

# Comparative Study of Arabic and Chinese Noun Structure

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**Abstract** Arabic and Chinese are two important and different languages of the world, with different grammatical structures and language rules. This study attempts to explain the differences of noun structures of these two languages in detail, in order to help learning Chinese language to Mauritanian (Arabic) students. This paper compares modern Chinese and Arabic noun structures, analyzes the characteristics of noun formation in Chinese and Arabic languages, and explores the role of noun prefixes in teaching second language.

**Keywords** Modern Chinese & Arabic, Noun word formation, Vocabulary teaching

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## 1. Introduction

Noun is one of the basic parts of a language, (Hopper & Thompson 1984), therefore it possesses great importance in any language and worthy of studying in detail. In this aspect the current study compares the noun structure of two languages i.e. Arabic and Chinese. This comparative study would make.

This study has been conducted, keeping the readers in mind, that it would provide a great help to the readers in understanding a variety of noun structures and their usage with grammatical explanation by comparing and differentiating the two different language systems. This study signifies the importance of noun and implies that just as other important parts of a sentence, for instance verb, noun has also a great value in Arabic language. The study would be proved valuable for the Arabic speaking people in order to understand differences between Arabic and Chinese.

### 1.1. The Review of This Two Languages

According to Hopper & Thompson (1984), nouns are words used to refer to things and are one of the basic parts of speech in each language. This article compares Chinese and Arabic terms from a structural perspective.

The comparative study of noun structure is of great significance because of the large number of nouns in each

language and their important grammatical status.

According to Lü Shuxiang (1987), the most fundamental part of speech that constitutes a sentence is a noun and a verb. This means that in addition to verbs, nouns are very important for language use. In second language learning, understanding the vocabulary structure helps students master and understand the target language vocabulary.

The vocabulary is the most sensitive part of any language. As society changes, the vocabulary of the language also changes.

In second language learning, mastering the lexical features of a language is one way to expand vocabulary. Mastering the laws of language-based word formation helps to understand word meaning, vocabulary usage, and new words (Wei Hong, 2009; Guo Chunhong, 2012). We know that Arabic is a Semitic language and Chinese is an isolated language.

The vocabulary characteristics of Semitic and Chino-tibetic languages are different because Chino-tibetic languages are dominated by free morphemes, so one word represents one meaning: but the words of Semitic Language are generally composed of different non-free morphemes and these are compound words. Morphemes sometimes have grammatical functions. Therefore, word sentences are not clear.

This problem is also reflected in the writing of words. There are also differences in the writing of "words" in different languages.

For example, in English, there are spaces between all words, but in Chinese there are no spaces between words, whereas in Arabic there are spaces between virtual words and real words. That means the writing styles of these two languages are completely different: Chinese uses Chinese Characters and Arabic is written in letters. In Chinese, one

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word usually means one meaning. Sometimes one Character is a word. According to Zhang Weiyu (2010), Chinese words are generally linked together in a sentence without space between the words.

For example: "这是我的书 This is my book." This sentence has five Chinese Characters that are linked together: 1. 这, 2 是-3 我-4 的-5 书, the sentence translated into English is: This is my book has four words: 1, THIS- 2, IS-3, MY -5, BOOK, and if we translate it into Arabic it is: haza kitab be هذا كتاب بي has tree words: 1, haza - 2, Kitab - 3BE.

By using this sentence, it can be known that the number of words used in Chinese and Arabic corresponding sentences is different. This difference is caused by differences in the construction of words in these languages. Different verbs and nouns in Arabic have different word formations and translating the morphemes of these words into Chinese can be used as independent words.

The Mauritanian Arab native speakers, who learn Chinese, can learn more about the application of Chinese and Arabic vocabulary. If the second language learners can distinguish the structure, characteristics, similarities and differences between the target language vocabulary and their own native language vocabulary, then the learner can master the vocabulary of the target language with great ease, without misunderstanding and negative transfers from their native language. During his study, the author observed that many Mauritanian learners who speak Arabic as their mother tongue, use the structure, meaning and word order of the Arabic language in Chinese language.

In order to reduce the influence of Arabic in the process of learning Chinese, this study will help the Mauritanian students to understand the noun building of Chinese language. Vocabulary refers to the sum of words in a language. It is one of the indispensable elements of any language in the world. If the language is likened to a tall building, then the vocabulary is other building materials.

