

Arabic Teaching and Learning System at Some Celebrated Institutions of Higher Education in Europe and United States

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Abstract This article explains teaching and learning system of Arabic in six noted Universities of Europe (Heidelberg, Leiden, The Sorbonne III, Cambridge, Louvain and Copenhagen) and five celebrated Institutions of United States (Berkeley, Yale, Georgetown, Harvard and Pennsylvania) according to several academic stays made by Professor Arvide, with the help of scientific grants, in order to do a study on the training ways of Arabic used in their Departments of Arabic Language and Literature, looking at the training methods of each one of them and analyzing her own experience as a teacher in Spain. The article has also reference to the connection of these training ways to the Higher Education in Europe and United States and their comparison to the Spanish system with special mention to the University of Almeria where she works. It also encloses thirteen final conclusions.

Keywords Training ways of Arabic, Higher Education system in Europe and United States, Didactics of languages

1. Preliminary Notes

To know foreign Universities working, to compare their training ways to the Spanish ones and to get in touch with the educational staff of the other countries, all that entails an important enrichment for every professor of the higher education.

The best manner of getting these goals is, without any doubt, visiting centres of higher education and institutions in order to contact the colleagues and to know in person the teaching and learning methods used by them.

And so, financed by several public subventions, I have visited diverse Universities of Europe[1] and United States[2] and I have stayed for some time into the Departments of my specialization field: Arabic language, culture and civilization [3].

This article refers, first, to the results obtained in the academic visits taken place in prestigious Universities, such as Heidelberg, Leiden, The Sorbonne III, Cambridge, Louvain and Copenhagen, in Europe, and Berkeley, Yale, Georgetown, Harvard and Pennsylvania, in United States, as well as the training ways of Arabic used by them, their connection to the higher education in Europe and United States[4] and their comparison with the methods employed in Spain with special mention to the University of Almeria[5] where I realize my professional activity. Secondly, it has

reference to the most important conclusions to which I have come after my research.

The most important objectives of these academic stays, of varying duration, were:

1) To know the performance of prestigious universities with a reputation and an international fame by its quality and rigor.

2) To compare their training ways with the Spanish system, improving my own teaching and research program in Spain where I've profession, as well as increasing my experience on techniques and other aspects of the higher education.

3) To contact with colleagues from abroad in order to expand career prospects and open the way for possible future joint scientific relations.

2. Results

2.1. European Universities

2.1.1. *Ruprecht-Karls-Universität*. Heidelberg. Germany[6]

Arabic is studied at this renowned University into the *Seminar für Sprachen und Kulturen des Vorderen Orients*, which is composed by three areas of expertise: Assyriology, Semitic Studies, and Arab and Islamic Studies.

In each one of them there are a number of compulsory subjects and a wide range of electives, for a total six, divided as follows: three compulsory and three electives, for each course.

The duration of study is four years, although the student who wants to expand his curriculum can take a fifth year.

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The academic year is divided into two semesters.

Arabic language studied is the *fushà* or Classical Arabic, also called Modern Standard Arabic and the study of the grammar is fundamental.

The technique employed was always the same: reading, translation and commentary of texts from the phonetic, phonological, morphological, syntactic, historical and ideological points of view.

2.1.2. *Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden*. Leiden. Netherlands[7]

Arabic is studied at this celebrated University into the *Vakgroep Talen en Culuren van het Islamitische Midden - Oosten*, dedicated to teaching and research of languages and cultures of Islam, as its name indicates, and includes three main areas of knowledge: Arabic, Turkish and Persian, and three secondary Areas: Ethiopian, Berber and South Arabic. In other hand, there are Egyptology, Assyriology, and Semitic Studies (Hebrew, Aramaic, Eblaite, Ugarit, etc.) which are independent and unrelated management. Its educational system is half way between the classical European university and the standard American university.

The period of graduation is four years and each academic year is divided into two semesters.

The student must choose one of three areas existing in the Department, namely, Arabic, Turkish or Persian, each of which there is a number of subjects (Islamic language, culture and civilization, including to literature and history) and other electives, which can be chosen from the remaining areas of the Department or from others.

