

Dismantling Arabic Epistemology: Badawi's Codification in the Sight of al-Jabiri

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Abstract: *This study critically examines the epistemological implications of Arabic language codification through the lens of Mohammad Abed al-Jabiri's thought. It argues that the standardization of the Bedouin (Badawi) dialect during the tadwīn period was not a neutral linguistic process but an ideological act that shaped the intellectual framework of Muslim society. Using a qualitative library-based approach, the study analyzes al-Jabiri's *Al-Turāth wa al-Ḥadāthah* and relevant linguistic-philosophical literature to uncover how the fixation of Arabic around a static, sensory worldview limited abstraction, historicization, and critical reasoning in Islamic thought. The findings show that Arabic codification rooted in the desert culture of the Bedouins produced a language system rich in lexicon but poor in conceptual flexibility, thereby constraining epistemological creativity. The article concludes by emphasizing the need to reconstruct Arabic as a dynamic epistemic medium responsive to modern civilizational contexts.*

Keywords: *Islamic epistemology, al-Jabiri, Arabic codification, linguistic ideology.*

Abstrak: *Penelitian ini secara kritis mengkaji implikasi epistemologis dari kodifikasi bahasa Arab melalui lensa pemikiran Mohammad Abed al-Jabiri. Penelitian ini berargumen bahwa pembakuan dialek Badui (Badawi) pada masa tadwīn bukanlah sebuah proses linguistik yang netral, melainkan sebuah tindakan ideologis yang membentuk kerangka intelektual masyarakat Muslim. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis kepustakaan, penelitian ini menganalisis *Al-Turāth wa al-Ḥadāthah* karya al-Jabiri dan literatur linguistik-filosofis yang relevan untuk mengungkap bagaimana fiksasi bahasa Arab di sekitar pandangan dunia yang statis dan indrawi membatasi abstraksi, historisasi, dan penalaran kritis dalam pemikiran Islam. Temuan-temuan menunjukkan bahwa kodifikasi bahasa Arab-yang berakar pada budaya padang pasir suku Badui-menghasilkan sistem bahasa yang kaya akan leksikon namun miskin fleksibilitas konseptual, sehingga membatasi kreativitas epistemologis. Artikel ini*

diakhiri dengan menekankan perlunya merekonstruksi bahasa Arab sebagai media epistemik yang dinamis dan responsif terhadap konteks peradaban modern.

Kata kunci: Epistemologi Islam, al-Jabiri, kodifikasi bahasa Arab, ideologi linguistik.

Introduction

Language is not merely a tool of communication, but a mirror of consciousness and a means of shaping civilization. In Islamic history, Arabic occupies a very special position because it serves a dual function: as a medium of revelation and as the foundation of the entire intellectual edifice of Islam from interpretation and theology to philosophy. Therefore, any change in the structure of the Arabic language is never purely linguistic, but is always related to the accompanying social, political, and ideological dynamics. One of the most important moments in the history of the Arabic language was the codification process that established one variety of the language as the standard and valid form, while other varieties were set aside.

Recent philological findings show that Arabic developed from a mosaic of Northern Arabic dialects recorded in Nabataean, Safaitic, and Hismaic inscriptions, as argued by Macdonald and Al-Jallad. This long process towards a standard language shows that what is referred to as “the purity of the Arabic language” is in fact a historical construct not a natural fact formed through the selection and exclusion of various dialects. Thus, behind the efforts to standardize the Arabic language lies a deeper issue: how language shapes the way of thinking, knowledge systems, and epistemological horizons of Muslims.¹

The codification of the Arabic language took place in the context of socio-political transformation after the *futuh* (Islamic military expansion). When various deviant dialects began to appear in urban centers, philologists felt the need to formulate a standard and uniform form of language. In this project, the Qur'an as a holy book was not the main reference, but took the *badawi* (inland) Arab society as the source of the purest Arabic uncontaminated by new languages. *Badawi* life away from the intricacies of the city affected the purity of the language. Hence, living factors also affect the dialect of a society, and the urban dialect (*hadlari*) must also be different from the rural dialect, due to the difference in lifestyle.²

In Mohammad Abed al-Jabiri's view, this choice is not neutral. He mentions that the codification project is part of an ideological construction that shapes the “Arab world” as it is recognized today—a narrow, sensory and unhistorical world. This *badawi* world eventually became the frame for the entire classical Arabic language system, and continues to overshadow the way of thinking, speaking, and even imagining reality.

¹ Ahmad Al-Jallad, “Connecting the Lines between Old (Epigraphic) Arabic and Modern Arabic Dialects,” *Languages* 6, no. 4 (2021): 173, <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages6040173>

² Tapa'ul Habdin, “*Abilah Arab dan Dialeknya: Studi Dialek dalam Al-Qur'an*”, *Jurnal At-Tahfiz: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an dan Tafsir*, Vol. 1 No. 01 (Juli-Desember 2019), hlm. 83.

