



THE HIDDEN INFLUENCE OF LINGUISTICS ON THE GRAMMATICAL STUDY OF MAHDI AL-MAKHZOUMI: AN ANALYSIS OF HIS BOOK IN ARABIC GRAMMAR: CRITICISM AND GUIDANCE

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Abstract:

This paper examines the pioneering and distinctive project for evaluating, reforming, and simplifying Arabic grammar presented by the Iraqi scholar Mahdi Al-Makhzoumi in his seminal work, *Fī al-Naḥw al-‘Arabī: Naqd wa-Tawjīh* (In Arabic Grammar: Criticism and Guidance). This critical and evaluative project offered numerous noteworthy proposals and solutions to many complex and problematic issues in the Arabic grammatical tradition (*al-naḥw al-‘arabī*), which Al-Makhzoumi viewed as suffering from inconsistency and a lack of clarity. His endeavour represented a comprehensive attempt to reform both the subject matter and the methodology of Arabic grammar, aiming to serve the language and facilitate its teaching and learning. The central hypothesis of this study is that Al-Makhzoumi’s project was shaped by a hidden influence of modern linguistics, specifically the descriptive approach, despite the traditional, heritage-based guise (*ḥillah turāthiyyah*) that the work assumed. This paper analyzes the indicators and features of this subtle linguistic influence on Al-Makhzoumi’s grammatical discourse.

key words: Hidden influence; Linguistics; Descriptivism; Grammatical study; Evaluation; Mahdi Al-Makhzoumi.

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Introduction

The introduction of Linguistics (al-lisāniyyāt) into Arab culture marked a decisive turning point in modern Arabic linguistic research. This new discipline profoundly impacted the scholarly stance toward the traditional Arabic grammatical heritage, leading to calls for reform, renewal, and simplification, or even for its complete abandonment, in favor of embracing modernity and contemporary linguistic knowledge. Among the scholars who engaged in this movement and advocated for the evaluation, reform, and simplification of grammar was Mahdi Al-Makhzoumi. His efforts culminated in a series of works, most notably *In Arabic Grammar: Criticism and Guidance*, which serves as the focus of this study.

Al-Makhzoumi's objective was inherently valid and timely, particularly when considered against the difficulties learners faced in acquiring and teaching the Arabic language, and the widespread frustration with the complexity of grammatical rules that persisted even into the modern era. However, a critical question arises: Were these pedagogical concerns the sole, genuine motivations for his project, or did the emergence of linguistics and its diverse methodologies exert an influence? The core question addressed here is: To what extent did linguistics influence Al-Makhzoumi's grammatical study through his aforementioned book, and what are the indicators and features of this influence?

This article is structured into three main sections, following this introduction and the abstract:

- Defining Concepts in the Network of Relations: Deconstructing the key terms that constitute the article's title.
- The Hidden Influence of Linguistics on Al-Makhzoumi's Grammatical Study: Focusing on the primary features and indicators of this influence as revealed in his book.
- Evaluation of the Attempt: Assessing the positive and negative aspects of Al-Makhzoumi's project.

1. Defining Concepts in the Network of Relations

1.1 The Hidden Influence of Linguistics

A. Influence

Linguistically, al-athar (trace/vestige) is what remains of a thing, and al-ta'thīr (influence) is the act of leaving a trace (athar) in something [Ibn Manẓūr, n.d., vol. 4, p. 5]. To be influenced (ta'aththur) means that the trace appears in the thing, or that one is imprinted by it, following its path. In the context of literary criticism, the Impressionist school (al-ta'thīriyyah) holds that literary criticism is not subject to fixed principles or rational rules, but rather to taste and subjective influence [Majma' al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah, 2004, pp. 5–6].

Influence, therefore, is the manifestation of signs and indicators of being affected by something. In human interaction, influence is the ability to control others, either willingly or unwillingly, and it can be mental, behavioral, or emotional. The influence discussed here, by its nature, may be positive and desirable or negative, requiring resistance and liberation.

