

Efforts To immortalize Arabic Language For Future Generation

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ABSTRACT: Arabic language is spoken by over one hundred million people across the globe. It has contributed immensely to the development of African history and modern science. The importance of the language also manifested in the contributions made by Muslims in the medieval period who wrote many works in Arabic on what we know as modern science today, before the Western scholars attained self-sufficiency in the field of science and technology. This paper focuses on the major contributions of this language towards the development of African history, modern science and efforts to translate many works to Arabic language. It is of the opinion that pragmatic efforts must be made to develop the language to bring more of its values to move the world forward and to preserve it for prosperity. At the end of this work, suggestions and conclusion are made on how to preserve the language for the incoming generations.

Keywords: Arabic language, African history, Modern Science, Preservation of Arabic language, The spread of Islam, Translation.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Arabic is the language of the Quran and the most important language among the Semitic groups (Hebrew, Phoenician, Acadian, Syriac, Greek and Arabic). The language, is spoken by over one hundred million people and understood by many more. (www.importanceoflanguages.com/learnarabic)¹. Before the advent of Islam, the dawn of the Golden Age of Arabic poetry was championed by Arabic language that coincided with the first decade of the sixth century of Christ. Then, Arabic language was used to write *Mu^ʿallaqāt* (Suspended Poems) hung up in the *Ka^ʿbah* on account of their merit. This distinction was awarded by the judges at the fair of *ʿUkāz* near Makkah. (Nicholson 1976: 6 and 101)². In the middle Ages, Arabic language was the intellectual language of Islam in the East and was used by many nationalities and religions for literacy and scientific compositions. The Persians in particular were great masters of the use of Arabic (Glasse 2005: 56-58)³. Glasse then asserts that:

Branches of knowledge from all countries in the World have been translated into the tongue of the Arabs, embellished and made seductive, and the beauties of the language have infused the veins and arteries of the peoples of those countries... (58).

The contributions of this language also emerged in the writings of African history in Arabic scripts which were documented by notable scholars. The intellectual quality as well as trait and the development of Arabic language into local sub-varieties of Arabic scripts showing numerous degrees of similarity with the medieval *Maghrib* style, is a clear evidence of the existence of a West African literate culture, and of its historical depth which equally led to its preservation in the region. (www.westafricanmanuscripts.org/history.ht...)⁴.

Today, the study of the language is waning. Most of the translated works into Arabic in those days have almost disappeared from the archives. This article will show some notable men of the past who have played important roles towards the survival of the language especially in the development of African history and modern science in the world today. It will also shed light on how the present generation of Arabic scholars can preserve the language for in-coming generations.

II. ARABIC LANGUAGE BEFORE ISLAM

Before the advent of Islam in Arabian Peninsula, Arabic language was widely used in the area particularly in literature. The fairs at Makkah, *ʿUkāz* and *Dhul-Majās* developed into annual literacy and intellectual congresses of the Arabs. Poets who competed in the verse making obtained distinctions and honors. The best verses were inscribed in golden letters and suspended on the walls of *Ka^ʿbah* (that was called *Mu^ʿallaqāt*, and considered to be the master piece of the Arabic language.

Among the great poets of the *Jahiliyyah* period were Imru ul-Qays, Jassas, Muhalihil and Antara. Imru ul-Qays was regarded as the prince of the Arab poets and his *Mu'allaqāt* was honored as the best specimen of the Pre-Islamic Period. This period also produced some wise men, such as Aktam, Hajib, Hindah and others. The renowned wise man, Luqmān, is said to have flourished in Arabia during this time. The existence of these poets and wise men proved that pre-Islamic period in Arabic was not completely devoid of an intellectual life. (Rahim 2003:5-6)⁵.

