

The Pedagogy of Arabic Grammar in General Education: A Cognitive-Linguistic Approach

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Received: 14/02/2026 Accepted: 25/04/2026 Published: 01/06/2026

Abstract

This research aims to clarify the role of cognitive linguistics in the pedagogy of Arabic grammar in general education—primary, middle, and secondary education—at the levels of planning and implementation. At the first level, this role is clearly manifested through the adoption of the approach of integrating knowledge and the problem situation. With regard to implementation, it is manifested through the methods and mechanisms for teaching and learning the new curricula and through classroom interactions, whether in its implicit dimension, through which the learner acquires, in the early stages of education (primary education), linguistic functions embedded in linguistic forms and patterns that the learner receives through listening and reading and produces orally and in writing, so that they become established patterns in the mind according to which the learner constructs correct sentences during language production; or in its explicit dimension, in which grammar is presented as theoretical knowledge through which the learner consciously seeks to learn rules and principles in the form of grammatical judgments and then uses them to regulate linguistic production. [1]

Introduction

Teaching languages in general and grammar in particular during the last decades of the twentieth century, amid this accumulation of knowledge, requires us to recognize the interrelationships between the educational act and cultural and social variables. It also requires us to understand the aims of the educational system and to identify the current and strategic requirements of the desired pedagogical challenge. In light of these changes, a number of modern pedagogical approaches to language teaching emerged in accordance with the requirements of the age. The communicative approach appeared in the 1970s, and it did not arise from nothing; like every approach or theory, it was preceded by two approaches: the traditional approach and the structural approach. The failure of these two approaches to achieve the desired objectives of language learning and teaching, together with the severe criticism directed at both, were among the most important reasons behind the emergence of the communicative approach, which considers that the function of language is manifested in three basic dimensions: a functional dimension, a socio-cultural dimension, and an interactive dimension. It also views language as a process of communication between a sender and a receiver, which cannot be successfully accomplished without acquiring communication skills represented by two receptive skills—listening and reading—and two productive skills—speaking and writing. Thus, this approach emphasizes the

semantic and communicative dimension rather than the grammatical dimension alone. One of the criticisms directed at this approach is its greater reliance on the oral level than on the written level.

The task-based learning approach subsequently emerged, although some studies regard it as an extension and development of the communicative approach. In the second half of the twentieth century, cognitive research received considerable attention, and several concepts, such as perception, memory, and reasoning, became foundational to cognitive science. This provided an initial basis for what came to be termed the cognitive approach. What is this approach, and to what extent can it contribute to language teaching in general and Arabic grammar in particular?

The term “cognitive approach” was first used explicitly in education in 1990. The cognitive conception considers language learning to be a gradual construction of knowledge that takes cognitive processes into account and makes problem solving the central focus. Cognitive processes refer to mental activities that lead to the completion of a task. We agree with a group of researchers that the mental activities most closely related to the specific requirements of grammar teaching are five: perception, discrimination, conceptualization, storage in memory, and automatization. In the first process, the teacher helps the learner gather a number of existing items of knowledge and connect them with new knowledge that must be added to previous knowledge. In the second, the learner discovers the distinctive differences between new knowledge and previous knowledge on the basis of differentiating features. In the third, the learner reviews the network of new and old knowledge by redistributing the relationships among them. In the fourth, the learner records the acquired network of knowledge in long-term memory. In the fifth, the new knowledge becomes stabilized alongside the old knowledge, enabling the learner to activate it and rely on it in expressing intentions naturally, easily, and fluently.

Before explaining the role of the cognitive approach in the pedagogy of Arabic grammar, it is appropriate to examine some of the concepts underlying this research.

