

Pragmatic Terminology in the Arabic Linguistic Heritage Through Mas‘ūd Ṣaḥrāwī’s Pragmatics among Arab Scholars (“Intentionality” as a Case Study)

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Abstract:

Through his book entitled *Pragmatics According to Arab Scholars: A Pragmatic Study of the Phenomenon of Speech Acts in the Arabic Linguistic Heritage*, Mas‘ūd Ṣaḥrāwī sought to reread the Arabic intellectual tradition by drawing upon the most significant concepts of modern pragmatics. This endeavor reflects his conviction regarding the importance of establishing a connection between contemporary linguistics and the Arabic linguistic heritage, while at the same time respecting the distinctive characteristics of the latter.

This orientation becomes evident in the scientific methodology he adopted in his study, which many researchers have described as rigorous and substantial. The author ultimately concludes that adopting and applying the pragmatic approach in the study of the Arabic heritage is capable of unlocking numerous concepts that have remained obscure, particularly with respect to terminological presence within this field.

Keywords: Intentionality, Arabic Heritage, Pragmatics.

Introduction:

Through this paper, we aim to underscore the importance of certain recent Arabic linguistic studies in rereading the Arabic heritage in light of the latest developments in linguistics and the human sciences, particularly the concepts developed in terminology studies. As an exemplar of this approach, we have chosen the book *Pragmatics among Arab Scholars: A Pragmatic Study of the Phenomenon of Speech Acts in the Arabic Linguistic Heritage* by the Algerian scholar Mas‘ūd Ṣaḥrāwī, and we have sought to examine its various dimensions, especially the principal Western pragmatic terms and concepts it presents and their counterparts in the Arabic linguistic heritage. This, in turn, indicates that the latter itself contains discussions, ideas, and issues informed by pragmatic orientations and analytical procedures. Our focus here is on the term “intentionality” (*Intentionnalité*) and the extent of its presence in the Arabic linguistic heritage as reflected in *Pragmatics among Arab Scholars*.

2- A Brief Overview of Mas‘ūd Ṣaḥrāwī’s *Pragmatics among Arab Scholars*:

In 2005, the Algerian scholar Mas‘ūd Ṣaḥrāwī published, through Dār al-Ṭalī‘a in Beirut, an important work in the field of pragmatics entitled *Pragmatics among Arab Scholars: A Pragmatic Study of the Phenomenon of Speech Acts in the Arabic Linguistic Heritage*. The book comprises an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion, spanning approximately 240 medium-format pages. In the first chapter, the author examines the conceptual apparatus of contemporary pragmatic inquiry. The second chapter addresses the criteria for distinguishing between *khābar* and *inshā’* in the Arabic heritage. The third chapter discusses Arab scholars’ classifications of *khābar* and *inshā’*. The fourth chapter is devoted to speech acts in the writings

of the scholars of legal theory (*uṣūliyyūn*), while the fifth chapter focuses on speech acts as treated by grammarians. The work concludes with a synthesis of the principal findings reached by the author, followed by a list of the sources and references on which he relied.

This study also constitutes an implicit response to those who claim that pragmatics emerged exclusively from modern Western linguistics and that classical Arabic linguistic scholarship has no share in it. In this regard, Mas‘ūd Ṣaḥrāwī sought to «demonstrate that the Arabic heritage contains discussions and ideas marked by pragmatic orientations and procedures. It¹» also aims to reread this theory in light of its linguistic identity after it had been cast in a philosophical and logical mold², for pragmatics lies at the intersection of several important fields of knowledge, such as analytic philosophy—to which the author devotes a separate section—cognitive psychology, represented in particular by Relevance Theory (*Théorie de la Pertinence*), communication studies, linguistics, and other related domains of knowledge.

Mas‘ūd Ṣaḥrāwī adopted a method of inquiry through which he investigated the pragmatic phenomenon of “speech acts” within the framework of the “theory of *khabar* and *inshā’*.” He traced its foundations and applications in the writings of a number of eminent scholars who laid the groundwork for this phenomenon in our heritage and deepened the inquiry into it. The following is an account of the most important of these scholars—across their various fields of specialization—on whom the author relied in his study³:

Table 1. The most prominent Arab scholars on whom Mas‘ūd Ṣaḥrāwī relied in his book.

Grammarians and Rhetoricians	Jurists and Legal Theorists	Philosophers and Logicians
<input type="checkbox"/> Sībawayh (d. 180 AH) <input type="checkbox"/> al-Jurjānī (d. 471 AH) <input type="checkbox"/> al-Sakkākī (d. 626 AH) <input type="checkbox"/> al-Istarābādī (d. 686 AH) <input type="checkbox"/> Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Jurjānī (d. 729 AH) <input type="checkbox"/> al-Qazwīnī (d. 739 AH) <input type="checkbox"/> al-Taftāzānī (d. 792 AH) <input type="checkbox"/> al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816 AH).	<input type="checkbox"/> Ibn Rushd (d. 595 AH) <input type="checkbox"/> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH) <input type="checkbox"/> Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631 AH) <input type="checkbox"/> al-Qarāfī (d. 684 AH) <input type="checkbox"/> Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685 AH) <input type="checkbox"/> Jamāl al-Dīn al-Isnawī (d. 773 AH).	<input type="checkbox"/> Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 338 AH) <input type="checkbox"/> al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadḥānī (d. 415 AH) <input type="checkbox"/> Ibn Sīnā (d. 428 AH) <input type="checkbox"/> Najm al-Dīn al-Kātibī al-Qazwīnī (d. 675 AH) <input type="checkbox"/> Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 766 AH).