Language is not merely a means of communication, but a fundamental medium that shapes the structure of thinking and the way humans understand reality.³ Within the framework of Arabic language codification, the choice of the badawi dialect as the standard has not only linguistic, but also epistemological implications. A language codified from one particular form of life, namely the static and concrete badawi life, indirectly limits the possibility of abstraction and historicization in thinking. When examined further to be able to think abstractly requires a flexible language, and is able to change the factual experience experienced into a form of conceptual symbols. Therefore, when language is built on the foundation of a world that is poor in historical dynamics, the way of thinking also tends to lead to simplification and freezing of meaning. In this context, the Arabic codification project according to Al-Jabiri not only connects linguistic choices, but also affects the intellectual horizon and the structure of unconsciousness and consciousness of Muslim society, especially Arabic after *futuh*.

Thus, understanding the codification of Arabic is not just tracing linguistic history, but also opening up space to criticize how the institutionalized language structure helped shape the thinking horizon and epistemological boundaries of Arab-Islamic civilization.

Research on Mohammad Abed al-Jabiri's thought in general is still dominated by his idea of Naqd al-'Aql al-'Arabī (Critique of Arabic Intellect), where he contributes an important analysis of how epistemological patterns in the Arabic tradition are formed from certain historical and political influences, and divides it into three main systems namely bayani (textual-authoritative), 'irfani (mystical-esoteric), and burhani (rational-demonstrative), Al-Jabiri analyzes the legacy of the history of Arab-Islamic epistemology which according to him has stagnated because it is still dominated by bayani ways of thinking, not critical rationality or burhani.

This study is important because the codification of classical Arabic not only produced a structured linguistic system, but also shaped a horizon of thought that determined the direction of Islamic reasoning. The selection of the Badawi dialect as the standard language, for example, reflects a particular way of understanding authority, tradition, and truth. When language becomes a means of knowledge formation, analysis of its codification opens the way to understanding how ideology works behind scientific constructions that are considered "natural." Based on this background, this study attempts to answer the main question: how does the process of Arabic language codification play a role in shaping the epistemological horizon of Muslims according to al-Jabiri's reading, and to what extent do the ideological elements in it influence the structure of Arab-Islamic reasoning? The purpose of this study is to describe the relationship between language, ideology, and epistemology in the Islamic tradition through a philosophical analysis of the codification of classical Arabic.

A number of studies have discussed this epistemological framework in the context of criticism of the Islamic scientific tradition, such as in Bahrur Rozi's writing which examines how al-Jabiri's construction of 'aql Arabī influences the re-reading of

³ Komaruddin Hidayat, *Memahami Bahasa Agama, Sebuah Kajian Hermeneutik*, (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1996), hlm. 44.

contemporary Islamic epistemology.⁴ Similarly, Syafa'at Annas and Abdul Basid in their study of the stagnation of the Arabic language use al-Jabiri's approach to explain the disconnect between contemporary Arabic and the socio-scientific dynamics of Muslims.⁵ However, the majority of research on al-Jabiri is still in the area of epistemology and criticism of Arabic reason in general. Unlike previous studies that generally examine Muhammad Abed al-Jabiri's thinking in the context of epistemological criticism in general, this article offers a new perspective by placing the process of Arabic language codification as an important factor in the formation of the Arab-Islamic structure of reasoning. This approach highlights that language codification which chose the Badawi dialect as the standard form not only produced a stable linguistic system, but also created a specific way of understanding reality, authority, and knowledge traditions. Thus, the novelty of this research lies in its attempt to interpret al-Jabiri's epistemological project through the lens of the relationship between language and reasoning, rather than solely through the categorization of rationality (bayani, 'irfani, burhani) as is commonly done in previous studies. This article contributes to broadening the horizon of Islamic epistemology studies by showing that language, through its codification, plays an active role in shaping the thinking structures and intellectual consciousness of Muslims.

Few have specifically examined how the linguistic codification by the Bedouin contributed to narrowing the intellectual horizons of the Muslim community. By analyzing al-Jabiri's perspective on this linguistic process, this research sheds new light on how language construction played a crucial role in shaping Muslim modes of thinking following the initial period of political expansion. Thus, this article is expected to contribute conceptually to efforts to renew Islamic epistemological studies that are more critical and reflective of their linguistic and ideological roots.

Method

This research uses library research and qualitative research methods with descriptive analysis. It employs a critical epistemological approach within Islamic philosophy to examine al-Jabiri's thought more deeply. The type of research determined is in the form of a literature review, which reveals argumentatively from data sources in the form of literature.⁶ And descriptive-critical analysis method within the framework of Islamic epistemology. The focus of the study is to understand how the process of Arabic language codification influences the formation of Arab-Islamic reasoning in the thought of Muhammad Abed al-Jabiri.

⁴ Bahrur Rozi, *Konstruksi Epistemologi Islam Kontemporer: Telaah Atas Kritik Nalar Arab Muhammad Abed Al-Jabiri*, dalam Kaca: Jurnal Kajian Islam dan Humaniora, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2023), hlm. 147–166.

⁵ Syafa'at Annas dan Abdul Basid, *Fenomena Stagnansi Bahasa Arab: Studi Atas Pemikiran Muhammad Abid Al-Jabiri*, dalam Al-Jamiah: Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra Arab, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2023), hlm. 88–99.

⁶ Sutrisno Hadi, *Metodologi Research*, Jilid 1, Yogyakarta: Yogya Yayasan Penerbit Psyecology UGM, 1990, pp. 54.