1. The Concept of Grammar (Grammaire)

A. Linguistically: If we examine the meaning of the word “naḥw” (grammar), we find that it appears in both classical and modern Arabic dictionaries with a range of meanings. Ibn Faris (d. 395 AH) states in *Mujmal al-Lughah*: “Naḥw: the way; and naḥw al-kalām is the direction of speech, that is, the speaker’s intention to follow the principles of the Arabs so as to speak in the manner in which they spoke.” In *Al-Zamakhshari’s Asas al-Balaghah* (d. 538 AH), under the entry (n-ḥ-w), we find: “N-Ḥ-W: it has various directions; it does not remain in one direction. I proceeded toward him; he has approximately one hundred men; you look in many directions; so-and-so is a grammarian ... He turned toward his left side; he relied upon him ... I approached him and he approached me.” [2][3]

There is little difference between this and what appears in Ibn Manzur’s *Lisan al-Arab* (d. 711 AH): “Naḥw: from naḥā, yanḥū, and yanḥā, naḥwan, and intahā. We say: he proceeded toward him when he intended him. He directed a thing when he diverted it; and from this grammar was named naḥw because it directs speech toward the various forms of inflection.” Among the meanings of naḥw, the *Al-Mu‘jam al-Wasīṭ* also gives: intention, way, direction, likeness, quantity, and type. [4][5] Thus, these definitions show that the linguistic meaning of the word revolves around intention and direction.

B. Terminologically: Grammar was classically defined as the science by which the endings of words are regulated and their inflectional and structural states are known, together with the composition of sentences. This can be understood from the definitions found in classical works. Ibn Jinni (d. 392 AH), in *Al-Khaṣā’is*, defines it as “following the direction of the speech of the Arabs in its inflection and other aspects, such as dual

formation, pluralization, diminutive formation, broken plurals, annexation, nisba, and composition.” Ibn ‘Usfur (d. 669 AH), in Al-Muqarrab, defines it as “the science derived from principles inferred from an inductive study of the speech of the Arabs, leading to knowledge of the rules governing the components from which it is composed.” As for Al-Sharif Al-Jurjani, he defines it as “a science of rules by which the states of Arabic constructions in terms of inflection and declension and other matters are known ... It has also been said that it is a science of principles by which correct and incorrect speech are known.” [6][7][8] From these definitions, we conclude that grammar in classical grammatical thought is the science concerned with the rules and principles according to which words combine to form constructions.

In the modern concept, grammar is defined as the “science of syntax.” Ratib Qasim Ashour says: “It is the science that investigates constructions and the properties connecting them, and it also deals with the relationships between words in a sentence and between sentences in an utterance.” Another definition describes it as “the science that studies the contextual relations between words in sentences and adds to them concepts inferred through coordinated specific features.” [9][10]

Among Western scholars, the meanings of the term grammar vary, but they may be summarized as follows:

- Grammar in opposition to linguistics: Some linguists use the term “grammar” to mean the general description of a language. This usage is found, for example, in Saussure, who stated: “We can give the name grammar, in the strict sense of the word, to any description of a state of a language ... Grammar is concerned with studying language as a system composed of means of expression.” [11][12]
- Grammar as a branch of linguistics: Grammar may refer to a branch of linguistic study, both classical and modern, focusing on the morphological and syntactic levels. Jean Dubois states: “Grammar is the description of grammatical and lexical morphemes only, through the study of their forms and their combination for the formation of words (construction) or sentences (syntax) ...” [13]
- Grammar in the sense of a theory: The term may be extended to serve as the name of a particular linguistic theory. Examples include “transformational-generative grammar,” “lexical-functional grammar,” and “generalized phrase-structure grammar,” among others. [14]

We have surveyed these different concepts associated with the term grammar among classical and modern Arab scholars and among Western scholars. Therefore, the linguist must clarify the intended meaning of the term grammar through a verbal qualifier so that the reader does not become confused. On this basis, the term functional grammar is used here to refer to teaching language users a set of rules that protects their speech from grammatical error. Abd al-Alim Ibrahim defines it as “a set of rules that perform the basic function of grammar, namely regulating words and the system of sentence composition so that the tongue is protected from errors in pronunciation and the pen from errors in writing.” [15]

