following the same technique; justifying the use of Arabic functional verbs and particles by adding notes to refer to the function. For example, he uses *kana* (was) to indicate the continuity of an action, [*sa* + *yakoon*] (will be) for the future progressive, [*sa* + *yakoon* + *qad*] (will have been) for the future perfect progressive, and [*la* + *kana*] for the conditional 'would'. These examples are taken from verbal sentences while the theoretical presentation of these particles and verbs is mostly done according to their use in nominal sentences. This evokes the paradox in interpreting the theoretical systemic analysis of Arabic and the translated corpus available for the trainees.

As long as Arabic, just like other languages, allows more than one style to express the same idea, then, why learners should suffer to figure out the Arabic equivalents due to restricted or false generalizations. Overgeneralizing context dependency of Arabic and rendering the use of Arabic functional words which function like the auxiliaries to express tense and aspect is observed in Gazala (2014) too. He gives some solutions to the problems of translating participles, modals, and the gerund. In some instances he approves the use of Arabic particles like *sa* (will) and *qad* (have/may) as being appropriate equivalents to the English auxiliaries *will* and *have* respectively. The approval was for the meaning, yet, they were not labeled in the theory section as being auxiliaries in function. On the other hand, he suggests to ignore some English auxiliaries like *have* for the reason that they are meaningless in Arabic. For him,

the perfect aspect and the progressive aspect do not exist in Arabic theoretically, however, they are available in the translated samples.

As there are no direct comments on the uses of the perfect aspect and the progressive aspect, the students cannot easily figure out the differences between these structures and that they are other than the simple. Students, regularly, tend to use the simple tense in replacement of the perfect and the progressive in composition and translation. Moreover, the common belief that there are no perfect or progressive aspects in Arabic leads to translating them using the simple. Theoretically, words and particles which function as either the perfect or the progressive auxiliaries are not associated with the verb phrase in linguistic interpretations, they are replaced by adverbs to do the function of some auxiliaries. With such instable treatment of auxiliaries in texts, the translation trainees are more likely to struggle a lot to avoid errors when converting texts.

The trainees are expected to translate English and Arabic texts of all varieties. Preparing them for the real working fields assumes covering the common dialects used in everyday life. Some Arabic dialects are analyzed by researchers who find sufficient evidences to compare some functional verbs and particles to the English auxiliaries. Vanhove, Miller and Caubet (2009) compare and translate modals belonging to the Mediterranean dialects (Maltase, Moroccan, Syrian, Egyptian, Palestinian and Jordanian) and find groups of words which form lists of equivalent modals to the English modals. Likewise, Firanescu (2010) examines the Syrian dialect and approves the uses of modal verbs like English.

Furthermore, source texts may include code switching which requires paying more attention during translation. Trainees have to encounter extra efforts to verify the different methods in considering the theoretical analysis of classical and dialectical Arabic with the available corpora in practice. The switch adds to the stress that the translator undergoes as he is already concerned with converting the topic and the message (Alzabidi, 2017). The translatability of the auxiliary in a sentence will become a serious problem that trainees should be ready to overcome.

## 5. Results

Neglecting the calls for the perception of auxiliaries as a class in Arabic obviously affects the coherence of the target texts produced by the students. Conventional comparison between the two linguistic systems fails to provide equivalents to the source text auxiliaries. Linguists consider particles like *qad* (have/may) and *sa* (will) out of the scope of auxiliaries because the term auxiliaries belongs to the verb class and there is no space for particles there. Arabic functional verbs and particles which perform the function of auxiliaries are either treated as mere elements affecting the morphophonemic structure of the main verb and the noun of a sentence or they are neglected completely in theory, but, they are recurrently used in translation. Therefore, modern linguists have to allow the transfer across some subclasses to promote practical contrastive studies specially for those interested in translation which requires reconstructing messages using ready chunks in a fast and easy process.

## 6. Conclusion

As the success of an educational process is measured by assessing the improvements of the outcomes within a specific period, the improvements of the learners' linguistic competence and performance, which can affect this success, is emphasized in this study. Linguistic improvements can be achieved by giving the learners the reliable tool of three dimensional word class definition and allowing them to consider function in context. Approving this way of defining words and particles in Arabic will facilitate reclassifying them that makes it possible for the class of auxiliaries to be recognized. Consequently, the learners' competence and performance in Arabic will improve beside their performance in translation. In addition, updating the general knowledge about Arabic language promotes the use of better and more practical methods in contrastive linguistics and error analysis.

The harmony between theory and practice enriches the work in linguistics. Practical review of the current resources about auxiliaries and translation training is strongly recommended. Being aware of the contradiction will enlighten instructors, textbooks designers and error analysts about the sources of the language learners' and translation trainees' errors and how to avoid them. Revising what and how knowledge is fed in the process of training will definitely improve the performance of the trainees. Moreover, the awareness of the educators will assist learners to experience less burden and achieve better levels of native like translation.

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