There are some limitations of the study, i.e., we could not compare each and every noun of Chinese and Arabic. So, we compared the features of some nouns of Chinese and Arabic and tried to explain the similarities and differences of nouns of these two languages. Researchers believe that such research can not only improve the efficiency of Chinese vocabulary acquisition, but also enable Mauritanian students to understand the characteristics of Chinese noun building and make students have a new understanding of the Chinese vocabulary, new feelings and new ways of learning.

## 2. Arabic-Chinese Noun Structural Comparison

### 2.1. Methodology

This paper advocates that, the most ideal aspect in vocabulary learning in t second language acquisition is to be able to find words in native language (مالا غللا), that are exactly equivalent to, or at least their more appropriately

corresponding words from the target language. In the case of Teaching Chinese as Second language in Mauritania, it is ideal to find the Chinese equivalents for Arabic which are the first languages for learners. For example; In Chinese (摸哈摸德喜欢巧克力" Mohamed xihuan qiaokeli") " جوني يحب الشوكولاته" (Arabic) or "Mohamed like the chocolate" (English). The Chinese words in this sentence corresponds exactly to those in Arabic and English.

As it is already mentioned that Chinese and Arabic are different languages. Chinese is a Sino-Tibetan language and Arabic is a Semitic language. Therefore, there is definitely some difference in noun structures. If we look at this Arabic Nouns Prefix: Filgurfa في الغرفة, Fisougue في السوق, Dahel algurfa داخل الغرفة, we will find that all these Noun prefixes have a certain significance, and if we translate them to Chinese language they will become prepositional phrases, For example, Dahel algurfa داخل الغرفة and Filgurfa في الغرفة, although the prefix is different, and the Chinese meaning is "在房间 Zài fángjiān "but, the Chinese equivalent of (Dahel algurfa ( داخل الغرفة ) is '在房间里 Zài fángjiān lǐ) Such Chinese-Arabic noun correspondence is caused by different structures. In short, because Chinese and Arabic noun structures do not exactly correspond, therefore it causes confusion for Mauritanians (Arabic speakers) in their Chinese vocabulary acquisition.

If the entire Chinese vocabulary system and the Arabic vocabulary system have such correspondence. The current study hypothesizes that, Mauritanian students should not face much challenge in the use of Chinese vocabulary. Because of this, this article will compare the Chinese and Arabic Nouns Structure systems so that we can understand the similarities and differences between the two languages. In the book "Cross-cultural Linguistics," Lado (1957:2) stated that "if you are learning a foreign language while studying in a foreign language, you can easily transfer the structure, meaning and word order of your native language and your own culture to foreign languages and foreign culture." This phenomenon proves to the second language.

For learners, the ideal situation is the complete correspondence between the language components of the target language and their own mother tongue. Therefore, this study will compare Chinese and Arabic vocabulary and discuss the vocabulary acquisition of Mauritanian students. We think that such kind of a study is important in helping Mauritanian students to be aware of of the characteristics of Chinese and Arabic Nouns structure Comparison , and to give learners new understanding, new feeling about Chinese Nouns Structure, Via of new Chinese vocabulary learning.

Therefore Chinese vocabulary teaching and learning depends very much on how Arabic and English language teaching material cause undue vocabulary errors and incomprehension.

This article advocates that the use of Mauritania's native language (Arabic) to teach Chinese vocabulary will not only reduce some vocabulary misunderstandings, but also increase students' interest in learning Chinese. This article

also argues that Arabic and native languages have an equal influence on students' Chinese vocabulary acquisition in Chinese teaching in the Arab world. Therefore, Chinese vocabulary teaching depends on Chinese Arabic or English-language teaching materials to cause undue vocabulary errors or vocabulary to students. misunderstanding.

Nouns in Arabic and Chinese languages are constructed by morphemes and they comprise a large number of vocabulary in both languages. In this study I have tried to explain the internal structure of noun, which will help in better understanding and learning of Arabic vocabulary. Therefore, Mauritanian students who are native Arabic speaking would also rely on the structure of Chinese nouns to understand differences in Chinese language acquisition.