2. The Concept of the Pedagogy of Grammar

It is “the scientific study of the contents, methods, and techniques of grammar teaching, and of the forms of organizing language teaching and learning situations to which the learner is exposed, in order to provide the communicative competence represented in the ability to compose speech while taking the requirements of the situation into account.” [16]

Thus, we may say that the pedagogy of grammar is a complex process consisting of theoretical foundations and principles and practical procedures governed by linguistic, psychological, and educational laws and rules,

with the aim of providing the learner with grammatical ability and skill, and extending this ability to communicative competence.

3. The Concept of Approach (Approche)

A. Linguistically: In Arabic, *muqārabah* (approach) is a verbal noun on the pattern *mufā'alah*, derived from the quadriliteral form corresponding to the pattern “fā'ala.” We say *qāraba–yuqāribu–muqārabah*: he approached, drew near to him, agreed with him in opinion, avoided excess, and sought correctness and truth. [17] Hence, the linguistic meaning of the term “approach” refers to nearness, approximation to correctness, and touching upon truth.

B. Terminologically: The concept of approach has multiple definitions, including the following: it is the conception and construction of a feasible work project in light of a plan or strategy that takes into account all the factors interacting to achieve effective performance and an appropriate outcome. It is a method for solving a problem or achieving a particular objective, beginning with a designed plan that takes into account everything capable of achieving the established objectives in terms of methods, means, and theories. [18]

It also means the manner of studying a problem, addressing it, or achieving a goal, and it is connected with the learner's view of the intellectual world. Every approach is based on a work strategy, either theoretically (strategy, method, technique) or practically (procedure, application, etc.). [19]

It is also the general manner by which an issue is perceived and studied, a project is addressed, a problem is solved, or a goal is achieved. [20]

The preceding definitions show that the concept of approach is associated with two meanings. The first is general and refers to moving closer to achieving a goal. The second is specific and refers to a set of planned conceptions intended to bring the learner closer to the intended objective until the desired outcome is achieved.

4. The Concept of Cognition / Cognitive Science

A. Linguistically: Lisan al-Arab states: “*al-‘irfān*: knowledge ... he knew him; he knows him; knowledge, knowing, and cognition ... a knowledgeable person: one who knows things and does not deny someone whom he has seen once; the feminine form is used for emphasis.” Al-Mu‘jam al-Wasīṭ states: “He knew the people—he became their ‘*arāfah*: he managed their affairs and administered their affairs. He knew a thing: knowledge and cognition: he perceived it through one of his senses.” [21][22] Thus, the linguistic meaning of ‘*irfān* oscillates between knowledge, knowing, and perception.

B. Terminologically: The term cognitive science/cognition, like other linguistic terms in the Arab world, has been characterized by terminological variation. It has been called *al-‘irfān* and *al-ma‘rifīyah*, while the Tunisian academic researcher Al-Azhar Al-Zanad, head of the Cognitive Linguistics and Arabic Language Research Unit at the University of Manouba in Tunisia, proposed the term “*al-‘arfanah*,” which he used in some of his writings. [23]

Lazard defines it as “those sciences whose objective lies in the various manifestations of sensory and mental activity through which human beings come to know the world surrounding them,” including psychology, artificial intelligence, communication theory, and philosophy of mind. [24]

George Lakoff defines it as a new field that brings together what is known about the mind in numerous academic disciplines, including psychology, linguistics, anthropology, and computer science. It seeks detailed answers to questions such as: What is the mind? How do we give meaning to our speech? What is the

conceptual system and how is it organized? Do all human beings use the same conceptual system? If so, what is that system? If not, what exactly is the thing shared by all human beings in what they think about? The questions are not new, but some of the answers are new. [25]

