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| **Semiotic Communication Between Arab Conception and Western Theory** | | |
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***Abstract****:*

*Communication is a fundamental human necessity and a central concept that emerges through the articulation of intentions. It is through communication alone that an individual can achieve self-realization, interact with others, and meet their needs. Due to its significance, it has been a focal point in both Arab and Western literary studies, historically and in contemporary discourse. These studies emphasize elements that affect the communicative process, whether sustaining or disrupting it. As such, scholars have concentrated on analyzing the components of communication, its linguistic and non-linguistic signs, its structures and categories, the relationship that binds the interlocutors, the ongoing generation of meaning, and the issue of intentionality and its influence on the success or failure of the communicative process. In light of the reflections on communication, several critical literary questions arise: What is the essence of communication, what are its mechanisms, what factors contribute to its continuity or disruption, and how have classical Arab literary studies and modern Western theories interpreted this?*

***Key words****: Communication, linguistic sign, non-linguistic sign, continuity of meaning generation, intentionality, signifier, signified.*

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**Introduction**

Since human beings are inherently social, influencing and being influenced by those around them, it becomes necessary for them to achieve self-realization through interaction. This involves attempting to convey their thoughts to others and understanding what lies within others' minds. This can only be achieved through an innate instinct, essential to human nature since the beginning of creation: communication. Thus, driven by the need to communicate, humans strive to employ available means of expression and invent new mechanisms for it. As Al-Razi states: "Man is created in such a way that he cannot independently fulfill all his needs, so he must communicate what is within his mind to others in order to seek their help."

It is a fundamental human necessity and a natural process present in various contexts, serving as the primary means to realize one's aspirations. The elevation of human life is contingent upon its continuity. In light of its profound significance and esteemed status, John Dewey proclaims that communication is the most remarkable aspect of human affairs². Thus, the act of communication has captured the attention of numerous ancient scholars and contemporary researchers alike, culminating in the development of theories that delve into communication and its intricacies.

What is meant by communication, and what are its underlying mechanisms?

**I-Communication:**

Communication occupies a pivotal role in human existence, as it allows individuals to engage with one another and meet their needs. To grasp the true essence of communication, it is imperative to examine its meaning from both linguistic and conceptual perspectives.

**I.1 In Linguistics:** According to Ibn Manzur in his lexicon Lisan al-Arab, the root "w, s, l" signifies the concepts of connection, establishing links, or bringing together. It embodies the act of forming a relationship or bond between two entities. To "connect" something implies maintaining ties, where the link between them is crucial. The plural form denotes "connections," and it is stated, "So-and-so has a bond that he nurtures," indicating that a relationship or means of connection exists. The terms "continuity" and "union" reflect the facilitation of connection, leading to "communication," which stands in contrast to separation and disconnection. Thus, the term "communication" is intrinsically associated with the notions of gathering, joining, and attachment, implying the act of linking one entity to another or bringing individuals together, as opposed to isolation and distance.

In both French and English, the equivalent term for communication stems from the Latin root "communis," which conveys the meanings of sharing and interaction.

**II.2.In Terminology:** Human life is fundamentally shaped by relationships with others, established through specific communicative and expressive systems. These systems are essential components of social existence, for without communication, no group or community could exist. Individuals within such a community would remain mere psychologically isolated entities, deprived of even a semblance of meaningful exchange. Thus, communication is the human behavior through which individuals achieve self-realization, navigate their lives, and sustain their existence. "Every action within social life is considered a form of communication."

Communication is an interaction between two or more parties, wherein the sender endeavors to convey his thoughts to the recipient, influence him, and persuade him of his proposed argument. This recipient may either support or oppose the issue at hand. In this communicative process, which is inherently circular, the sender becomes the receiver, and the receiver assumes the role of the sender. The sender seeks to construct meaning, while the recipient aims to deconstruct and analyze it. This implies that the recipient attempts to unravel the communicative signs produced by the sender, decode their messages to unveil their underlying meanings, and comprehend their true significance. Thus, the communicative process is interactive, circular, and organized. In this context, Muhammad Fouad Abu al-Khair defines communication as the reciprocal influence between the parties involved in the interaction.³

The continuity and success of the communicative process require the presence of six elements, as noted by Roman Jakobson. These elements include the sender of the linguistic message, the receiver, who must be able to deconstruct the message and uncover its hidden meanings. Additionally, the sender must provide a reference point for the message, and there must be a shared system between the parties involved in the communicative act, as well as a communication channel.⁴