The main source of this research is al-Jabiri's work *Al-Turāth wa al-Ḥadāthah* (translated by Ahmad Baso), while secondary sources are obtained from books, articles, and academic writings relevant to the themes of language codification, epistemology, and Arab-Islamic thought. The sources were selected purposefully based on three criteria: thematic relevance, the scientific authority of the author, and contribution to the analysis of language codification.

Data analysis was carried out through three main steps: (1) reading and identifying al-Jabiri's key concepts on language and epistemology, (2) reviewing supporting literature to map the historical context of Arabic language codification; and (3) conducting a conceptual critique of language codification as an ideological practice that shapes the thinking structure of Muslims. This procedure ensures that the interpretation process is systematic, transparent, and academically accountable.

Result and Discussion

Ideological Foundations of Arabic Codification

According to Muhammad Abed al-Jabiri, Arab reason (*al-‘aql al-‘Arabī*) is a set of principles and rules inherited by Arab civilization from its followers as a foundation for acquiring knowledge it can be said to be a set of epistemological rules that shape the way of thinking of its people. This idea is systematically developed in his monumental work *Takwīn al-‘Aql al-‘Arabī* (The Formation of Arab Reason), which is part of the larger project *Naqd al-‘Aql al-‘Arabī* (Critique of Arab Reason). In this project, al-Jabiri maps the Arab epistemological model into three main forms: *bayani*, *‘irfāni*, and *burhāni*.⁷

From a linguistic perspective, *bayan* refers to the human ability to articulate meaning through signs or symbols. This ability is universal, but historically and sociologically it is manifested in specific language systems that become the main medium of human expression. *Irfani* refers to intuitive and illuminative knowledge obtained through the process of spiritual purification and illumination of truth (*kasyf*), while *burhani* refers to rational-deductive thinking based on logic, empirical experience, and reason. According to al-Jabiri, these three epistemologies form a distinctive configuration of Arab-Islamic reasoning.⁸

However, in his critical reading, al-Jabiri assesses that Arab intellectual history has been dominated by *bayani* epistemology. This dominance was reinforced by the codification of the Arabic language that occurred in the early days of Islam.

Abed Al-Jabiri, in his view, a language codification activity is not just 'bookkeeping' in the sense of recording. More than that, codification is a transition from

⁷ Abdurrahman Shobirin dan Agung Yusup, "Struktur Nalar Arab Menurut 'Abid Al-Jabiri", *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Education and Local Culture (IJIELC)* 1, no. 2 (Oktober 2023): 61–72. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22437/ijielc.v1i2.28145>.

⁸ Ibid

unscientific Arabic to scientific language.⁹ And Arabic is one of the languages belonging to the family of Semitic languages that dwell in the south, precisely in the region of Iraq.¹⁰ Therefore, geographical and historical influences play an important role.

The codification of Arabic took place during the *tadwīn* period, following the Islamic expansions (*futūḥāt*) that caused linguistic fragmentation across newly conquered regions. Arabic began spreading widely across the Arabian Peninsula in the 1st century Hijri (7th century CE), accompanying the expansion of Islam.¹¹ It reached regions such as Byzantium, Persia, North Africa, and Andalusia. During the Islamic caliphate, Arabic became the official language for religious, administrative, cultural, and scholarly affairs.¹² As native Arab populations became minorities, various dialects diverged from the original norms a phenomenon known as *al-laḥn*.

In the beginning, language transmission was oral and took place naturally. However, over time, especially since the codification period in the early 2nd century AH, language began to be treated as a technique that could be engineered. Arabic language standardizers emerged who worked hard to compile standard rules. Among the important figures of this period are Abu 'Amr bin al-'Ala (d. 154 AH), Hammad ar-Rawiyah (d. 155 AH), and al-Khalil bin Ahmad al-Farahidi (d. 170 AH). According to Abdul Wahid Wa'fiy, the information that was recorded in the history that reached us about the history of the Arabic language is the findings of the inscription about Arab Baidah who is estimated to have lived in the first century BC, while Arab Baqiyah later after the fifth century AD, so the priorization of the growth of Arabic is very difficult to track.¹³

The early development of the Arabic language took place within a learning culture, where it spread orally and informally, embedded in the daily life of Arab communities. During the pre-Islamic *Jāhiliyyah* era, this natural transmission began to evolve into a semi-formal teaching culture, as seen in poetry festivals such as those held in the 'Ukāz market. With this poetry festival.¹⁴ As Arabic interacted with various ethnic and linguistic groups, dialectal corruption (*al-laḥn*) increased, triggering a linguistic awareness among scholars. This led to efforts to return to what was considered the most "authentic" Arabic namely, the dialects of the desert-dwelling 'Arab al-'Arab or Bedouins, who were seen as preserving pure pronunciation and grammar. In this context, *faṣīḥ* Arabic symbolized high social standing, while non-standard dialects were linked to lower status.¹⁵ Elite families, especially during the Umayyad period, sent their sons to live among the Bedouins to acquire linguistic refinement and social prestige. The

⁹ Muhammad Abed Al-Jabiri, 1989, *Formasi Nalar Arab*, terj. Imam Khoiri, (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2003), pp. 131

¹⁰ Abdul Wahid Wa'fi, „Ilmu al- lughah (Cet. V; Misr: Maktabah Nahdhah Misr, 1962), 10-11.