B. Hidden (al-Khafī)

The term al-khafī refers to something concealed, veiled, or unmanifested [Ibn Manzūr, n.d., vol. 14, pp. 234, 236]. It is the opposite of the apparent (al-zāhir), the clear (al-wāḍiḥ), and the manifest (al-jalī). Consequently, a hidden influence (al-ta'thīr al-khafī) is one where the signs of being affected are not clearly visible or explicitly declared. Conversely, a manifest influence (ta'aththur jalī) is one that is obvious and openly acknowledged.

C. Linguistics (al-Lisāniyyāt)

Linguistically, al-lisān (tongue) is the organ of speech, and al-lisan (speech/language) is the utterance [Ibn Manzūr, n.d., vol. 13, pp. 385–386]. The term Linguistics (al-lisāniyyāt) is fundamentally a Western concept. George Mounin notes that the first use of the word Linguistique was in 1833, while the term Linguiste (linguist) was used earlier by Raynouard in 1816 [Mūmin, 2008, Introduction].

In scholarly terms, linguistics is the scientific and objective study of the human language phenomenon in general (a holistic science). It seeks to study the common ground among languages and deduce the laws that govern these phenomena [Qaddūr, 2008, p. 15]. Linguistics primarily relies on description (al-waṣf), moving away from pre-established standards and judgments. Its modern inception is often traced to the publication of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de Linguistique Générale* in 1916. However, the field underwent revisions and transformations, leading it to abandon some of its initial principles, such as moving beyond mere description to include explanation and interpretation, and later, the reinstatement of linguistic norms and rules, as seen in the work of Chomsky.

D. The Hidden Influence of Linguistics

The Tunisian scholar 'Izz al-Dīn al-Majdūb discussed this issue, noting that the early Arab researchers who witnessed the rise of descriptive linguistics (al-lisāniyyāt al-waṣfiyyah) in the mid-twentieth century were influenced by its methodology. This influence took two forms [Al-Majdūb, 1998, pp. 13–48]:

- **Manifest Influence:** A group that was clearly and openly influenced, directly applying linguistic modernity to the Arabic language or engaging directly with linguistic thought. Examples include Ibrāhīm Anīs and Tammām Ḥassān.
- **Hidden Influence:** A second group that was subtly influenced, including Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafā and his student, Mahdī Al-Makhzoumi. These scholars did not explicitly or clearly engage with linguistic modernity but were affected by the descriptive methodology without compromising the essence of the traditional grammatical rules. They remained within the framework of the heritage, seeking

to reform, evaluate, and simplify grammar as they envisioned it. This paper aims to shed light on the features of this hidden influence on Al-Makhzoumi's grammatical study, a project that does not explicitly claim allegiance to linguistics but was nevertheless driven by it.

2. The Grammatical Study of Mahdi Al-Makhzoumi

2.1 The Grammatical Study (al-Dars al-Naḥwī)

A. Study (al-Dars)

Al-Dars refers to the act of reading and studying a book [Ibn Manzūr, n.d., vol. 6, pp. 79–80]. In its original sense, a dars (lesson) is what the teacher imparts to the student, representing a specific, defined amount of information and knowledge in a field, intended for comprehension, learning, and acquisition [Majma' al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah, 2004, pp. 279–280]. The teacher employs pedagogical methods and educational tools to achieve the lesson's objective.

B. Grammar (al-Naḥw)

Al-Naḥw (grammar) literally means the path, direction, or intention [Al-Fayrūzābādī, 2005, p. 1337; Majma' al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah, 2004, p. 908]. As a technical term, it is the science by which the states of the ends of words—inflection (i'rāb) and non-inflection (binā')—are known. Ibn Jinnī defined grammar as following and imitating the Arabs in their speech, inflection, and morphology, so that the non-Arab could achieve the same eloquence as the Arab [Ibn Jinnī, 2000, vol. 1, p. 34].

Grammar is a science established by Arab linguists to protect the language from error (laḥn) and deviation. It is organically and existentially linked to the language itself. The need for this science arose with the advent of Islam and the Qur'an, and the subsequent entry of non-Arabs into the faith, which led to the spread of errors in speech. The early steps in establishing the science of grammar were simple and instructional, focusing on inflectional movements. This study evolved into a clear scientific methodology, particularly with Al-Khalīl and his student Sībawayh, the most prominent figures in Arabic grammar. The role of the grammarians (al-nuḥāh) was to make the implicit grammatical rules, which existed in the minds of native speakers, explicit and accessible for learning.

C. Mahdi Al-Makhzoumi (1910/1919–1993)

Mahdi bin Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ Āl Zāyir Dahhām, known as Al-Makhzoumi, was a modern Iraqi grammarian, linguist, and poet. He was born in Najaf, Iraq, and received his early education there before traveling to Egypt in 1938 to pursue his university studies, earning a B.A. in Arabic Language from Fuad I University (now Cairo University). He later returned to Egypt for postgraduate studies, obtaining his M.A. (1951) and Ph.D. (1953), studying under prominent scholars such as Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, 'Abd al-Wahhāb Ḥamūdah, and Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafā.

Al-Makhzoumi's key works include:

- Al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī: A ‘māluhu wa-Manhajuhu (Al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī: His Works and Methodology), originally his M.A. thesis.
- Madrasat al-Kūfah wa-Manhajuhā fī Dirāsāt al-Lughah wa-al-Naḥw (The Kufan School and its Methodology in the Study of Language and Grammar), his Ph.D. thesis.
- Fī al-Naḥw al-‘Arabī: Naqd wa-Tawjīh (In Arabic Grammar: Criticism and Guidance), the subject of this study, in which he presented his reformist and evaluative view of Arabic grammar.
- Fī al-Naḥw al-‘Arabī: Qawā‘id wa-Taṭbīq (In Arabic Grammar: Rules and Application), a practical application of the proposals in his previous book.

D. Al-Makhzoumi’s Grammatical Study

Al-Makhzoumi dedicated his life to serving the Arabic language. His practical experience and awareness of the difficulties faced by learners, coupled with the contemporary calls for reform, led him to advocate for the simultaneous reform of both the subject matter and the methodology of grammar. The emergence of linguistics, brought to the Arab world through academic missions to Western universities, clearly influenced this trend of re-examining the rules of Arabic grammar.

While some Arab scholars, such as Ibrāhīm Anīs and Tammām Ḥassān, directly applied the new linguistic culture and adopted a critical stance toward the traditional grammatical heritage, particularly the Theory of the Agent (Naḥariyyat al-‘Āmil), Al-Makhzoumi remained rooted in the heritage. Although his work shows features of influence from descriptive linguistics, it was not a direct engagement with linguistic modernity. He sought to evaluate, correct, simplify, and purify grammar from the impurities that had attached to it [Laḥrash, 2012/2013, pp. 9–10].

Al-Makhzoumi’s grammatical study, as presented in *In Arabic Grammar: Criticism and Guidance*, was based on the following foundations [Al-Makhzoumi, 1986]:

- The views of the early grammarians (Kufan and Basran) must be the starting point for any attempt at reform and renewal.
- A clear bias toward the Kufan School (Madrasat al-Kūfah).
- Influence from modern scientific methodologies.
- Influence from the positions of Ibn Maḍā’ al-Qurṭubī and a rejection of the Theory of the Agent and Analogy (al-Qiyās).
- A distinct view of the sentence (al-jumlah), inflection (al-i‘rāb), and the inflectional movements (e.g., al-raf‘, al-khafḍ, al-naṣb).
- A call to divide linguistic study into distinct levels: phonological, morphological, grammatical (syntactic), and lexical.

3. The Hidden Influence of Linguistics on Al-Makhzoumi's Grammatical Study

Al-Makhzoumi did not study language sciences in Western universities, but he was certainly aware of the contemporary re-evaluation of grammar. Al-Majdūb argues that Al-Makhzoumi was motivated by linguistics, though his influence did not reach the point of explicit affiliation. However, this hidden influence led him to establish some of the axioms of modern linguistic study, a step not fully achieved by his mentor, Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafā.

Al-Makhzoumi's concept of the "modern study" appears to be a blend of:

- Ideas advocated by synchronic descriptive linguistics, which he absorbed from the prevailing intellectual atmosphere of his time rather than directly citing original sources.
- Views derived from historical and comparative linguistics, and judgments related to the Semitic language family.

Al-Majdūb suggests that Al-Makhzoumi unconsciously mixed these two approaches, unaware of the decisive debate in the history of linguistics that necessitated a methodological separation between historical and synchronic study, with priority given to the latter [Al-Majdūb, 1998, pp. 26–27]. Nevertheless, Al-Makhzoumi was more explicit in his alignment with linguistics than his mentor, and his attempt marked a transition point after which explicit affiliation with linguistics became a clear characteristic of subsequent Arab linguistic projects.

The following points illustrate the features and indicators of the hidden influence of descriptive linguistics on Al-Makhzoumi's grammatical study:

3.1 Explicit Statements on Methodological Reform

Although Al-Makhzoumi did not explicitly state his affiliation with linguistics, he made statements that align with the principles of the descriptive school. For instance, he noted that the modern era, with all its novelties, spurred attempts to reform and revive grammar, and that true simplification requires a comprehensive reform of the methodology and subject matter of the grammatical study [Al-Makhzoumi, 1986, p. 17]. The "new methodology" he refers to is clearly the descriptive method, which mandates the separation of grammar from philosophy and logic.

Crucially, Al-Makhzoumi stated: "It is not the function of the grammarian... to impose a rule on speakers or to deem their style incorrect, because grammar is a descriptive and applied study that does not exceed that state" [Al-Makhzoumi, 1986, p. 19].

He further clarified the grammarian's role: "The function of the grammarian is to record his observations and the results of his tests in the form of principles and rules dictated by the nature of this language... and to describe for us what happens to the word or the sentence and its various structures" [Al-Makhzoumi, 1986, p. 19].

These principles are identical to those championed by Western descriptive linguists against traditional European grammar. The insistence that the grammarian's role is

purely descriptive, without prescribing rules or judging correctness, echoes the descriptive linguists' critique of the prescriptive nature of traditional grammar. This position, which views the grammarian as a mere observer rather than a linguistic authority, is a clear indication of the influence of descriptive linguistics.

3.2 Favouring the Kufan School for its Descriptive Nature

Despite his mentor Muṣṭafā al-Saqqā's assertion that Al-Makhzoumi did not adhere to any specific school but chose the views closest to the nature of the language, Al-Makhzoumi clearly favored the Kufan School (Madrasat al-Kūfah).

In his book *The Kufan School and its Methodology*, Al-Makhzoumi stated: "While studying Al-Khalīl, I noticed in the views of the Kufans openings through which the student could glimpse the jurisprudence of Arabic and a sense of its nature, and I felt that their methodology in this study was suitable as a basis for a new structure" [Al-Makhzoumi, 1958, Introduction].

This preference stems from his belief that the Kufan approach was more descriptive and closer to the actual nature of the language. The Kufans relied more heavily on oral transmission (al-samā') and authentic texts (the Qur'an and poetry) than on the theoretical, logical Analogy (al-Qiyās) favored by the Basrans. Al-Makhzoumi saw the Kufan methodology as more aligned with the nature of linguistic study, as their views were characterized by soundness, grounded in actual Arabic speech, and consistent with the practical reality of the language.

This bias is evident in his support for Kufan terminology, such as using ḥurūf al-idāfah (letters of annexation) instead of the Basran ḥurūf al-jarr (prepositions), and his adoption of the Kufan classification of the verb into three types, including the Permanent Verb (al-fi'l al-dā'im), which the Basrans classified as the active participle (ism al-fā'il) [Al-Makhzoumi, 1986, pp. 78, 41–45]. Furthermore, he supported the Kufan view that the verb is the origin of all derivatives (aṣl al-mushtaqqāt), not the verbal noun (al-maṣdar) as held by the Basrans, aligning Arabic with other Semitic languages.