Al-Azhar Al-Zanad considers cognitive sciences to study the functioning of the mind and intelligence through an interdisciplinary approach involving philosophy, psychology, artificial intelligence, neuroscience, linguistics, and anthropology. Cognitive sciences study intelligence in general, human intelligence, and the biological substrate that carries it. [26]

This term became associated with linguistic studies through researchers such as Jackendoff, Langacker, Lakoff, and others, giving rise to cognitive linguistics, which is defined as “a branch with its own analytical methodology within the group of studies concerned with mental functioning and its general processes, taking language as a foundation because it is a central mental capacity within the domain of perception, together with the signs, coding, encoding, expression, and thinking associated with it.” [27]

Accordingly, cognitive linguistics is a science concerned with studying language in light of cognitive mental processes, in which linguistics interacts with the mind, artificial intelligence, psychology, neuroscience, and anthropology.

The Role of Cognitive Linguistics in the Pedagogy of Arabic Grammar

Every educational process, including the pedagogy of Arabic language and grammar, is based on two fundamental levels: the level of planning and the level of procedure and implementation. In this research, we examine the contribution of cognitive linguistics at each of these levels.

1. At the Level of Planning in Educational Curricula

The teaching of Arabic grammar in general education is planned at the curriculum level within the Arabic language curriculum according to specific linguistic, psychological, and educational criteria. Before explaining the role of cognitive linguistics at this level, it is useful to refer to the concept of educational planning.

Planning for learning is defined in the Dictionary of Educational and Psychological Terms as “a mental conception and psychological preparation for teaching situations needed in the classroom during a specified period of time and for a specified educational level, with the aim of achieving educational objectives in an organized and purposeful manner through the selection of appropriate experiences, activities, procedures, educational means, and activating and evaluative questions.” [28]

On this basis, planning for Arabic grammar teaching at the level of the Arabic language curriculum means distributing grammatical elements in an organized and precise manner according to the educational level, the time allocated to it, and the number of lessons. For such planning to be carried out at the best level, to suit the learner group, and to achieve learning objectives, cognitive linguistics has contributed a number of principles and factors, the most important of which are:

A. Distinguishing between Scientific Grammar and Pedagogical Grammar

Scientific grammar is grammar based on a scientific linguistic theory that seeks precision in description and explanation and adopts the most rigorous methods to achieve this objective. It is specialized grammar that should be profound and abstract and is studied for its own sake; that is its nature. [29]

Pedagogical grammar, on the other hand, is an educational and functional level useful for correcting speech, ensuring sound discourse, fulfilling a purpose, and expressing a need. It focuses on the objectives of the learner, who selects the appropriate material from scientific grammar and adapts it carefully according to educational objectives and teaching conditions. It is an educational process achieved through an educational mechanism known as didactic transposition. It is based on linguistic, educational, and psychological foundations and is not merely a summary of scientific grammar. It is therefore a process of adapting and transforming scholarly knowledge into a subject for teaching according to the place, the target persons, and the intended purposes or objectives. [30]

B. Dividing Pedagogical Grammar into Implicit and Explicit Grammar

The foundations on which pedagogical grammar is based adopt a methodology of gradual knowledge acquisition consistent with what is required at each educational stage. What is presented to children in the first stage of primary education differs in type and degree from what is presented to learners in the second and third stages and other educational levels. This has resulted in dividing pedagogical grammar into two parts.