Arabic language studied is the *fushà* or Classical Arabic, also called Modern Standard Arabic, and it is an obligatory subject; but, some dialects, like the Egyptian, the Moroccan or the Palestinian, are studied, too, as optional matters.

The study of the grammar is very important and among the techniques used in advanced courses are the commentary and the translation of the classical and modern texts, both prose and poetry.

2.1.3. *Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle III*. Paris. France[8]

Arabic is studied at this University into the *U.F.R. Orient et Monde Arabe*, which encloses four fields of knowledge: Arab Philology, Hebrew, Persian Studies and Hindi.

The length of the studies is four years divided into two cycles of two years each one, and are oriented mainly to the modern Arab world. In each cycle is a particular set of compulsory subjects and others of optional character, which vary depending on the field according to the specialization chosen.

In general are three major blocks:

- a) Applied Modern Arab Language and Literature.
- b) History and Civilization of the East and the Arab world, where primarily taught courses in Islamic history, culture and thought.
- c) Applied Foreign Languages: Arabic which has two common levels: Arabic language and culture; and tongue and culture of any foreign language to choose between

English, German, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Chinese and Japanese.

If we look carefully at these programs, we realize that this University prepares the students in three domains: philological training, specialized translation and application of Arabic of fields like trade or economy in relation with other languages (English, German, Spanish, etc.).

Arabic language studied is the *fushà* or Classical Arabic, also named Modern Standard Arabic, and teaching of grammar is fundamental.

2.1.4. *Cambridge University*. Cambridge. United Kingdom[9]

Arabic is studied at this noted University in *Pembroke College* into the *Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies* which dedicates to the teaching and research of Arab, Persian and Turkish cultures and civilizations through the knowledge of their language, literature and history, and belongs to the whole Department called *Oriental Studies*, that is dedicated to the study of Oriental languages and cultures, and includes some independent areas of expertise such as: Chinese, Japanese, Hindu, Hebrew, Aramaic, Coptic, Egyptology and Assyriology.

The length of the studies is four years and each academic year is divided into two semesters.

The specialization starts in the first year. Inside of an extensive game of optional subjects, there are the compulsory subjects, which are language, literature and history, and their duration can be annual or half-yearly.

Arabic language studied is the *fushà* or Classical Arabic, also called Modern Standard Arabic, which is treated into several matters.

The study of the grammar is very important and among their training ways are: the reading, the translation and the commentary of the classical or modern texts. The knowledge and the mastery of the spoken language is an aspect too considered, and for that the Institution has Arab teachers among its staff.

2.1.5. *Katholieke Universiteit Leuven*. Louvain. Belgium[10]

Arabic is studied at this University into the *Departement Oosterse en Slavische Studies*, which is structured in five independent sections or Seminars:

- a) Oriental Studies, with three areas: Egyptology (Ancient Egyptian and Coptic), Assyriology (Sumerian and Babylonian languages and cultures) and Semitic Studies (Hebrew and Aramaic).
- b) Arab and Islamic Studies (Arabic, Persian and Turkish).
- c) Chinese Studies.
- d) Japanese Studies.
- e) Slavic Studies (Russian and other Slavic languages and cultures).

The duration of the studies is four years and are structured in two cycles of two years each one. The academic year is divided into two semesters.

The students begin to specialize in the first year, according to their choice. There are compulsory subjects and a certain number of credits electives, with the major disciplines of language, literature and history, as almost all the universities in the world. The program subjects complete with complementary, optional and minority on more accurate and specific aspects of culture and civilization objects study.

Arabic language studied is the *fushà* or Classical Arabic, also called Modern Standard Arabic, and regarding the methodology used and followed in the teaching of Arabic, it focuses mainly on grammar and translation of literary, historical and administrative texts, as classic as modern. In parallel, this University prepares the students in the knowledge of speech of Modern Standard Arabic through the practice of oral texts from diverse audiovisual methods. It also makes some incursions in certain Arab dialects, preferably the Moroccan.

2.1.6. *Kobenhavns Universiteit*. Copenhagen. Denmark[11]

Arab Studies are taught at this University into the *Carsten Niebuhr Institute for Near Eastern Studies*, a Centre dedicated to teaching and research of languages and cultures from Arabic, Persian, Hebrew and Turkish.