¹¹ Muhammad Idris, *al-Adnā li Sharqī fī 'Aql al-Muslim: Ziyārah al-'Arab wa al-'Abbāsiyyah khilāl al-'Aṣr*, *Journal of Islamic Social and Cultural Studies* 1914 (2016): 9–30.

¹² Ibid

¹³ Abdul Wahid Wa'fi, „Ilmu al- lughah, h. 97.

¹⁴ M. Jawad, 'He Role of Women in the Būyid and Saljūq Periods of the Abbasid Caliphate', *Philosophy in Arab and Islamic Studies*, 5.4 (2019), 1–313.

¹⁵ Abdul Wahid Wa'fi, „Ilmu ..., 10-11.

Abbasids, although valuing Arabic mastery, were more disconnected from the Bedouin lifestyle. Instead, they brought Bedouin teachers into urban centers like Baghdad.¹⁶

According to al-Jabiri, this period marked more than the formalization of language and the systematization of Islamic sciences such as hadith, fiqh, and tafsir. It was a broader cultural reconstruction that went beyond academic standardization. The process involved ideological interventions through elimination, assimilation, domination, silencing, and reinterpretation shaped by historical and socio-political forces.¹⁷ The codification of the Arabic language during the tadwīn period was not merely a technical linguistic project, but rather an ideological one. In this context, ideology is understood as a set of assumptions, values, and collective frameworks of thought used by social groups to understand and shape reality. Ideology not only reflects cultural beliefs, but also functions as an instrument of power embedded in language and discourse to direct ways of thinking, acting, and shaping institutional norms.¹⁸

The process of language standardization cannot be separated from the underlying ideological structure. In Haugen's (1966) classic model, standardization is understood as a series of stages selection, codification, elaboration, and implementation which appear technical, but in essence reflect certain power relations and worldviews. According to McLelland, each stage is not neutral because it always deals with the questions “who has the right to determine the correct form of language” and “in whose interest are the standards enforced.”¹⁹ In the “third wave” of standardization studies, a purely structural linguistic approach has been abandoned; language is now understood as a social construct shaped by policy, identity politics, and the cultural demands of multilingual societies.²⁰ Thus, language standardization is more accurately understood as a process of ideologization that involves value selection where certain variations are elevated as symbols of prestige, while other variants are marginalized in the name of national unity, modernity, or even purity.

One classic example discussed by McLelland in the Western context is the case of Norway, analyzed by Einar Haugen (1966), which later became the initial model for studies of ideology in language standardization. After Norway separated from Denmark in the early 19th century, two forms of official written language emerged: Bokmål, which originated from the Danish language used by the urban elite, and Nynorsk, which was constructed from a collection of Norwegian rural dialects to symbolize an “authentic” national identity. The conflict between these two forms was not only linguistic, but also laden with political and national ideological connotations: Bokmål represented colonial heritage and cosmopolitanism, while Nynorsk was positioned as the authentic language

¹⁶ Izzuddin Washil, “Dilema Tradisi dan Modernitas: Telaah atas ‘Kritik Nalar Arab’ Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri,” *Jurnal Khatulistiwa – Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2 (September 2013): 105.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Nabil Al-Awawdeh, “The Function of Ideology in Translation: A Case Study of Selected Aljazeera News Headlines Translated into Arabic,” *IJAZ ARABI: Journal of Arabic Learning*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2022): 52,

¹⁹ Nicola McLelland, “Introducing this Special Issue: Standardisation and Multilingualism,” *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 42, no. 2 (2021): 109–111

²⁰ Ibid., 112–114.

of the people. In McLelland's perspective, the battle between Bokmål and Nynorsk shows that language standardization is essentially a process of symbolic selection, in which one variant is chosen to symbolize national unity while erasing internal diversity.²¹

The process of language codification, wherever and whenever it occurs, is never neutral. It always serves as an arena where political, ideological, and symbolic interests intersect. As in nineteenth-century Norway, following its separation from Denmark, the emergence of two official language forms Bokmål, derived from the Danish used by the urban elite, and Nynorsk, constructed from rural dialects to assert an “authentic” national identity illustrates that linguistic standardization is, in essence, an act of symbolic selection. A similar implication can be observed in the history of Arabic *tadwīn* (codification) during the eighth and ninth centuries CE, when the Bedouin dialect was elevated as the purest and most legitimate foundation for *al-‘Arabiyyah al-fuṣḥā*. Much like Nynorsk, idealized as the language of the people, the Bedouin dialect was positioned as the embodiment of revelation’s purity and the authentic identity of early Islam. Yet, just as Bokmål continued to represent the colonial legacy of Denmark, the codified Arabic language carried a significant ideological burden: it institutionalized one linguistic form as the sole bearer of legitimacy and, in doing so, constrained alternative linguistic and epistemological possibilities within the Islamic tradition. Consequently, even philosophers ostensibly the freest thinkers in Islamic intellectual history remained confined by the linguistic boundaries imposed by this codification.