Our ancient scholars have exhibited a profound interest in communication, highlighting it as a central concept that manifests through the articulation and revelation of meanings and intentions. This is eloquently expressed by Al-Jahiz when he discusses the notion of clarity, stating: "Clarity is an encompassing term for anything that lifts the veil of meaning and tears aside the curtain that obscures the conscience, allowing the listener to grasp Its essence and penetrate its core, irrespective of the nature of the evidence presented. The crux and ultimate aim of both the communicator and the audience revolve around understanding. Whatever facilitates comprehension and elucidates the meaning is, in that context, clarity."⁵ A close examination of Al-Jahiz's definition reveals that he addresses the components of the communicative process, which pivots around two principal poles: The sender and the receiver, whose ultimate goal in establishing a communicative process is understanding and comprehension, can achieve this only through clarity—meaning transparency—and, consequently, influence and persuasion. The essence and purpose of both the speaker and the listener revolve around the notions of understanding and being understood. Here, Al-Jahiz has presciently recognized what modern studies in argumentation assert: that the primary function of language is to influence and persuade, rather than merely to convey information. The sender strives to articulate his message and ideas clearly in order to alter the listener's perspective and convince him of the presented argument, thereby "lifting the veil of meaning."

In order for the sender to effectively convey his message and present his ideas, he employs specific means, which may encompass both linguistic signs and non-verbal cues. Al-Jahiz references these categories, and we will explore them further. These signs and cues are founded upon a mutually recognized system between the parties involved. Each linguistic community possesses its own unique semiotic framework, without which clarity would remain elusive. All these elements interact within a defined context, weaving a rich tapestry of communication.

Communication can manifest internally, as a dialogue between an individual and their own self, where one cultivates an inner self that engages in introspective discourse. It can also occur externally, where a person interacts with another member of their species. In these exchanges, the individual utilizes both linguistic signs and non-linguistic signs.

What, then, is the essence of a sign, and what is meant by linguistic and non-linguistic signs?

God, in His divine wisdom, has bestowed upon humanity the intellectual capacity to produce a unique semiotic system, encompassing both linguistic and non-linguistic signs. This system facilitates contemplation, comprehension, and the conveyance of thoughts to others of the same kind. Due to the profound significance of signs and the systems they inhabit within human life, they have received central focus and attention in both ancient and modern Arabic and Western studies. Scholars consider the sign to be a tangible, concrete entity that points to an underlying abstract truth that is not immediately visible.

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure asserted that the signs we engage with in our daily communications are linguistic signs characterized by a dual nature. These signs are structured around two components: the signifier, which is the acoustic image articulated by the speaker and received by the listener’s ear, and the signified, which is the mental image or concept that emerges in response to the signifier. These two elements are inseparable; the presence of one inherently calls forth the other. De Saussure likened them to the two faces of a single sheet of paper, underscoring that the process of their association is termed signification. Thus, the linguistic sign does not merely link the external reference to the signifier but instead establishes a connection between the signifier and the signified.⁶

Conversely, we observe that the concept of a sign among Arab scholars has been intricately linked to the notion of signification. Ibn Manzur, in his lexicon Lisan al-Arab, articulates: "To guide someone to something means to lead them toward it. The guide is that which directs; thus, the guide itself serves as the sign. He guided him along the path, indicating it through signification."⁷ Moreover, he elaborates on the terminology associated with signification and clarity, stating: "The term signification can be pronounced with either a kasra or a fatha. Sibawayh describes signification as a mark of clarity and understanding."

Through this definition, signification becomes intertwined with meanings of elucidation, clarity, and communication, implying that it serves to define and illuminate a subject by relying on means referred to as signs. In essence, signification unveils the unknown through the known, acting as a beacon of indication.

Raghib al-Isfahani reinforces this idea, positing that signification is the vehicle through which knowledge of a subject is attained, akin to the way words signify meaning, as well as the indications derived from gestures, symbols, and writing. This remains true regardless of whether it is intended by the creator of the sign, as in the instance of observing a person's movement and inferring their aliveness.

Herein lie the components of signification, or the sign, which are manifested in the dynamic interplay between the word and its meaning—those meanings that dwell concealed in the human mind, not immediately visible, yet revealed through language. Meaning is actualized solely through words and can only be conceived via them; conversely, meanings serve as the impetus for the existence of signs. Were it not for humanity's intrinsic need for words to articulate thoughts and inner sentiments, the endeavor to produce or create them would be non-existent.

Al-Jurjani articulates that "signification is the condition wherein knowledge of one thing necessitates knowledge of another; the first is the signifier, and the second is the signified." The term "condition," as noted in al-Jurjani's definition, refers to the system within which signs operate; indeed, a sign possesses no intrinsic value apart from the established system recognized within the linguistic community.

The Arabs' interest in the study of signs and their significations was primarily aimed at unveiling the hidden meanings and mysteries of the Holy Quran. Additionally, Allah, in many verses of His sacred text, has directed us to reflect upon and contemplate the linguistic signs within His Quran and the wondrous signs of creation. The sky, the mountains, the seas, the trees, and the creation of humankind—all serve as manifest signs pointing to an unseen truth: the oneness of Allah, the Exalted, and His unparalleled might. As He says: "Indeed, in that are signs for a people who reason" (Raad: 4) and "And by the stars, they are guided" (An-Nahl:16).

