

Indeterminates between Grammatical Heritage and Modern Western Linguistics

(A Descriptive–Comparative Study)

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Abstract:

Arabic grammatical heritage is exceedingly rich in many authentic linguistic concepts that may be regarded as modern compared with the achievements of contemporary Western linguistic theories. Among the linguistic issues that have stirred considerable debate in Western linguistics is the question of *indeterminates*, or *empty entities*, as Émile Benveniste first termed them. Therefore, this paper seeks to address the concept of indeterminates from two perspectives: an Arab classical (heritage-based) perspective and a modern Western perspective through a descriptive and comparative approach. The research problem may thus be formulated as follows: if the concept of indeterminates constitutes one of the self-evident notions that Arab grammarians dealt with centuries ago, why did many heritage-based concepts remain marginalised? This stands in contrast to the fascination modern linguists show for every concept imported from Western linguistic culture.

Keywords: indeterminates; empty entities; linguistic concepts; grammatical heritage; Western linguistics.

Introduction:

Indeterminates are linguistic units (or empty entities, as Émile Benveniste described them for the first time in Western linguistics). In contrast, the concept of indeterminates is an authentic concept that was addressed by our grammarians in their grammatical chapters, including Sībawayh and his teachers, as well as later grammarians, who followed their approach. We have therefore chosen to study textual indeterminates through a descriptive–comparative analysis between grammatical heritage and Western linguistics.

Through this study, we also aim to highlight the close interconnection between textual analysis and grammatical–semantic analysis in the work of grammarians, such that the former cannot be attained without the latter. It is thus necessary to pause at two issues: first, indeterminates from a Western linguistic perspective; second, indeterminates from a heritage-based perspective. It is likewise essential to reflect on the significance of Arab

heritage's precedence in linguistics, in general, and textual studies in particular, given that indeterminacy is among the elements that contribute to textual cohesion (cohesion and coherence). Accordingly, we raise the following question: what are the points of difference and agreement between indeterminates from the perspective of heritage linguistics and those of modern Western linguistics? Moreover, if this concept constitutes one of the self-evident notions in Arabic linguistic heritage, why are modern linguists fascinated by every import from Western linguistic culture? What is the reason for the absence of theorisation of these concepts and theories in heritage linguistics, unlike the situation in Western linguistics?

1. The First Issue: Indeterminates in Western Linguistics and the Origins of This Term in Arabic Linguistic Heritage

1.1. The Concept of Indeterminates from a Western Perspective:

The linguistic term *déictiques* is etymologically derived from the Greek *déiktikos*, which denotes indeterminacy, obscurity, and ambiguity.¹

In terminological usage, indeterminates (*embrayeurs* or *déictiques*), translated from English *shifters*, include everything related to pronouns or to references to time and place, since this term approximately corresponds to the concept of *shifters* as defined by Jakobson.²

Among the terms that revolve around the same concept is the use of the term *déictique* in several forms in addition to this one, such as *valeur déictique* (deictic value), *élément déictique* (deictic element), and *un déictique* (a deictic).³

If we return these terms to grammatical heritage as intended by Sībawayh, al-Raḍī, and Ibn Yaʿīsh, we find that they have counterparts in Western linguistics, namely, indeterminates, the connector (*embrayeur*), the deictic indicator, indexicals, and deixis (*déictique*). From a Western perspective, indeterminates generally denote linguistic units that link language to reality through discourse and acquire meaning, according to Jakobson, in the course of interaction. He maintains that “contextual indicators are systematic linguistic units that are determined only within discourse at the moment of utterance.”⁴

Halliday, for his part, regarded them as elements whose understanding depends not on their intrinsic meaning but on their extension to something else.⁵ They emerged as a new term in Western linguistics with Émile Benveniste within the framework of the theory of enunciation, which conceives of language as a communicative system. According to this view, “the enunciator is the subject who takes the floor, or the subject who makes use of specific linguistic forms to control the enunciative situation; this is what Benveniste calls the ‘formal apparatus of enunciation,’ composed of pronouns, verbal tenses, indeterminates, sentence forms, and modes. However, the enunciator is not a single individual, for the ‘I’ of the enunciator (S) becomes the ‘I’ of the enunciated (‘A’) from the moment the latter takes the floor.”⁶