Between the eighth and tenth centuries, when the great translation movement of Greek philosophy and science flourished particularly through the *Bayt al-Ḥikmah* in Baghdad Arab translators encountered deep linguistic and epistemological challenges. Abstract Greek concepts such as *ousia* (substance), *hypostasis*, *essence*, *quantity*, and *quality* had no direct equivalents in the pure Arabic,²² derived from Bedouin dialects. Yet the translators hesitated to borrow these forms directly, for doing so would violate the ideology of linguistic purity established by the *tadwīn* project a monumental enterprise that had enshrined Bedouin Arabic as the ultimate source of linguistic and cultural legitimacy.

This codification, undertaken by grammarians such as Sībawayh and al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad, set the Bedouin dialect as the standard of *faṣāḥah* (linguistic purity). For them, the language of the desert tribes represented the most authentic form of *al-‘Arabiyyah*, untouched by foreign influence and closest to the language of divine revelation. As a result, the morphological and syntactic system developed through *tadwīn* not only prescribed linguistic rules but also shaped a cognitive horizon that limited the scope of linguistic and conceptual innovation. Any attempt to create new terminology had to conform to the authorized framework of classical grammar.

Faced with this constraint, translators adopted a middle path that remained faithful to the *tadwīn* system, they utilized established morphological mechanisms of classical

²¹ Ibid., 115–116.

²² Shukri B. Abed, “Language,” in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 1996), 1615–1618.

Arabic, notably the suffix *-iyyah*.²³ This suffix derived from the *nisbah* form (*-iyy*), traditionally used among Bedouins to denote association or belonging for example, *Qurashiyy* (of Quraysh) or *Tamīmiyy* (of Tamīm). Within the codified grammatical system, the *nisbah* pattern was rigidly defined, and its extension became a creative yet disciplined way of generating new abstract concepts while remaining within the sanctified linguistic structure. Through this process, translators coined Arabic equivalents for key Greek philosophical terms, such as:

- *kayfa* → *kayfiyyah* (quality)
- *kam* → *kamiyyah* (quantity)
- *huwa* → *huwiyyah* (being, selfhood)
- *ghayr* → *ghayriyyah* (alterity).²⁴

Even seemingly radical forms like *huwiyyah* (from *huwa*) or *laysiyyah* (from *laysa*) strictly adhered to the classical derivational rules (*isytiqāq*) established by Arab grammarians. The creativity of Arab philosophers and translators, therefore, was a constrained creativity an expansion of existing structures rather than a departure from them.²⁵ Thus, philosophical expression in classical Islam was an act of linguistic innovation that remained obedient to the ideological boundaries of *faṣāḥah* shaped by *tadwīn*.

Thinkers such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Rushd exemplify this paradox. When al-Fārābī defined *insāniyyah* (humanity) as a *masdar* (verbal noun) of *insān* (human), or *huwiyyah* (selfhood) as derived from *huwa* to translate *ousia*, he appeared to be conceptually innovative.²⁶ Yet in reality, these constructions merely extended the morphological logic already prescribed by *tadwīn*. In this sense, philosophy in Islam did not exist outside of language it was both shaped and delimited by the linguistic structures codified from the Bedouin dialect.

Beneath these morphological mechanisms lay profound ideological dimensions. The use of the suffix *-iyyah* was not simply a linguistic strategy but also a cultural assertion of autonomy against Greek intellectual hegemony. Translators and philosophers sought to demonstrate that Arabic possessed an intrinsic scientific capacity to express universal realities without borrowing foreign forms such as the Greek *-ia* or Latin *-itas*. Yet paradoxically, the very language that symbolized intellectual sovereignty became a system that constrained freedom of thought.

If even philosophers those most inclined toward rational inquiry were bound by the strictures of *tadwīn*, scholars of ḥadīth, jurisprudence, and theology were all the more restricted. For them, Arabic was not merely a communicative tool but a sacred medium of revelation. Syntax and diction thus carried not only linguistic but also theological

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

authority. In this way, *tadwīn* functioned as an ideological fortress, delimiting all forms of interpretation and innovation both linguistic and intellectual.

It is therefore unsurprising that Muḥammad ‘Ābid al-Jābirī offered a sharp critique of this linguistic legacy. He argued that the codification of Bedouin Arabic reinforced the dominance of *bayānī* reasoning a mode of thought centered on textuality and literal meaning yet impoverished in rational and empirical horizons. The simplicity of Bedouin cosmology shaped by life in a homogeneous desert environment became institutionalized within the very structure of the language, thereby obstructing the development of *burhānī* (demonstrative) reasoning that embraces rationality and experience. Thus, the legacy of *tadwīn* shaped not only language but also the structure of consciousness within Islamic civilization: Arabic became not merely a vessel of knowledge but an epistemological prison confining the horizons of thought.