It can be observed from the preceding discussion that a sign consists of two components: the "signifier" and the "signified," as noted by de Saussure, or, as recognized by Arab scholars, it can be understood as a "word" and its "meaning." This notion is echoed by Avicenna, who stated: "Indeed, man possesses a sensory power that allows the images of external realities to be imprinted upon it... forming a second, stable impression, even when the object is absent from the senses."

The essence of the denotation of a word is that, when it is etched in the imagination, the sound of the name evokes a corresponding meaning in the mind, enabling the individual to recognize that this sound refers to that particular concept. Whenever the senses present something to the mind, it turns to its meaning.Avicenna (d. 427 AH / 1037 CE) was perceptive in recognizing the nuances of the denotative communication process and its evolution, as well as the centrality of the linguistic sign and its profound effects on the psyche. He highlighted the strong connection between word and meaning and the associative relationship that binds them together. His insights serve as a testament to the clarity of his vision and the depth of his analysis concerning the mechanisms of language production and the active engagement of the human mind in both reception and creation. Upon a closer examination of this succinct and insightful assertion, it becomes evident that Allah, the Exalted, created mankind and endowed him with a sensory capability (the intellect) that enables him to capture and imprint what he perceives from the external world; When a person perceives external matters, these are represented in their mind as images or meanings that are imprinted within the psyche. Subsequently, they attempt to translate these representations or concepts into linguistic signs, whether spoken or written, through which they can convey these ideas to their audience. Al-Qartajani emphasized this by stating: "Everything that exists outside of the mind, once perceived, creates a mental image corresponding to the perception of that external reality. When one expresses this mental image derived from perception, the words employed construct the form of that mental image in the understandings and minds of the listeners, thus granting the meaning an alternate existence through the denotation of words.

If there is a need to establish written symbols that signify the words for those who may not have the opportunity to hear them spoken, then these written symbols establish in the minds the forms of the words, thereby creating in the intellect representations of meanings. Thus, the auditory image of the words serves as a signifier for the written forms and denotes the mental images, while the mental images serve as signified for the auditory representations of the words and signify the external objects being comprehended.

If we closely examine what Avicenna asserted in ancient times alongside the insights of Ferdinand de Saussure in modernity, we observe a remarkable similarity in their ideas concerning the dual nature of the sign. This duality pertains to the components of meaning: the word and the concept, which correspond to what is referred to in Western studies as the signifier and the signified. On one hand, both thinkers emphasize the psychological aspect of the sign, evident in the effect that words have on the mind of the recipient (the signified meaning)—that is, the mental image or representation that forms in the listener’s mind when they receive the word. This duality is further reinforced by Al-Razi, who, in the 6th century AH (12th century AD), linked words to meanings rather than to external entities, stating: "Words are not designed to signify external existences; rather, they are established to indicate mental meanings."

This pertains to those who view the sign as having a dual structure. In contrast, those who recognize it as having a three-part construction include Ogden and Richards, along with their renowned semantic theory, known as the theory of meaning. This referential theory provides an insightful scientific perspective on the process of communication. The researchers sought to emphasize the independence of meaning and its liberation from the constraints of words. A word does not signify a single meaning; rather, it encompasses various meanings that vary depending on context and the audience. Thus, their communicative sign is conceptualized as a three-part structure, consisting of the symbol, the idea, and the referent, depicted in the form of a triangle. This model asserts that meaning arises from a triangular relationship among the signifier, the signified, and the referent, where the connection between the symbol and the idea is continuous, as is the connection between the idea and the referent. However, the link between the symbol and the referent is intermittent, which can be illustrated in the following diagram:

The idea

The Referent

The symbol

**So, what causes the disconnection and continuity?**

Continuity signifies companionship and interconnectedness. When a drawn or spoken symbol is received by the audience, it immediately evokes an impression (an idea) within their minds. This idea instinctively prompts the recipient to associate it with a specific subject, depending on their cognitive capacities. Should they fail to establish this connection, the communicative process falters, resulting in a lack of understanding. Therefore, the relationship remains continuous between the symbol and the idea, as well as between the idea and the referent.

Conversely, the disconnection arises from the fact that the symbol does not directly refer to the referent; there is no inherent relationship between them. The symbol first engages the mind, which then interprets it and assigns it a subject or referent. Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), the founder of semiotics and a leading American philosopher, emphasized this process by stating that the sign is a triadic entity: it designates a second thing in order to reference a third. He concentrated on studying the sign and its semantic charges, as well as the continuously evolving meanings that arise from the interaction of three primary poles, which are:¹⁴

**1-**The first component (representamen) represents the realm of possibilities and sensations; it encompasses tangible experiences (auditory, visual, tactile, or olfactory). In other words, it constitutes the existential, perceptible aspect of the sign. This can be likened to the 'signifier' in Saussure's framework, and to the 'symbol' in the theories of Ogden and Richards.