III. ARABIC LANGUAGE AND THE SPREAD OF ISLAM

By and large, the spread of Islamic Religion all over the world is through the Arabic language. Arabic is considered as a sacred and religious language, hence the Holy Qur'ān was revealed to Prophet Muhammad through this language. Whenever Islam goes, the first language to be reckoned with is Arabic. You cannot practice Islam without having a rudimentary knowledge of Arabic language.

The Arabs were great lovers of poetry and eloquence. In the period of Prophet Muhammad and his successors, there were great poets in Arabia who distinguished themselves in verse making and tried to compose verses. *Khalifa* Ali was a great orator of the time. His discourses were largely attended by many people of his time.

During the time of *Khalifa* Abdul Malik (the second founder of the Umayyad dynasty), Arabic language was introduced as the official language throughout the empire in place of the provincial languages. This was intended to combine the various peoples of the empire into a homogenous body. As a result, the elevation of Arabic to the position of state language has had great stimulus on the study of this language by non-Arabs. This prepared the ground for brilliant literacy and intellectual achievements of Muslims. (Rahim 2003:151-152)⁶.

During the Abbasid period, Arabic language assumed yet another dimension whereby a Basrite, Abul-Aswad ad-Duali founded the Arabic grammar. Encyclopedia Britannica has it that Al-Khalil Ibn Ahmad Al-Farāhidi compiled the first Arabic dictionary and invented Arabic prosody⁷. The greatest intellectual measure of progress was attained in the field of poetry. The use of Arabic language gave impetus to the greatest intellectual measure in the field of poetry. 'Umar, Jamil Hammad, Farazdaq, Jarir and Akhtal were some of the notable figures in the field of poetry.

The importance of the use of Arabic language is attested on the field of translating many works from other languages to Arabic. According to Rahim (2003:200)⁸, the Arabs had begun to have interest in sciences also. Harith, who studied in Persia, was the first scientifically trained Arab doctor. Khalid Ibn Yezid was a Philosopher and is said to have been the first in Islam to translate Greek and Coptic books on alchemy, medicine and astrology. 'Umar II was to have transferred the school of medicine from Alexandria to Antioch. He translated many Greek works into Arabic.

IV. ARABIC LANGUAGE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN HISTORY

To show the level of the contributions of Arabic language to the development of African history, Hunwick and others launched an annual journal called "*Sudanic Africa: A Journal of Historical Sources*" in 1990 at the University of Bergen. In this journal, a great deal of information on African Arabic writings were published which also included Arabic documents in their original Arabic texts with English translation. (Hunwick, 2008:306)⁹.

Hunwick states further that the objectives of that journal included identification and analysis of Arabic manuscript collections, translation and publication of manuscripts dealing with African history. It is also to show Arabic manuscripts libraries in various countries of Africa and to analyze their contents. In that journal, Arabic writings of western Sudanic Africa are classified under four headings namely: (a) historical (b) pedagogical (c) devotional and (d) polemical (312-17). Hunwick then quotes Martin that "if the collected materials written in Arabic could be used for research, it would contribute greatly to a writing of the history of African region, which is so badly needed" (315).

Among the efforts of the scholars to immortalize Arabic writings for documentation especially in Nigeria are catalogued collections in Africa both public and private collections. This was made by the *al-Furqān* Foundation in Nigeria such as the Arabic collection of the National Archives, Kaduna, University of Ibadan library, Jos museum and the collection of the late *Wazīr of Sokoto*, Junayd b. Muhammad al-Bukhari. Another one is the research and documentation center of Ahmadu Bello University known as *Arewa House* located in Kaduna. It contains Arabic manuscript documents of historical interest as well as works of the Islamic intellectual tradition written in Arabic form (307).

Most of these works are in Arabic, though some are in *ʿajam* i.e. African languages such as Hausa, Fulfulde and Wolof written in the Arabic script. Eventually, the collection unites an impressive concentration of works by African authors mainly between the 19th and 20th centuries. It makes it a unique and valuable resource

for scholars who were interested in the production of events written in Arabic language. It is also an attempt made to ensure that these works of art are preserved for prosperity.