3.3 Criticizing Grammar as Prescriptive and Influenced by Greek Philosophy

Following the descriptive linguists, Al-Makhzoumi criticized traditional Arabic grammar as being prescriptive (mi'yārī) and a product of philosophical and logical thinking, arguing that the grammarians had confused matters by introducing philosophy and logic into their analysis of language, which is fundamentally social and far removed from such abstract reasoning.

He argued that the grammarians' function is to describe the reality of the language, not to impose rules or judge speech as correct or incorrect. This position directly challenges the prescriptive nature of the traditional grammatical tradition.

Al-Makhzoumi explicitly opposed the intrusion of philosophy: "...It is not for him [the grammarian] to philosophize that or build it upon a judgment of the intellect, because language is a social phenomenon subject to the same judgments as society, which are

based on the intellect of society itself, and may not agree with what the logic of the intellect and philosophy knows” [Al-Makhzoumi, 1986, p. 22].

He also criticized the grammarians' reliance on rational deduction:“...The grammarian is put to the test, and the first grammarians’ belief in the correctness of their methodology and their adherence to rational deduction, interpretation, and estimation is invalidated...” [Al-Makhzoumi, 1986, p. 20].

This critique was primarily directed at the Basran school's perceived over-reliance on rational and philosophical interpretations, which Al-Makhzoumi believed distanced the study from the true nature of the language.

3.4 Rejection of Analogy and the Theory of the Agent

Al-Makhzoumi, like other descriptive linguists, absolutely rejected the Theory of the Agent (Nazariyyat al-‘Āmil) and the excessive use of Analogy (al-Qiyās). He considered the Theory of the Agent a manifestation of arbitrariness (ta‘assuf) and the influence of Greek philosophy and logic, which corrupted the grammatical study.

He argued that when the grammarians—excluding Al-Khalīl, Al-Kisā’ī, and Al-Farrā’—lacked sufficient attested usage (samā‘), they resorted to analogy, turning it into a tool for manufacturing language and its structures, rather than merely interpreting it. When analogy failed, they resorted to far-fetched interpretations (al-ta’wīl al-ba‘īd) that contradicted the apparent form of the language [Al-Makhzoumi, 1986, pp. 67–68].

Al-Makhzoumi saw the Theory of the Agent as the core problem: “Sībawayh came... and he and his students after him wanted to codify this study... so they took liberties in using terminology that is not part of the language at all, such as al-‘āmil (the agent) and al-ma‘mūl (the governed element)... which paved the way for scholastic philosophy and Greek logic... From here, grammar began to deviate from its path and gradually transformed into an isolated, strange study that had nothing of the features of linguistic study except its appearance and form” [Al-Makhzoumi, 1986, p. 27].

He insisted that the verb is not the agent that causes the nominative (raf‘) or accusative (naṣb) case, because these are merely accidental features (‘awāriḍ) required by the style and the nature of the language [Al-Makhzoumi, 1986, pp. 27–28]. His reform project, therefore, required two steps:

- Purifying the grammatical study from the impurities brought by the foreign methodology of philosophy, which introduced the idea of the Agent.
- Defining the subject of the linguistic study and establishing a clear starting point for students [Al-Makhzoumi, 1986, pp. 15–16].

Al-Makhzoumi also challenged the traditional definition of Inflection (al-I‘rāb) as the change that occurs at the end of words due to the Agent. Following his mentor Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafā, he argued that the inflectional signs themselves denote meanings, rather than being merely the effect of a governing agent. He defined the meanings of the inflectional movements as follows:

- Dammah (Nominative): The sign of predication (al-isnād), indicating that the word is a subject (musnad ilayh), such as the subject (mubtada') or the agent (fā'il).
- Kasrah (Genitive): The sign of annexation (al-idāfah), whether by a preposition or otherwise.
- Faṭḥah (Accusative): The sign that the word is neither a subject nor a predicate nor an annexed element. It is considered a light movement that is frequent in Arabic speech.