**2-**The second component (object) is a fundamental element of the sign according to Peirce. It asserts that the representamen has an object, which can be categorized into two types. The first represents the active, dynamic aspect; that is, the entity to which the sign refers and seeks to depict. The second is the direct object, namely the idea to which the representamen points. This can be likened to the 'referent' in the components of the sign as outlined by Ogden and Richards.

**3-**The third component (Interpretant) embodies the realm of thought and is the necessary mediating element that connects the representamen to the object in the mind's effort to clarify and elucidate the representamen. Without this interpretant, such a connection would not exist, nor would there be understanding or effective communication. In Peirce's framework, the interpretant represents a new sign generated from the impression and effect left by the representamen in the mind of the sign's recipient. This can be likened to the 'signified' in Saussure's terms, and the 'idea' in the framework of Ogden and Richards. Thus, the sign, according to Peirce, is conceptualized in the following schematic representation:

Interpretant

Object

Representamen

It is noted here that there is continuity between the representamen and the interpretant, as well as between the interpretant and the object. However, there is a discontinuity between the representamen and the object, meaning that we cannot directly move from the representamen to the object without first passing through the necessary mediating factor, which is the interpretant.

This transitional movement occurs from the first component (representamen), which is characterized by ambiguity and lack of clarity, to the second component (object), where the sensations (the referent) are transformed from an indeterminate, unclear nature to a determinate, clear subject, relying on the third component (interpretant). This transitional process can be illustrated in the following diagram:

Interpretant

Representamen…………………………………………………….. object

This transitional movement, embodying the true essence of the sign and affirming its vitality and evolution, is referred to as semiosis—indicating the continuous generative flow of meaning.

Before this, we find Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, who passed away in 505 AH, demonstrating his keen understanding of signification. He moves beyond merely highlighting the essence of signification to uncovering its core and substance while discussing things and their four levels. He states: "Know that the levels we intend are four: the existence of a thing in reality, then in the mind, then in words, and finally in writing. Writing signifies the word, and the word signifies the meaning that resides in the soul, which exemplifies existence in reality."¹⁵

Upon closer examination of Al-Ghazali's statement, we find it to be a profound description of a sound communicative process, articulated with precise linguistic expressions. It reveals the manner of perceiving reality and the process of producing and receiving language. In this statement, he elucidates the hierarchies of things.

**What is meant by the hierarchy of things?**

It is important for us, before understanding the meaning of the hierarchy of things, to first comprehend the meaning of "things."

It is widely recognized that "things" is the plural of "thing," and upon examining Arabic dictionaries, we find that a "thing" refers to that which must be known or revealed. It signifies everything that exists, whether it is tangible or abstract, real or mental. Therefore, the concept of the hierarchy of things refers to the arrangement and relationship between different entities.Here, we must note that al-Ghazali's use of the word "then" is neither arbitrary nor capricious; rather, it is intentional and purposeful. The term "then" denotes both order and succession. Ibn Hisham al-Ansari explains that this word is employed to indicate "¹⁶arrangement and delay." Thus, "then" connects the ranks of things, signifying that, according to al-Ghazali’s hierarchy, a thing first exists outside the mind, meaning it is present in reality. In other words, an individual may be unaware of it because it does not reside in their consciousness.Due to the need for communication, images of these real entities take shape in the mind, leaving impressions in the soul. To convey these impressions and concepts from one’s mind to an audience, a medium is required—hence the use of words. However, when this audience is, for various reasons, distant or absent, another means of communication becomes necessary to convey the message without words; thus, writing emerges as a crucial tool.

Thus, we conclude that:

1. The existence of entities in reality is signified by the existence of ideas in the mind, and conversely, the existence of ideas in the mind signifies the existence of entities in reality.
2. The existence of ideas in the mind is represented by the existence of words, and the existence of words signifies the existence of ideas in the mind.
3. The existence of words is represented by the existence of writing, and the existence of writing signifies the existence of words.

Accordingly, things first exist in reality, then transition to the mind, afterward are expressed through words, and finally are recorded in writing. This process can be illustrated in the following diagram:

The existence in reality, the existence in the mind, the existence in words, and the existence in writing.

Thus, according to Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, the sign through which we communicate has a tripartite nature:

1. The existence in reality.
2. The existence in the mind.
3. The existence in words and writing (depending on the context of communication, whether spoken or written) and the state of the receiver.

