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Abstract

This article examines Shukri Muhammad Ayyad's *Madhal ilā Ilm al-Uslūb* (An Introduction to Stylistics), a distinguished work in contemporary Arabic criticism and rhetoric. The book presents a balanced, methodological vision reconciling classical Arabic rhetorical heritage - specifically Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani's pioneering theories- with modern Western linguistics. Rejecting both a blind fascination with Western terminology and the stagnation of classical rhetorical formulas, Ayyad advocates transitioning from traditional "prescriptive" rhetoric to modern "descriptive" stylistics. He analyzes literary texts across three comprehensive levels: phonological, lexical-semantic, and structural-syntactic. The author positions "deviation" (*al-'udul / al-inziyah*), the backbone of modern stylistics, as an aesthetic and creative tool, masterfully aligning this dynamic approach with Ibn Jinni's concept of *Shaja'at al-Arabiyye* (The Audacity of the Arabic Language). The work's practical dimension is reinforced through philosophical and psychological analyses of aesthetic elements in the Holy Qur'an, such as *fawasil* and *iltifat*, alongside classical and modern Arabic poetry. Although criticized for being somewhat "impressionistic" by lacking statistical data, the book successfully protects the text's literary spirit from dry mathematical formulas. It transforms traditional rhetoric into a dynamic tool for textual analysis, serving as a fundamental reference that demonstrates the immense potential of the Arabic language.

Keywords: Stylistics, Shukri Muhammad Ayyad, Arabic Rhetoric (Balagha), Deviation.

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1. Introduction: The Nature of Sacred Art and Modern Critique

Dr. Shukri Muhammad Ayyad's book, *An Introduction to Stylistics (Madkhal ila 'Ilm al-Uslub)*, occupies an exceptional position in the modern Arabic critical and rhetorical library. Far from being a mere compilation of imported Western theories, this book is the fruition of a quarter-century of rigorous academic teaching and research across Arab universities -most notably at King Saud University (formerly the University of Riyadh)-, which was among the pioneering Arab institutions to integrate stylistics into the curricula of Arabic language departments.

In this seminal work, Dr. Ayyad operates from a conscious critical perspective that rejects both blind infatuation with imported Western terminology and rigid adherence to ancient rhetorical formulas, which have hardened over time into dry, mechanical educational molds. The ultimate objective of this book is to revive the rich Arab rhetorical heritage by connecting it with the latest advancements in contemporary linguistics and stylistics. He accomplishes this by standing on the firm ground of authentic Arabic culture while maintaining a well-balanced, sophisticated awareness of Western criticism.

2. Philosophical and Methodological Framework

The methodology charted by Dr. Ayyad is characterized by extreme objectivity and balance. The philosophical and methodological foundations of the book can be summarized in the following points:

- **Bridging Rhetoric and Stylistics:** The author posits that "*talking about style is ancient, but the science of style (stylistics) is very recent.*" Consequently, he rejects the notion that stylistics arrived to demolish traditional Arabic rhetoric. Instead, he argues that stylistics has an ancient lineage in Arabic culture, explicitly embodied in the works of classical masters of rhetoric and criticism, such as Abdul Qaher al-Jurjani in his monumental *Dala'il al-I'jaz (The Proofs of Inimitability)*. In Ayyad's view, stylistics is the natural, scientifically evolved extension of traditional rhetoric once it is liberated from the shackles of narrow scholastic classification.
- **A Warning Against Superficial Modernity:** Dr. Ayyad explicitly states in his introduction that he does not seek to peddle "imported Western goods" for the sake of empty modernization or to infatuate scholars with cultural fads alien to the spirit of the Arabic language. He calls for a critical assimilation of Western approaches (such as structural stylistics, statistical stylistics, and the stylistics of expression) to evaluate their compatibility with the unique aesthetic and syntactic nature of the Arabic language.

- **The Applied, Analytical Approach:** The author does not content himself with historical narratives or scholarly biographies; rather, he transforms his book into a practical guide. Extensive textual examples ranging from the Holy Quran, Pre-Islamic poetry, and Abbasid poetry, up to modern literature, form the backbone of the book. This proves that stylistics is a science of practice, appreciation, and discovery, rather than a set of inert rules.

3. Book Chapters and Core Axes

The book progresses systematically from macro-concepts and historical contexts to meticulous micro-applications, structured around three fundamental axes:

Axis I: The Genesis of Stylistics and its Distinction from Traditional Rhetoric

In this section, the author highlights the core differences between classical and modern approaches to the literary text:

Traditional Rhetoric: In its later scholastic phases, it operated largely as a prescriptive science. It dictated rules, categorized figures of speech (such as metaphors, metonymy, alliteration, and antithesis) into rigid ready-made boxes, and demanded that writers measure their discourse against them.

Modern Stylistics: A descriptive science that does not pass preliminary judgments on the text. Instead, it studies the text as it actually exists, aiming to explore the internal relationships among its components, uncover how linguistic structures manifest the psychological or intellectual state of the creator, and analyze how it impacts the receiver.

Ayyad traces the roots of Western stylistics, starting from the Swiss linguist Charles Bally (a student of Ferdinand de Saussure), who laid the groundwork for the *stylistics of expression* and its emotional underpinnings, moving to Karl Vossler and Leo Spitzer, who focused on psychological and aesthetic stylistics.

Axis II: Levels of Stylistic Analysis

Dr. Ayyad guides the reader through a multidimensional and integrated analysis of the literary text across three linguistic levels:

1. The Phonological and Rhythmic Level

The book emphasizes the role of sound in shaping the stylistic structure of a text. Style is not merely words and meanings; it is melody and rhythm intertwined with sense. Ayyad examines:

- **Letter Selection:** How the choice of voiced/voiceless or plosive/fricative consonants serves the overarching theme of a poem or prose piece.

- **Phonetic Repetition:** How rhyme, alliteration, enjambment, and poetic meters transform from mere linguistic ornaments into functional stylistic tools that capture the reader's attention and reveal the internal tension of the text.

2. The Lexical and Semantic Level

Here, the author examines the "word" or "vocabulary item" as the basic building block of style. Stylistics does not view a word isolated in a dictionary, but rather its function within a specific context. The book discusses:

- **Semantic Fields:** How a cluster of vocabulary words converges in a text to serve a unified theme (e.g., fields of death, nature, rebellion, etc.).
- **Lexical Dissonance and Harmony:** The deliberate selection of anomalous or abrasive words within a delicate context (or vice-versa) as a conscious stylistic choice.

3. The Syntactic and Grammatical Level

This level is deeply intertwined with the traditional Arabic "*Ilm al-Ma'ani*" (The Science of Meanings). Ayyad demonstrates that grammatical structures are conscious stylistic choices rather than dry rules:

- **Word Order Permutation (Inversion/Foregrounding and Backgrounding):** Placing the object before the subject, or the predicate before the subject, to achieve emphasis, exclusivity, or to capture attention.
- **Ellipsis and Pleonasm (Omission and Mention):** Condensing a text by omitting certain elements or expanding it by mentioning them, and the artistic motives behind such choices.
- **The Declarative and the Imperative (Statement and Composition):** Shifting between reporting modes (declarative) and emotional/rhetorical modes (interrogative, exclamative, vocative, imperative) and how this transition dynamic builds poetic vitality.

Axis III: The Concept of "Deviation" (*Al-Udul / Al-Inziyah*)

The book dedicates significant space to elucidating the concept of "deviation", which serves as the cornerstone of modern stylistics. Deviation is the writer's or poet's deliberate departure from the standard, familiar norms of everyday language to create an innovative, striking, and evocative discourse.

Ayyad brilliantly demonstrates that this concept is deeply rooted in classical Arabic thought. Ibn Jinni termed it "The Boldness of Arabic" (*Shuja'at al-Arabiyyah*) in his book *Al-Khasa'is*, proving that Arabic does not always adhere to

rigid, linear patterns; it possesses the artistic courage to breach linguistic habits for profound aesthetic goals without losing its eloquence or identity. The concept was also explored by Al-Jurjani and Hazim al-Qartajanni under various nomenclatures. The author concludes that stylistics analyzes deviation not as an “error,” but as a creative energy that unleashes the latent potentials of language.

4. The Applied Dimension: From Theory to Text

What sets this book apart from purely theoretical works is its wealth of superb practical analyses, showcasing the author’s refined critical taste. Key applied models include:

1. **Stylistic Analysis of the Quran:** The author repeatedly returns to the Quranic text as the absolute pinnacle of Arabic eloquence. He analyzes miraculous stylistic phenomena such as Quranic cadences (*Fawasil*), grammatical shifts (*Al-Iltilaf*—shifting between third, second, and first-person pronouns), and purposeful repetition, demonstrating how these structures carry profound psychological, theological, and rhetorical dimensions that ordinary language cannot replicate.
2. **Analysis of Classical and Modern Arabic Poetry:** The book evaluates poems by Imru’ al-Qais, Al-Mutanabbi, and Abu Tammam, reaching down to modern figures like Shawqi, Mutran, and free-verse poets. The author illustrates how their styles diverge based on their psychological and intellectual makeups: while Abu Tammam leans toward a cerebral, intellectual style rich in antithesis and paradox, Al-Mutanabbi favors an epic, oratorical style anchored in self-aggrandizement and thunderous rhythms.

5. Scholarly Value and Critical Contributions

Dr. Shukri Ayyad’s book introduced a massive qualitative addition to the Arab academic and critical landscape:

- **Conceptual Indigenization:** The book successfully translated and indigenized Western stylistic terminology into a robust, accessible, and elegant Arabic idiom, steering clear of alien jargon or misleading literal translations that plagued other modernist critics.
- **Purging Rhetoric of Stagnation:** It breathed life back into classical rhetorical sciences (*Al-Ma’ani*, *Al-Bayan*, *Al-Badi’*), showing that for rhetoric to survive, it must be taught as a dynamic tool for living textual analysis rather than dry materials for rote memorization.

- **Establishing a Balanced Academic Curriculum:** It laid the foundation for teaching stylistics in universities, offering a model paradigm that seamlessly balances heritage (*Asalah*) with modernity (*Mu'asarah*).

Conclusion

In conclusion, *An Introduction to Stylistics* by Professor Dr. Shukri Muhammad Ayyad remains a monumental milestone and a guiding beacon for students of language and literature. Ayyad successfully formulated a critical framework that champions self-awareness of one's cultural heritage while maintaining a smart, fruitful openness to Western linguistic achievements.

The book proves beyond a doubt that the Arabic language -with its inherent flexibility, derivational capacity, and vast rhetorical legacy- is fully capable of assimilating and evolving the most sophisticated modern stylistic methodologies. It remains an indispensable text for every student of knowledge, researcher of textual aesthetics, and lover of the Arabic language.

References

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