Chinese and Arabic nouns are constructed by morphemes, similarly as the other words in the language. The Arabic noun structure that is discussed in this paper is dependent on the internal structure of the vocabulary. Hence, for the sake of teaching the Arabic speaking people, the same structure is applied to Chinese nouns to differentiate the Chinese language acquisition.

Yang Jichun (2008) proposed that because the synthesized words in the (Chinese) language are composed of two or more morphemes, with grammatical structure and semantic structure, the synthesized symbols have internal forms, this shows that students who synthesize words can understand the meaning of their words based on morphemes. This makes Mauritanian (Arabic) students confuse about the structure of Chinese vocabulary. Because if they rely on Arabic vocabulary structure to study the Chinese vocabulary, then they may face some vocabulary misunderstandings.

This means the characteristics of the vocabulary structure of Arabic, if students rely on Arabic vocabulary structure to study the structure of Chinese vocabulary, they may cause some vocabulary misunderstandings.

According to the internal composition of words, Chinese words are divided into simple words and compound words, same as the Arabic words. Hence it makes the two languages, to somewhat, similar structure but of course with different rules.

For Example: (Noun prefix + noun root)

(EL = Prefix لا

عجوز = Noun root عجوز

(El3ajuz العجوز) In Arabic derogatory term means the old man, Chinese meaning (老人 Laorén).

② EL= Prefix ال

Madrassa= Noun root مدرسة

(Elmadrassa (مدرسة) in Arabic means school, (学校 = Xuéxiào) in Chinese language. Chinese nouns also have the same prefix + root structure Example: (The prefix teach 教 + the root teacher 师) that means Chinese-Arabic noun structure is a bit the same. There are many kinds of structures in Chinese nouns but the structure of Arabic nouns is more complicated than Chinese.

### 3. The Difference between Chinese and Arabic Nouns Structure

	Chinese noun structure	Arabic Noun Structure	English meaning
Prefix+root	Jiào+Shi=教+师	El+uztaz الا+استاذ	teacher
Root+suffix	Yǐ+zi =椅+子	Magua+dun مقعد+ون	Chair
Prefix+root+S uffix	Jiào+shī+men=教+师+们	El+ asa +tiza الا+اساتذة	Teachers
Prefix+root+S uffix	Jiào+shī+men=教+师+们	El+ asa +tiza الا+اساتذة	Teachers

Yi Ling (2000: 38) proposed that in Chinese Language other than “prefix + root” structure, the Chinese nouns also have “root+suffix” and “Prefix+root+suffix” etc, as shown in the following examples:

①root+suffix	Chinese Pinyin	the meaning in Arabic
刷子	Shuāzi	فرشاة
梳子	shuzi	مشط
钳子	Qiánzi	كماشة
夹子	Jiázi	قصاصة
剪子	Jiǎnzi	مقص
画儿	Huà er	رسم
棍儿	guner	عصي
盖	Gài er	غطاء
圈儿	Ouān er	دائرة
馒头	Mántou	خبز صيني
石头	Shítou	حجر
我们	Wǒmen	نحن

②Prefix+root+Suffix	Chinese Pinyin	The meaning In Arabic
老+师+们	Lǎoshīmen	الاساتذة
老+乡+们	Lǎoxiāngmen	اشخاص من نفس المدينة
同学们	Tóngxuémen	زملائي الطلبة
阿姨们	Āyimen	العمات
姐姐们	Jiějiěmen	الاخوات

According to Ma Qingzhu (1998), in total there are 190 kinds of Chinese prefixes and suffixes, and the following examples are widely used.

\*Prefix: initial phrase indicates time sequence for example: Third, fourth, etc. (初三, 初四 等等).

\* before the Chinese morpheme always use (阿 A) or to indicate the name of a person or relative example: (阿兵, 阿里, 阿明, 阿斗, 阿姨, 阿婆等, Ā bīng, ālǐ, ā míng, ādǒu, āyí, āpó děng).

\*before the numerals always use: (第 di) to make ordinal numbers like: 第一 first, 第二 Second, 第三十 thirtieth, 第六 sixth, 等 etc.