Regarding the relationship between the signifier and the signified, or between the word and its meaning, opinions have diverged significantly. Ferdinand de Saussure argued that this relationship is arbitrary, suggesting that there is no inherent connection between the two; instead, it is a conventional and unmotivated association. He emphasized that the transition from the signifier to the signified does not occur mechanically. This implies that a user of linguistic signs—since he focused exclusively on linguistic signs—cannot grasp the meaning evoked by sounds through mere suggestion. His rationale lies in the fact that while mental images in human minds may be similar, the ways in which they are expressed (the signifiers) differ, which accounts for the diversity of languages.¹⁷

Before Saussure, Ibn Jinni (d. 392 AH) affirmed this arbitrary conventional relationship when discussing language. He stated that "language is an acquired mental ability represented by a system of arbitrary spoken symbols, through which members of society communicate."¹⁸ This indicates that language is acquired by individuals from their surrounding environment, making it a social construct rather than an individual one, existing in potential within the mind. It is expressed by the speaker through a mutually agreed-upon symbolic system, ensuring comprehension and effective communication, thus facilitating the continuity of information exchange. Similarly, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH) noted that "what exists in the external world and in the mind does not differ across countries and nations, unlike words and writing, which are determined by convention and agreement."¹⁹ Therefore, there is a consensus regarding what exists in the external world and in the mind, while there is variability in the expressions used in words and writing, this is further confirmed by Al-Razi (d. 606 AH) in his Mafatih al-Ghayb, where he states: "Words signify what is in the minds, not what is in the external world. For this reason, it is said that words indicate meanings, as meanings are those intended by the speaker, and they are mental constructs."²⁰ This notion is supported by Al-Suyuti (d. 911 AH), who remarked: "Names do not signify their referents by virtue of their essence; there is no inherent connection between the name and the named. Thus, it is permissible for them to differ across nations and for them to change. For example, a garment is called one thing in the Arabic language and another in the language of non-Arabs. If a garment were called a horse and a horse were called a garment, it would not be impossible." Unlike rational evidence, which indicates by its inherent nature and cannot vary, language signifies through established conventions and mutual agreements.²¹

Considering that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is generally arbitrary—meaning that the signified is independent of the signifier’s control—Ogden and Richards emphasized in their book The Meaning of Meaning that the signifier does not refer to a specific signified (meaning); rather, the signifier transforms into a signified, and this latter signified becomes a new signifier in search of another signified, and so on. Charles Sanders Peirce also recognized this in terms of the sign's potential for ongoing generation, leading to a series of signs with unlimited meanings. It is important to clarify here, to avoid confusion, that the continuity of generation does not imply that different meanings arise solely from different receivers or varying times and places. Instead, what is meant by semantic generation is the emergence of different meanings from the same sign in relation to the same receiver.

The Arabs, long ago, keenly observed this phenomenon of semantic regeneration. An example of this is what Al-Jurjani discussed about the various forms of speech. He said: "Speech comes in two forms: one where the meaning is reached directly through the words themselves. This happens when, for instance, you intend to convey that ‘Zayd has left’ and you simply say, ‘Zayd has gone out.’ The other form requires more than just the words for the meaning to be fully understood. The words suggest an initial meaning based on their literal use, but from that meaning, the listener deduces a second, deeper meaning, which conveys the actual intent. This type of speech involves ‘metonymy,’ ‘metaphor,’ and ‘simile.’ For example, when you say, ‘He has much ash by the pot,’ or ‘He has a long sword belt,’ or of a woman, ‘She sleeps into the morning,’ you are not conveying your true intent with just the surface meaning. The words first hint at their apparent meanings, but the listener interprets them to understand the deeper significance, such as from ‘much ash by the pot,’²² implying generosity, from ‘a long sword belt,’ implying tall stature, and from ‘she sleeps into the morning,’ implying wealth and privilege, with someone to manage her affairs.” He reinforced this concept in his book Secrets of Eloquence by saying, “The listener does not grasp that deeper meaning directly from the words, but rather from the implied meaning within the words themselves.” ²³This could be represented in the following diagram:

Plentiful ashes (Signifier 1) seeks a signified (1) → A place with abundant ashes (Signified 1) becomes a signifier (2) seeking a signified (2) → A place where much cooking occurs (Signified 2) becomes a signifier (3) seeking a signified (3) → A place with many guests (Signified 3) becomes a signifier (4) seeking a signified (4) → The owner of the place is generous (Signified 4).

In other words, we have derived a series of meanings from a chain of interpretations applied to a single sign, with the same analyst. The number of interpretations and transformations depends on the level of understanding of the recipient. If the recipient has a lower level of comprehension, they might stop at the first interpretation (the surface meaning). If they are of an intermediate level, they might reach the second or third interpretation, and if they have a high level of comprehension, they will continue through the series of interpretations and transformations.