The formation of philosophical terms through the suffix *-iyyah* therefore reflects the latent power of *tadwīn* ideology. The Arabic language, born from Bedouin tradition, succeeded in imposing its internal logic upon philosophy and science. Even at the height of Islamic rationalism, intellectual freedom remained guarded by the sacred structure of language. *Tadwīn* was not merely a linguistic enterprise it was an ideological mechanism defining the epistemological boundaries of the entire Islamic intellectual tradition, a system which, as al-Jābirī critically observed, simultaneously expanded the expressive horizon of Arabic while enclosing it within its own cultural logic

The phenomenon criticized by al-Jabiri shows that the codification of the Arabic language since the *tadwīn* period was not only philological in nature, but also reflected epistemological biases rooted in the Bedouin world. When classical grammarians such as al-Khalīl and Sibawaih used Bedouin speech as the main reference for determining the criteria of *faṣāḥah*, they were actually doing what Haugen calls “symbolic selection” in the standardization process. The language chosen as the standard not only reflected correct linguistic rules, but also contained an ideological charge about who had the right to be considered representative of the “correct language.” In the Arab context, the choice of the Bedouin dialect meant the establishment of a linguistic model that was considered sacred and pure an ideal rooted in a nomadic and simple life while the more dynamic urban (*ḥaḍarī*) form of language, which reflected social complexity, was rejected.

The codification of the Arabic language during the *tadwīn* period cannot be separated from the ideological context that shaped the collective consciousness of the Arab nation. As al-Jabiri pointed out, the past has become such a dominant element that contemporary issues are considered to be resolved through an understanding of the legacy of the past. Within this framework, al-Jabiri introduces the concept of cognitive unconsciousness that is, a set of concepts and cognitive activities that unconsciously limit the Arab people's perspective on history, society, ethics, and themselves. Al-Jabiri said:

“Thus, it can be said that the ‘cognitive unconsciousness’ of the Arab nation is a set of concepts and cognitive activities that limit the perspective of Arab society those related to Arab culture on society, history, humanity, nature, and other matters. When we discuss the Arab nation's thought scheme, we are referring to the cognitive activities and concepts rooted in

Arab culture, which construct the ‘cognitive unconsciousness’ that shapes their perspective on morality and thought, as well as their perspective on others and themselves”.²⁷

This concept shows how the system of knowledge and language codified during the tadwīn period not only regulates grammatical and lexical aspects, but also frames the horizon of thought. The Arabic language, constructed through the Badawi dialect and formally standardized, has become a discourse framework that “directs” meaning, not just “represents” meaning. In this sense, ideology is no longer merely present in the content but within the language structure itself. Thus, the codification of Arabic is part of a hegemonic project: it not only selects specific linguistic forms but also perpetuates static ways of thinking and closes off the possibility of criticism toward the standardized heritage of the turats.

And when in this language codification project, the experts did not make the Qur'an as the only benchmark in the preparation of a standard language system both in aspects of lexical, syntactic, semantic, and grammatical material. Not because the experts are *wara'* (being careful in religion), but they are required in the process of codifying this language aimed at the formation of a kind of meta-language system structure, namely a framework designed to be the main reference and basis for all lexicographic and grammatical efforts of Arabic, as well as a bulwark against outside influences and deviations.

Automatically and naturally, the life of a language is always accompanied by a process of change. However, the problem arises when there is codification or standardization of words, which is a cultural mobilization to form a dictionary. This codification involves the arrangement of lexical materials as a basis, as well as the determination of grammatical structures and boundaries. As classical Arabic linguists explain, this process is referred to as *shina'ah*, which is the technique or art of engineering and standardizing language. This process clearly requires a systemic and organized set of rules and standards. One of the main criteria in selecting lexical data is the authenticity of the speakers. Those considered eligible are Bedouin Arabs, those who live in the interior, isolated from the influence of cities and civilization, and have not been “contaminated” by cultural changes. These figures even competed fiercely in the search for such speakers.

However, this competition has had negative consequences. Rare and seldom-used words are considered more authentic, and therefore more valuable. As a result, for the sake of material rewards and the opportunity to become a reference source, some Bedouin Arabs began to manipulate and even falsify linguistic data. This phenomenon is recorded in the history of language development. As long as standards of standardization rely on such assumptions, such manipulative practices will continue.

It should be noted that the codification of Arabic which relies on basic materials from badawi Arabs and not from other Arabic speakers, according to Al-jabiri, narrows

²⁷ Naufal Kholid, “Struktur Nalar Islam Perspektif Epistemologi Muhammad Abid Al-Jabiri,” *Aqlania: Jurnal Filsafat dan Teologi Islam* 12, no. 1 (2021): 70.

the scope of the language world itself. The narrow and limited world of the badawi, characterized by a simple and sensory life, is directly reflected in the character of the standardized language. Arabic, in its raw form, appears simple, concrete, and tends to be sensual. It grew up amidst a nomadic life without history, in a time that was not progressive, but rather cyclical like an endless, flat desert without ripples.

In this kind of life, the activities of “speaking” and “hearing” rely entirely on sensory perception through the eyes and ears. It is this kind of world that shapes the structure and vocabulary of lexical Arabic as recorded in classical dictionaries. Every lemma in the dictionary seems to carry a trail of sand: the meaning and evidence proposed is always based on the simple and primitive reality of the badawi people.