Implicit grammar represents the set of rules and principles that underlie individuals' linguistic use. They are essentially acquired and embedded in the mind of every speaker of a particular language; no speaker can acquire the ability to speak any language without internalizing its implicit rules. Researcher Fatima Shafik Ali Ahmad defines it as grammar used to acquire grammatical rules through imitation of correct models and practice without explicitly referring to them. [31] Explicit grammar, by contrast, is grammar that involves a direct presentation of the rules underlying constructions and sentences; that is, grammatical rules are presented directly. [32][33]

C. Introducing Implicit Grammar in the Early Stages of General Education

A close observer of the linguistic reality in the Arab world generally notices that Modern Standard Arabic is not the first language the child learns. The Arab child learns the colloquial or vernacular language prevailing at home and in the street, rather than Modern Standard Arabic. This constitutes one of the greatest problems confronting the Arab child at the beginning of his or her educational journey. The child therefore learns the language of origin from the family environment, and upon entering school encounters another language whose rules and uses differ from the language used at home. The child is required to master it in order to understand the knowledge presented at school. Abdallah Al-Danan states in this regard: "The Arab pupil enters school at the age of six, having mastered the colloquial language before that age, when the enormous linguistic capacity of the brain for acquiring languages is at its peak. That is, he or she has acquired the language with which the child is expected to acquire different kinds of knowledge according to his or her nature and constitution, but is surprised that the language of knowledge is not the language with which he or she has been supplied, but another language that he or she has not mastered; in order to understand the knowledge subjects, it is necessary to learn it and the other ..." [34]

On this basis, implicit grammar is presented in the first years of general education in the form of sentences and texts that are heard and imitated, followed by the production of sentences modeled on them, using activities and procedural mechanisms that teach rules not as formulated laws but as patterns and examples.

D. Giving Attention to Explicit Grammar in Later Stages

The cognitive conception is concerned with teaching linguistic knowledge in general. One of its consequences is the renewed and strong interest in explicit grammar, because the circumstances of communication through language require the interacting parties to negotiate the construction of intended meanings. This requires, in

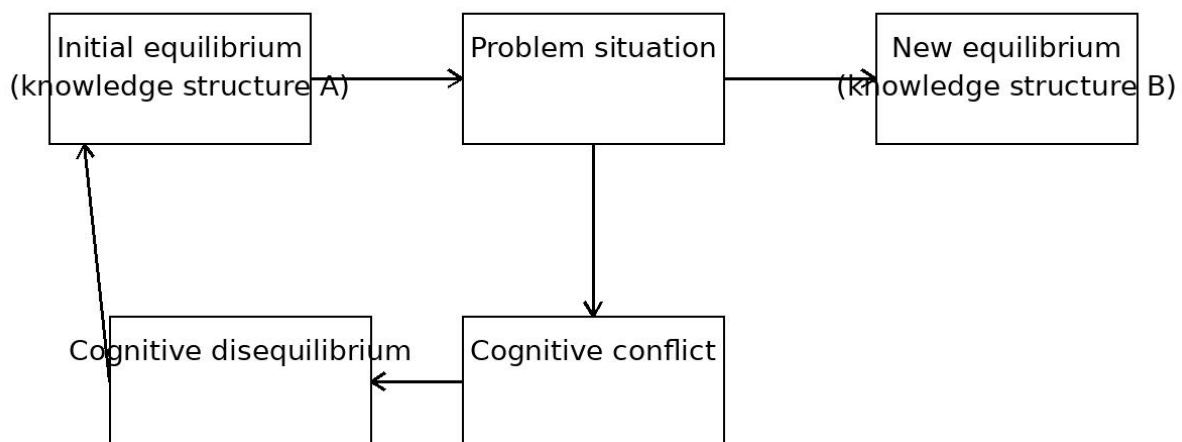
addition to knowledge of language units, knowledge of the rules governing meanings and ensuring the communication of intentions—namely, grammatical rules. [35]

E. The Problem Situation (Situation Problème)

Every educational situation has a starting point. The problem situation constitutes the starting point of every educational act whose objective is to construct new knowledge. In this situation, the learner is compelled to mobilize all resources (skills, knowledge, etc.) in order to find a solution to the problem presented. If unable to do so, the learner reformulates hypotheses and employs his or her own cognitive capacities to gather scattered knowledge and think about experimenting with other means that may reduce the difficulty of the problem and lead to appropriate solutions. [36]

Bouvier defines it as “a learning situation in which the learner is required to adapt to a problem that confronts him or her, within which difficulties arise that can be overcome by constructing new knowledge.” [37]

Piaget, drawing on his research into the theory of equilibrium and equilibration, argues that the construction of knowledge develops only through three successive stages: a state of equilibrium, disequilibrium, and re-equilibration. The learner’s movement from one cognitive structure (A) to another, more developed structure (B), is therefore translated into a disturbance of a given state of equilibrium, as shown in the following figure:



The figure illustrates the role of the problem situation in knowledge construction.

