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**How Did Arabic Words Shape Islamic Culture**

**Abstract**

The presence of the Arabic language is without a doubt the primary reason underpinning the persistence of Islamic culture and Islamic identity. Although languages are thought of as a component of communication, new research in linguistics and philosophy suggests that languages actually constitute the most fundamental component in the development of identity and the acceptance of knowledge. The significance of language in the construction of identities and the learning dissemination of knowledge has grown, particularly since the American philosopher Edward Sapir. By modifying the structure of languages, Sapir attempted to explain the fundamental components of language, such as meaning, word, and speech. Language thus serves as an embodiment of culture in linguistics, opening up the prospect of a successful scientific analysis of society. As a result, my major objective in writing this paper is to highlight the connection between the Islamic identity and the Arabic language and to shed light on the role that the latter had in the development of the former.

**Key Words:** Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, Linguistic Relativity, Religious Identity, Language, Culture, Philosophy, Islam

**Language as a Mental Tool: Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis and The Linguistic Turn**

The fundamental process that underpins the notion that language shapes people’s worldviews has existed and been continuously taking place since Ancient Greece, despite the fact that it may appear like a recent premise. For instance, Plato examined the role of language in several of his dialogues, including the *Phaedrus*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Cratylus*, all of which are devoted to discussing language-related topics. The fundamental claim made by Plato was that he disagreed with sophists like the Gorgias of Leontini, who believed that language was necessary for experiencing the world of matter. Plato made the case that the universe is comprised of timeless concepts and that language should appropriately convey these concepts. The sophists’ readings are what make the Greek philosopher’s thoughts on language apparent. In this regard, Plato questions if the name, which serves as the idea’s marker, really describes the thing in his *Cratylos.* Plato claims in the discourse of *Cratylos* that the names we assign to things are imitations of those things, much like images. According to him, the term is a sound-based approximation of the thing. Names are representations of the item that indicate how it actually is. But Plato was not the only thinker who recognized the importance of language. Aristotle, one of his pupils, also produced useful writings and analyses. According to Aristo, human language is a made-up, arbitrary sign; meaning is established by how other species understand it as opposed to by what the human voice says. The main characteristic that sets people apart from animals, in Aristotle’s view, is the ability to convey meaning through sound. He was the first to consider the connection and distinction between voice and sound. While all animals can have some type of voice, not all of them can produce meaning through sound.

The interest in language has persisted since Aristotle and Plato and caught the curiosity of medieval thinkers. St. Augustin, one of the most influential intellectuals of the Middle Ages, in a way sided with Plato when he said that language is only a container for ideas which already exist. In Augustine’s view, genuine knowledge is represented through words as symbols and sensory things. Although Kant completely disregards language in his philosophy, he somehow suggests that it is one of many instruments that people employ to comprehend and experience the universe. However, a word, according to Locke, was nothing more than a concept in the speaker’s head. As a result, the same term may not always signify the same thing when employed by various speakers. Each person had a distinct understanding of the link between a certain word, the sign it symbolizes, and the thing it represents, despite civilizations generally agreeing on this relationship. German romanticism joined these intellectuals in expressing their love of language and keen interest in it without holding back. Wilhelm von Humboldt, one of the most significant philosophers of the 19th century, for instance, suggested the connection between language, nation, and culture. According to him, language plays a significant role in the intellectual growth of humans and carries cultural information. In other words, it is believed that language and culture are references to one another. As in the past, language is the outward expression of human thoughts. In other words, language is a means through which people may communicate their innermost ideas and feelings. Individuals are created by words, and language itself is the spirit that produces them. The creation of language continues Humboldt, ‘’is an innate necessity of humanity. It is not a ‘’mere external vehicle, designed to sustain social intercourse, but an indispensable factor for the development of human intellectual powers, culminating in the formulation of philosophical doctrine ” (Wilhelm von Humboldt 25-64). The idea that languages are superior to one another, or Wilhelm von Humboldt’s preconception that some of us may not embrace, is his most significant conclusion about language. German, English, and other Indo-European languages, which predominate over other non-Indo European languages, were in his opinion the most desirable languages. The variety of languages, according to the German romantic, does not just refer to a range of signs and sounds, but also to a range of worldviews or individual realities.