Al Jabiri himself gives a direct example, namely Ibn Manzhur's *Lisān al-'Arab* (d. 711 AH/1311 AD) is still considered the largest and most comprehensive dictionary in the history of the Arabic language, with more than 80,000 entries. However, if you look closely, this dictionary hardly contains the names of everyday objects, home furnishings, or social terms commonly known to urban communities such as in Mecca, Medina, Damascus, Baghdad, and Cairo even though these cities already represented advanced civilizations in their time. Terms related to the socio-political life of the Prophet Muhammad and the Khulafaur Rashidin are almost absent. This shows how classical dictionaries represent the badawi world rather than the hadhari (urban) world.²⁸

Badawi Lexicon and the Poverty of Meaning

Ironically, within the limitations of meaning and reality, badawi Arabic developed by multiplying synonyms (*mutarādifāt*) to the extreme. The language became rich in lafaz, but poor in meaning. The vocabulary reflected the world of the desert, not the world of civilization. As a result, standard Arabic in dictionaries, poetry, and literature is often trapped in a world that is increasingly distanced from real life and the times. The badawi world remains the center of imagination and mental reference, while the reality of Arab society itself has long changed and become much more complex. So this Arabic heritage has stagnated in meaning, leading to the romanticism of the past, whereas the reality of Arabia today is not what it was in the past; its imagination and literary expression still revolve around the desert, not cities, technology, or modern problems.

Thus, he claims that the badawi Arabs of the desert are the creators of the Arab world. They shaped the landscape of meanings that Arabs still live by today, both at the level of words, expressions, perceptions, and imaginations. In fact, their influence extends to ways of thinking and feeling. The world built by this language is a narrow, dry and poor world similar to the desert conditions in which it was born.

This is the world reflected by the Arabic language during the Jahiliyah period, the “pre-historic” period of the Arabs. A time that did not recognize history as a consciousness

²⁸ Ahmad Baso, *Al-Jabiri, Eropa, dan Kita: Dialog Metodologi Islam Nusantara untuk Dunia* (Jakarta: Pustaka Afid, 2017). Hlm, 235.

of time moving forward. This world lived in repetition and stagnation, and the language born from it also carried traces of that limitation.

If we look at this process of codification of the Arabic language demonstrated by al-Jabiri through the lens of Arkoun's thinking, it makes religious discourse or discourse closed, securing the authority of interpretation and limiting creative new meanings. The Arabic language resulting from Badawi's codification becomes an instrument of power that reproduces orthodoxy. Efforts to reopen space for plurality of meaning, modern rationality, and freedom of thought, especially in reading religious texts, are thus hindered. In this context, Arabic is no longer treated as a sacred and untouchable system, but as a historical field of debate that must be critically examined in an inclusive and interdisciplinary manner. This is one of the causes of the slow pace of renewal and the strength of rigid orthodoxy. According to Prof. Dr. Mahmoed Hamdi Zaqqouq from Al-Azhar, the slow pace of renewal is due to efforts to revive awareness of civilizational responsibility, in order to lift this community out of a civilizational crisis that has lasted longer than it should have.²⁹

In his analysis of the codification of the Arabic language, Mohammad Abed al-Jabiri seems to be heavily influenced by French structuralism, especially in the way he reads language as a consciousness-forming structure, rather than simply a means of communication. He does not see Arabic as a neutral system, but rather as an ideological construct that reflects certain power relations and social discourses an approach that clearly intersects with the thinking of figures such as Michel Foucault and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Al-Jabiri highlights how the selection of the badawi dialect as the benchmark for standard Arabic is the result of a process of cultural selection that constricts the world of meaning, limits abstraction, and directs Muslim thinking into a static and unhistorical horizon. This reflects the structuralist view that symbol systems (in this case language) shape not only how we speak, but also how we understand reality. In this context, al-Jabiri uses a structuralist approach to dismantle the Arabic linguistic heritage as a frozen system of knowledge, and calls for the need for a more progressive and historical reconstruction of language, in line with the dynamics of modern Islamic society.

Based on the above analysis, the renewal of the Arabic linguistic and epistemological framework needs to begin with the idea of a new *tadwīn* that is, a process of recodification that is no longer bound by the ideology of Bedouin linguistic purity, but is based on scientific, historical, and cultural awareness. Classical *tadwīn* has indeed succeeded in maintaining linguistic unity and giving birth to a stable scientific system, but at the same time it has also given rise to epistemological rigidity that limits Arab reasoning within the *bayānī* framework. Therefore, a more scientific codification of language needs to be open to interdisciplinary approaches by integrating findings from modern philology, historical linguistics, cultural studies, and contemporary critical theory.

²⁹ *Al-Fikr al-Dīnī wa Qadhāyā al-‘Aṣr*, juz 1, Markaz al-Ḥiwār bi al-Azhar al-Sharīf, edisi Jumada al-Akhirah 1441 H, hlm. 5.