These terms first appeared with the theory of enunciation, which, contrary to preceding theories, does not regard language as its sole object but rather studies language in use and approaches it interactionally, focusing on both the producer and the recipient of discourse and the circumstances surrounding them, that is, the communicative situation. This theory holds that indeterminates acquire meaning only through interaction. It also focuses on the first participant in the production of speech, namely, the enunciator, thereby rendering this concept of the enunciative subject a linguistic sign. In this way, the speaker employs linguistic forms that evoke time and place, beginning with "I," "here," and "now." These are deictic forms represented by expressions such as "this," interrogative forms such as "yesterday" and "there," forms indicating personal relations such as "I" and "you" as opposed to "he," and verbal modalities (such as obligation), which occur in multiple forms in every language.⁷

Émile Benveniste states in his book *Subjectivity in Language*: “There is no ‘I’ here that can encompass all the ‘I’s uttered at every moment by all speakers ... for ‘I’ does not signify any lexical entity.”⁸ He continues: “We are dealing here with a class of words, namely, pronouns, whose status differs from that of all other linguistic signs. To what, then, does ‘I’ refer? It refers to a singular entity of a specifically linguistic nature ... it is a form that is determined only within what we call a discursive situation.”⁹ According to him, indeterminates have no reference in themselves other than an immediate one, which is determined when the producer of discourse appropriates language as an entity at the moment of assuming the pronoun “I.”

Benveniste summarises the role of pronouns as follows: “They constitute the primary anchoring points for the establishment of subjectivity in language, followed by other types of substitutive nouns (such as demonstratives and relative nouns), which share the same status. These include adverbs, demonstratives, circumstantial expressions, and attributes, all of which organise spatial and temporal relationships around the subject as a point of reference ‘this,’ ‘now,’ and their numerous correlates: ‘that,’ ‘yesterday,’ ‘last year,’ ‘tomorrow,’ and so forth. They all share the characteristic of being defined only through their connection to the discursive situation in which they arise, that is, through their dependence on the ‘I’ that utters them.”¹⁰

Benveniste’s view is that there exists no other measure and no other expression for determining the time in which we are, except by considering it the time of speaking itself. This is the present moment of language appropriation. He thus concludes that language, in a sense, proposes empty forms suitable for every speaker engaged in discourse.

Bar-Hillel is regarded as one of the earliest scholars to formulate this term alongside Russian poetic circles. Émile Benveniste, however, was the first Western linguist to designate them as empty entities, maintaining that they acquire meaning only within discursive reality. This analysis represents a singular and pioneering perspective in the history of Western linguistics and constitutes the core of the theory of enunciation from a Western linguistic standpoint.

Nevertheless, this concept has its roots in Arabic grammatical and linguistic heritage, particularly in the work of Sibawayh and the grammarians who followed him. It is considered a self-evident notion in Arabic scholarship and was addressed by grammarians in various chapters, including the chapter titled "This is the chapter on what is put in the accusative because it is a predicate of a definite element built upon what precedes it among indeterminate nouns." He summarised these indeterminate nouns as follows: "The indeterminate nouns are: this, these two (masculine), this (feminine), these two (feminine), these, that, that (feminine), that there, those, he, she, they two (masculine), they (masculine), they (feminine), and the like of these nouns."¹¹

These expressions, in general, apply to everything, which underscores the Arab precedence in formulating the concept of indeterminates. Thus, we find a concept that is absent, both theoretically and practically, in Western heritage, where it is considered very recent. At the same time, it is both original and well established in the Arabic tradition.

This notion also appears in Émile Benveniste's theory of enunciation, as previously explained, which focuses on the pragmatic and interactional aspects of language. It views language from the perspective of the enunciator (the speaker) and the recipient of discourse (the addressee), with these two poles alternating roles in enunciation. The third element is the communicative situation (time and place) and the circumstances of discourse production.

According to Émile Benveniste, language "is interpreted through these three elements, and these elements that constitute the utterance are indicated by words such as 'I,' 'you,' 'here,' and 'now.' The pronoun 'I' is a linguistic element that refers only to the person who is speaking, and the pronoun 'you' refers only to the addressee, whereas 'here' and 'now' refer to the time and place of the utterance."¹²

In his view, language has established empty forms that do not refer to a concept or to a person in themselves; instead, they derive their content from the reality of discourse. Consequently, the use of "I" at a given moment differs from its use at a previous or subsequent moment, which entails the insertion of the speaker into a new temporal framework and into a different network of the addressee's circumstances and conditions.

These forms also embody the principle of linguistic economy, insofar as empty indeterminates allow the expression of an unlimited number of ideas with a limited number of lexical items. Their semantic content is filled during interaction. Thus, for example, the pronoun "I" is indeterminate in itself, but in discourse, I am the director; its meaning becomes specified in the course of communication.

2. Indeterminates in the Arabic Linguistic Heritage from an Interactional Grammatical Perspective

2.1. The Concept of Indeterminates and the Manifestations of Grammarians' Engagement with This Term in Their Grammatical Chapters:

In linguistic usage, *mubham* (indeterminate) is a passive participle derived from the verbal noun of the verb *ubhima* (*yubhamu*, *ibhāman*). The term *mubham* is applied to everything difficult for the senses to perceive, if perceptible, and for the intellect to comprehend, if conceptual. From this meaning derives the term *buhmah*, which is used to denote anything that lacks articulation owing to the indeterminacy in its sound. The Almighty says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَوفُوا بِالْعُقُودِ أُحِلَّتْ لَكُمْ بَهِيمَةُ الْأَنْعَامِ إِلَّا مَا يُتْلَى عَلَيْكُمْ غَيْرِ مُجَلِّي الصَّيْدِ
وَأَنْتُمْ حُرْمٌ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَحْكُمُ مَا يُرِيدُ

"O you who believe! Fulfil (your) obligations. Lawful to you (for food) are all the beasts of cattle except that which will be announced to you (herein), game (also) being unlawful when you assume *Ihrām* for Hajj or 'Umrah (pilgrimage). Verily, Allāh commands that which He wills. "(al-Mā'idah, verse 1).¹³ They also describe a night as *bahīm*, on the morphological pattern *fa'il*, because of its darkness. Ibn Fāris considered indeterminate terms, such as *alladhī*, *alladhīna*, *mā*, *man*, 'an, etc., to be among those words that have no derivation and whose origins are unknown.¹⁴ demonstrative nouns, relative nouns, particles of meaning, and similar elements in their indeterminacy. Al-Suhaylī explained the reason for designating these categories as indeterminates by stating that these indeterminate nouns are derived from the expression *abhāmta al-bāb* ("I closed the door") and *aretabham* 'alayya al-jawāb ("the answer became obscure to me"), meaning that it was blocked. Likewise, these nouns were initially established when the name of the referent was obscure to the speaker or when the speaker intended to render it obscure to some addressees but not to others and thus sufficed with pointing to it or when indicating it was more apparent to the addressee than naming it explicitly.¹⁵

For this reason, indeterminates require elements that eliminate their indeterminacy and dispel their ambiguity. Among them are demonstrative nouns. Ibn Manẓūr states, "Indeterminate nouns, according to grammarians, are demonstrative nouns, such as when you say: *this*, *these*, *that*, and *those*."¹⁶

Al-Sīrāfi reports from al-Mubarrad that all pronouns are considered among the indeterminate nouns, as stated in his remark: "Indeed, *huwa* and its sisters, as well as *hādhā* and its sisters, apply to everything and do not distinguish one thing from another, whether lifeless objects, living beings, or otherwise."¹⁷ By this account, he classified all pronouns and demonstrative nouns as indeterminates. Al-Zamakhsharī and others added relative nouns, stating, "The indeterminate consists of two categories: demonstrative nouns and relative nouns."¹⁸

The grammarians thus articulated this concept, recognised its significance, and devoted independent chapters to it in their grammatical works. They also understood that the indeterminacy and ambiguity of these nouns are not resolved except in the course of interaction.

Ibn al-Sarrāj, al-Farrā', and the Kūfan grammarians held that the most definite of definite nouns is the indeterminate noun, namely, the demonstrative noun, such as *this* and *that*, followed by the pronoun, and then the proper noun. These nouns admit definiteness and gender distinction, whereas the indeterminate noun does not admit indefiniteness. Thus, "the definite article *al-* is prefixed to it, as in *al-hādhān*, which indicates that it does not accept indefiniteness. It is more definite than what admits indefiniteness and is therefore placed in the category of the pronoun; and just as the pronoun is more definite than the proper noun, so too is the indeterminate."¹⁹

What concerns us here is why these nouns are considered indeterminate by the grammarians. They maintained that the cause of the indeterminacy of these nouns is attributable to two factors:²⁰

- a. Their generality and their applicability to everything.
- b. The need of the aforementioned nouns for an explicator that follows them to complete their meaning; this constitutes the very essence of the theory of enunciation in Western linguistics. Here, there is a clear indication of Arabic studies' precedence over what has only recently been discovered in modern Western linguistic research.

Sībawayh, the leading authority among grammarians, attributed the reason for the indeterminacy of the demonstrative noun to its need for a referent, as in the demonstrative noun occurring in the verse:

أُولَئِكَ عَلَىٰ هُدًى مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

"Those are on (true) guidance from their Lord, and those are the successful."²¹ (al-Baqarah, verse 5).

The demonstrative *ulā'ika* ("those") refers back to the previously mentioned category, namely, those who believe in the unseen, as stated in the preceding verse:

وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ مِن قَبْلِكَ وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ

« And who believe in (the Qur'ân and the Sunnah)^[4] which has been sent down (revealed) to you (O Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم) and in that which was sent down before you [the Taurât (Torah) and the Injeel (Gospel), etc.] and they believe with certainty in the Hereafter. (Resurrection, recompense of their good and bad deeds, Paradise and Hell)."²² (Sūrat al-Baqarah, verse 4).

Thus, the demonstrative *ulā'ika* is indeterminate and is explained only by its referent, namely, "those who believe in the unseen" mentioned earlier.

Sībawayh also classified pronouns among indeterminate nouns, as indicated in his statement: "As for *huwa*, it is a marker of an implicit element." It functions as a subject, and what follows it assumes the same syntactic status as what follows *hādhā*. The expression illustrates this: *huwa Zaydun ma'rūfan* ("He is Zayd, well known"), where *ma'rūfan* becomes circumstantial accusative, just as *al-munṭaliqu* functions as circumstantial accusative when one says: *hādhā Zaydun munṭaliquan* ("This is Zayd, setting out").²³

Here, Sībawayh treated the pronoun in the same manner as the demonstrative noun. He likewise regarded first-person pronouns as indeterminates, as in the poet's verse:

Anā ibnu Dārata ma'rūfan bihā nasabī

Wa-hal bi-Dārata bi-l-nāsi min 'āri

("I am the son of Dārah; my lineage is well known through her

And is there among people any disgrace attached to Dārah?")²⁴

"It is well known to us that presence explains the first-person and second-person pronouns at the moment of speaking; however, indeterminacy arises with these two pronouns when they occur in speech whose speaker is absent, as in the cited verse. For had the intended referent of 'I am the son of Dārah' not been specified, it would have been valid for the pronoun to apply to anyone who recites the verse, since the identification of 'I' and 'you' is contingent upon immediate presence."²⁵

Thus, as Émile Benveniste maintains, they are empty entities suitable for any speaker or addressee, namely, pronouns and demonstrative nouns. Among the reasons that led Sībawayh to place them in the category of indeterminate nouns is what may be inferred from his statement: "*Hādhā* and its counterparts may occupy the same position as *huwa*, by means of which something is identified. You say: 'This is 'Abd Allāh,' and thereby identify him. However, *hādhā* is not a marker of the implicit pronoun; rather, you intend to identify something in your presence. You may also say: 'He is 'Abd Allāh,' or 'I am 'Abd Allāh.'"²⁶ Here, he placed pronouns and demonstrative nouns within the domain of indeterminate nouns, since either may substitute for the other.

2.1. The Question of Theorising Linguistic Terms in the Heritage Tradition:

Grammarians did not confine the issue of indeterminates to a single chapter; instead, it appeared across various sections of their grammatical works. Sībawayh states in the chapter entitled "That Which Proceeds in the Manner of *Kam* in Interrogation": "This is as in your saying: 'He has such-and-such dirhams,' where it is indeterminate in things,

similar to *kam*. It functions as a notation for number, akin to *fulān* when used as a circumlocution among nouns.”²⁷

Al-Mubarrad, for his part, classified numerals among the indeterminates, stating: “When you say, ‘I have twenty dirhams and thirty garments,’ and you say ‘I have twenty and thirty,’ you have mentioned an indeterminate number that may apply to any countable entity. When you then say ‘dirhams,’ you specify the entity you intended by mentioning one unit of it, which indicates the rest.”²⁸

Demonstrative nouns were likewise considered indeterminate. Ibn Ya‘īsh (d. 643 AH) explained the reason for this by stating: “These nouns are called indeterminates because by them you point to everything that is in your presence. There may be several things in your presence, and they may become confused for the addressee, who does not know which one you are indicating; hence, they are indeterminate.”²⁹

Demonstrative nouns require the removal of their ambiguity through the referent, as clarified by Raḍī al-Dīn al-Astarābādhī (d. 686 AH): “By indeterminates he means demonstrative and relative nouns. Their mention has already preceded. They were termed indeterminates, although they are definite, because the demonstrative noun, without a sensory indication of the referent, is indeterminate for the addressee, since there are things in the speaker’s presence that may be indicated. Likewise, relative nouns, without the relative clause, are indeterminate for the addressee.”³⁰

Ibn Hishām (d. 761 AH) also discussed adverbs, stating: “Those suitable for this function among place nouns are of two types, one of which is the indeterminate, namely, that which requires something else to clarify the form of its referent.”³¹

The upshot of this discussion is that indeterminate nouns do not point to a specific entity such that they are restricted to it and thus unsuitable for anything else. Do you not see that just as one says “this is Zayd,” one may also say “this is ‘Amr”? Indeed, this noun may shift in reference to different types and disparate categories, so that we may say “this is a Frenchman” or “this is a Sīfī.” The demonstrative noun, as you can see, thus applies to these different entities and is not confined to one of them to the exclusion of others. This is the very essence of indeterminacy: they are established for all speakers and are not restricted to one speaker rather than another. The same applies to language as a whole because it is an empty apparatus suitable for every speaker, whose meaning is determined only in the course of interaction. Its meaning does not become clear, nor is its indeterminacy removed, except during use, not at the stage of establishment.

2.2. Indeterminates in the Modern Khalilian Theory:

‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥājj Ṣāliḥ holds that the concept of indeterminates is an authentic one in the heritage tradition, developed by Sībawayh, his teacher al-Khalīl, and those grammarians who followed their approach. They devoted independent chapters to it in their grammatical works, dedicating them to study and discussion. In contrast, it is a

modern concept in Western thought, which they recognised only recently. This is made clear in his statement:

Among the philosophers' contributions to the advancement of pragmatics is their demonstration of the decisive role of specific linguistic units. Thus, if a speaker says, 'I am tired,' or 'I am fatigued,' or 'The man came yesterday,' or 'The earth revolves around the sun,' one cannot know, from the text alone in the first and second examples, who the speaker is, who it was that came, the time indicated by 'yesterday,' or the place, and other elements contained in the utterance. The second statement does not pertain to a particular person's utterance, nor does it contain information that could be false. The first two utterances require evidence external to the utterance itself, which they call *contexte*, and which some refer to as the *situation*. This is attained only in discourse. There are expressions such as 'I,' 'you,' 'the,' and 'yesterday,' which are indeterminate in the sense that they do not indicate any specific entity at the level of establishment and therefore in speech devoid of contextual clues. The presence of these indeterminate indicators is never separable from contextual clues."³²

He further noted that this property is the reason for the success of interaction, for "it is attributable to this property that the language system in use is able to enable the speaker, in his speech, to refer to himself, to the addressee, to the topic of discourse, to the time in which he is speaking or that which precedes or follows it, and to the place in which he is situated as a speaker, by means of markers that stand in place of nouns, namely, pronouns, adverbs, and the like which they have termed *indexicaux* (plural)."³³

Dr 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥājj Šāliḥ continues by stating, "The first in the West to draw attention to the role of these markers was the American logician Bar-Hillel, who published a study on this topic entitled *Indexical Expression* (published in 1954). He was the one who designated them by this name. Among Arab scholars, however, they correspond to all indeterminate nouns in the broad sense previously discussed; they are markers, that is, indicators of other indicators."³⁴ This concept also spread within Russian poetic circles. In linguistics, however, Émile Benveniste is considered the first to elaborate this concept within the theory of enunciation in the domain of pragmatics. This point is clarified by Dr 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥājj Šāliḥ, who states, "As for linguists, the first among them to investigate this was Benveniste (1954). He borrowed the term *déictiques*, which had previously been denoted, as a linguistic term, demonstrative nouns alone, and applied it to these markers. Curiously, Sibawayh did something similar: the 'indeterminate' nouns for him are demonstrative, yet all other markers that resemble them in indeterminacy, such as pronouns, relative nouns, nonspecific adverbs, and others, are likewise termed indeterminate. The early scholars who came after him did the same."³⁵

Following Benveniste, Roman Jakobson designated these markers *shifters* since they are the elements that link the meaning of discourse to reality external to the utterance.

Among Arab scholars, however, this issue has been elucidated with far greater clarity and within a broader conceptual framework that goes beyond the narrow understanding of indeterminates in Western linguistic theory, which is primarily confined to pronouns and

demonstrative nouns. In contrast, Arab grammarians expanded this concept. They approached it from a deep, comprehensive, and holistic perspective, whereby the notion of indeterminates extends beyond pronouns and demonstratives to include adverbs, relative nouns, numerals, and others. They elaborated on this extensively in their works from an early period. In this regard, Dr ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥājj Ṣālīḥ affirms, “It must be emphasised that they demonstrated this with complete clarity and were not preceded in doing so. What is noteworthy in their work is their clarification that the meaning of indeterminate nouns is obtained and their content is specified by the discursive situation through the presence of the interlocutors and that the time indicated by indeterminate adverbs such as ‘now,’ ‘today,’ ‘yesterday,’ and ‘tomorrow’ is the speaker’s time. They thus constitute the temporal reference point of discourse: ‘today’ is the day on which he speaks, ‘yesterday’ is the day before it, and so on.”³⁶

In contrast, Émile Benveniste was the first among Western linguists to distinguish between discursive time, which is linked to the performance of the speech event, and physical time. He stated that “time in speech is not physical time (the succession of nights), nor is it historical time; rather, it is linguistic time, connected to the occurrence of speech. It is a function of discourse itself.” He further asked, “To what does the pronoun (*je*, *tu*, or *I* in the present tense) refer? It refers to something highly singularly and exclusively linguistic: *je* refers to the individual act of discourse at the moment of its utterance and thereby designates the speaker. As a lexical form, its nature cannot be known except within what we have called the instance of discourse (*instance de discours*). It has no referent to which it returns except within the reality of discourse. This means that the speaker, through the use of the first-person pronoun (and others), connects his subjectivity to reality, that is, to the external world, by means of discourse.”³⁷

This perspective is not new in the history of Arabic linguistics. Arab grammarians had already elucidated it within the dichotomy of establishment (*wadʿ*) and use (*istiʿmāl*), clarifying the rules governing establishment and distinguishing it from those related to use. “Everything that pertains to establishment, whether in isolation or in combination, is indeterminate, as the Arabs stated, for its meaning is not specified except within discourse, that is, in a particular discursive situation in which a speaker and an addressee participate at a specific time and in a specific place.”³⁸ Just as rules and constraints govern the establishment, so too is linguistic use regulated by its own rules.

The grammarians also elucidated the role of contextual indicators (*qarāʿin*), that is, the communicative situation, and their importance in clarifying the purpose of interaction. This is precisely what Émile Benveniste emphasises in asserting that indeterminates are empty entities that acquire their referents within the situational context. Arab grammarians had already anticipated this insight in maintaining that “the situational context has paramount importance in its role of realising discourse and linking it to reality. Western scholars’ awareness of this has become profound only after their own discovery of these phenomena, even though they are relatively recent to them.”³⁹

Moreover, the grammarians went further by specifying the degree of indeterminacy characteristic of each indeterminate noun. They elaborated extensively on this concept, explaining both the causes of indeterminacy and the relative degree of indeterminacy across nouns. This, too, represents an area in which the grammarians preceded others and were not preceded themselves.

Conclusion:

Accordingly, indeterminates in both the Arabic linguistic tradition and Western linguistics converge on the meaning of indeterminacy and ambiguity. They are linguistic units that are not autonomous and whose semantic value is realised only through other elements of indeterminacy. While this concept is recent in Western linguistics, having been introduced by Benveniste, it is original and well established in Arabic grammatical studies. This has generated considerable debate in pragmatic linguistics among scholars, particularly those who are captivated by everything imported from Western thought. Here, a moment of reflection is needed, calling us to look back and ask: is it conceivable that those who attack and belittle the heritage in favour of venerating everything that comes from the West have overlooked the invaluable treasures contained in our Arabic heritage, treasures capable of founding genuinely Arabic linguistic theories that not only keep pace with what Western linguistics has achieved but often surpass it? The concept of indeterminates is but a drop in the vast ocean of authentic concepts contained within Arabic heritage, concepts that render us independent of imported frameworks. For this reason, we propose that researchers mobilise all available means to revive and utilise our heritage to formulate original linguistic theories rooted in the very core of Arabic scholarship.