3.5 Separation of Linguistic Levels and Focus on the Sentence

Al-Makhzoumi observed that the works of the early grammarians, such as Sībawayh and Al-Farrā', were not purely grammatical but a mixture of morphological, phonological, and grammatical studies. While he excused them due to the nascent state of linguistic research at the time, he called for the modern study of language to be more systematic.

In line with modern linguistic methodologies, Al-Makhzoumi advocated for dividing the linguistic study into four distinct levels [Al-Makhzoumi, 1986, pp. 162–163]:

- Phonological Level (al-mustawá al-ṣawfī): Studying the linguistic sound, its articulation, and phenomena like substitution and assimilation.
- Morphological Level (al-mustawá al-ṣarfī): Studying the isolated word, including derivation and compounding.
- Grammatical/Syntactic Level (al-mustawá al-naḥwī): Studying the composition and inflection of words in context, specifically the Sentence (al-jumlah), including its types, changes (e.g., fronting, delaying, omission), and rhetorical functions (e.g., affirmation, negation, interrogation).
- Lexical Level (al-mustawá al-mu'jamī): Studying the isolated word in terms of its semantic meaning.

For Al-Makhzoumi, the grammatical or syntactic study is specifically concerned with the sentence and the changes in its form and content. This focus on the sentence as the primary unit of analysis is a fundamental principle of modern syntax, which he adopted in his book *In Arabic Grammar: Criticism and Guidance*.

3.6 Emphasis on Meaning (al-Ma'ná)

Al-Makhzoumi's project placed a primary emphasis on meaning over form. He argued that the grammarians' preoccupation with the Theory of the Agent led them to neglect many issues that have a significant impact on determining and guiding meaning. He advocated for a synthesis of grammar and rhetoric (al-balāghah), a concept that is both old (seen in the work of Al-Jurjānī) and new (related to Firth's contextual theory, which influenced modern Arab linguists like Tammām Ḥassān).

He believed that the goal of linguistic study is to understand the meaning of the utterance, and that the grammatical structure is merely a means to that end. This focus on the communicative function and semantic dimension of language is a hallmark of modern functional and descriptive linguistics.

3.7 Language as a Social Phenomenon and its Evolution

Al-Makhzoumi opposed the grammarians' over-reliance on analogy and their philosophical approach, arguing that language is not subject to the judgments of the intellect or logic. Instead, it is a dynamic social phenomenon subject to the changes, movement, and vitality of society, not a static entity as the grammarians perceived it [Al-Makhzoumi, 1986, pp. 19–20].

He saw the grammarians' belief in the static nature of language as the reason for their reliance on analogy and interpretation, which led them to create linguistic structures that were not naturally used by native speakers. He argued that the grammarian's function is to follow the language, tracking its path through induction, observation, and description, and not to view the derived rules as fixed standards to be followed. This view, which rejects the imposition of prescriptive rules and emphasizes the social and evolutionary nature of language, is a direct echo of the principles established by Ferdinand de Saussure, the founder of descriptive linguistics [Mūmin, 2008, p. 123].

4. Evaluation of the Attempt

Al-Makhzoumi's reformist and evaluative project in *In Arabic Grammar: Criticism and Guidance* is a pioneering and distinguished effort that offered many solutions and proposals for complex issues in Arabic grammar. A key strength is that many of his proposals were grounded in the heritage itself, particularly the Kufan tradition. His work remained fundamentally a traditional grammatical work, calling for the reform of the method and material of grammar, not the creation of a new grammar. This is a significant point in his favour, as he did not directly affiliate with or blindly adopt linguistics, unlike some of his contemporaries who rushed to take dogmatic positions against the Arabic grammatical heritage.