However, this new idea of *tadwīn* has never been free from the long debate that has been going on since the beginning of the Arab modern revival. Thinkers such as Sāṭi' al-Ḥuṣrī, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, Salāmah Mūsā, and Shukri B. Abed highlights that since the 19th century, when modernization began to be driven by Muḥammad 'Alī in Egypt, the Arabic language entered a phase of complex identity crisis: between the desire to maintain the sanctity and purity of the language of revelation, and the need to adapt to modern scientific and social realities. Abed notes that since its first encounter with Western modernity, the Arab world has been “literally overwhelmed militarily, politically, and technologically,” and this condition raises a fundamental question: is the Arabic language still capable of accommodating the development of modern science and rationality without losing its identity?³⁰

It is important to understand that the codification of the Arabic language was not a single event that was completed in the 8th–9th centuries AD, but rather a continuous process that underwent revision and reinterpretation in every century of Islamic history. Each phase of civilization gave birth to new forms of *tadwīn* in grammar, terminology, and epistemology. In the 10th to 12th centuries AD, for example, the codification of philosophy emerged through the works of al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn Rushd, who expanded the semantic structure of Arabic to accommodate Greek metaphysical concepts. The following centuries witnessed the codification of law (*fiqh*) with an increasingly complex system of terms, followed by the codification of Sufism and *kalam*, which enriched the spiritual and theological vocabulary. Every classical book, from century to century, carries changing meanings terms such as *ma'nā*, *wujūd*, *'aql*, *ḥaqīqah*, or *ma'rifah* never cease to undergo negotiations of meaning according to the social, political, and intellectual contexts of their time. Therefore, the renewal of modern Arabic cannot be separated from the awareness that every previous *tadwīn* is the result of a historical construction that can be reinterpreted.

However, the question of how and to what extent *tadwīn* can be updated remains a difficult debate to resolve. Language reformers, from Ṭāhā Ḥusayn to Yūsuf Idrīs, have proposed simplifying grammar and bringing *fuṣḥā* (written language) and *'ammiyyah* (spoken language) closer together. However, these proposals were strongly opposed by groups who believed that such changes would undermine the unity of Arab-Islamic identity and threaten the position of the language of the Qur'an as the primary epistemic source.³¹ As Abed notes, modern Arab intellectuals face *al-'uqdah* an ideological and epistemological “knot” because every attempt at linguistic renewal always clashes with the religious and political consciousness inherent in the language itself.³²

The proposed *tadwīn* updates are not intended to dismantle the linguistic heritage of Arabic, but rather to reinterpret it dynamically. Philological studies can help trace the historical development of Arabic meanings diachronically, transcending the narrow

³⁰ Shukri B. Abed, “Contemporary Debates Concerning the Future of the Arabic Language,” in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 1996), 1634.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1635–1636

³² *Ibid.*, 1636.

Bedouin model, while historical and cultural studies can place the evolution of the Arabic language in a broader civilizational context. On the other hand, modern linguistics especially in the fields of semantics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis] provides methodological tools to reexamine meaning not as a frozen entity, but as the result of continuously evolving interpretations. Thus, scientific *tadwīn* can transform the Arabic language from a closed and sacralized system into an open epistemic medium, capable of expressing the plurality of contemporary Islamic thought.

Such re-codification efforts will also have an impact on the epistemological realm. It can restore the balance between the three main types of reasoning proposed by al-Jābirī *bayānī* (textual), *burhānī* (demonstrative), and *‘irfānī* (intuitive) so that Arabic language can once again become a living space for rational and spiritual creativity. However, as contemporary thinkers realize, this project is not without obstacles. The Arabic language carries a long and complex historical burden, any attempt at renewal also means confronting traditions that have been sacralized for more than a thousand years. Therefore, language renewal cannot be achieved revolutionarily, but rather through a gradual reinterpretation of old codifications by combining philological fidelity and intellectual courage. Only in this way can Arabic remain a living vehicle for Islamic knowledge and spirituality in the future.

Conclusion

This study confirms that the codification or *tadwīn* of the Arabic language since the early Islamic period was not merely a linguistic project, but also an ideological project that shaped the thinking patterns and epistemological consciousness of the Arab-Islamic community. Muhammad Abed al-Jabiri's analysis shows that the dominance of *bayānī* epistemology, which emphasizes text and literal meaning, stems from the selection of the Badawi dialect as the standard of classical Arabic. This codification process, through the reinforcement of *faṣḥah* and morphological systems such as the suffix *-iyyah*, allowed philosophical and scientific expression to remain within certain structural and ideological boundaries. As a result, the Arabic language became both a vehicle of knowledge and an “epistemological prison” that limited the freedom of rational (*burhānī*) thinking and spiritual intuition (*‘irfānī*).

The main contribution of this research lies in the understanding that the codification of the Arabic language has a direct impact on Islamic epistemology. By highlighting the relationship between language structure and thought patterns, this research asserts that linguistic renewal through new scientific, historical, and cultural codification can open up space for the development of a more balanced epistemology between *bayānī*, *burhānī*, and *‘irfānī*. The proposed re-codification does not aim to replace the linguistic heritage, but to progressively reinterpret and expand it. This allows Arabic to become a living medium of expression, capable of accommodating the complexity of contemporary society, science, and spirituality. Thus, this research offers a concrete framework for the renewal of modern Arabic while making an important contribution to the dynamics of Islamic epistemology, opening up opportunities for rational and spiritual creativity without abandoning historical traditions.

Therefore, the codification of Arabic was criticized by al-Jabiri and made to reformulate the linguistic and epistemological basis of Muslims. He tried to free Arabic from the influence of Badawi's ideology and tried to direct it back to the current reality, into the dynamics of the ever-evolving Muslim civilization. Language is not something that is fixed or dead but becomes flexible, historical and develops not only as a means of inheriting tradition, but also a medium for renewing reason and imagination.

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