



ARABIC AND THE LOST IDENTITY: THE PROBLEM OF SYMBOLIC PRIDE AND THE ABANDONMENT OF PRACTICE IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

ZAHRAA IBRAHIM RAOF^{1*}

¹Al-Muthanna University / College of Applied Medical Sciences

AHMED QASIM MOHAMMED²

²Al-Muthanna University / College of Engineering

RAED ALIWI SHAYEA³

³Shiite Endowment Office in Muthanna

***Corresponding Author: Zahraa Ibrahim raof**

ABSTRACT

This research seeks to address a fundamental problem currently facing the Arab world: the gap between the positive emotional stance towards the Arabic language as a vessel of identity and belonging, and the tangible reality of its abandonment in daily communication, replaced by colloquial dialects or foreign languages. The research begins with the premise that pride in Arabic without speaking it represents a genuine identity crisis, reflecting a psychological and cultural deficit. Using a descriptive-analytical approach, the research examines the historical roots of the problem, represented by colonial policies, and then analyzes its contemporary manifestations in the educational system, the dominance of colloquial dialects, and the weakness of digital content. It concludes that restoring lost identity begins with restoring the Arabic language as a living language for life, not merely a heritage celebrated on special occasions.

Keywords: Arabic language, identity, globalization, bilingualism, cultural imperialism, intercultural communication.

DOI:-10.5281/zenodo.18811336

Manu script # 410

INTRODUCTION

"I see for the men of the West glory and strength... and how many nations have been glorified by the glory of their languages." In these verses, the poet describes a historical reality that continues to manifest itself in our contemporary world: strength and power have become associated with languages that carry the torches of knowledge and thought. Arabic, the language of the letter Dād and the bearer of the Quran, lives a strange paradox: it is a source of pride and honor in official and public discourse, yet it suffers from clear marginalization in daily practice, in homes, schools, and workplaces.

Speaking about the Arabic language today is not merely a discussion of vocabulary and grammar; it is a discussion of the very being and identity of the nation. Language is not simply a tool for communication, but rather "the framework through which belonging and loyalty to the state and the nation are expressed, and an indicator of the nation's strength or weakness." The central problem of this research lies in this stark contradiction: how can a nation take pride in its language at gatherings and events, while gradually abandoning it in daily life, thus transforming the language into a sacred icon in the collective consciousness, yet marginalized in reality?

This research aims to diagnose this phenomenon, analyze its historical and contemporary causes, and reveal the dialectical relationship between the abandonment of language in practice and the loss of identity. It will begin with the central premise that pride in a language without speaking it is a form of "suspended identity" that lacks cultural efficacy. The research will employ a descriptive-analytical approach to study this crisis from its historical roots to its contemporary manifestations, drawing on literature on language and identity and studies in social psychology, culminating in a forward-looking vision for preserving both language and identity.

First: Language and Identity: A Formative Relationship

The crisis of the Arabic language cannot be understood without understanding the organic relationship that connects it to identity. Identity is not a static entity, but rather "a person's perception of themselves, their beliefs, their cultural and intellectual heritage, and their religion. It is open to discussion, growth, renewal, and adaptation to changes." Language is the cornerstone of this identity; it is the vessel that carries ideas, beliefs, and customs, and it is the strongest symbol of belonging to a community.

Social identity theories indicate that the group to which a person belongs contributes significantly to their self-esteem and sense of belonging. Language emerges as the most important element of this group, serving as "the most important unifying factor for a nation's identity and culture, despite geographical distances and the diversity of its countries." When language declines in the lives of individuals and society, it inevitably leads to an identity crisis. This is known as an "identity crisis," where the individual finds themselves torn between their original culture, whose language they are beginning to abandon, and another culture they wish to integrate into but to which they do not fully belong. Losing one's mother tongue is losing a significant part of one's self, because "whoever loses their language and culture loses everything."

Secondly: The Historical Roots of the Problem: From Colonialism to Cultural Dependence. The weakening of the Arabic language and its separation from identity did not occur in a vacuum; rather, it is the result of historical accumulations in which Western colonialism played the most significant role. Researchers describe how "the foreign colonizer did not leave the Arab countries until he left the rules for the continuation of the occupation that guaranteed his continued presence in the nation, as his culture and language achieved for him bonds of relationship and connection that his soldiers could not achieve."

The colonizers realized early on that language is the key to identity, and that controlling minds begins with controlling tongues. At the beginning of the 20th century, the British and French conducted in-depth studies to understand the reasons for the strength of the Arab Muslim people. They discovered that its secret lay in their method of learning Arabic through the Quran in traditional Quranic schools (kuttabs). It was at this point that the colonial plan began targeting these kuttabs, establishing parallel government and foreign schools with the aim of "creating a class that would collaborate with the foreign occupier and become alienated from its own society." The colonizers succeeded in associating English and French with "sophistication" and "progress," while linking Arabic with backwardness and stagnation—a misconception that continues to dominate the minds of many even today.

This plan created an elite "fascinated by the West and its language," which contributed to entrenching a culture of dependency and made foreign languages the measure of civilization and culture. This has resulted in what is called "linguistic-referential psychological impairment," where Arabic speakers feel pride when speaking a foreign language and inferiority when speaking Classical Arabic. This is the psychological defeat that Ibn Khaldun described as "the vanquished imitating the victor."