V. ARABIC LANGUAGE AND MODERN SCIENCE

Adeyemi (1996) asserts that during the period of Islamic advancement in human civilization, Europe was known to be in “the Dark Ages” (Period of Barbarism) or the period that was characterized by lack of civilization¹⁰. When Islam was introduced in the middle of the seventh century, the well-established Greco-Latin civilization was in the process of waning. This implies that through the translation of many works into Arabic language, Muslims were able to lead the world in what is known as Modern Science.

The first century of ʿAbbasid rule was marked by a great deal of intellectual agitation. It was an age of discovery and awakening. In a marvelous way, studies in Theology, Law, Medicine, Philosophy, Mathematics, Astronomy and Natural Science had received popularity among Muslim scholars. (Nicholson, 1976:367)¹¹.

It is pertinent to mention some areas in modern science where Arabic language took the lead by some notable Muslim scholars:

1. **Medicine:** The beginning of a new epoch in the history of translation emerged. The Arabs assimilated the ancient lore of Persia and classical heritage of Greece. The translations and their contributions were ultimately transmitted to Europe through Syria, Spain and Sicily. Ali Ibn Tabari, Razi, Ali ʿAbbas and Ibn Sina distinguished themselves in translations as well as in original works. Ibn Sina had earned undying fame in Arabic medicine by his valuable contributions. His book titled *Qānun*, a master piece of medical work originally written in Arabic was a medical Bible for several centuries all over the world.
2. **Mathematics:** The principal figure in this field was Khwarizmi. He influenced mathematical thought to a greater extent than any other mediaeval writer. He composed the oldest works on algebra, and it was developed by others, especially ʿUmar Khayyam. This ʿUmar and Al-Aruni were two other great mathematicians and scientific minds of Islam.
3. **Astronomy:** The greatest contribution of the Arabs through the use of Arabic language was in astronomy. The first astronomical observatory, founded by Mamun at *Shamasia*, made valuable discoveries as regards the globe, the sun and the moon. Sind bin Ali, Yahya bin Mansur and other distinguished astronomers collected information on the procession of the equinoxes and the length of the solar year.
4. During the time of *Khalifa* Mamun, the astronomers were able to examine the size of the earth and its circumference unlike previous assumption that the earth was round at a time when Europe was ascertaining its flatness. At the time of the *Buwaihid* Sultan, Ruknud Dawlah, Jafar Al- Khazim ascertained the obliquity of the eristic and solved a problem in Archimedes which led to cubic equation. Al-Battani, Al-Baruni and ʿUmar Khayyam were the remarkable astronomers of the later ʿAbbasid period. ʿUmar Khayyam is credited with reforming the old calendar.
5. **Chemistry:** Through the help of translation into Arabic, the Arabs were able to make their greatest scientific contributions in Chemistry. Jabri Ibn Hayyan was famous as the father of Arabic Chemistry at *Kufa*. He and his disciples are credited with the establishment of pharmacy and dispensary stores. An early representative of zoological and anthropological sciences was Abu Uthman (d.868 C.E.) whose writings contain the germs of the theories of evolution, adaptation and animal psychology.
6. **Geography:** The Arabs invented the mariners’ compass and voyaged into parts of the world in quest of knowledge or in the pursuit of commerce. Ptolemy’s geography was translated by Yaqub (840 C.E.). Khawarizm’s work, was the first geography study accompanied by a map. Systematic geography appeared with Astakhir (d.950 C.E.). Hamdani, Masudi Yakut and others were the renowned geographers of the ʿAbbasid period (Rahim 2003:296-300)¹².

VI. PRESERVATION OF THE LANGUAGE FOR COMING GENERATIONS

Many, if not all works of Muslims heritage on science, have been translated into other languages. The most pathetic part is that the Catholics in Spain have destroyed all the valuable works, progressive ideas and institutions developed by the Arab genius. Centers of learning and culture have become the places of ignorance and darkness. The havens of scholars and knights have become the abodes of bandits and beggars. The history of the Catholics in Spain is a melancholy to the most illuminating history of the Arabs in Spain.