Figure: Schematic representation illustrating the role of the problem situation in knowledge construction.

The initial state of equilibrium is the stage in which the learner is able to confront familiar situations on the basis of previous knowledge. However, when the learner encounters a new type of situation for which that knowledge is insufficient, he or she is forced to expand and develop it (cognitive destabilization), entering a stage of cognitive conflict that leads to disequilibrium because of the difficulty of the problem presented. After a stage of research and investigation and with the help of the teacher and peers (socio-cognitive conflict), the learner succeeds in overcoming this difficulty, thereby regaining equilibrium and moving to a new state of equilibrium in which new knowledge, skills, and behaviors are acquired that enable the learner to confront similar situations. On this basis, the problem situation is considered a fundamental entry point for constructing and using knowledge and identifying the limits of its application. [38]

F. The Technique of Integrating Knowledge

This technique was given particular attention by Xavier Roegiers, who considered it a process through which initially separate elements are connected in order to activate them according to a given objective. The Higher Council of Education of Quebec in 1999 also defined it as the process through which the learner adds new knowledge to previous knowledge, thereby reconstructing his or her internal structure and applying acquired knowledge to new situations. We also find the following definition by Legendre, which may be more expressive of the meaning of integration: “Learning integration is based on the assumption that knowledge forms a logical and organized whole, and considers learning to be a problem-solving process through acquired knowledge and skills.” [39]

Accordingly, an integration-learning situation is a complex problem situation that gives the learner an opportunity to practice integrating resources (transversal and subject-specific competencies, declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors) in order to connect knowledge that was initially fragmented.

Having addressed the most important principles included at the planning level, which have a cognitive-linguistic dimension and have had a significant impact on the development of Arabic grammar teaching through Arabic language curricula, we turn in the second part of the research to the level of procedure and implementation.

2. At the Level of Procedure and Implementation: Classroom Interactions

The role of cognitive linguistics in the pedagogy of Arabic grammar at this level becomes clear in the operationalization of learning, represented by mechanisms for teaching implicit and explicit grammar in a functional manner.

A. Pedagogy of Implicit Grammar

This comprises all the procedural processes to which the learner is subjected and which teach rules not as formulated laws but as patterns and models, in order to provide communicative competence represented in the ability to compose speech while taking the requirements of the situation into account. It takes place at the first stage through all Arabic-language activities, with the content presented implicitly and incidentally. The contribution of cognitive linguistics is manifested as follows:

- Implicit grammar teaching between what is acquired by potential and what is actually learned: Human beings are born biologically equipped with a system containing the major linguistic laws, known as universal grammar, which is connected with the linguistic property distinguishing the human species. Human beings—unlike other creatures—are biologically equipped to learn languages through a set of predispositions resulting from the biological structure of the brain. This equipment is what linguists have called linguistic competence. It explains the child’s ability to learn and acquire the language of the surrounding environment rapidly, before acquiring other skills, without teachers, schools, or books. In other words, the child has a basic grammatical program embedded in the brain that enables him or her to capture from the environment a range of linguistic structures and elements and adapt them to the natural system in order to construct the distinctive grammatical system of the surrounding language, which is called linguistic competence or the implicit grammar of the language. Thus, the child acquires any human language from the incomplete linguistic manifestations heard around him or her, relying on an innate linguistic competence that transforms linguistic experience into latent rules in the child’s mind. The child’s language subsequently develops in accordance with cognitive growth until language acquisition is completed. Throughout this process, the family and environment have the

function of providing the child with the necessary linguistic material through which the rules of the mother tongue are discovered. [40][41]

- Bringing artificial grammar closer to natural grammar: From a cognitive perspective, grammar teaching adopts this principle by bringing the artificial grammar that we study as close as possible to the natural grammar acquired spontaneously before entering school, using the educational means available. The mental activities of perception, discrimination, conceptualization, storage in memory, and automatization all proceed toward bringing the artificial closer to the natural. The more our construction of grammar takes into account the five mental activities mentioned above, the closer our grammar is to what the learner can manage and readily engage with, thereby facilitating and accelerating grammar learning. These activities take into account the nature of mental functioning and the requirements of use, considering language use as an interactive communicative space inside the classroom and in the natural environment outside it. Since the child in the first stage of primary education is characterized by limited experience and a need to broaden experience and develop linguistic repertoire, the child should be given security and freedom to the extent that helps him or her express themselves in the language they use and express their natural disposition in a natural setting, without imposing restrictions that limit spontaneity. The teacher's task here is limited to enabling the child to speak in the language available to him or her and overlooking some colloquial usages, because linguistic correctness will gradually come through practice in language use, through:
- Using the listening-comprehension lesson by hearing models of linguistic constructions in spoken texts and asking learners to repeat them and formulate sentences according to the same pattern.
- Using the oral-expression lesson through the use of new linguistic forms and employing them in meaningful communicative situations.
- Using the reading lesson to train children in correct linguistic habits.
- Using the written-expression lesson to construct and arrange sentences and fill in blanks to form short sentences, etc.
- Using other educational situations during plays, memorized texts, and learners' conversations to train them in some appropriate correct usages.

B. Pedagogy of Explicit Grammar

This comprises all procedural processes related to the contents, methods, and techniques of teaching explicit grammatical rules, as well as forms of organizing language-learning situations to which the learner is exposed, in order to provide grammatical skill represented in the ability to distinguish correct speech from incorrect speech and to enable the learner to possess mechanisms for self-correction. The most important manifestation of cognitive linguistics in teaching this type of grammar is language embodiment. This conception represents a clear cognitive orientation in contemporary linguistic theory. Linguistic communication relies on experience acquired through bodily experience, or what has recently been termed embodied language. It is one of the most important outcomes of research in contemporary cognitive theory. In this embodiment, linguistic communication—both in production and reception—relies on conceptualization on the one hand and mental schemas on the other, both of which are fundamentally products of bodily experience. The contribution of the German Gestalt school perhaps clearly reveals the extent to which the mind is influenced by the body in linguistic production in general. One of the most prominent manifestations of this process can be observed in the grammatical conceptualization of the inflectional marker, one of the most important axes of Arabic grammar. This marker is organized into four categories: nominative, accusative, jussive, and genitive. No one

can overlook the fact that tongue movement is what gave this marker its conceptual category. Moreover, these four categories are linearly organized among themselves at the level of syntax and expression through a schema of force, or what classical grammar knows as the concept of the governing element ('āmil). Therefore, proposing a relational analysis of the mental product represented by the construction is the closest approach to understanding the links among the mental schemas that generate Arabic constructions in particular. [42][43]

Conclusion

The adoption of the cognitive approach in the pedagogy of Arabic grammar is represented by a set of principles of cognitive linguistics that have contributed to providing some solutions to the difficulties encountered by the grammar learner, who is equipped with an activated natural system. This applies both at the level of planning the educational process, through the development of curricula that take into account all linguistic, educational, and psychological foundations in order to achieve the desired objectives, and at the level of implementation, represented by classroom interactions involving the implicit or explicit grammar included in the curriculum through educational mechanisms, methods, and situations.

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