Endnotes:

¹ See: Maliha Fayyad, *Mu'jam al-Tullab* (French–Arabic), Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2nd ed. (Beirut, Lebanon, 2005), 16.

² See: Omar Belkhir, *Tahlil al-Khitab al-Masrahi fi Daw' al-Nazariyyah al-Tadawuliyyah* (Analysis of Theatrical Discourse in the Light of Pragmatic Theory), Dar al-Amal, 2nd ed. (Tizi Ouzou, Algeria, 2013), 32.

³ Patrick Charaudeau and Dominique Maingueneau, *Dictionary of Discourse Analysis*, trans. Abdelkader al-Mehiri and Hammadi Samoud (Tunis: Dar Sinatra, 2008), 155.

⁴ Nargis Badis, *Al-Mushirat al-Maqamiyyah fi al-Lughah al-Arabiyyah* (Contextual Deictics in the Arabic Language) (Tunis: Centre de Publication Universitaire, 2009), 75.

⁵ See: Nadia Ramadan, *Al-Ittijah al-Tadawuli wa-l-Wazifah fi al-Dars al-Lughawi* (The Pragmatic Approach and Function in Linguistic Studies), 1st ed. (Alexandria, Egypt: Horus International Publishing Foundation, 2013), 87.

⁶ Francine Maziere, "Discourse Analysis," trans. Hammou al-Hajj Dhahabiyyah, *Majallat al-Khitab* (Journal of Discourse), Discourse Analysis Laboratory, Faculty of Arts and Languages, Mouloud Mammeri University, Tizi Ouzou, Algeria 1 (2008): 386.

⁷ See the same source, 387.

⁸ Émile Benveniste, "Subjectivity in Language," trans. Saber al-Habbashah, *Hikmah Journal*, January 7, 2021, hekma.org, 1.

⁹ See the same source, 2.

¹⁰ See the same source, 4.

¹¹ Sibawayh, *Al-Kitab*, ed. Abd al-Salam Harun, 3rd ed. (Cairo, Egypt: Maktabat al-Khanji, n.d.), 2:77.

- ¹² Jean Cervoni, *Al-Malfuziyyah* (Enonciation), trans. Qasim al-Miqdad (Damascus, Syria: Arab Writers Union, 1998), 27.
- ¹³ Qur'an, Surat al-Mā'idah 5:1.
- ¹⁴ See: Ahmad Zakariyya ibn Faris, *Maqayis al-Lughah*, s.v. "b-h-m," ed. Abd al-Salam Harun (Cairo, Egypt: Dar al-Fikr, 1979), 1:311.
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- ²² Ibid., 2:4.
- ²³ Sibawayh, *Al-Kitab*, 2:78–79.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 2:79.
- ²⁵ Abd al-Rahman Aziz Mustafa al-Suddi, *The Indeterminate Pronoun in the Holy Qur'an*, 64.
- ²⁶ Sibawayh, *Al-Kitab*, 2:8.
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- ²⁸ Abu al-Abbas al-Mubarrad, *Al-Muqtadab*, ed. Muhammad Abd al-Khaliq Azimah, 2nd ed. (Cairo, Egypt: Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, 1979), 32.
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- ³¹ Jamal al-Din Ibn Hisham al-Ansari, *Awdah al-Masalik ila Alfiiyyat Ibn Malik*, ed. Muhyi al-Din Abd al-Hamid (Cairo, Egypt: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), 2:52.
- ³² Abd al-Rahman al-Hajj Salih, *Al-Khitab wa-l-Takhatub fi Nazariyyat al-Wad wa-l-Isti'mal al-Arabiyyah*, 1st ed. (Reghaia, Algeria: National Foundation for Graphic Arts, 2012), 225–26.
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- ³⁴ Ibid., 226.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 226.
- ³⁶ Ibid., 226–27.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 227; see also Émile Benveniste, *Subjectivity in Language*, trans. Saber Habbashah, 261–62.
- ³⁸ Abd al-Rahman al-Hajj Salih, *Al-Khitab wa-l-Takhatub*, 229.
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