Third: Manifestations of the Crisis in Contemporary Reality: Signs of Abandonment

The crisis of the Arabic language today manifests itself in several serious ways, confirming that pride in it has become mere slogans without genuine practice.

First: The Crisis of Education and Linguistic Disparity: Arab educational curricula suffer from a clear deficiency. In many countries, the time allocated to a foreign language exceeds the number of hours dedicated to Arabic. Even more serious is the proliferation of foreign schools and universities that teach their curricula entirely in a foreign language. In Egypt alone, there are more than thirty foreign universities and hundreds of schools that "teach their subjects in the complete absence of the Arabic language." This situation creates a generation that reaches advanced stages of education without being able to read a simple Arabic text without errors. It also creates a class and social gap between those who studied in Arabic and those who studied in a foreign language.

Second: The dominance of colloquial Arabic and the decline of Classical Arabic in daily life: One of the most dangerous manifestations of the abandonment of Arabic is the transformation of Classical Arabic into a language confined to reading, writing, and official occasions, while colloquial Arabic is used in all aspects of life. These colloquial dialects have become "standardized and used in gatherings, possessing their own literature and being the subject of seminars." This phenomenon has even reached academic institutions, where some doctoral dissertations are discussed in the local dialect, as is the case in Egypt. This distance between the language of the street (colloquial Arabic) and the language of thought and heritage (Classical Arabic) makes it difficult for young people and foreigners alike to connect with authentic Arab heritage.

Third: Weak presence in the digital sphere: Despite the increasing number of Arab internet users, Arabic digital content remains very modest compared to other languages. The spread of "Franco-Arabic" (writing Arabic using Latin script) in digital communication, and the proliferation of smartphone applications programmed exclusively in foreign languages, is further evidence of the decline of Arabic in the sphere most prominent in the lives of new generations.

Fourth: Language and Identity: Between Duality and Loss

The above leads us to the fundamental question: What is the impact of this linguistic abandonment on identity? Arab societies are experiencing a state of fragmentation and loss, and their language "embodies" this. Linguistic duality (colloquial Arabic for daily communication, a foreign language for science and sophistication, and Classical Arabic for heritage and religion) creates a duality of identity. The contemporary Arab lives in a cultural "vacuum"; he is disconnected from his heritage because he does not master his Classical Arabic, and he is not integrated into Western civilization because he is not an integral part of it.

This clash of civilizations is reflected in the individual, who feels confused and alienated. UNESCO experts have warned that if this situation continues for fifty years, "it will lead to the death of the Arabic language." If a language dies, identity dies with it. Studies have shown that 25 languages die annually worldwide, and Arabic may be headed for the same fate if neglect continues. Old colonial schemes are no longer necessary; we are killing our language and identity ourselves by voluntarily abandoning it in our homes and schools.

Fifth: Towards Restoring Identity: From Passive Pride to Positive Practice

Restoring a lost identity begins with restoring Arabic as a living language, not merely a language of heritage. This requires integrated work on several levels:

1. At the educational level: Revising school curricula and making Arabic a primary language of modern sciences at early stages. We must recognize that "there is no civilization without freedoms, no civilization with famine, and no civilization with ignorance of the nation's language." Mastering Arabic is the key to genuine innovation and creativity rooted in our heritage.
2. At the institutional level: Activating laws protecting the Arabic language in administration, politics, and economics, and reducing the dominance of foreign languages in these areas. Successful international experiences, such as those of Turkey and Korea, confirm that progress begins with establishing the national language.
3. At the individual and family level: Returning to speaking simplified Modern Standard Arabic in daily life and instilling in children a love for and use of it, not only as a religious language, but also as a language of science, thought, and communication with others. "The Arabic language is not merely a means of communication, but an existential essence and a civilizational destiny." Whoever takes pride in their language takes pride in themselves and their identity.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the question remains: When will we speak our language? The greatest challenge facing the Arab nation today is not its pride in Arabic, but its ability to speak it and make it a present language in all aspects of life. To take pride in something while neglecting it is a contradiction that undermines the foundations of identity and weakens belonging. Restoring our lost identity depends on restoring the Arabic language as a living, vibrant language, not merely a language of rituals and occasions. Just as language is the vessel of thought, it is also the vessel of existence. Whoever preserves their language preserves their existence and identity amidst the clash of civilizations and the interaction of cultures.

List of Sources and References:

1. Al Jazeera Documentary. (2019). Arabic... The Lost Identity Between Colloquial Arabic and the Language of the Occupier. Al Jazeera Net.
2. A Group of Authors. (2024). The Language of Resistance and the Clash of Civilizations: A Reading in the Philosophy of Survival and the Valor of the Tongue. Community website.
3. Al-Ittihad. (2026). The Arabic Language and the Danger of Losing National Identity. Al-Ittihad Newspaper.
4. Mas'ad, Marlene. (2025). Lost Identity and Multiple Affiliations. Al-Nahar Newspaper.
5. Al-Bashrawi, Maryam and Younes, Sarah. (2024). The Crisis of Arab Identity. New Generation Program.
6. The Jordanian Arabic Language Academy. (2023). The Importance of the Arabic Language in Civilizational Communication in the Contemporary World. Academia.edu.
7. Kuwait. (2024). The Loss of Arab Identity. National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters.