

Linguistic Approaches between Tradition and Modernity: Ibn Fāris in Maqāyīs Al-Lughā and Chomsky in Transformational Generative Grammar

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Abstract

This study examines two distinctive linguistic approaches separated by more than a millennium: Ibn Fāris's theory of Uṣūl and Maqāyīs (الأصول والمقاييس) in his book "Maqāyīs Al-Lughā" and Noam Chomsky's Transformational - Generative Theory. The study seeks to investigate the principles underlying Ibn Fāris's attempt to trace the diverse meanings of Arabic lexical forms to underlying semantic origins and to compare them with the principles through which Chomsky accounts for the systematic nature of human language. The study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach in presenting the linguistic thought of Ibn Fāris and the major principles of Chomsky's theory, together with a comparative approach to identifying areas of convergence and divergence between the two linguistic projects. The comparison shows that, despite their significant differences in historical context, epistemological foundations, analytical levels, and methodological orientations, both approaches share a general concern with discovering an underlying system beyond the apparent diversity of linguistic phenomena. The study contributes to a more balanced comparative reading of the relationship between the Arabic linguistic heritage and modern linguistic theory.

Keywords: *Ibn Fāris; Maqāyīs Al-Lughā; Uṣūl and Maqāyīs; Noam Chomsky; Transformational- Generative Theory; Arabic linguistic heritage; Comparative linguistics.*

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I. Introduction

Language has long been regarded as a highly organized human phenomenon governed by patterns, relationships, and principles that extend beyond the observable forms of linguistic expression. The search for such underlying regularities has occupied linguists across different historical periods and intellectual traditions. Within the classical Arabic linguistic tradition, numerous scholars developed sophisticated approaches to explaining the structure and organization of language. Among the most distinctive of these scholars was Ibn Fāris, whose Maqāyīs Al-Lughā (مقاييس اللغة) represents an important attempt to identify underlying semantic principles governing the meanings of Arabic lexical forms. Ibn Fāris did not merely record the various meanings associated with a lexical root; rather, he frequently sought to identify one or more underlying origins (Aṣl) (أصل) from which the different semantic extensions could be understood (Ibn Fāris, 1979).

More than a millennium later, Noam Chomsky introduced a radically different approach to the study of language. Dissatisfied with approaches that primarily described observable linguistic structures, Chomsky sought to explain the underlying system of rules and principles that enables human beings to produce and understand an unlimited number of sentences (Chomsky, 1957). His Transformational-Generative approach consequently shifted considerable attention toward the mental representation of linguistic knowledge and the generative capacity of the human mind. In Aspects of the Theory of Syntax, Chomsky further developed the distinction between linguistic competence and performance and elaborated the theoretical foundations of generative grammar (Chomsky, 1965).

At first sight, comparing Ibn Fāris with Chomsky may appear problematic because their projects emerged in radically different historical, intellectual, and methodological contexts. Ibn Fāris was primarily concerned with lexical meaning, semantic relationships, and the organization of Arabic lexical material, whereas Chomsky's early generative framework was principally concerned with grammatical structure, linguistic competence, and the rules underlying sentence formation. Consequently, it would be methodologically

inappropriate to assume that concepts developed within the classical Arabic tradition are equivalent to concepts formulated within modern linguistic theory.

Nevertheless, the significant differences between the two projects do not preclude a carefully controlled comparative investigation. A comparison at the level of specific technical concepts may lead to misleading analogies; however, a comparison at the level of broader intellectual and methodological orientations can reveal potentially significant points of convergence. Both Ibn Fāris and Chomsky, in different ways, move beyond the immediately observable diversity of linguistic phenomena in search of an underlying system capable of explaining such diversity. Ibn Fāris attempts to relate multiple lexical meanings to an underlying semantic origin, while Chomsky seeks to account for the diversity of linguistic structures through a system of rules and principles underlying the speaker's linguistic competence.

This study therefore examines Ibn Fāris's concept of Uṣūl and Maqāyīs (الأصول والمقاييس) in his book: Maqāyīs Al-Lughah (معجم مقاييس اللغة) and compares it with Chomsky's Transformational-Generative Theory. It focuses particularly on the notions of underlying order, the relationship between general principles and particular linguistic forms, abstraction, and the explanatory function of linguistic rules or principles. The study does not claim historical influence or conceptual equivalence between the two scholars. Rather, it seeks to determine the extent to which their approaches may be compared at a more general theoretical level while preserving the distinctive characteristics of each.

The study adopts a descriptive-analytical method to examine Ibn Fāris's linguistic thought and the principal concepts of Chomsky's Transformational-Generative Theory. It also employs a comparative method to identify the major points of convergence and divergence between the two approaches. Through this methodological framework, the study seeks to avoid both the uncritical glorification of the classical linguistic heritage and the unjustified imposition of modern linguistic terminology upon it.

Research Problem

The problem addressed by this study lies in examining the concept of "Origins and Measures" (Al-Uṣūl wa Al-maqāyīs) (الأصول والمقاييس) developed by Ibn Fāris in Maqāyīs Al-Lughah and comparing it with Chomsky's Transformational-Generative Theory. The comparison focuses on the conception of the linguistic system, the relationship between origins and branches, and the nature of the rules and principles through which linguistic phenomena are organized. The study is guided by the question of whether a scientifically valid comparison can be established between two linguistic projects that emerged within different historical and intellectual contexts, without assuming conceptual equivalence or direct historical influence between them. Accordingly, the central problem of the study is to identify the points of convergence and divergence between the two projects and to determine the limits of a possible comparison between them.

Research Questions

- How does Ibn Fāris conceptualize Al-uṣūl wa Al-maqāyīs in Maqāyīs Al-Lughah?
- What are the main principles of Chomsky's Transformational - Generative Theory?
- What are the main similarities and differences between Ibn Fāris's approach and Chomsky's theory?
- What are the significance and limits of comparing the two linguistic approaches?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study derives from its examination of one of the pioneering contributions to linguistic thought in the Arabic intellectual heritage through a comparative analysis with Chomsky's Transformational-Generative Theory. The study also addresses a topic that, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, has not been examined in an independent study. It therefore seeks to contribute to filling a gap in existing scholarship and to highlighting the theoretical depth of Arabic linguistic thought.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes that the Arabic linguistic heritage cannot be reduced to a merely descriptive tradition. It also proposes a methodological framework for comparing Ibn Fāris's conception of Al-uṣūl wa Al-maqāyīs (الأصول والمقاييس) with Transformational-Generative Theory, basing the comparison on the epistemological functions of the concepts rather than on superficial terminological similarities.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to comparatively examine Ibn Fāris's linguistic approach in Maqāyīs Al-Lughah and Chomsky's Transformational - Generative Theory.

Specifically, the study aims to:

- Examine Ibn Fāris's concept of Al-uṣūl wa Al-maqāyīs in Maqāyīs Al-Lughah.
- Identify the main principles underlying Chomsky's Transformational-Generative Theory.
- Compare the major similarities and differences between the two linguistic approaches.

- Assess the significance and methodological limits of comparing Ibn Fāris's approach with Chomsky's theory.

II. Scope of the Study

This study is limited to a comparative examination of Ibn Fāris's linguistic approach in his work *Maqāyīs Al-Lughah* and Noam Chomsky's Transformational - Generative Theory. With regard to Ibn Fāris, the study focuses primarily on the concepts of *Al-uṣūl* and *Al-maqāyīs*. With regard to Chomsky, the study focuses on the main principles of Transformational-Generative Theory that are directly relevant to the comparison. The study does not aim to examine all aspects of Ibn Fāris's linguistic thought, nor does it address all the stages and developments through which Chomsky's linguistic theories have passed. The comparison is confined to the linguistic and methodological dimensions relevant to identifying the points of convergence and divergence and determining the methodological limits of the comparison between the two approaches under study.

Previous Studies

1. Studies on Ibn Fāris's Linguistic Project

One relevant study is "Ibn Fāris's Theory between *Al-Aṣl*, *Al-Waṣl*, and *Al-Naql*: *Maqāyīs al-Lughah* as a Model." (نظرية ابن فارس بين الأصل والوصل والنقل: مقاييس اللغة أنموذجاً) he study examines Ibn Fāris's conception of *Al-aṣl*, *al-waṣl*, and *al-naql*, seeking to identify the foundations underlying his linguistic project in explaining the relationships between words and meanings. This study is particularly useful for illuminating an important dimension of Ibn Fāris's concept of *Al-Aṣl* (الأصل). However, the present study differs in its comparative orientation, as it focuses specifically on analyzing the concept of *Al-uṣūl* wa *Al-maqāyīs* and relating it to principles underlying Chomsky's generative theory.

2. Studies on Chomsky's Generative Theory

A substantial body of research has examined Chomsky's generative theory from various perspectives, focusing on its major concepts, including linguistic competence, generative rules, deep and surface structures, transformation, and the cognitive nature of language. These studies have contributed significantly to clarifying the theoretical foundations upon which the generative school was established, as well as its subsequent developments.

The present study draws on this theoretical body of scholarship in identifying the generative principles that can legitimately be brought into comparison with Ibn Fāris's project. It should be emphasized, however, that the present study does not attempt to examine generative theory throughout all of its stages and subsequent developments. Rather, it focuses on those principles that are directly relevant to the subject and objectives of the present research.

3. Studies Connecting the Arabic Linguistic Heritage with Modern Linguistics

Contemporary Arabic linguistic scholarship has witnessed growing interest in rereading the Arabic linguistic heritage in the light of modern linguistic theories. A number of studies have therefore attempted to compare selected concepts from the classical linguistic tradition with concepts developed within modern linguistic schools. These studies have followed different directions, including comparisons between Arabic grammatical thought and modern linguistic theories, as well as investigations into possible points of convergence between selected traditional and contemporary linguistic concepts.

The present study benefits from this comparative orientation but differs from previous work in its more specific focus. It examines the concept of *Al-uṣūl* wa *Al-maqāyīs* in Ibn Fāris's *Maqāyīs Al-Lughah* and compares it with principles of Chomsky's Transformational-Generative Theory. The purpose of this comparison is to identify the nature and limits of convergence and divergence between the two projects in their respective conceptions of the linguistic system and the mechanisms through which it operates.

III. Research Gap

A review of the previous literature indicates that some studies have examined Ibn Fāris's project from semantic, lexicographical, and morphological perspectives, while other studies have addressed Chomsky's generative theory, its central concepts, and its applications to the study of Arabic. Nevertheless, the present study focuses on a more specific issue: a comparative examination of Ibn Fāris's concept of *Al-uṣūl* wa *Al-Maqāyīs* (الأصول والمقاييس) in relation to Transformational-Generative Theory.

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, this particular comparison has not been examined in an independent study in the form proposed here. The contribution of the present study therefore lies in its attempt to construct an analytical comparison between the two projects while maintaining awareness of the fundamental differences between the historical and intellectual contexts in which each project emerged. Rather than assuming equivalence between their concepts or methodologies, the study seeks to determine the extent to which meaningful comparison is possible and to identify both the points of convergence and the fundamental distinctions between them.

Section One: Ibn Fāris and the Concept of Al-Uṣūl wa Al-Maqāyīs

A Brief Biographical Overview of Ibn Fāris

Aḥmad ibn Fāris ibn Zakarīyā ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb al-Rāzī was a prominent Arab linguist who made significant contributions to several fields of knowledge, particularly Arabic linguistics. He was born in the early fourth century AH. The earliest biographical sources do not provide a precise date of his birth. He was born in Qazwīn and grew up in Hamadhān. He subsequently travelled extensively and resided in several regions, including Hamadhān, before moving to al-Rayy, to which his nisbah is commonly attributed (Umar Mukhtar, 1988).

Ibn Fāris was known by several nicknames, including al-Rāzī, in reference to Al-Rayy; Al-Qazwīnī, in reference to Qazwīn; Al-Hamadhānī, in reference to Hamadhān; and Al-Zahrāwī, in reference to Rustāq Al-Zahrā'. These different attributions reflect the various geographical locations associated with his life and intellectual activity (Yaquut, 1995).

Ibn Fāris authored numerous works covering language, literature, jurisprudence, history, biography, and related disciplines. He is therefore regarded as a scholar whose intellectual contributions extended across several fields. Among his major works are Maqāyīs Al-Lughah, (مقاييس اللغة) Khalq Al-Insān (خلق الإنسان), Dhamm al-Khaṭa' fī al-Shi'r (ذم الخطأ في الشعر), Al-Mujmal fī al-Lughah (المجمل في اللغة), Ikhtilāf al-Naḥwiyyīn, and al-Amālī (Fākhir Ameen, 1991).

Biographical sources report that Ibn Fāris died in al-Rayy and was buried there opposite the tomb of Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Jurjānī. However, the sources differ concerning the exact year of his death. Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, in Mu'jam al-Udabā', dates his death to 369 AH, whereas Ibn Khallikān gives the year 390 AH (Ibn Khillikan, 1987).

The Concept of al-Aṣl (Origin) (الأصل)

The Arabic lexical root Aṣl (الأصل) carries several related meanings, most of which revolve around the notion of a foundation upon which something else is built, or from which other elements branch out. An aṣl is therefore that upon which something else is established and to which it can be traced back. The concept may apply both to concrete entities and to abstract meanings. Accordingly, the term Aṣl (الأصل) acquired an extensive range of uses in the Arabic intellectual sciences, referring to the meanings to which other meanings are traced, the principles upon which branches are established, and the foundations through which individual elements are organized (Ibn Fāris, 1979).

In Ibn Fāris's thought, however, the concept of Al-aṣl (الأصل) assumes a more specific semantic dimension. It is based on the assumption that a unifying meaning may underlie a set of linguistic usages derived from the same lexical material. In this sense, Al-aṣl becomes a methodological instrument for uncovering the underlying unity behind semantic plurality rather than merely a starting point in the morphological or historical derivation of words.

This conception is particularly evident in the structure of Ibn Fāris's Maqāyīs Al-Lughah. For many lexical entries, he identifies one or two fundamental origins and subsequently traces the meanings derived from them according to the semantic relationships that he perceives among the various usages. In the introduction to his work, Ibn Fāris states that the Arabic language possesses sound measures and origins from which its branches develop. His project consequently seeks to identify a degree of unity and coherence among the different meanings associated with a particular lexical item. This conception gives his lexicographical project its distinctive character and provides the basis for understanding the mechanism of Al-maqāyīs upon which the work is constructed (Fākhir Ameen, 1991).

The Concept of Miqyās and Maqāyīs (المقياس والمقاييس)

In Arabic, the lexical root (ق ي س) (qa-ya-sa) conveys meanings associated with estimation, measurement, comparison, and analogy. The term qiyās may refer to relating one thing to another based on a shared rationale or transferring a judgment from an established case to a new one on the basis of a common underlying cause. The concept subsequently acquired broad applications in various Arabic sciences, including grammar, morphology, jurisprudence, and the principles of jurisprudence, where it generally denotes the derivation of a judgment or conclusion from an established principle or precedent (Ibn Fāris, 1979).

In Ibn Fāris's Maqāyīs Al-Lughah, however, miqyās (مقياس) does not primarily denote grammatical or morphological analogy in the technical sense of extending a ruling from an established form to a derivative form. Rather, it is closely associated with his attempt to identify a semantic principle underlying the meanings of a particular lexical root and to relate its various usages to that underlying principle. Accordingly, maqāyīs may be understood as a set of semantic principles through which Ibn Fāris organized lexical material and attempted to identify the relationships among its different meanings (Ibn Fāris, 1979).

From this perspective, the relationship between Aṣl (أصل) (underlying principle/origin) and miqyās (مقياس) (semantic measure) in Ibn Fāris's project is complementary. The Aṣl (أصل) represents the central

semantic meaning around which the various branches of meaning are organized, whereas the miqyās (مقياس) provides the conceptual framework through which this central meaning can be identified and the semantic branches related to it. Thus, the two concepts together constitute an important methodological foundation of Maqāyīs Al-Lughā.

Ibn Fāris's project in Maqāyīs al-Lughā is based on a distinctive conception of the relationship between linguistic forms and meanings. He assumes that the multiple meanings associated with many lexical roots can be traced to a central semantic meaning, or to a limited number of underlying meanings, around which the different usages are organized. His purpose was therefore not merely to enumerate and explain lexical meanings, but also to identify the semantic relationships connecting them and to determine the central meaning that could account for the development and diversification of the lexical material. This orientation is explicitly reflected in his introduction to the dictionary, where he argues that the Arabic language possesses underlying measures and principles from which its branches may be derived (Ibn Fāris, 1979).

From the perspective of the present comparative study, the concept of Al-uṣūl wa Al-maqāyīs provides a particularly relevant point of comparison with Chomsky's transformational-generative theory. Ibn Fāris seeks to identify underlying semantic principles around which diverse lexical meanings are organized, whereas Chomsky seeks to formulate a system of principles and rules capable of explaining the generation and structure of linguistic expressions (Chomsky, 1957, 1965). The comparison, however, does not imply that Ibn Fāris's Aṣl corresponds directly to a generative rule or that Miqyās (مقياس) constitutes an equivalent of Chomsky's theory. Rather, the comparison operates at a more abstract methodological level: it examines how each linguistic project conceives of underlying order, systematicity, and the principles through which apparently diverse linguistic phenomena may be explained.

The Second Section: Noam Chomsky and Transformational-Generative Grammar

2.1. A Brief Overview of Noam Chomsky

Noam Chomsky was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, United States, on December 7, 1927. He studied linguistics, mathematics, and philosophy at the University of Pennsylvania, where he later received his doctoral degree. His early intellectual formation was influenced by his engagement with linguistics, philosophy, and the study of language structure. He subsequently became one of the most influential figures in twentieth-century linguistics, particularly through his development of a new approach to the study of grammar and the human capacity for language (Sabry, 1997).

Chomsky's linguistic work brought a significant change to modern linguistic theory. Rather than viewing language primarily as a collection of observable utterances and patterns, he directed attention toward the underlying system of knowledge that enables speakers to produce and understand an indefinitely large number of sentences. His work therefore contributed to a shift from a predominantly descriptive conception of linguistics toward a more explanatory and theoretically oriented approach to language (Chomsky, 1957, 1965).

Among his most influential works are *Syntactic Structures* (1957), *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965), and *Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origin, and Use* (1986). These works represent important stages in the development of his linguistic thought and in the formulation of the generative approach to language.

For the purposes of the present study, Chomsky's significance lies primarily in his conception of language as a structured system governed by underlying principles and rules. It is this aspect of his linguistic theory that provides the theoretical basis for comparison with Ibn Fāris's conception of Al-uṣūl wa Al-maqāyīs in Maqāyīs Al-Lughā.

2.2. Transformational-Generative Grammar and Its Theoretical Foundations

Transformational-Generative Grammar emerged in the context of major changes in twentieth-century linguistic thought, particularly as a response to approaches that emphasized the description of observable linguistic structures. Although Chomsky recognized the importance of structural analysis, he argued that a purely descriptive account could not adequately explain the nature of the linguistic knowledge possessed by human speakers or their ability to produce and understand an unlimited number of sentences.

Accordingly, Chomsky sought to develop a linguistic model that would move beyond the description of linguistic forms toward an explanation of the system underlying them. The central concern was therefore not simply to record the sentences speakers produce, but to identify the rules and principles that make the production and interpretation of such sentences possible (Chomsky, 1957, 1965).

Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* (1957) represents a major landmark in the development of generative grammar. In this work, he presented a formal conception of grammar capable of generating a potentially unlimited number of grammatical sentences from a finite system of rules. The significance of this approach lies in its attempt to explain how speakers can construct and understand novel sentences rather than merely reproduce sentences previously encountered (Chomsky, 1957).

The generative approach subsequently developed through several theoretical stages, and its terminology and architecture underwent substantial modification. The present study does not attempt to cover all of these developments. Rather, it focuses on those principles that are directly relevant to the comparison with Ibn Fāris's conception of *Al-uṣūl wa Al-maqāyīs*.

2.3. Fundamental Concepts of Transformational-Generative Grammar

2.3.1. The Innate Capacity for Language

One of the central assumptions underlying Chomsky's linguistic thought is that human beings possess a distinctive cognitive capacity for language. Language acquisition cannot therefore be explained entirely in terms of imitation, repetition, or behavioral conditioning. Rather, the child develops an internal system that enables him or her to construct and understand grammatical expressions on the basis of limited linguistic experience.

This position is closely connected with Chomsky's critique of behaviorist accounts of language acquisition. The child does not simply memorize the linguistic expressions encountered in the environment; instead, the child develops an internal representation of the system governing the formation and interpretation of linguistic structures. This capacity enables the speaker to go beyond the linguistic data directly encountered and to produce novel expressions (Chomsky, 1965, 1986).

In this sense, language is viewed as a specifically human cognitive capacity. The speaker possesses an internalized linguistic system through which linguistic forms can be generated, interpreted, and evaluated. This conception became one of the foundations of the generative approach to grammar.

2.3.2. Universal Grammar

The concept of Universal Grammar (UG) refers, in the broad generative tradition, to the set of principles and structural conditions assumed to underlie human language. It seeks to account for what human languages have in common while also providing a framework within which differences among individual languages can be explained.

Universal Grammar is therefore concerned not with the description of one particular language but with the conditions that make human language possible as a system. In the generative perspective, linguistic knowledge involves an internal system of principles that enables speakers to distinguish well-formed linguistic structures from structures that do not conform to the grammatical system of their language (Chomsky, 1965, 1986).

Chomsky's famous example illustrates the distinction between grammatical form and semantic plausibility. The sentence "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously" is syntactically well formed despite its unusual semantic content, whereas "Furiously sleep ideas green colorless" does not conform to the syntactic organization of English. The example demonstrates that grammaticality cannot be reduced simply to meaningfulness or to the frequency with which a sentence occurs in actual speech (Chomsky, 1957).

For the present study, the significance of Universal Grammar lies in the broader assumption that linguistic phenomena are not random but are governed by an underlying system of principles. This general conception of linguistic order constitutes one of the points at which a cautious comparison with Ibn Fāris becomes possible.

2.3.3. Linguistic Competence and Performance

A central distinction in Chomsky's earlier formulation of generative grammar is that between competence and performance. Competence refers to the speaker-hearer's implicit knowledge of the grammatical system of a language, whereas performance refers to the actual use of that knowledge in concrete linguistic situations (Chomsky, 1965).

Competence therefore represents the internalized linguistic knowledge that enables a speaker to construct and interpret grammatical expressions. It includes knowledge of the structural properties of the language and enables the speaker to recognize whether particular expressions conform to its grammatical system. The speaker's ability to produce and understand an indefinitely large number of sentences is consequently understood as a manifestation of an underlying linguistic competence rather than as the result of memorizing individual sentences.

Performance, by contrast, concerns the actual use of language in particular circumstances. Real linguistic performance may be affected by factors that are not part of the abstract grammatical system itself, such as memory limitations, attention, distraction, and the specific conditions of communication.

The distinction is important because it demonstrates that generative grammar is primarily concerned with the underlying system of linguistic knowledge rather than with every feature of actual speech. In simplified terms, competence concerns the internalized system, whereas performance concerns the use of that system in actual communication (Chomsky, 1965).

2.3.4. Generative Grammar

The term generative refers to the capacity of a finite system of rules to account for an indefinitely large set of linguistic expressions. The concept is closely associated with Chomsky's attempt to explain how speakers can produce and understand sentences that they have never previously encountered.

A generative grammar is therefore not merely a catalogue of sentences. Rather, it is a formal system that specifies the principles and rules according to which grammatical structures can be constructed. Its explanatory value lies in its capacity to account for the productivity and creativity of human language (Chomsky, 1957, 1965).

The concept of generation is particularly significant because it establishes a relationship between a finite set of principles and an apparently unlimited range of linguistic expressions. The speaker does not require a separate rule for every possible sentence; instead, the underlying system enables the construction of numerous structures from a limited set of rules and elements.

This conception of an underlying system capable of accounting for linguistic diversity is particularly relevant to the present comparative study. Ibn Fāris similarly sought to move beyond the mere enumeration of lexical meanings by identifying underlying semantic principles through which a range of meanings could be related to a common origin. The comparison, however, concerns the general explanatory function of an underlying system and does not imply that Ibn Fāris's Aṣal (أصل) corresponds directly to a generative rule.

2.3.5. Transformational Rules

The concept of transformation constitutes another important component of the earlier formulation of Transformational-Generative Grammar. Transformational rules describe systematic relationships between different structural representations. In the classical model, transformations operate on an underlying representation and derive a corresponding surface form (Chomsky, 1965).

Transformation may involve operations such as addition, deletion, movement, or substitution, depending on the grammatical system under consideration. These operations demonstrate that different surface forms may be systematically related rather than being treated as completely independent structures.

For example, a transformation may alter the arrangement of constituents in a sentence while preserving important aspects of its underlying structural relationship. Similarly, elements may be omitted or replaced under specific grammatical conditions. The essential point is that such changes are not arbitrary; they are constrained by the rules of the linguistic system.

It is important, however, to avoid extending the term transformation beyond its technical use in generative grammar. The transformational component concerns structural relations within grammatical representations and should not simply be equated with every type of linguistic change or rearrangement.

2.3.6. Deep Structure

In the earlier versions of Transformational-Generative Grammar, deep structure referred to an underlying level of syntactic representation associated with the structural and interpretive properties of a sentence. It provided the basis from which transformational operations could derive different surface forms (Chomsky, 1965).

The concept is significant because it illustrates the generative assumption that observable linguistic forms may be related to underlying structural representations. Thus, linguistic analysis is not necessarily restricted to what is immediately observable in speech or writing; it may also investigate the underlying organization that accounts for the observable form.

For the purposes of the present study, the concept of deep structure is relevant only at a general methodological level. It illustrates the generative search for an underlying system behind observable linguistic phenomena. It should not, however, be equated with Ibn Fāris's concept of Al-aṣl (الأصل), since the latter belongs primarily to the semantic and lexical organization of Arabic vocabulary, whereas deep structure belongs to a different theoretical level of linguistic representation.

2.3.7. Surface Structure

In the earlier formulation of the theory, surface structure refers to the structural form in which a linguistic expression is ultimately realized after the relevant transformational operations have applied. It represents the observable linguistic organization of expressions in speech or writing (Chomsky, 1965).

Surface structure is therefore not simply identical to the physical sound produced by a speaker. Rather, it constitutes a level of structural representation that stands in a systematic relationship to underlying representations. The distinction between deep and surface structures demonstrates the generative concern with explaining the relationship between underlying linguistic organization and its observable realization.

The importance of this distinction for the present study lies in its illustration of a broader theoretical principle: linguistic forms may be understood more adequately when the researcher investigates the system of

relations underlying their observable diversity. This general principle provides one possible point of comparison with Ibn Fāris's attempt to identify the semantic origins underlying the diversity of lexical meanings.

2.4. The Relevance of Transformational-Generative Grammar to the Present Study

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that the generative approach is fundamentally concerned with the identification of an underlying linguistic system capable of explaining the diversity of observable linguistic forms. Chomsky's theory therefore moves beyond the description of individual expressions toward the principles and rules that make those expressions possible (Chomsky, 1957, 1965).

This theoretical orientation provides a useful basis for the present comparative study. Ibn Fāris's project in *Maqāyīs al-Lughah* likewise seeks to move beyond the simple enumeration of meanings by identifying underlying semantic origins and relationships among the different meanings associated with a lexical root. In both cases, therefore, there is a general concern with moving from apparent multiplicity toward an underlying form of organization.

Nevertheless, the two projects operate at fundamentally different theoretical levels. Chomsky's generative model is primarily concerned with grammatical structure, linguistic competence, and the system that enables speakers to generate and interpret linguistic expressions, whereas Ibn Fāris's *Al-uṣūl wa Al-maqāyīs* concerns the organization of lexical meanings and their semantic relationships.

Accordingly, the comparison undertaken in this study does not assume that *Al-aṣl* (الأصل) corresponds to a generative rule, that *Al-miqyās* (المقياس) constitutes a grammatical theory, or that Ibn Fāris anticipated Transformational-Generative Grammar in its modern technical sense. Rather, the comparison investigates whether the two projects share broader methodological tendencies, particularly the search for an underlying system, the movement from particular phenomena toward more general principles, and the attempt to explain linguistic diversity through underlying relationships.

Section Three: Comparative Analysis of Ibn Fāris's *Al-Uṣūl wa Al-Maqāyīs* and Chomsky's Transformational-Generative Theory

This section provides a comparative analysis of Ibn Fāris's conception of *Al-uṣūl wa Al-maqāyīs* in *Maqāyīs Al-Lughah* and Noam Chomsky's Transformational-Generative Theory. The purpose of the comparison is not to establish historical influence or to claim conceptual equivalence between the two projects, which emerged in substantially different historical, intellectual, and methodological contexts. Rather, the comparison seeks to identify areas of methodological convergence and theoretical divergence, particularly with regard to the search for an underlying linguistic system, the relationship between general principles and individual linguistic phenomena, abstraction, and the explanatory function of linguistic rules.

3.1 Areas of Convergence

3.1.1 The Search for an Underlying System

One of the most significant points of comparison between Ibn Fāris and Chomsky is their shared concern with identifying an underlying system that accounts for apparently diverse linguistic phenomena. Ibn Fāris does not merely record the various meanings associated with a particular lexical root; rather, he attempts to identify a fundamental semantic principle, or *Aṣl* (أصل), from which the different meanings can be understood as related developments. His approach therefore seeks to move from semantic plurality toward an underlying unity within the lexical material (Ibn Fāris, 1979).

Chomsky, in a different theoretical context, likewise seeks to move beyond the observable diversity of utterances toward the system of rules and principles that makes linguistic production possible. Generative grammar is concerned not simply with listing grammatical sentences but with constructing a formal account of the linguistic knowledge that enables speakers to produce and understand an indefinitely large number of sentences (Chomsky, 1957, 1965).

At this general methodological level, both projects can therefore be understood as attempts to move from linguistic diversity to an underlying system. Ibn Fāris searches for semantic unity within lexical material, whereas Chomsky searches for grammatical and mental principles underlying syntactic productivity. The similarity is consequently methodological rather than conceptual.

3.1.2 Movement from the Particular to the General

A second point of convergence lies in the movement from individual linguistic phenomena toward broader explanatory principles. In *Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, Ibn Fāris examines particular lexical meanings and attempts to relate them to a more general semantic origin. The *aṣl* consequently functions as a higher-level explanatory framework through which several related meanings can be interpreted (Ibn Fāris, 1979).

Generative theory similarly seeks general principles capable of accounting for a potentially unlimited number of grammatical structures. Rather than treating every sentence as an isolated linguistic event, the generative

approach seeks to formulate rules and principles that account for a wide range of structures (Chomsky, 1957, 1965).

Thus, both approaches exhibit a tendency toward generalization and abstraction. However, the object of generalization differs considerably: Ibn Fāris generalizes primarily over semantic relations within lexical material, whereas Chomsky generalizes over grammatical structures and the principles governing their formation.

3.1.3 The Relationship between General Principles and Particular Phenomena

The relationship between the general and the particular provides another useful level of comparison. In Ibn Fāris's system, the *Aṣl* (أصل) represents a general semantic principle to which a number of related meanings may be connected. The individual meanings therefore constitute particular manifestations that can be interpreted through their relationship to the underlying semantic principle (Ibn Fāris, 1979).

In generative grammar, individual sentence structures are similarly interpreted in relation to the grammatical rules and principles that generate or constrain them. The sentence is not treated merely as an isolated object; rather, it is understood as an outcome of a system of linguistic knowledge (Chomsky, 1965).

Nevertheless, the terms *Aṣl* and "generative rule" should not be treated as equivalents. The *Aṣl* (أصل) in Ibn Fāris's work is primarily a semantic and lexical concept, whereas a generative rule belongs to a formal grammatical system concerned with the structure and derivation of sentences. The comparison is therefore possible at the functional level but not at the level of terminological or theoretical identity.

3.1.4 Abstraction as a Method of Linguistic Analysis

Abstraction constitutes another point of methodological convergence. Ibn Fāris moves beyond individual lexical meanings in order to identify a more general semantic principle capable of explaining their relationships. His conception of *Al-uṣūl* (الأصول) therefore involves a movement from observable lexical variation toward a more abstract level of semantic organization.

Abstraction occupies an even more central position in Chomsky's linguistic theory. Generative grammar attempts to formulate an abstract representation of the linguistic system underlying observable utterances. The objective is to explain linguistic competence rather than merely describe the sentences produced in actual speech (Chomsky, 1965).

Both approaches, therefore, employ abstraction as a means of discovering regularity beneath linguistic diversity. The difference lies in the nature of the abstract entity being sought. Ibn Fāris abstracts semantic relations within lexical material, whereas Chomsky abstracts grammatical and cognitive principles underlying sentence formation.

3.1.5 Explaining Diversity through Underlying Unity

A further point of convergence is the attempt to account for linguistic diversity through an underlying principle of unity. Ibn Fāris encounters multiple meanings within a single lexical root and seeks to explain their relationship through a common semantic origin. In this respect, plurality does not necessarily imply the absence of systematic organization.

Chomsky confronts the enormous variety of sentences that speakers are capable of producing and seeks to explain this diversity through a finite system of rules and principles. The central concern of generative grammar is consequently not merely the number of sentences produced but the system of knowledge that makes such productivity possible (Chomsky, 1965).

The two projects thus share a broad epistemological orientation: linguistic diversity can be investigated through the identification of an underlying organizing principle. Yet, the phenomena being explained remain different. Ibn Fāris primarily addresses semantic plurality within lexical materials, while Chomsky addresses syntactic productivity and the structure of linguistic competence.

3.1.6 The Explanatory Dimension

Both projects also demonstrate an interest in explanation rather than description alone. Ibn Fāris's lexical analysis goes beyond the enumeration of meanings by attempting to explain the semantic relationships that connect them. The identification of an *Aṣl* provides a basis for interpreting how apparently different meanings may be related (Ibn Fāris, 1979).

Similarly, Chomsky distinguishes explanatory linguistic analysis from approaches that merely classify or describe linguistic forms. His generative framework seeks to explain the speaker's capacity to construct and understand grammatical sentences through an underlying system of linguistic knowledge (Chomsky, 1957, 1965).

Consequently, both approaches can be characterized as having an explanatory orientation. However, the explanatory target is different: Ibn Fāris seeks semantic explanation within the lexicon, whereas Chomsky seeks a formal and cognitive explanation of grammatical competence.

3.2 Areas of Divergence

Despite these points of convergence, the differences between Ibn Fāris's project and Chomsky's Transformational - Generative Theory are fundamental. These differences arise from the distinct historical contexts, intellectual assumptions, objects of investigation, analytical levels, and methodological procedures associated with the two projects.

3.2.1 Difference in the Object of Study

The most fundamental difference concerns the object of linguistic investigation. Ibn Fāris's Maqāyīs Al-Lughā (مقاييس اللغة) is primarily concerned with lexical material, semantic relationships, and the underlying meanings that connect different uses of a lexical root (الجزر اللغوي). His project is therefore fundamentally associated with Arabic lexicography and semantics (Ibn Fāris, 1979).

Chomsky's Transformational-Generative Theory, by contrast, focuses primarily on the structure of grammar and the linguistic knowledge that enables speakers to generate and understand sentences. Its central concern is therefore not the semantic unity of lexical roots but the grammatical system underlying linguistic productivity (Chomsky, 1957, 1965).

Accordingly, Ibn Fāris and Chomsky operate principally at different levels of linguistic analysis. Ibn Fāris investigates semantic organization within lexical material, while Chomsky develops a formal theory of grammatical structure and linguistic competence.

3.2.2 Difference between Al-Aṣl (الأصل) and the Generative Rule (القاعدة التوليدية)

Although the concepts of Al-aṣl and the generative rule may appear comparable because both have an organizing or explanatory function, they are fundamentally different concepts. For Ibn Fāris, the Aṣl (أصل) is a semantic principle that connects several meanings belonging to a particular lexical material. It provides a basis for understanding semantic relationships among lexical derivatives and usages (Ibn Fāris, 1979).

A generative rule, in contrast, is part of a formal grammatical system. It specifies structural relationships and contributes to the generation or description of grammatical sentences. Its function is therefore grammatical rather than lexical-semantic (Chomsky, 1957).

Consequently, it would be methodologically inaccurate to equate Ibn Fāris's Aṣl with Chomsky's generative rule. The appropriate comparison is instead between their broader functions as organizing principles within their respective linguistic models.

3.2.3 Difference in Methodology

The methodological foundations of the two projects also differ significantly. Ibn Fāris works with Arabic lexical materials, examining patterns of usage and attempting to infer common semantic principles from them. His approach can therefore be characterized largely in terms of lexical analysis, semantic interpretation, and inductive reasoning.

Chomsky, on the other hand, develops an abstract theoretical model intended to account for the grammatical knowledge underlying linguistic performance. His approach places greater emphasis on formalization, theoretical abstraction, and the mental representation of linguistic knowledge (Chomsky, 1965).

The methodological direction can consequently be expressed as follows: Ibn Fāris generally proceeds from lexical data toward an underlying semantic principle, whereas Chomsky constructs a theoretical system of grammatical principles through which linguistic structures can be generated and explained.

3.2.4 Difference in the Level of Analysis

Another important difference concerns the level at which linguistic phenomena are analyzed. Ibn Fāris focuses on the lexical root, its meanings, and the semantic relations among its various uses. His analysis consequently operates mainly at the lexical-semantic level.

Chomsky's generative approach focuses more centrally on sentence structure, grammatical relations, and the mental system underlying linguistic competence. His analysis therefore operates primarily at the syntactic and cognitive levels, particularly in the earlier formulations of Transformational-Generative Grammar (Chomsky, 1957, 1965).

This difference in analytical level constitutes a major limitation on direct comparison. The comparison is most productive when it is conducted at the level of general methodological principles rather than by matching individual concepts from the two traditions.

3.2.5 Difference in the Source of Linguistic Knowledge

The two projects also differ in their conception of the basis from which linguistic knowledge is investigated. Ibn Fāris's analysis is grounded in the inherited Arabic linguistic tradition, including lexical usage and linguistic evidence available to classical Arab scholars. His conclusions about semantic origins emerge from his examination and interpretation of Arabic lexical materials.

Chomsky places particular emphasis on the speaker's internal linguistic knowledge and the mental system that enables linguistic production and comprehension. In this framework, linguistic theory seeks to characterize the underlying competence of the ideal speaker-hearer (Chomsky, 1965).

Thus, Ibn Fāris begins primarily with linguistic data and seeks to identify semantic principles within them, whereas Chomsky begins from questions concerning the nature and structure of linguistic knowledge and seeks to construct a theoretical account of that knowledge.

3.2.6 Difference in Scientific Objectives

The scientific objectives of the two projects are likewise different. Ibn Fāris seeks to organize lexical material and explain the semantic relationships among the meanings associated with linguistic roots. His concept of *Al-uṣūl wa Al-maqāyīs* provides a framework for understanding lexical diversity through semantic unity.

Chomsky, in contrast, seeks to explain the nature of human linguistic competence and the system of grammatical principles that enables speakers to produce and understand an indefinitely large number of sentences (Chomsky, 1957, 1965).