Now that almost all these works have gone into oblivion or have been destroyed, it is high time that a proactive measure should be taken in order to immortalize the language for the in-coming generation. With particular reference to Nigeria, since the inception of the language, Arabic Scholars have achieved a resounding success in self-actualization. They formed the first literate elite in the pre-colonial Nigeria. (Fafunwa 1995:60)¹³. There are many erudite Nigerian scholars who have contributed immensely to immortalize Arabic language either in producing Arabic prose or composing Odes.

To corroborate this assertion, Adeyemi (2011) states that among these scholars especially in Yorubaland is Shaykh Abdus-Salām Yūsuf Alikinla (d. 1960) who amongst his works on Arabic language is a

composition of a long ode called *Al-Hifridul-Farid*. This work is in form of an addition to the famous work of Abū-Bakr Muhammad ibn al-Hasan ibn Durayd al-Azdi (d. 321H), *Maqsūratu Ibn Durayd*¹⁴.

Among Nigerians scholars who have also left indelible footprint in the preservation of Arabic language for future generations is Shaykh Ādam Abdullah Al-Ilori (d. 1992). Without prejudice, Abubakre (2012) states:

Among those who have altered the course of history and influenced the destiny of generations, the name of Shaykh Ādam Abdullah Al-Ilori is etched on stone and cast in gold. A world-class intellectual, ebullient scholar and of dynamic personality. He revolutionized the teaching of Arabic and Islamic Studies in Southern Nigeria..... The sage left a seemingly unmatchable legacy of academic dynamism and intellectual eclecticism through his vast writings on other fields such as linguistics, history, political science, Islamic mysticism, philosophy, rhetoric, grammar and logic, among others¹⁵.

All his works were written in Arabic language to preserve the language from extinction and to be used by coming generations. This is just a section of the great contribution to the language by Yoruba scholars in the field of Arabic language and literature to immortalize Arabic in Nigeria and beyond. Works of this type is waning among the scholars of today which needs to be addressed so as to ensure the preservation of the language.

Arabic scholarship had been firmly established in the Northern and South – Western parts of Nigeria before the country was fully colonized in 1914. The history of Arabic learning in pre- and post *Sokoto* Jihad era is very glaring. The official language in the Northern Nigeria and some other parts of West African countries till the early 20th century was Arabic. The use of Arabic language has reduced with the colonial incursion into Nigeria. Among the various methods used by the colonial masters to suppress the Arabic language in the region was that English was introduced as the official language of commerce and administration. Thus, Arabic was pushed to the backstage and ceased to be the major means of literacy communication as it was before. (Abdul-Rahmon 2008:2-3)¹⁶.

VII. SUGGESTIONS

Presently, it is pathetic that while the French language is growing due to government's favorable attention to it through various policies; chief of which is its adoption as the second official language, Arabic does not receive the attention of the Nigerian government policy makers. What can salvage Arabic language from its total collapse in Nigeria is through the efforts of:

a) Arabic Scholars: Most children of Arabic scholars in Nigeria today do not want to study the language as a course either in secondary or tertiary institutions of learning. Firstly, their parents do not inculcate the study of the language into them from the childhood stage, thereby making them avoid its study. Secondly, some parents think that the language is difficult to comprehend; therefore, they prefer their children to study science or commercial subjects rather than the Arabic language. Arabic scholars should encourage their children to study it as a subject in schools so as incorporate the right-attitude of learning the language in them right from basic stage.