These studies, which extend for five courses of two semesters each one of them, are structured in two cycles. The first cycle lasts three years and it is accessed by students after opting for one of the four areas offered, namely, Arabic, Persian, Hebrew and Turkish. In each of which, all subjects are compulsory and related to language, literature, history, sociology, politics and religion. Therefore, the specialization begins in the first course. The second cycle is improving in the speciality and lasts two years. It requires completion of a specific examination and includes mandatory subjects, which are related to two major specialization blocks existing in this Danish university: one, of the philological nature, called *Modern Literature*, and another, of the historical-philosophical nature, called *Modern of Political and Sociological Development*, among which the students must choose one. Both blocks refer to aspects of the Middle Ages, Early Modern Age and Contemporary Age. The study on al-Andalus is included in any of the items on their subjects.

Arabic language studied is the *fushà*, also named Modern Standard Arabic, and in this discipline, grammar is prepared and takes an important role to know the syntax of standard Arabic and written Arabic, as well as the translation of texts. It also introduces the students to the practice of the spoken Arabic, but this level properly is reached at the university, most students travel to Arab countries, especially Syria and Egypt and made rooms, which have the primarily aim at improving the learning of speech.

2.2. American Universities

2.2.1. *University of California, Berkeley*. Berkeley. California. U.S.A.[12]

Arabic language, culture and civilization are studied at this famous University into the *Department of Near Eastern Studies* together with Hebrew, Turkish, Persian, Ancient Mesopotamian Languages and Cultures, and Egyptology.

The American Higher Education system favours the free selection of matters thanks to a wide scale of optional subjects, and Berkeley University is an example of that.

The length of the studies is four years and each academic year is divided into two semesters.

Arabic studied is the *fushà* or Classical Arabic, also called Modern Standard Arabic.

The subjects of Arabic language I and Arabic language II, named *Elementary Arabic* and *Intermediate Arabic* respectively, are most times trained by Arab teachers and the language used in class is more often Arabic together with English in the case of the basic level. The aim is that the pupils can learn to speak Arabic at the same time that they learn morphology and syntax doing exercises of grammar.

Other teaching and learning way is to talk about different topics and, since the second course, the redaction of phrases and the translation of easy texts from English into Arabic are methods very important in the training.

Since the third year, the study of texts is imposed and is made translation from English to Arabic.

2.2.2. *Yale University*. New Haven. Connecticut. U.S.A.[13]

Arabic language, culture and civilization are studied at this noted University into the *Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations* together with Hebrew and Semitic North-Western Languages, Coptic, Assyriology and Egyptology

The length of the studies is four years and the academic year is divided into two semesters.

First course is common for every knowledge fields and the speciality starts since the 2nd course with an extensive game of annual or biannual obligatory and optional subjects on language, literature and history.

Arabic language studied here is the Classical one or the *fushà*, also named Modern Standard Arabic.

The most remarkable aspects with regard to the teaching and learning methods of Arabic are:

- a) To get an excellent knowledge of grammar is one of the main objectives pursued, and for that exercises get done.
- b) To get a good training of the spoken Arabic language is other main objectives pursued, and for that this Institution includes Arab teachers among its educational staff.
- c) The translation is one of the most important training ways used for teaching the language.

2.2.3. *Georgetown University*. Washington D.C. U.S.A.[14]

Arabic is studied at this renowned University into the *Department of Arabic Language, Literature and Linguistics*. The length of the studies is four years divided in two cycles and each academic year is divided into two semesters. The specialization stars since the first year.

The obligatory subjects are referred to three main

contents: linguistics, language and literature, and the optional ones are referred to complementary contents, like Arabic and Islamic history, culture and civilization: philosophy, law, religion, politics and economy, in relation to the modern Arabic world as well as to additional contents, like for example other languages (Spanish, French, German, Italian, Hebrew, Turkish, Modern Greek, Japanese, Chinese, etcetera).

Arabic language studied here is the Classical and the dialects are treated into some optional subjects.

Since the third and the fourth levels, the knowledge of Arabic is improved with the translation and the grammatical analysis of texts. The first aim pursued is to get an excellent training of phonetics, grammar and vocabulary. And for that, the audiovisual methods are used together with the study of the grammar, the reading of the Arabic texts and the making of exercises on morphology and syntax, as well as the translation of texts from Arabic to English and from English to Arabic.

2.2.4. *Harvard University*. Cambridge. Massachusetts. U.S.A.[15]

Arabic is studied at this important University into the *Department of Middle Eastern Languages and Civilizations* of the *Center of Middle Eastern Studies* together with Hebrew, Turkish, Persian and Ancient Mesopotamian Civilizations.

The length of the studies is four years and each academic year is divided into two semesters.

The specialization starts in the first year. Inside of an extensive game of optional subjects, there are the obligatory subjects, which are language, literature and history.

Arabic language studied is the *fushà* or the Classical Arabic, also called Modern Standard Arabic, which is treated into several subjects we will see below.

The obligatory subjects respect to the tongue and their contents are:

A) Elementary Arabic

This course introduces the students into the phonology and the writing of Classical and Modern Standard Arabic and it deals with the basic morphology and syntax of the written tongue. It also emphasizes the four techniques (to read, to speak, to listen and to write).

B) Classical Intermediate Arabic

This course offers a revision of Arabic grammar and insists upon the reading and the writing of texts. Other ways used are the talk in Arabic and the translation.

C) Modern Intermediate Arabic

This is a continuation of the Elementary Arabic with the same emphasis in the written language and the spoken one (conversation and discussion) in order to guarantee the knowledge of the Arabic grammar and a competent vocabulary.

D) Classical Advanced Arabic

This treats on the study of a selection of texts from the Classical literature's poetry and prose. Therefore, it also serves for reviewing and revising the Arabic grammar

(morphology and syntax).

E) Modern Advanced Arabic

This is a subject for reinforcing the knowledge of Arabic through the study of Modern texts.

F) Classical Arabic Philology

This is a course of specialization and it is the last degree in the knowledge of the Classical Arabic language.

Among other things, the students are introduced into the Arabic Paleography (manuscripts, scientific translations, use of medieval books, etcetera).

G) Historical and Literary texts of the Modern Arabic

This is a course of specialization and it is the last degree in the knowledge of the Modern Arabic language.

H) Modern Arabic Literature and Criticism

This is a continuation of the previous subject. It insists on the study of the advanced syntax and the grammatical analysis. The language used is always Arabic and a very good knowledge of Arabic is required.

2.2.5. *University of Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia. Pennsylvania. U.S.A.[16]

Arabic is studied at this University into the *Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* which is composed by eight fields of knowledge: Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Indian (Sanskrit and Prakrit), Medieval and Modern Hebrew and Judaism, Ancient Near Eastern (Egyptology, Ancient Mesopotamian and Babylonian Languages and Cultures, and Ancient Western Semitic Languages and Cultures), Islamic Near Eastern (Medieval and Modern Arabic, Turkish and Persian) and Modern Near Eastern (Modern Arabic and Hebrew). And Arabic is studied into Islamic Near Eastern Section, together with Turkish and Persian, as well as into Modern Near Eastern Section, together with Hebrew.

Arabic language taught is the *fushà* or Classical Arabic language, called also Modern Standard Arabic. The dialects, like for example Syrian and Egyptian, are treated only in some optional subjects.

The study of the grammar is fundamental and the training ways take good care of phonetics and getting a competent vocabulary by means of the reading of texts and the talk in the lecture room using Arabic.

2.3. *University of Almeria*

Arabic is imparted in this University by the area of knowledge called *Arabic and Islamic Studies* belonging to the *Department of Philology*. Also, there are other courses of Arabic in *The Language Centre* of the University of Almeria, which is autonomous, but I am not going to refer to it in this paper because this is not the topic.

In general, Arabic learned in the Department of Philology of the University of Almeria is the classical one, named Modern Standard Arabic, like in all the universities of the world I have visited, mainly Europe and United States.

It is a matter studied as a second basic language into Degree in Hispanic Philology, Degree in English Philology and Degree in Humanities. During four semesters in two

academic years, the students of the University of Almeria are trained in Arabic through four subjects with value of 6 ECTS each one, into the context of Bologna Plan in European Higher Education Area system [17][18][19].

-Arabic I: Lexical, grammatical, phonetic, sociolinguistic, discursive and functional elements of Arabic attributed to level A1 from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

-Arabic II: Lexical, grammatical, phonetic, sociolinguistic, discursive and functional elements of Arabic attributed to level A1+ from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

-Arabic III: Lexical, grammatical, phonetic, sociolinguistic, discursive and functional Arabic attributed to level A2 from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

-Arabic IV: Lexical, grammatical, phonetic, sociolinguistic, discursive and functional elements of Arabic attributed to level A2+ from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

In short, there are two main objectives in the training ways of Arabic in the University of Almeria:

a) To educate philologists and specialists in Humanities for the knowledge of a second language till level A2+ from the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages [20][21].

b) To create and to encourage vocations of specialists in Arabic and Islamic studies.

After all, we try to train the students of Arabic in the next fields:

a) The knowledge of the grammar of Modern Standard Arabic which, according to my experience in Spain and abroad, is fundamental in the study of any language.

b) The acquisition of an adequate and suitable vocabulary according to level A2+ from the Common European Framework.

c) The technique of translation Arabic- Spanish- Arabic (initiation).

d) The spoken Modern Standard Arabic, through the learning of the most usual expressions (initiation), using diverse audiovisual methods.

Moreover, we contain with the support of an educational e-technical tool: the Virtual Classroom, where the pupils are able to find all information about the four subjects (objectives, methodology, contents, exercises, bibliography, etcetera), with e-mail and forum.

After all, the training ways of Arabic in the University of Almeria are diverse and, in comparison to the ways used in other national and international institutions of the higher education, they are in concordance with the ones taken by the most distinguished universities and institutions of the world in Spain and abroad.

3. Conclusions

The most important conclusions got in this research are the next ones:

◆ Arabic studies in the eleven departments visited in Europe and United States are minority. The length of the studies is four years, except in Copenhagen, where the graduation lasts five years. The studies are divided into two cycles and the academic year is divided into two semesters. The specialization starts in the first year.

◆ Arabic studies in these eleven centres are enclosed into Departments of Oriental, Semitic or Islamic Languages, Cultures and Civilizations.

◆ The openings of the graduates are: Universities, Council for Scientific Research, Embassies, International Agencies and Institutions, and National and International Companies, etcetera.

◆ Teaching programmes enclose obligatory and optional subjects. The obligatory subjects are mainly referred to language, literature and history. The optional ones referred to diverse aspects in relation to philosophy, religion, law, Islamic thought, etcetera, as well as other more specific and concrete sights of the obligatory subjects.

◆ Although all these universities look after classical and modern aspects of Arab and Islamic culture and civilization, The Sorbonne and Copenhagen are preferentially interested by the modern Arabic world, whereas Leiden and Louvain is by the classical one. Heidelberg and Cambridge are a combination of both tendencies.

◆ Arabic language studied is the *fushà* or the Classical Arabic, also named Modern Standard Arabic. The dialects were treated by chance in some courses.

◆ The eleven universities include Arab people among their staff. The stay of the students in Arab countries is too advised.

◆ The translation of classic and modern texts is a technique very used and quite habitual. And it proves that:

✓ Translation science was in expansion in past times and today it is still in progress

✓ Translation technique is very important in the training ways of any language

◆ Other techniques used are the audiovisual methods.

◆ The main goals pursued in the educational programmes are:

✓ An excellent knowledge and a mastery of the written Arabic language.

✓ A good training of the spoken Arabic language.

◆ All these universities share the same view: the importance which has the grammar in the study of any language.

◆ Bearing in mind the previous conclusion, we must have many doubts about the scientific exactness of the some manuals, which underestimate the importance of the grammar in the knowledge of any language, because they forget the most basic questions of the general philology. Luckily, these manuals and the theory which supported them, in fashion some years ago, are now on a slope.

◆ The training ways of Arabic in the University of Almeria are in concordance with the used in these prestigious European and American Institutions of Higher Education.

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