Accordingly, Ibn Fāris's project can primarily be characterized as lexical-semantic, whereas Chomsky's early generative project is principally grammatical and syntactic, with an important cognitive dimension.

3.3 Limits of the Comparison

The comparison undertaken in this study must therefore be understood within clearly defined limits.

First: There is no evidence presented here that Ibn Fāris was historically influenced by the theoretical developments associated with modern generative linguistics. The two scholars lived in radically different intellectual and historical environments.

Second: The comparison does not claim that *Al-uṣūl wa Al-maqāyīs* constitutes a precursor to Transformational-Generative Grammar. Such a claim would require historical and conceptual evidence beyond the scope of the present study.

Third: The comparison is conducted primarily at the level of general methodological functions. Concepts such as *Al-aṣl*, *Al-maqāyīs*, "generative rules," "transformations," and "linguistic competence" belong to different theoretical frameworks and should not be treated as interchangeable.

3.4 Concluding Comparative Assessment

The comparison demonstrates that Ibn Fāris and Chomsky, despite their profound historical and theoretical differences, share a broad methodological orientation toward understanding language as an organized system rather than as a random collection of isolated phenomena. Ibn Fāris seeks underlying semantic unity within lexical diversity, while Chomsky seeks the grammatical and cognitive principles underlying syntactic productivity.

The strongest point of convergence is therefore not the identity of their concepts but their common interest in moving beyond surface linguistic diversity toward underlying principles of organization and explanation. The principal differences, however, concern the object of study, level of analysis, methodological orientation, source of linguistic knowledge, and scientific objectives.

Accordingly, the comparison supports a balanced reading of the relationship between classical Arabic linguistic thought and modern linguistic theory. Ibn Fāris's *Maqāyīs al-Lughā* (مقاييس اللغة) should be understood within the intellectual framework of classical Arabic lexicography and semantics, while Chomsky's Transformational-Generative Theory should be understood within the context of twentieth-century theoretical linguistics and the study of linguistic competence.

3.5 Note on the scope of the comparison:

The researchers consider it inappropriate to characterize one of the two projects exclusively as a semantic project and the other as a syntactic one, since both address multiple levels of language, albeit with different degrees of emphasis. Ibn Fāris did not overlook morphological and derivational structures, just as Chomsky did not disregard the importance of meaning; rather, each scholar focused primarily on the level he considered most capable of explaining the nature of language.

Accordingly, the comparison reveals greater complementarity in their perspectives than contradiction between the two projects. Ibn Fāris primarily addresses the semantic system of the lexicon, whereas Chomsky primarily

addresses the syntactic system underlying linguistic competence. This opens the way for an integrative reading that can benefit from both projects while preserving the distinctive character and intellectual context of each.

IV. Conclusion

This study has examined Ibn Fāris's linguistic project of *Al-Uṣūl wa Al-Maqāyīs* in *Maqāyīs al-Lughā* through a comparative analysis with Noam Chomsky's Transformational-Generative Theory. The study has sought to identify the points of convergence and divergence between the two projects, while taking into consideration the significant differences in their historical, intellectual, and methodological contexts.

The comparative analysis demonstrates that, despite the considerable distance separating Ibn Fāris and Chomsky, their projects share a general orientation toward uncovering an underlying system capable of explaining linguistic phenomena. However, this convergence remains limited to the level of general methodological orientation, since the nature, scope, and analytical tools of the systems proposed by the two scholars differ substantially.

The study also emphasizes that a scientific comparison between the Arabic linguistic heritage and modern linguistic theories should be based on methodological and functional analysis rather than on claims of precedence, direct equivalence, or historical influence that cannot be established through adequate evidence.

V. Findings of the Study

The study arrived at the following principal findings:

The comparative analysis revealed a general convergence between Ibn Fāris's project in *Al-Uṣūl wa Al-Maqāyīs* (الأصول والمقاييس) and Chomsky's Transformational - Generative Theory in their shared orientation toward identifying an underlying system capable of explaining linguistic phenomena. Nevertheless, the nature, scope, and analytical mechanisms of these systems are fundamentally different.

The study established that Ibn Fāris's concept of *Al-aṣl* (الأصل) is primarily concerned with identifying a semantic basis that accounts for the relationships among the various meanings associated with a lexical root or linguistic material, whereas Chomsky's generative framework is concerned with the rules and principles underlying the formation and interpretation of linguistic structures.

The comparison demonstrated that the relationship between *Al-aṣl* and its semantic branches in Ibn Fāris's project should not be equated directly with the relationship between generative rules and linguistic structures in Chomsky's theory. The similarity lies only in their broader explanatory function: both seek to account for a range of linguistic phenomena through an underlying organizing principle.

The study further confirmed that the two projects emerge from substantially different epistemological and historical contexts. Ibn Fāris's analysis is rooted in the Arabic linguistic tradition and in the investigation of lexical materials and their semantic relationships, whereas Chomsky's theory is grounded in a modern theoretical and cognitive conception of linguistic competence and grammatical structure.

The study concludes that a scientifically valid comparison between the two projects should avoid claims of direct equivalence or historical precedence. Instead, comparison should focus on functional and methodological dimensions, particularly their respective approaches to linguistic system, abstraction, generalization, and explanation.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Future comparative research should expand its scope to include other major scholars of the Arabic linguistic heritage, such as 'Abd Al-Qāhir Al-Jurjānī (عبد القاهر الجرجاني) and Ibn Jinnī (ابن جني), and examine their linguistic ideas in relation to modern linguistic approaches.

Comparative research in this field should distinguish carefully between genuine methodological convergence and superficial terminological similarity, so that the study of the relationship between traditional Arabic linguistics and modern linguistics remains academically rigorous and historically responsible.

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