The signs that humans use in their daily interactions, spanning various fields, encompass both linguistic and non-linguistic forms. This is precisely what modern studies have called attention to through the discipline of semiotics or semiology, which emerged from two distinct origins: an American one, with the mathematician and logician Charles Sanders Peirce laying its foundations, and a European one, foretold by Ferdinand de Saussure, whose focus was solely on linguistic signs, considering them the primary means of communication. In his reflections on language, Saussure stated: "We can thus imagine a science that studies the life of signs within the framework of social existence, a science that could branch off from social psychology, and ultimately from general psychology. We will call this science semiology, and it will shed light on all types of signs and the laws that govern them… Linguistics, in turn, will be but one part of this broader science."²⁴

Saussure only speculated on this in modern times, recognizing that individuals communicate through non-linguistic signs, and that the communicative process can still succeed. For example, the sign language of the deaf and mute allows for communication without linguistic symbols, yet the exchange of information is effective. Likewise, military signals and traffic signs are non-verbal, but they facilitate successful communication.

It is noteworthy that our Arab scholars in the past acknowledged the diversity of communicative signs, both linguistic and non-linguistic. An exemplary illustration of this is found in the works of Al-Jahiz (160 AH - 255 AH), who states in his book "Al-Bayan wa Al-Tabyeen": "All types of signs indicating meanings, whether verbal or non-verbal, can be categorized into five distinct categories, which neither decrease nor increase. The first is verbal, followed by gesture, then contracts, then writing, and finally the state referred to as 'Nasbah.' The 'Nasbah' represents a state that signifies, standing in place of these categories and encompassing their meanings. Each of these five categories possesses a distinct form that differs from its companions and employs a unique method that contrasts with its counterparts. These signs collectively reveal the essence of meanings in general and their realities in interpretation."²⁵

Here, Al-Jahiz—the exceptional scholar who demonstrated profound insight and keen perception—defined the types of linguistic and non-linguistic signs through which individuals communicate. These concepts have become the foundation for contemporary semiotic research, encompassing the following:

**The Word:** (Linguistic Sign): This refers to verbal proficiency or oral linguistic production, representing an individual's ability to express what lies within their mind. It comprises the auditory vocal images emitted by a person with a sound speech apparatus, which are received by someone with a healthy auditory system. This sign is relied upon when the recipient is present during communication.

**The Gesture:** (Non-Linguistic Sign): Its medium consists of bodily members, such as raising a hand, smiling, or lifting the eyebrows... All of these are present signs that indicate something else that is not present.

**The Token:** (Non-Linguistic Sign): (Counting without words or writing): These are signs indicating numeration, such as knowing the days of the month from the lunar phases or determining the times of day from the positions of the sun and shadows... etc.

**The Line or Writing:** (Linguistic Sign): This refers to written linguistic production, representing written proficiency that is relied upon when the recipient is distant or absent during communication.

**The Sign (Nusba):** (Non-Linguistic Sign): A sign that clearly indicates its meaning without the need for interpretation. Any individual who perceives it comprehends its meaning directly through reason and contemplation, such as the signs of God's blessings that signify His oneness, like the creation of humans, animals, and plants, and the raising of the sky without pillars. All of these serve as indicators that the Creator is one and unique.

The previous statement underscores the strong relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic signs. Often, non-linguistic signs can substitute for linguistic ones, and in many contexts, non-linguistic signs can be more expressive than linguistic signs. Al-Jahiz articulates this by saying: "Gestures and words are partners, and they serve as excellent aids for one another; how often gestures stand in for words, and how they can suffice without writing. Without gestures, people would fail to comprehend specific meanings and would remain utterly ignorant of this matter."²⁶

Although we can communicate and express what is within us through non-linguistic signs, linguistic signs have taken precedence in communication processes across various contexts. This is likely what led Roland Barthes to refute Ferdinand de Saussure's theory, which posits that semiology is the root and linguistics is a branch. Barthes states, “… we will name this science semiology, and this science will inform us about all these signs and the laws governing them… and linguistics is merely a branch of this general science.”²⁷ Saussure viewed semiology as the origin because it studies both non-linguistic and linguistic signs (the subject of linguistics). Thus, the latter—linguistics—was seen as a branch.

The reason Barthes contested this view, considering linguistics to be the foundation and semiology a branch, lies in the assertion that we cannot fully grasp non-linguistic signs without relying on linguistic signs. Hence, linguistic signs are the core, and the science that focuses on them—linguistics—is the primary discipline.