4.1 Positive Aspects

- **Preservation of Heritage:** Despite the influence of new methodologies, the spirit of the heritage remained firmly rooted in his work. He relied on the early grammarians, such as Al-Khalīl, Al-Kisā'ī, and Al-Farrā', whose approach he considered purely descriptive and consistent with the nature of the language, untainted by philosophy and logic.
- **Constructive Simplification:** His simplification (*taysīr*) was not a matter of abbreviation or reduction but a new presentation suitable for learners, making the comprehension of grammar easier while preserving its structure and essence.
- **Critical Dual Perspective:** He viewed the heritage through two lenses: one descriptive and consistent with the language's nature, and the other influenced by philosophy and logic, leading to analytical deviations. This dual perspective is acknowledged by many Arab scholars [Al-Majdūb, 1998, p. 5].

- **Substantive Proposals:** His attempt provided convincing solutions and proposals for many complex issues, such as the sentence, the *nawāsikh* (operators), and the classification of verbs.
- **Integration of Theory and Application:** The study combined theoretical critique with practical application, making it one of the most comprehensive attempts at simplifying grammar within a constructive critical framework. His subsequent book, *In Arabic Grammar: Rules and Application*, served as a practical complement.
- **Reinstatement of Meaning:** The study reinstated the importance of meaning and content, focusing on the sentence and its functions, thereby advocating for a synthesis of grammar and rhetoric.

4.2 Negative Aspects

- **Lack of Methodological Foundation:** Al-Makhzoumi did not explicitly state the methodological foundations of his project. His approach was characterized by what Al-Majdūb termed Empiricism (*Empirisme*), marked by a lack of theoretical foundation for his scientific practice and a failure to fully articulate his premises, a common flaw in modern approaches to the heritage.
- **Inconsistent Application of Descriptive Principles:** Although influenced by descriptive linguistics, he did not adhere strictly to its principles. He failed to distinguish clearly between synchronic descriptive study (which establishes grammatical rules) and diachronic historical study (which tracks the language's evolution). He also blurred the lines between *lisān* (language system), *lughah* (language/dialect), and *kalām* (speech/utterance).
- **Contradiction on Prescriptivism:** Despite his strong opposition to prescriptivism, his project ultimately served a prescriptive goal—the educational objective of codifying rules for learners. This is a contradiction, as the educational goal was precisely what drove the early grammarians to establish the rules in the first place.
- **Internal Inconsistencies:** He exhibited contradictions, such as initially rejecting the Adverbial Sentence (*al-jumlah al-zarfīyyah*) but later accepting it as a third type of sentence. Furthermore, he contradicted his own principle that the grammarian should not impose rules or judge correctness, while simultaneously calling for the preservation of Classical Arabic (*al-fuṣḥá*) and its integrity.
- **Failure to Differentiate Scientific vs. Pedagogical Grammar:** He failed to grasp the fundamental difference between grammar as a science (which is not inherently simple) and the pedagogical requirements of teaching grammar (which necessitates simplification and reform). The science itself is not amenable to simplification; it is the teaching of the science that requires simplification of the material and methodology.

Conclusion

Mahdi Al-Makhzoumi strove throughout his distinguished academic career to serve the Arabic language and facilitate its teaching and learning. In *In Arabic Grammar: Criticism and Guidance*, he focused particularly on defining the subject matter of the grammatical study to make it easier for students to comprehend. He centered his analysis on the sentence—its structure and functions—a focus that he argued was neglected by the traditional Arab grammarians due to their preoccupation with the Theory of the Agent (*Nazariyyat al-‘Āmil*).

In Al-Makhzoumi’s view, the grammarians’ obsession with the Agent allowed philosophy and logic to strongly permeate the core of Arabic grammatical theory, giving it a clear philosophical and logical character that distanced the grammatical study from the true nature of the language, especially among later grammarians. He believed that the Arab grammarians had taken a wrong path that required correction and evaluation to set grammar on the right course. This was the goal Al-Makhzoumi sought to achieve through this book and all his works, leaving behind a positive legacy that earned the admiration and praise of researchers and scholars.

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