\* before the last personal noun always use (Lǎo, 老) to

explain the appellation in Chinese for example: (老婆、老妈、老王，老师等等), Lǎo pó (Wife), lǎo mā (mom), lǎo wáng (Chinese name), lǎoshī (teacher).

\*the suffix (er, 儿, zi 子, tou 头, men 们) used in Chinese language to indicate the emotion, for example:

(zi, 子), (刷子 梳子 钳子 夹子 剪子, Shuāzi, shūzi, qiánzi, jiǎzi, jiǎnzi)

(tou 头), (馒头 石头 后头 甜头 苦头, Mántou, shítou, hòutou, tiántou, kǔtóu)

(er, 儿), (画儿 棍儿 盖儿 圈儿, Huà er, gùn er, gài er, quān er)

(men 们), (我们 你们 他们 咱们, Wǒmen, nǐmen, tāmen, zánmen)

Many Chinese nouns can only be classified according to morpheme relationships. Basically, they cannot divide the noun components according to the “prefix plus root” structure. For example: 马 (horses), 沙发 (Sofa), 电脑 (computers), etc. As mentioned earlier, the Arabic nouns are simple or compound words, most of them have fixed prefix+root structure. However, there are some nouns referring to females or feminine things that are made by fixed suffixes (ah or an), they have root+suffix structure. These words contain names of animals, people and some borrowed words from other languages. For example:

Arabic feminine Names root suffix

طالبه (学生)	taliba	+	ah
حبيبته (情人)	habiba	+	ah
طالبة (学生)	talibat	+	an
حبيبة (情人)	habibat	+	an
قبعة (帽子)	kuba	+	ah
قبعة (帽子)	kubaat	+	an

There are some types of noun structures that have no prefixes, such as, “zero prefix +noun root” for example: zero+Computer كمبيوتر zero+Telephone تلفون, zero+camera كاميرا, zero+television تلفزيون, if we borrow this structure from Arabic noun structure, we can find most of the noun structures in Chinese are prefixed with zero. Example: “zero prefix+root”:

必+手机, Bì +shǒujī=(Two noun root "noun root + noun root").

必+书, Bì+shū=(one root)

必+学院 Bì +xuéyuàn=(two roots (verb root + noun root)

必+黑车 Bì +hēichē(Two roots (description root + noun)

The above example is just an assumption, we cannot analyze the structure of Chinese nouns in this way, Chinese linguists certainly do not analyze the structure of Chinese nouns in this way, but for Mauritanian (Arabic speaking) students who are learning Chinese, this structure makes nouns easier to understand. This is because in Arabic acquisition as long as they can grasp the noun prefix and suffix relation, they will use the word in different contexts,

but unfortunately the Chinese nouns do not have the same structure like Arabic.

For Huang Qing (2002), the deep structure of Chinese nouns is particularly complex. Huang Qing also proposed the N+N=N morpheme structure of Chinese nouns (Noun + noun = noun) 飞机, besides this structure, Chinese noun structure also have other common Chinese noun structures. For example: (V+N=N and N+V=N and A+N=N). In my opinion Huang Qing’s N+N=N noun structure is more suitable for Arabic.

Because most of Arabic noun structures are (N+N=N), there are few (V+N=N) structure.

The following table shows the comparison of some commonly used Chinese and Arabic language noun structure. For example:

Chinese Nouns	Chinese Nouns Structure	Arabic Nouns	Arabic Nouns Structure
飞机 feiji	V+N=N ( Verb+Noun =Noun )	Abdalahmane ( عبدالرحمن )	N+N=N (Noun+Noun=Noun)
小河 xiao he	A+N=N ( Adj+Noun=Noun )	ASSI HELANI ( عاصي حلاني )	V+N=N (Verb+Noun=Noun)
河流 he liu	N+V=N ( Noun+Verb =Noun )	HADRA MAWT ( حضرموت )	N+N+N (Noun+Noun=Noun)
教师 jiao shi	V+N=N ( Verb+Noun =Noun )	BEIT BEIT بيت بيت	N+N=N (Noun+Noun=Noun)
蛋黄 jidan huang	N+A=N ( Noun+Adj=Noun )	EHDA ACHAR ( احد عشر )	N+N=N (Noun+Noun=Noun)
大头 da tou	A+N=N ( Adj+Noun=Noun )	Yumyum ( يوم يوم )	N+N=N (Noun+Noun=Noun)
小弟 xiao di	A+N=N ( Adj+Noun=Noun )	SABAH MASSA ( صباح مساء )	N+N=N (Noun+Noun=Noun)
学校 xue xiao	V+N=N ( Verb+Noun =Noun )	BYNA BYNA ( بين بين )	N+N=N (Noun+Noun=Noun)
学院 xue yuan	V+N=N ( Verb+Noun =Noun )	MAHAL TIJARI ( محل تجاري )	N+Adj=N (Noun+Adj=Noun)
黑车 heiche	A+N=N ( Adj+Noun=Noun )	ALMALIK ALWATAN ( الملك الوطن )	N+N=N (Noun+Noun=Noun)
大学	A+V=N ( Adj+Verb=Noun )	ADEL RAHUF ( عبدالروف )	N+N=N (Noun+Noun=Noun)