b) The Children: Most children today are not willing to study Arabic in school. Most of the children follow their colleagues who study science or commercial subjects and neglect the language as a course. Some students think that only lazy students take to arts subjects and so, subjects like Arabic will not make them successful in the society. In order to put more efforts to study Arabic language, frequent symposia and career talks should be organized in schools and by professional organizations such as Nigeria Association of Teachers of Arabic and Islamic Studies (NATAIS), International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), Academic Society of Arabic Language and Literature in Nigeria (ASALLIN) and a host of others at the local, state and national levels to enlighten the people on the value of the language.

c) Government: Government at all levels should create enabling environment for study of this language. This can be done by making it the country's second official language instead of French language which currently is accorded the second official language status in the country. Most of the states in the western Nigeria are biased in employing Arabic/Islamic teachers in their schools. This is one of the major set-back for children who are interested in learning the language in the schools. In the contemporary global age, Hashimi (2015:38) notes that the relevance of Arabic in the corporate world is very enormous¹⁷. He stressed further on its relevance at industries, companies, and banks with corporate links or headquarters in the Arab countries where there is a preference to employ those that are Arabic language literate.

d) Arabic Teachers: Arabic teachers should make the subject simple for the learners when they teach it. There should be instructional materials for learners so as to make the subject more interesting to learn. Also more qualified teachers should be employed to handle the course. Incentives should also be given to gifted students who demonstrate exceptional aptitude for the subject in order to pursue the subject to the highest level.

e) Use of Course Books: Relevant books on Arabic language should be used by teachers of the language so as to ease the burden of learning the language on students. Also, the books to be used for the subject should

be in line with the immediate environment of the learners and in accordance with Nigerian culture instead of depending on foreign-cultured books.

f) Individual Efforts: Efforts should be made by respective individuals at all levels to restore the glory of this language because it is a life and internationally accepted language that competes with others in usefulness in our society today.

g) Awareness against Religious Sentiments: Another area which will help in the preservation Arabic language especially in Nigeria is awareness against religious sentiments. According to Hashimi (2005:31), there are religious sentiments amongst the non-Muslims, who believe that Arabic language belongs solely to the Muslims and that they have nothing to do with it¹⁸. The major cause of this sentiments is their lack of knowledge about the difference between Arabic as a language and Islam as a religion. Arabic is a language that anybody can learn irrespective of tribe, ethnic group or religion. There are some countries who demand for expertise on the language as a means of civilization. So efforts should be made to correct this notion so as to remove the sentiments which people have about the learning of Arabic language.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The early history of the use of Arabic language presupposes the early literature of the Arabs. The potency of the language became strengthened with the revelation of the Quran. The language became more powerful in terms of imaginative capability and communicative adequacy when non-Arabs entered into Islam and used it as the medium of communication, literacy expression and scientific medium. It also served as medium of transmitting Greco-Arabic books such as Latin, Spanish and French languages. The language contributed immensely to the development of African history by documenting many works in Arabic script and preserving them in the archives. Its roles in Modern Science as stated in this paper should not be ignored. Among the major contributions of Arabic in Nigeria in the past were in the areas of eradication of illiteracy and encouragement of adult education through works written in Arabic language. This happened before the advent of Western education in the country. (Abduraheem, 2008:10)¹⁹.

Glasse (2005: 56) confirms this fact when he remarked that:

In addition to religious vocabulary, vast numbers of Arabic words have been adopted into such African and Asian languages as Swahili, Hausa, Yoruba, Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Malay, and others. Arabic is also the liturgical, not only of Islam, but of some Christian Churches ...²⁰.

In Nigeria today, the language faces many challenges. Some of them include, some Arabic scholars who do not encourage their children to learn it. Even if some children wish to learn it, there is no proper upbringing for them from the grass root. Many children show lackadaisical attitudes to it because the government does not create enabling environment for it. To preserve the language from going into extinction, career talks and symposia should be organized from time to time, so as to make the society aware of its importance for the betterment of in-coming generation. On the side of scholars, more works, written in Arabic should be encouraged and taught to create more interest on the language in the society. Efforts to translate many works from other languages to Arabic is a giant stride that makes the language remain forever.

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