Ancient Arabic scholarship acknowledged the paramount importance of linguistic signs in the communication process. A notable example is found in the words of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, who articulated: "The avenues of communication are numerous, encompassing writing, gestures, clapping of hands, and movements of various body parts; yet, the most effortless and most refined method is to convey what resides in the hearts and minds through these words."²⁸

Signs have been classified according to the French school, represented by de Saussure, into four categories: the index, the gesture, the symbol, and the evidence. Meanwhile, the American school, exemplified by Peirce, distinguishes between three types: the icon, the index, and the symbol.²⁹ Upon reviewing the classifications found in ancient Arabic studies, we discover the following:

**Natural Signification:** This refers to the relationship between the signifier and the signified being a natural one, a relationship of imitation and replication. For instance, the chirping of birds is called "chirping" because the sounds they make seem to repeat the sounds of the letters "z" and "q." Al-Tahanawi states in this regard: "Natural signification is that signification where the mind perceives a natural relationship between the signifier and the signified, prompting a transition from one to the other. The term 'natural relationship' refers to the establishment of a nature among various essences, whether it be the nature of the signifier, the nature of the meaning, or the nature of something else. This occurs when the signifier appears alongside the signified, as in the case of 'ah ah' signifying a cough, or the sounds of animals calling to one another. The nature is evoked through the establishment of those signs when the meanings manifest themselves, making the connection between the signifier and the signified here instinctual."³⁰

If we turn our attention to Peirce's classification, we find among his divisions the "icon," which represents a sign characterized by a relationship of similarity and imitation with what it denotes. Examples of this include photographs and statues, as they reference their subjects through a relationship of resemblance. Peirce describes the icon as "the sign that refers to its object by virtue of the properties or characteristics it possesses, regardless of whether the object exists or does not exist."³¹

A concept similar to this Is Saussure's notion of the "index," which is a sign that functions without intentional communication. For instance, a cloudy sky serves as a natural sign, not deliberately signaling to humans that rain is approaching. This type of sign typically corresponds to natural phenomena³². Louis Prieto defines the index as "an observable event that instantly reveals something about another, unmentioned event."³³

**Rational indication**: refers to a type of sign where the relationship between the signifier and the subject it points to is one of necessary causality, deduced by reason. In other words, the existence of the signifier implies the existence of the subject. For instance, smoke signifies fire; when we see smoke, we logically conclude the presence of fire, with no other possibility. Al-Tahanawi defines it as: "Rational indication is when the mind perceives a natural relationship between the sign and the signified, one that compels the mind to move from one to the other. This natural relationship either involves the effect requiring the cause, like smoke indicating fire, or the cause necessitating the effect, like fire³⁴ requiring heat, or one effect implying another, like smoke suggesting heat." It is essentially a relationship between cause and effect, or influence and outcome.

From the perspective of the founder of semiotics, Peirce, the relationship between an indexical sign and its object is one of causal and necessary correlation. The index, as he defines it, is "a sign that refers to its object because it is genuinely affected by that object, establishing a real connection with it."³⁵

In contrast, the French school, represented by Saussure, attributes a natural quality to the symbol. For them, a symbol is a sign that refers to its object through a natural relationship. Saussure distinguished between a sign and a symbol, attributing the characteristic of arbitrariness to the sign and the characteristic of causal connection to the symbol.³⁶

**The situational meaning** : pertains to a sign in which the transition from the sign to its subject is not mechanical; instead, the relationship between the two is purely conventional. This connection is established by consensus within a social group. Without such a convention, we would remain unaware of the sign’s reference to its subject. This type of meaning is closely tied to linguistic signs, such as "pen," where the relationship with its subject is simply one of customary agreement. Likewise, non-linguistic signs, such as the "red light" that signals a stop within the traffic signal system, embody an arbitrary and conventional relationship—the connection between the red light and stopping is purely a matter of social agreement.

As Habnaka Al-Midani eloquently articulates: "The situational meaning is that of a sign for which people have reached a consensus to signify a specific concept. This sign may take the form of a landmark, a symbol, or a word. For instance, the meanings of traffic signals and the signage designed to guide drivers exemplify non-verbal situational meanings. Conversely, verbal situational meaning refers to the way in which words denote concepts through linguistic conventions, whether these denotations occur literally or metaphorically, as seen in the phrase 'lowering the wing,' which conveys the notion of humility."³⁷

Within the framework of the conventional relationship between a sign and its referent, the "symbol" aligns with the American school of thought. As Peirce explains, a symbol is "a sign that points to its object by virtue of a rule, which is the association of general ideas—a principle of habit, custom, or final logical interpretation."³⁸

Among the classifications of the French school, the sign (évidence) aligns with the concept of "conventional indication" in Arabic thought and with the "symbol" in Peirce’s framework. According to Saussure, a sign refers to "those signs primarily established to transmit a message or convey information, such as traffic signals and linguistic markers."³⁹

The semiotic approaches that have delved into the intricacies of the communicative process and unveiled the meanings embedded in both linguistic and non-linguistic signs are vast and varied. Foremost among them are the semiotics of communication and the semiotics of meaning. If we delve into the approach of communication semiology, as advocated by prominent figures like (Buyssens, Brito, Monan, Austin, and Martinet), we find that they assert the success and continuity of the communicative process depends on the intention of its creator (the sender). In this view, the sender deliberately uses linguistic and non-linguistic signs to influence and persuade the recipient. Thus, they argue that the semiological signs employed in the act of communication are intentional and purposeful. Accordingly, the sign is built upon three fundamental elements: the signifier, the signified, and the intentional function.⁴⁰