The main difference between Chinese and Arabic noun structures is the role of prefixes in noun classification. We can divide the entire Arabic nouns into several categories by noun prefixes in Arabic.

## 4. The Effect of Prefixes in Arabic Nouns Classification

Arabic prefixes are the main elements of noun classification, most of the nouns in Arabic are made by prefixes. In Arabic Language each prefix represents a class of noun and classify nouns by prefixes. Lu Shuxiang (1979) believes that affixes are "not just used" like a morpheme, they cannot independently make a word. So, in order to exist it must be attached to a root. Some Chinese linguists believe there are 14 prefixes in Chinese language and others think there are less than 14 prefixes. In Chinese Language, the prefix cannot be used as the basis for noun classification, Chinese nouns can only be classified by other methods. This can be regarded as the main difference between Chinese and Arabic nouns in the classification method.

### 4.1. Let Us First Look at the Fixed Prefix of Arabic Nouns

The nouns in Arabic that express people, things, time, and place are generally prefixed by noun structures such as:

- (a) -AL-(prefix) to indicate Nouns Of persons, objects, places, for example:  
ALRAJOU ( الرجل the man), ALMARA3 ( The women المرأة ) ALGURFA ( the room الغرفة ) ALMAKTAB ( The office المكتب ) ALWALAD ( الولد the boy ) ALBINT ( The girl البنت ) ALHIMAR ( الحمارة a Donkey ) ALKALB ( The dog الكلب ) ALMALAB (The football field الملعب) ALKITAB (The book).
- (b) Ru (prefix) to describe Nouns Of person, object, In plural For Example: rujouli ( 男士的复数 روجولي ) , rukhani ( 精神 روحاني ) ruman ( 石榴 رومان ) riassi ( 总统 رئاسي ) rabani ( 真主 رباني ) rasuli ( 使者 رسولي ) .
- (c) Mu (prefix) Generally used to refer to person related terms example: mukhatibin ( 收件人的复数 مخاطبين ) mutakalim ( 说话人 متكلمين ) mutaalimin ( 学习者 متعلمين ) mutadaribin ( 实习生 متدربين ) mutakharrijin ( 毕业生 خريجين ) mudarissin ( 老师的复数 مدرسين ) mutarjimin ( 译者 مترجمين ) muziin ( 记者 مذيعين ) . It is important to note that although these nominal plurals have a fixed prefix (mu), but sometimes they can be prefixed with (AL) without changing the significance, for example: mukhatibin = Al-mukhatibin, mutaalimin = Al-mutaalimin, etc.
- (d) ma (prefix) used to indicate a place or object, and expresses an attitude Noun of person in plural, for example: makaed ( 椅子的复数 ) , mahamid ( 好处 محامد ) madariss ( 学校的复数 مدارس ) marakiz ( 中心 مراكز ) manatik ( 地方的复数 مناطق ) majalis ( 评议会 مجالس ) maraji3 ( 文献 مراجع ) madakhil ( 收入 مداخل ) masarif ( 消费的复数 مصاريف ) masalik ( 路的意思 مسالك ) .

The above 3 kinds of Arabic noun prefixes are close to the actual object noun, the animals noun, (Common noun?) etc. And they are grouped into the same category and are

called Arabic Noun Classes / Arabic Compound Noun (المركبة الإسماء أو المركبة الإسماء أنواع). We can see that this kind of noun classification method is completely different from the modern Chinese noun classification.

## 5. The Effect of Prefixes in Chinese Nouns Classification

According to Huang Yang (2007), the classification of Chinese nouns has always been controversial. At the moment we cannot divide all Chinese nouns into fixed nouns, because Chinese nouns cannot be classified according to structure, so it is different from Arabic nouns. Zhu Dexi (1982) proposed that "the essential basis for dividing a word class can only be the grammatical function of a word rather than the meaning or morphological change of the word. He classified Chinese nouns into the following five categories according to the choice of nouns and quantifiers:

- 1) The nouns that can be expressed by numbers or quantifiers, such as, countable nouns and more appropriate individual quantifiers, for example: (车子 Car) 、(电脑 Computer) 、(书 Book)
- 2) Uncountable nouns: There are no individual quantifiers that are applicable to them. Only metric words and temporary quantifiers can be selected. For example: (水 water、尘土 dust)
- 3) Collective nouns: can only be suitable by collective quantifiers and indefinite quantifiers for example: (人口 population、动物 animals、人类 humans).
- 4) Abstract nouns: only be applicable by quantifiers and quantifiers:(生气 Angry、善良 Kindness)
- 5) Proper noun: In general, they are not modified by quantifiers such as: persons Nouns (小都 xiao dou、高飞 gao fei) places Nouns (毛里塔尼亚 Mauritania、中国 China , 上海 Shanghai , 努瓦克肖特 Nouakchott).

Through the above five Chinese nouns we can find that these noun divisions also comply with Arabic noun classification.

## 6. Conclusions

Although Arabic and Chinese nouns have a little similarity in their usage, but from the above comparison, we can say that the Arabic nouns are different from Chinese nouns. The nouns in Arabic account is not only for the largest percentage of Arabic vocabulary but it is also important for the sentence composition. In Arabic Language The prefixes of all adjectives and verbs must be consistent with the prefix of the main noun in the sentence or the demonstrative pronoun of the noun.

It is very likely that the Mauritanian Students can feel that it is too difficult to learn Chinese Language because There is no prefix harmony between nouns, adjectives and

verbs in the sentences.

Chinese nouns determine the choice of quantifiers in sentences. Among Chinese sentences with quantifiers, can let us to say that Chinese nouns are very important for choosing the quantifiers. For Chinese-speakers, using the mixed of quantifiers will make the listeners feel awkward. For example if some Arabic student says in Chinese (一位牛 Yī wèi niú ) he means (one cow) of course, speaking Chinese as a native speaker would feel that this sentence is wrong, because (一位 Yī wèi,) this qualifier cannot be used for animals, so that means Chinese Language qualifier is not the same as the prefix used in Arabic terms. Although there is no quantifier in Arabic Language or is not same as Chinese, because in Arabic, in some cases some fixed words must be used and need to have the same prefix as the noun, for example (رأس من البقر ra3s baguar في الغرفة) it means so many cows and it's in plural, here we use (رأس, 头 in Chinese), In Arabic to prefix the Noun in plural.

As it is already mentioned that Chinese and Arabic are different languages. Chinese is a Sino-Tibetan language and Arabic is a Semitic language. Therefore, there is definitely some difference in noun structures. If we look at this Arabic Nouns Prefix: Filgurfa في الغرفة , Fisougue في السوق, Dahel algrurfa داخل الغرفة we will find that all these Noun prefixes have a certain significance, and if we translate them to Chinese language they will become prepositional phrases, For example, Dahel algrurfa داخل الغرفة and Filgurfa في الغرفة, although the prefix is different, and the Chinese meaning is "在房间 Zài fángjiān "but, the Chinese equivalent of (Dahel algrurfa داخل الغرفة) is '在房间里 Zài fángjiān lǐ) Such Chinese-Arabic noun correspondence is caused by different structures. In short, because Chinese and Arabic noun structures do not exactly correspond, therefore it causes confusion for Mauritanians (Arabic speaking) in their Chinese vocabulary acquisition.

In order to facilitate foreign students' understanding and mastery of Chinese vocabulary, it is suggested that the Chinese language experts must explain more the morpheme relation in Chinese nouns.

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