Many intellectuals who emerged after Humboldt were interested in his perspective on the supremacy of languages. For instance, the American linguist William Dwight Whitney aggressively worked to exterminate Native American languages, claiming that those who spoke them were barbarians, and that it was preferable for them to acquire English and lead civilized lives. Franz Boas, an anthropologist and social scientist from the United States, was one among many who disagreed with this notion. Boas highlighted the equality of all cultures and languages, the lack of a basic language, and the ability of all languages to communicate the same ideas, albeit in very different ways. Boas saw language as an inseparable part of the culture but rejected the idea that language dominates culture and emphasized that the way to understand a culture is to learn the mother tongue of that culture. He believed that a direct relationship between a tribe’s culture and the language they speak seems unlikely unless the form of the language is shaped by the state of the culture but ‘’not in so far as a certain state of the culture is conditioned by the morphological traits of the language ”(Boas in Underhill 2009).

Edward Sapir, a student of Boas’ who had relatively similar beliefs to Humboldt, questioned Boas’ ideas. Sapir, an American linguist, held the view that language, a wholly human non-instinctive mechanism, allows individuals to convey thoughts, feelings, and wishes through a set of deliberately created symbols. (Sapir 2014). Sapir views language as a culturally built aspect since it is a socially constructed phenomena. Sapir, who came at this conclusion via his anthropological research, was not satisfied with this and additionally considered language and meaning from a psychological, social, and philosophical standpoint. By adjusting them to the structure and system of the language, he attempted to explain the fundamental components of language, such as meaning and speech. Language is therefore viewed in linguistics as a cultural creation that offers a good chance for the scientific study of society. Last but not least, Sapir asserts that language is a system made up of a wholly human, non-instinctive, conventional, and deliberately constructed system of random sounds and symbols. The main reason Sapir views language as a social and cultural entity is that he does not consider it to be a biological or innate trait of humans. He views eating and walking as fundamental human needs, but he does not view language in the same way. He concurs that creating noises, or speaking, is a talent that comes naturally to people, but believes that the concept of ‘’meaning’’ is a framework that is beyond human nature. Sapir contends that generating meaning through sound is a behavior that is exclusive to humans, and his rendition of language matches perfectly within this conceptual framework.

In his 1921 book *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*, Sapir indicates, people can speak, but that doesn’t mean they have some innate meaning, which is biologically embedded*.* It doesn’t matter whether there are societies or not, a person tends to walk and survives*.* Speaking, i.e. conveying his/her ideas to another, on the other hand, an individual can never learn it on his/her own. This is only shown and taught to him/her by the society to which he/she belongs.Again, according to Sapir, if we remove the newborn child from his or her original environment of social interaction and place him or her in a culture that is completely distinct, the child would nevertheless develop walking skills, but his or her vocabulary would be drastically distinct from that of the community from which he or she originally was born. In light of this, walking is described as ‘’a general human activity that varies only within defined limits as we pass from individual to individual.’’ Its fluctuation is unconscious and random. As we move from one social group to another, speech is a human activity that changes without any discernible restrict because it is solely an evolutionary inheritance of the group and the result of long-continued social usage. It varies as all creative effort varies — not as consciously, perhaps, but none the less as truly as do the religions, the beliefs, the customs, and the arts of different peoples. Walking is an organic, an instinctive, function (not, of course, itself an instinct); speech is a non-instinctive, acquired, ‘’cultural’’ function.’’ (Sapir 1921, 3-23). Any spoken word or noise can represent an idea or an affiliation between ideas. In this definition, a notion is a vague concept that denotes a basic characteristic. Starting from here, an illustration can be provided. When someone hears the expression ‘’dog,’’ they might picture an object in their minds that has certain vital features like a tail, muzzle, withers, paws, or nose, but they do not picture a specific ‘’dog’’ they have ever seen since the word ‘’dog’’ refers to something that is made up of fundamental biological structures that all dogs have in common. The reality that individuals experience depend on the language they use. No two languages, in Sapir’s opinion, are sufficiently similar to be regarded as expressing the identical social circumstances. According to Sapir, ‘’the worlds in which various societies exist are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with various labels attached.’’ (Sapir 1929). Sapir comes to his own conclusion that language gives our reality an important historical context and gives us the mental classifications we use. Each language, in this sense, has a different system, which determines its classification of the world around it. Therefore, each language creates a different worldview.

