

Intentionality in English and Arabic

A Contrastive Study

Abstract:

This study is an attempt to contrast intentionality theory in English and Arabic. As such, it aims to show the differences and similarities in tackling this theory by both English and Arabic scholars (philosophers and linguists). It starts with a description of the theory in English. Then, it describes the theory in Arabic. It is hypothesized that there are both similarities and differences between English and Arabic concerning this theory. Moreover, Arabic supposedly precedes English in stating the importance of intention in deciding the meaning of the utterance.

It is concluded that both English and Arabic have their own philosophical and linguistic roots of intentionality theory. However, their treatments have some similarities and other differences. For instance, Arabic philosophers and linguists are earlier in their study of intentionality than the English scholars. Moreover, both have focus on the relationship between mind or mental states and intentionality. In addition, both relate the interpretation of the intended meaning to the role of two types of context:

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situational and linguistic. However, English linguists deal with intentions in terms of speech act theory and the cooperative principle, whereas Arabic scholars are found to treat them in terms of wills.

1. Introduction

This study is an attempt to contrast intentionality theory in English and Arabic. As such, it aims to show the differences and similarities in tackling this theory by both English and Arabic scholars (philosophers and linguists). It starts with a description of the theory in English. Then, it describes the theory in Arabic. It is hypothesized that there are both similarities and differences between English and Arabic concerning this theory. Moreover, Arabic supposedly precedes English in stating the importance of intention in deciding the meaning of the utterance.

2. Intentionality in English

Intentionality theory in English is developed by both philosophers and linguists. Different theories have been suggested in English to treat the problem of intentionality in humans. Most theories of intention in English have been produced in the 19th and 20th centuries. Some of the

important theories will be overviewed in this section.

2.1 Husserl's Approach to Intentionality

Husserl's theory of intentionality is based on his philosophy of mind. He is influenced by his teacher 'Brentano' who asserts the idea that our intentions are fundamental properties of our consciousness. The word 'intend' is derived from the Latin origin 'intendere' which means to 'point to' or 'aim to'. An action, thus, is intentional when it is done with intention (with purposeful aim). Intentionality is explained in terms of relation: intention is a mental state or experience with a relation to extra-mental states in the outside or objective world. Thus, intentionality is based on internal-external relationship¹. According to Husserl, intentionality is part of the mentalese, or the language of thought. This form of thinking language is conception-dependent. It is said to be innate and universal. Its domain is mind, although it may be differently reflected or realized in reality or the objective world². Husserl's theory is phenomenological in the sense that each act or action in the objective world has a conceptual feature or 'content' which is independent of what

the act is articulated in reality, and this is the feature that makes that act intentional³.

2.2 Millikan's Approach to Intentionality

Millikan's approach is based on biology. In different publications, she affirms that intentionality is based on a biological function. Functions precedes intentions. To be intentional is to be able to represent objects mentally. Hence, "Millikan argues that biological selection is a method of design, and that this design is the source of function, and this function is the source of Intentionality or content. Thus, Intentionality can be reduced to function"⁴. In this respect, she distinguishes between what is *selected* and what is *selected for*. Thus, she disagrees with 'deductive inferences' in meaning. She thinks that to derive from past to infer future is something useless in causal explanation⁵. Millikan asserts that language and thought are activities of our biological organism. As such, she indicates that the function of reference in meaning is a biological one⁶.

2.3 Dretske's Approach to Intentionality

Like other philosophers, Dretske thinks that intentionality is related to mental

perception and representations. However, he affirms that intentions are things produced from a connective relation between objects and minds⁷. Thus, his theory of intentionality is something that relates speakers and hearers. Lehan states that

Dretske believes that we can have a visual experience of a station wagon without recognizing what it is that we are having an experience of; we can see a yellow station wagon without seeing that the thing in front of us is a station wagon. He argues that the fact that one can be mistaken about whether x is an F or not means that our perceptions cannot have propositional content because our perception can only be a representation after we have identified a particular object⁸.

Thus, for him, identification and not mere perception is the cause of intentional perception.

2.4 Pragmatic Theories of Intentionality

This section is devoted to the discussion of theories of intentionality in pragmatics. The most influential theories are J. Searle's and P. Grice's theories.

2.4.1 The Role of the Context of Situation

The focus on the role of context in the interpretation of the intended meaning of the speaker has been asserted by the London Circle linguists J. R. Firth and Malinowski in the 1920's and the 1930's. They canonicate that language does not involve representational facts or functions; rather it has some kind of doing an action. Such acts are induced from what is called "the context of situation" which, for them, covers the wholes of life⁹. Thus, treatments of context in English linguistics seem to be historically late. The role of context in inferring the intentions of the speakers has been clearly developed and formulated by philosophers of language and pragmatians in the 1960's and the 1970's. However, such attempts have been considered as completely full theories in spite of their being criticized in different ways.

2.4.2 Searle's Theory of Intentionality

Searle's work on intentionality treats philosophy of language as a branch of philosophy of mind. He takes mental states as existing (mostly as we think they are) and wants to get a foundation

that relates the biological reality/capacity of the mind to the world and reality. "In general, we can get at the content of an intention by asking, 'What is the agent trying to do?' Well, what is he trying to do when he makes a declaration? He is trying to cause something to be the case by representing it as being the case"¹⁰.

According to Searle, "intentional states represent objects and states of affairs in exactly the same sense that speech acts represent objects and states of affairs"¹¹. This is not to say that intentionality is essentially linguistic: on the contrary, "language is derived from intentionality, and not conversely"¹².

Searle's main contribution to the philosophy of language and pragmatics has been his developments of Austin's (1962) theory of speech acts. He attempts to synthesize his new ideas related to the analysis of "illocutionary acts". His thesis invokes that such acts are constituted by the "rules of language". Besides, he maintained that sentence meaning consists in sets of regulative rules requiring the speaker to perform the illocutionary act indicated by the sentence and that such acts involve the utterance of a sentence which (a) indicates that one performs

the act (illocution); (b) means what one says (locution); and (c) addresses an audience in the vicinity (perlocution). In his book *Speech Acts*, Searle sets out to combine all these elements to give his account of illocutionary acts. He develops a set of rules or 'felicity conditions' that reflect the speaker's intention in communication¹³. He proposes a model for deriving indirect meanings for utterances from their literal readings according to regular inferences, based on these felicity conditions. Such conditions are many including:

(1) an essential condition (whether a speaker intends that an utterance be acted upon by the addressee);
(2) a sincerity condition (whether the speech act is being performed seriously and sincerely);
(3) a preparatory condition (whether the authority of the speaker and the circumstances of the speech act are appropriate to its being performed successfully¹⁴).

Among the concepts presented by Searle is the distinction between the "illocutionary force" (speech act) and the "propositional content" of an "utterance". According to Searle, the sentences...

1-Lydia writes hastily.

2-Does Lydia write hastily?

3-Lydia, write hastily!

4-Would that Lydia write hastily!

...each invokes the same propositional content (Lydia writes hastily) but differ in the illocutionary force implied (respectively, a statement, a question, a command and an expression of desire)¹⁵. Moreover, Searle asserts the different levels of direct speech acts and indirect speech acts. Indirect speech acts encode the speaker's indirect or real intentions. Applying a conception of such illocutionary acts according to which they are (roughly) acts of saying something with the intention of communicating with an audience, he describes indirect speech acts as follows: "In indirect speech acts the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and nonlinguistic, together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer." An account of such act, it follows, will require such things as an analysis of mutually shared background information about the conversation, as well as of rationality and

linguistic conventions¹⁶. For example, a statement like:

I am occupied tonight.

may be intended not only as an assertion but as an apology or polite refusal for not coming to a night party.

2.4.3 Grice's Theory of Intentionality

One of Grice's most influential and prominent contributions to the study of language and communication is his theory of "meaning". In his article 'Meaning', Grice highlights the difference between natural and non-natural meaning. Grice further extends his theory of meaning in his 'Logic and Conversation'¹⁷. These two articles shed the light on 'utterer's meaning and intentions' as well as 'utterer's meaning, sentence meaning, and word meaning'. It is the utterer's (or addressor's) meaning which is related to his pragmatic theory of intentionality¹⁸.

His theory of meaning can be described as an intention-based semantics. In most of his writings, Grice deals exclusively with non-natural meaning. His overall approach to the study of non-natural meaning, formulated in his 'intention-based semantics', because it attempts to

explain non-natural meaning in terms of the notion of a speakers' intentions. To do this, Grice distinguishes between two kinds of non-natural meaning:

a- Utterer's Meaning: What a speaker means by an utterance. (Grice hasn't introduced this term until 'Logic and Conversation'. The more common term in contemporary pragmatics is "speaker meaning".)

b- Timeless Meaning: The kind of meaning that can be possessed by a type of utterance, such as a word or a sentence. (This is mainly called "conventional meaning".)

The two steps in intention-based semantics are

(1) to define utterer's meaning in terms of speakers' overt audience-directed intentions, and then

(2) to define timeless meaning in terms of utterer's meaning. The net effect is to define all linguistic notions of meaning in purely mental terms, and to thus shed psychological light on the semantic realm.

Grice presents the basic saying/implicating distinction. According to him, what a speaker means by an utterance

can be divided into what the speaker 'says' and what the speaker thereby 'implicate'. Saying as such is generally related to the surface or external meaning of the utterance. It is related to the propositional content of the wording. On the other hand, implicatures are related to the set of assumptions surrounding the utterance in a given context. In this regard, implicatures are decoded by listeners via their inferences of the speaker's intention¹⁹. Implicatures are created due to the speaker's intended violation or flouting of the maxims of the cooperative principles which are as follows:

1-The maxim of quantity: Be as informative as you possibly can, and give as much information as is needed, and no more.

2-The maxim of quality: Be truthful, and do not give information that is false or that is not supported by evidence.

3-The maxim of relation: Be relevant, and say things that are pertinent to the discussion.

4-The maxim of manner: Be as clear, as brief, and as orderly as one can in what you say, and avoid obscurity and ambiguity²⁰.

3. Intentionality Theory in Arabic

Intentionality and intention analysis have been presented in Arabic literature in both philosophy and linguistic studies. First, the theory will be introduced in the philosophical views.

3.1 Philosophical Views of Intentionality

Philosophical foundations of intentionality theory in Arabic are obscure and murky. However, there are some fundamentals of this theory in the Islamic philosophy. Such view are mainly presented by two prominent scholars Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes).

Avicenna apparently links the concept of a meaning or maana **معنى** to the mind's intention to signify some object in the external world. In this context, it is the extra-mental things or objects themselves that are primarily denominated as intentions, inasmuch as they are the referents of a deliberate act of signification by the mind. Still, things are only called intentions inasmuch as they are understood and signified linguistically—so intention is not simply synonymous with object. The fundamental

point here, then, is that we can label as an intention anything that functions as a significandum relative to either a mental or a linguistic sign. Avicenna believes in two types of existence: 'internal or mental' and 'external or objective'. The objects of linguistic signification can be called intentions in either of these two modes of existence. His theory of intentionality is, thus, based on the fact that intentions are mental states or representations in the internal reality, directed to the external or objective reality²¹.

Avicenna indicates that intention "is the selfsame nature or quiddity that is instantiated in both external and mental being. [On the other hand] Averroes (...) builds his account of intentionality around the principle that *x* and the intention of *x* are two distinct things—as Averroes says, «the intention of colour is other than colour»"²². Since the intention produced is indeed a new being or existent, it requires a subject for its existence, and that role is played by the relevant faculty in the cognizer (or, in the case of Averroes's doctrine of the unicity of the intellect, the separate material intellect)²³.

Both Avicenna and Averroes think that abstractness is a necessary condition for

intentionality to be present: the intentional existence of objects is always marked by some increase in their immateriality, however that dematerialization is produced.

3.2 Linguistic Views of Intentionality

Arabic views on intentionality in language can be considered as a scattered theory. Arabic linguists or grammarians do not attempt to formalize a deep theory of intentionality. However, their views have been novel, original and important.

3.2.1 Al-Jahidh's View of Intentionality

Al-Jahidh is one of the famous scholars in Arabic, mainly rhetoric. He cites one of Bishr bin Al-Muatamir's important statements on communicative meaning: "the right thing in speech (al-maqāl المَقَال) is that it should be related to its context (al-maqām المقام or al-masāq المساق)²⁴. Then, he scurries to assert that speakers should pay attention to the levels of context and the nature of listeners. As such, they have to select the way or style of speech according to such levels²⁵. Here, it is clear that Arab rhetoricians are aware of the role of context and participants in interpreting the intended meaning of the message. Then, Al-Jahidh cites a statement written

by Al-Itābi: «the real eloquent is the one who exposes his intentions without any hesitation, or repetition»²⁶. Here, Al-Itābi sets what can be seen a type of cooperative principle which focuses on the maxims of quantity, quality and the like. Thus, speakers should not repeat themselves and be clear to other participants in communication. For such scholars, successful communication is based on the successful transference of intentions from speakers to listeners. Al-Jabiri states that Arabic semantic studies can be divided into two main trends: establishing the principles of the interpretation of speech and setting the conditions of successful speech and communication²⁷. Thus, Arabic rhetoric can be seen as a classical version of modern pragmatics²⁸.

3.2.2 Al-Jirjani's View of Intentionality

Al-Jirjani establishes his theory of meaning which named 'theory of systems' نظرية النظم. This theory is based on the unity of discourse at different levels: syntactic, semantic and pragmatic²⁹. Thus, he affirms that we have two types of context: the linguistic context (neighboring words الجارات) and context of situation (al-maqam المقام). He adds that we say that an utterance is meaningful when it coheres

with other words in the context and relates to its social context³⁰. Consequently, the intended meaning is derived from such types of 'systems' which relate parts of communication to each other. As such, he focuses on language use rather than usage.

This is evident in his statement that knowing the meaning of expressions is more important than the expressions themselves³¹. Moreover, he clarifies that every intended meaning is based on a previous mental or logical (pre) supposition³². Besides, he asserts that speakers have to take their listeners into consideration and select his intended meanings according to his/her speakers³³.

3.3 Iraqi Jurists' Approach to Intentionality

It is rarely acknowledged that Iraqi religious jurists mainly in Najaf, Karbala and Hilla (Babylon) (such as Al-Iraqi, Al-Naini, Al-Hilli, Al-Khoie, Al-Sadr, ...etc.) have developed the classical Arabic theories of meaning and communication in a way that can be seen as a complete theory or perspective. In this section, the focus will be on Al-Sadr's interpretation of intentional meaning and levels of meaning. This is

done because he represents the most developed school in jurisprudence and he has discussed the ideas of all his teachers. Thus, he can be seen as a good source for summarizing his teachers' thoughts as well as his criticisms and additions. One of the important features of the jurist's studies of the nature of language and meaning is that they talk about language in its general sense regardless of whether it is Arabic or whatsoever. Thus, their ideas can be generalized to any language on a large scale. Besides, their examples are not limited to religious texts only, but they include sentences from the ordinary variety of language. Moreover, their general theories of meaning are based on the nature of the human cognition. Al-Sadr indicates that the speakers intentions can be described as a series of wills (Irada إرادة). The meaning that is created in the mind of the listener according to his analysis or interpretation of such wills. Thus, he proposes three types of wills³⁴:

a-The cognitive will (al-irāda al-tasawuriya (الإرادة التصورية): This intention is in fact referential in its orientation because the speaker here wants the listener to recognize his utterance as it is. The meaning which is derived from this will

is the referential meaning (al-māna al-tasawuri (المعنى التصوري). It is related to language usage.

b-The serious will (al-irāda al-jiddiya (الإرادة الجدية): This intention is connotative in its orientation. Here, the speaker seriously wants the listener to recognize his cognitive meaning. The meaning which is derived from this will is the elementary pragmatic/intended meaning (al-māna al-tasdīqi al-awwali (المعنى التصديقي الأولي).

c-The use-oriented will (al-irāda al-istiamaliya (الإرادة الاستعمالية): This intention is contextual in orientation since the speaker wants the listener to infer the real intended meaning from the context at hand. It is related to language use not usage. The meaning which is derived from this will is the real pragmatic meaning (المعنى التصديقي الاستعمالي al-māna al-tasdiqi al-istiamali).

Now, it is useful to give an example for these wills and their meanings: the sentence: '*I am thirsty*' has the following wills:

a-The speaker (S) wants the hearer (H) to recognize that S is thirsty. It is not important for S that H will see it as true or false. (He may be joking). (Direct meaning)

b-S wants H to seriously believe that S

is thirsty. Here, the statement should be received as true by H. (Direct meaning)

c-S wants H to bring him/her water. Here, the statement is rendered to a request by S. This is his/her real intended meaning. (Indirect meaning)

It is important to mention that Al-Sadr gives conditions for interpreting the intended meaning. He refers to context as 'al-qarina (القرينة)', and we have situational context (قرينة حالية) and linguistic context or co-text (قرينة مقالبة). Such context will decide the intended meaning in any utterance or sentence³⁵.

4. Contrast

The similarities and differences between English and Arabic intentionality theory can be summarized as follows:

1. Arabic philosophers preceded English philosophers in discussing the mental representations of intentionality.

2. Arabic linguists and grammarians preceded English scholars in their reference to the role of context in the interpretation of intended meaning in language.

3. Both English and Arabic scholars

present two major kinds of context: context of situation and Linguistic context or co-text.

4. English scholars introduce two level of acts of meaning: direct and indirect. On the other hand, Arabic scholars present two direct levels (cognitive and serious) and a direct level.

5. English scholars discuss intentionality in terms of speech acts and co-operative principles, while Arabic scholars discuss it in terms of wills.

6. Arabic statements of intentionality in classical rhetoric have been scattered and unorganized. On the contrary, the beginnings of intentionality theory in English have been presented in a more technical or theoretical language.

7. English philosophical views on intentionality are deeper and more elaborated than the Arabic ones, though they are historically later.

8. Both Arabic and English philosophers consider speaking and its intention as two different but related things.

Conclusions:

Both English and Arabic have their

own philosophical and linguistic roots of intentionality theory. However, their treatments have some similarities and other differences. For instance, Arabic philosophers and linguists are earlier in their study of intentionality than the English scholars. Moreover, both have focus on the relationship between mind or mental states and intentionality. In addition, both relate the interpretation of the intended meaning to the role of two types of context: situational and linguistic. However, English linguists deal with intentions in terms of speech act theory and the cooperative principle, whereas Arabic scholars have treated them in terms of wills. Also, both English and Arabic highlight the role of speaker's and hearer's knowledge and relationship in inferring the intended meaning of the message.

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Notes:

1. McIntyre & Smith (1989: 1489-).
2. See Chapman & Routledge (2009: s.v. language of thought).
3. McIntyre & Smith (1989: 153).
4. Lehan (2005: 17).
5. (Ibid: 18).
6. Millikan (1984: 22).
7. Dretske (1981).
8. Lehan (2005: 45).
9. Sampson (1980).
10. Searle (1983: 1723-).
11. (Searle, 1982: 260, Cited in Chapman & Routledge, 2009: 102).
12. Ibid.
13. Searle (1969: 5771-).
14. See Al-Hindawi (1999: Ch. 2).
15. Searle (1969: 22).
16. Searle (1979: 6061-).
17. Grice (1957).
18. Grice (1967).

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19. Grice (1975). Tabyīn. Beirut: Dar al-Mu'arrikh al-Arabi.
20. (Ibid: 33). -Al-Jirjani, Abdul-Qaher (10101992/). Dalā'il al-Iljāz. Riyadh: Dar al-Madani.
21. Black (2000: 4).
22. (Ibid: 67). -Al-Sadr, Mohammad Baqer (1958). Durūs fi Ilm al-Uṣūl. Najaf: al-Ghari Press.
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24. Al-Jahidh (975: 132). -Al-Shuhri, Abdul-Hadi (2004). Stratēgiyāt al-khitāb. Beirut: Dar al-Kitāb al-Jadīd.
25. (Ibid: 138).
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28. See Abdurrahmān (1998: 103); Al-Shuhri (2004: 63).
29. Al-Jirjani (1010: 44).
30. Ibid.
31. (Ibid: 148).
32. (Ibid: 285).
33. (Ibid: 121; See Miftāh, 1992: 164).
34. Al-Sadr (1958: 22).
35. Ibid.

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