The sender's intentionality in initiating a communicative act, aimed at influencing the receiver and aligning them either in favor of or against the presented issue, was a topic explored by our early scholars, starting with (Ibn Jinni). He perceived language as the spoken expression crafted by the speaker (the sender), when they possess the intent to convey their thoughts and objectives to the recipient. In defining language, he states: "It is a series of sounds through which every people express their intentions."⁴¹

Ibn Khaldun does not deviate from this perspective, as he also highlights the intentionality of the language producer. On another note, he affirms that linguistic signs are the most capable and effective means for conveying intentions. In his definition of language, he states: "Language, in common parlance, is the speaker's expression of their intent, and that expression is a linguistic act. It must therefore become an ingrained faculty in the organ responsible for it, which is the tongue. In every nation, the Arabic language possesses the finest and clearest capacity to articulate intentions."⁴²

In a creative and interrogative style, Al-Jurjani transitioned from the literal meaning to an oppositional one, striving to captivate his audience's attention and persuade them regarding the argument at hand (intentionality). This denial manifested in his questioning of the act in question: the neglect of the speaker's intent during the communicative process, for it is through this very intent that understanding and comprehension can occur. He queried, "How is it possible when the wise unanimously agree that understanding the intentions of people in their dialogues is an absolute necessity?"⁴³

On the other hand, the pioneers of the semiotics of meaning, such as Roland Barthes and his students, do not uphold the principle of intentionality during the communicative process. Their assertion is supported by the observation that successful communication can occur, resulting in understanding and comprehension, even in the absence of any deliberate intention. For instance, consider the actions of animals: when a cat emits an unusual meow, it immediately conveys to the listener that it is either hungry or in distress, prompting the listener to offer assistance, even though the cat had no intention of engaging in a communicative act with the recipient. Similarly, the evidence collected by an investigator to apprehend a criminal (such as a thief) possesses meaning devoid of any intent from the thief. Thus, according to their perspective, signs—whether linguistic or non-linguistic—are constructed from two fundamental components: the signifier and the signified.

The scholars of the Arab world, in ancient times, keenly grasped the issue of the *presence* or absence of intentionality and its relationship to the success or failure of the communicative act. Abu Hilal al-Askari (d. 400 AH), while explicating the meaning of signification (the sign), clarified that signs can convey meaning both with and without intent, provided they consist of a signifier that is linked to a commonly recognized signified: “They can be inferred whether their originator intended it or not; for instance, the actions of animals indicate their states without any intention behind them. Similarly, the traces left by a thief reveal his identity, even though he did not intend for that to happen. It is well known among linguists that we infer things from their effects, even if the agent of the effect did not intend it.”⁴⁴ This perspective is corroborated by al-Raghib al-Isfahani (d. 502 AH), who asserted: “Signification is what leads one to knowledge of something, such as the signification of words to meanings, as well as the significations of gestures, symbols, and writing, regardless of whether this was done with intent by the signifier or not. For example, if one observes the movement of a person, they know he is alive; as stated, ‘Nothing indicated to them his death except a creature of the earth’” (Saba 14).⁴⁵

**Conclusion**

What this research paper has touched upon is but a drop in the ocean and a small fraction of the vast contributions made by our esteemed scholars in the field of linguistics. Their work primarily stemmed from the study of the Holy Qur'an to uncover its profound meanings, which served as the impetus for exploring the Arabic language and understanding its intricacies.

When we compare these efforts to contemporary Western studies, we find that much of what has emerged in modern linguistic research from the West closely parallels the findings of ancient Arabic linguistic studies. It appears as though these Western studies are a continuation and development of the earlier Arabic scholarship.

The contributions of ancient Arab linguists represent a significant cultural heritage that deserves revival. It is imperative for contemporary Arab linguists to reawaken this legacy by authenticating, disseminating, and revitalizing it anew.

What ancient Arab linguists achieved is profoundly rich and calls for modern Arab linguists to re-examine and present it through contemporary methodologies that resonate with current trends and practices. It is widely acknowledged that knowledge is cumulative, and ancient Arabic studies concentrated exclusively on the Qur'an and the pure, eloquent Arabic language, without exploring other languages or engaging in comparative analysis. Consequently, Arabic is not the sole medium of communication.

Modern Arab linguists have the potential to build upon the rich legacy of their predecessors. The insights offered by ancient scholars arose from a linguistic milieu that markedly differs from our contemporary context, with their language diverging from our current usage.

The discussions found in classical Arabic studies regarding communication, its means, and the dynamics of influence and persuasion are profoundly rich, yet they often remain dispersed within the pages of their texts. In contrast, Western scholarship has articulated its findings through coherent theories meticulously structured according to rigorous methodologies.

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