These statements by Sapir served as the inspiration for the linguistic relativity thesis that he and his collaborator Benjamin Lee Whorf developed. According to this theory, what individuals think are related to the languages they speak because the construction of a language affects how its speakers interpret their surroundings. Throughout its history, there have been numerous, frequently conflicting interpretations of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. One of the primary reasons is that the proposal is typically presented in two forms: (1) the strong form, also known as linguistic determinism, which asserts that language determines thought, and (2) the weak form, which contends that categories of language and usage only influence thought and human decision-making (Ahearn 2011). The former is a reference to the notion that one's language defines, limits, or stimulates their thinking. For instance, a linguistic determinist would say that users of a particular language would not be able to grasp the notion if the language fails to include a word or a certain voice to represent a specific concept. To put it another way, a person will comprehend a subject more quickly, simply, and easily the more words or sounds there are in a language for that particular notion. Although linguistic relativity became increasingly popular in the twentieth and even the twenty-first centuries, it is questionable whether this is a verifiable thesis. However, contemporary linguistics supported the latter, while some empirical scientists disapproved and refuted it. For instance, the German word *schadenfreude* is to enjoy another person's misery. Although there is no equivalent in English or Turkish for this word, this does not imply that people from those countries do not understand what it means or the emotion it alludes to. The Danish term *hygge* might serve as yet another illustration. *Hygge* is fundamentally about creating a cozy environment and appreciating the good things in life with nice people. Although this word fails to possess a clear etymological equivalent in English or Turkish, it is a phrase that both English and Turkish speakers would be familiar with.

Many psychological and philosophical scholars started their studies of the detrimental impact of language on everyday existence and mental processes after conducting such in-depth analyses of philosophers and linguists. Philosophers have begun to concentrate on the knowledge-language conundrum that philosophy has been facing. The Linguistic Turn, a significant trend in Western philosophy in the early 20th century, was eventually named as a result of the attention and importance of this philosophical conundrum. As the name implies, philosophy and other disciplines also pay particular attention to the connections between language and the meaning it imparts on human behavior. Although linguistic turn gained popularity with the introduction of the American philosopher Richard Rorty, Austin’s ‘’*How to Do Things with Words* (1962)’’ contains the most obvious and important determinations of linguistic transformation for me. His book, ‘’*How to Do Things With Words*’’ is published posthumously in 1962. Austin’s book is the collection of a series of courses he taught at Harvard University. The theory of speech act, which is a set of expressions expressed by an individual that presents knowledge and performs an action, is one of the significant works of Austin and is currently used in modern sociolinguistics and the philosophy of language. For example, ‘’I want salt; would you please pass it to me?’’ It is considered an act of speaking as it expresses the speaker’s desire to obtain the salt and also makes a request for someone to give them the salt. Speech acts fulfil their function once spoken or communicated. These usually include actions such as apologizing, promising, ordering, responding, requesting, complaining, warning, inviting, rejecting and congratulating. We can examine the speech act theory, which Austin inherited, under 3 different headings: *a locutionary act*, which is an act of making an expressive meaning such as warning someone to stop smoking and using drugs, requesting or ordering someone to do something, or giving his/her expression during a particular action such as saying ‘’ it is cold here.’’ *An illocutionary act*, on the other hand, in its simple terms, involves an action that a speaker takes to say certain words. For example, promising or threatening actions. And finally, there is the third category: *perlocutionary act*, which in its simple form, depends on the result of the action. For example, saying ‘’would you mind closing the window?’’ Or when one says, ‘’I want you to remain here with me.’’ In his book, Austin discusses the work of many philosophers such as Émile Benveniste, Karl Bühler, Roman Jakobson, Charles Bally, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Ludwig Wittgenstein and differentiates two main hypotheses that made him a popular thinker in the literature of sociolinguistics: the constative statement and the performative (or performative) statement. An expression is performative when nothing is specified or defined but an action is performed. A performative expression, however, is situational and circumstantial.

We may conclude from Austin's, Sapir's, and research in medieval philosophy that language is closely tied to people's culture and, most crucially, their behavior. People use their language to understand the world, and as a result, the words they use take on metaphorical meaning. The thing we refer to as reality is created by the images or dreams that words create in our brains, despite the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis not being widely accepted. Therefore, Sapir and Austin should both be criticized (at least in my opinion) for their lack of interest in learning foreign languages. For example, Austin puts forward the performative utterances’ thesis by considering the English language in general. However, is promising considered a performative act for a person who speaks a different language other than English? This inquiry, while reasonable and rational, does not demonstrate that it is fair in any way since, regardless of language, words or phrases are created to carry out an activity and place the person in a particular circumstance. For example, although ‘’to promise’’ exists in many western languages and has similar meanings, a language such as Kurdish does not have such a word group, and this absence may indicate that ‘’promising’’ does not necessarily conclude an action, which is quite important. Another example can be given for Arabic or Turkish languages. Although the utterances ‘’promise’’ exists in these languages, ‘’to swear’’ is more acceptable and is considered to be an utterance that needs to be woven into the action.

**Do Arabic Words Create Islamic Identity?**

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis contends that if language is crucial to the development of our ideas, it is also crucial to the formation and manifestation of our identities, social behaviors, cultural norms, and even our religious beliefs, all of which are manifested in our everyday interactions. But before I do, I'll start to take some of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis's detractors into account. We cannot comprehend the validity or acceptability of this argument without taking some of the critiques into account. Stephen Pinker is one of the people who rejects this idea. Whorf centered his studies on the Hopi tribe and language while presenting his argument. He thought that since they didn't have a notion of "time" in their native tongue, it had an entirely distinct significance for them than it did for those in the West. Nobody really knows how Whorf came up with his ludicrous statements, but Pinker thinks that the combination of his long-standing mysticism and his small, poorly annotated sample of Hopi speech may have contributed (Pinker 1994). In Pinker's opinion, investigations on Hopi society and culture demonstrate that words for ideas like "time" and "calendar" may be found in their language. In his subsequent criticism, Pinker advances the following argument: If it is true that language represents an idea, then the thesis follows that individuals who lack the capacity to speak cannot think. So how do babies learn and develop language without thought processes, he wonders, if this is the case? Although Pinker unveils these critiques and determinations within a rational and equitable structure, there are two primary aspects that he misunderstands: (1) Pinker fails to clarify what constitutes thought according to Whorf's clue; and (2) Pinker concentrates merely on some basic and specific ideas or society, language, or culture. Whorf might not necessarily be incorrect if Hopi culture has a sense of time. The advancements in the domains of literature, philosophy, and cultural sciences in the contemporary age determine whether Whorf's thesis is true or not. Terms have greater meaning on their own in modern humanities. It is crucial to understand what Whorf means when he uses the term "thought" in light of current thinking. Whorf's definition of "imagination" or "representation" by thinking, for instance, is not entirely apparent. It is certainly incorrect to hold the idea that those who are without language skills are incapable of thinking. However, it is also true that someone who performs this task must also mimic various sounds. Again, starting with Pinker's illustration of how newborns acquire thinking without language, it is generally acknowledged that newborns are gifted and predisposed to linguistic ability. The absence of words or sounds does not preclude the existence of language. Again, it is common knowledge that after a certain age, babies only use the sounds associated with the object or living thing in question to imagine it in their minds. They think and picture a particular thing because of that linguistic sound. The color research by Lucy and Shweder provides yet another example of how poor Stephen Pinker's objections are. In other words, persons who speak a language that has more words to describe a color tend to think more strongly about that color. Taking into account all of these critiques and remarks, both favorable and unfavorable, I would want to provide an illustration of this suggested thesis by demonstrating how Arabic words or language in general influence Islamic ideas. In order to clarify the primary goal of creating this post, I would first want to describe my argument with the line that follows: Islamic culture, civilisation, and most crucially, thought, all stem from Arabic.

Islamic identity is formed as a result of Islam's influence on several cultural and political spheres. However, Muslim theologians and political scientists alike have neglected the fact that in many non-Arab geographic areas, the Arabic language has had a greater political and cultural influence than Islam. This argument will be better understood if I use the word "Imam," which is frequently used in many Islamic nations, as an example. The distinction of the term "imam" is that it represents a person's social identity as well as their personal identity. The term gradually develops into a political, cultural, and religious identity that is wholly rooted in the Islamic faith. It often denotes a ruler or head of state. It is an Islamic phrase for those who preside over congregational prayer and carry out other religious tasks. This idiom, which is also acknowledged politically, gives the individual a social function and is acknowledged by the state as an identity. For instance, the Imam is typically utilized in Turkey to oversee religious obligations. In other words, this name, which has an Arabic roots, is also perceived in Turkish society as a religious authority. However, this word is used both politically and religiously in a nation like Iran. In other words, the term "Imam" serves as a religious identity and political authority in nations that are not Arab, such as Iran and Turkey. I'm trying to say that even in nations where Arabic is not spoken, this Arabic phrase denotes the same identity and function.

A new illustration might make my thesis more obvious. The word *Arife*, which is likewise of Arabic origin, is credited for spreading the Islamic philosophical tradition. It has the connotation of being the day before a religious celebration. Although Arabs originally used this word to refer to the day before anything, with the rise of Islam, it has taken on a wholly Islamic meaning and opened the door for a cultural tradition. Another significant social identity is contained in the term "Molla," which also plays a hierarchical function. Derived from the Arabic word *mawla*, this term refers to a person who is responsible for religious teachings and events. Though the term is widely used for the *Sia* communities, in many other *non-Sia* Muslims, the word is accepted and used. *Mollas* receive a religious education ‘’as a child in a *maktab (Ar. kuttab)*. They study the Quran, *hadith* (sayings of the prophet Muhammad), and fundamental aspects of belief and practice. At the highest level of training, *Mollas* receive the equivalent of a doctorate in theology from a theological seminary, called a *madrasa* or *howzah˓ilmiyya*. *Mollas* serve a series of social and religious functions: prayer leader in a mosque, reciter of the Quran, religious teacher for children or a professor, jurist or judge, administrator of religious endowments and sites, community leader, politician, a scholar of religion, and sometimes as scribes or even bookkeepers ” (Encyclopedia.com).

Examples of several Arabic terms changing and acquiring new meanings in the name of Islam are numerous. Words have a significant influence in the construction of social, cultural, and the advancement of political events, in addition to the religious meaning of the terms and their growth over time as an identity component. Using a few examples, I will demonstrate this thesis: Fasting during Ramadan, one of the most significant Islamic cultural practices, has a variety of cultural and political repercussions. In addition to the fact that the word is an Islamic word of Arabic origin, it also enables the formation of a single culture in almost all Islamic countries and evokes the same etymological meaning. Another term in which the word constitutes culture and social behaviour is the term *Juma*. This word, which is also an Arab-Islamic term, creates a common culture and behaviour among Muslims. As its meaning is perceived as the fifth day of the week (Friday), *Juma* calls for going to the mosque and worshipping, eating together as a family among all Muslims.   
 In conclusion, these principles apply to a wide range of religious traditions, not only Islam. Islam is still more enduring and comprehensive in this respect than Christianity, though. This is unquestionably caused by the fact that Arabic, a language that is still spoken today and is widely used, was not the source of Christianity. Although it is considered to be Latin in Christianity, this language no longer exists, or more accurately, it has evolved into different languages, which is why it does not lead to social cohesion in Christianity, at least not to the same extent as in Islam. From this vantage point, we may assert that while some terms borrowed from Arabic inspire comparable realities in the minds of Muslims, they do not inspire identical emotions and perceptions in non-Arabic or non-Muslim populations. As a result, it is clear why the Sapir-Whorf thesis insists that languages have an impact on people's thought processes.

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