As for the author’s terminological and translational frame of reference, we note that whenever Mas‘ūd Ṣaḥrāwī introduces a term in his work, he generally follows it with its foreign equivalent, especially its French counterpart in many instances, given the prevalence of French rather than English in Algeria. Regarding the sources on which he relies in translating foreign terminology, he notes in footnote 41 that he drew in particular on the translations produced by the team of the Center for National Development (Beirut), the articles published in *al-‘Arab wa*

¹ Mas‘ūd Ṣaḥrāwī, *Pragmatics among Arab Scholars*, p. 12.

² See also: *ibid.*, p. 12.

³ See also: *ibid.*, p. 6 ff.

al-Fikr al-‘Ālamī journal, as well as the translation by Ṭālib Sayyid Hāshim al-Ṭabṭabā’ī in *Speech Act Theory*⁴.

It is also worth noting that the author, Mas‘ūd Ṣaḥrāwī, benefited from two important works in the field of modern pragmatic studies, namely:

- **Austin, John Langshaw:** *Quand dire, c'est faire*.
- **Searle, John:** *Sens et expression: étude de théorie des actes de langage*.

The author’s reliance on these two works in particular is entirely understandable, given that Austin and Searle are among the leading figures of modern pragmatics, having laid the foundations for many pragmatic concepts.

Among the most important findings reached by the researcher’s study are the following:

- The Arabic linguistic heritage gave considerable attention to the phenomenon of “speech acts” within the framework of the theory of *khavar* and *inshā’*. Various groups of scholars engaged with this phenomenon across numerous fields of learning—grammar, rhetoric, jurisprudence, legal theory, philosophy, and logic—which attests to its strong presence within the Arabic intellectual system.

- Scholars of legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) were among those who made the most effective use of the phenomenon of *khavar* and *inshā’* within its pragmatic framework.

- Many Arab grammarians were likewise not far removed from the pragmatic conception developed by legal theorists in their application of the phenomena of *khavar* and *inshā’* to their own specific subject matter.

3- The Term “Intentionality” in the Arabic Linguistic Heritage through *Pragmatics among Arab Scholars*:

The author refers to this term in various places throughout his book *Pragmatics among Arab Scholars*. He notes that the term originated in «phenomenological philosophy, where it was⁵ regarded as «a highly useful procedural principle in pragmatic linguistics»⁶. He further explains that it was also studied by «analytic philosophers, and that pragmatists subsequently expanded, differentiated, and deepened it to the point that it came to constitute “a network of interrelated concepts Perhaps the first to make productive use of it was the philosopher Austin, especially⁷» in his study of the phenomenon of «speech acts. His student Searle followed the same path⁸» by adopting it as a fundamental criterion for classifying the «forces implicit in utterance. As⁹» a result, the term “intentionality” came to be regarded as one of the basic premises of pragmatics and «an important principle of speech acts, since the illocutionary identity of any speech act depends upon it.¹⁰»

Mas‘ūd Ṣaḥrāwī sought to reread the Arabic linguistic heritage through these concepts—that is, through pragmatic concepts, and especially the term “intentionality”—and to apply them in a way that avoids forcing the material or subjecting it to strained interpretation. This is clearly reflected in the method he adopts in his study, through which he arrives at the conclusion that many modern pragmatic terms and concepts are indeed present in the Arabic heritage,

⁴ See also: *ibid.*, p. 41.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

particularly the term “intentionality,” in the works of early scholars despite their differing specializations and diverse intellectual orientations. In this connection, I would like to cite one of al-Tahānawī’s statements, which I came across incidentally while browsing an article, where he says: «In sum, the scholars of Arabic stipulate intentionality in signification..»¹¹ We do not, then, need much reflection on this statement to perceive the extent to which this term was present among scholars of the Arabic language.

It is well known that «the concern of pragmatic studies with communicative intention, and with defining its concept in theoretical treatments, has taken on several meanings that may be subsumed under two notions: intention in the sense of meaning, and intention in the sense of will. Arab scholars were familiar with both of these notions. An example of the first is what ¹²» al-‘Askarī states in al-Furūq al-Lughawiyya, namely that «meaning is intention... and purpose is that which is intended by speech..¹³». An example of the second is what Mas‘ūd Ṣaḥrāwī mentions in the course of his discussion of the legal theorists, where he writes: «Legal theorists linked commands and prohibitions to ‘the speaker’s will,’ which, in our view, corresponds in certain respects to the concept of ‘intentionality’ among contemporary scholars. Indeed, ¹⁴» there are many terms employed by Arab scholars in their works to denote “intention,” such as: «meaning, purpose, aim, need, and the end the speaker seeks to attain..¹⁵», along with other related terms.

It is perhaps hardly necessary to point out that Mas‘ūd Ṣaḥrāwī, on page 186, distinguishes between two important terms that are equivalent in pragmatic value, namely “ifāda” and “purpose (intention)”. He writes: «The difference between ifāda and purpose is that ifāda is more closely related to the addressee and to the communicative benefit he derives from the speaker’s discourse, whereas purpose pertains to the speaker—that is, to the intention and end he seeks to realize. The speaker and the addressee are thus the two fundamental parties in the communicative process.¹⁶»

Table 2. Some of the terms used by Arab scholars and Western scholars.

The principal terms employed by Western pragmatic scholars	The principal terms employed by Arab scholars to denote “intention”
<input type="checkbox"/> “Intentionality” (<i>Intentionnalité</i>) <input type="checkbox"/> “Intention” (<i>Intention</i>)	Intention, meaning, purpose, aim, need, end, will, communicative import, specification, objective, intention (niyyah), avoidance of ambiguity, etc.

¹¹ al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Funūn*, s.v. “Dalālah,” cited in: ‘Abd al-Ghanī Bārah, “The Principle of Intentionality and the Pragmatic Character of al-Shāṭibī’s Uṣūlī Discourse,” p. 19.

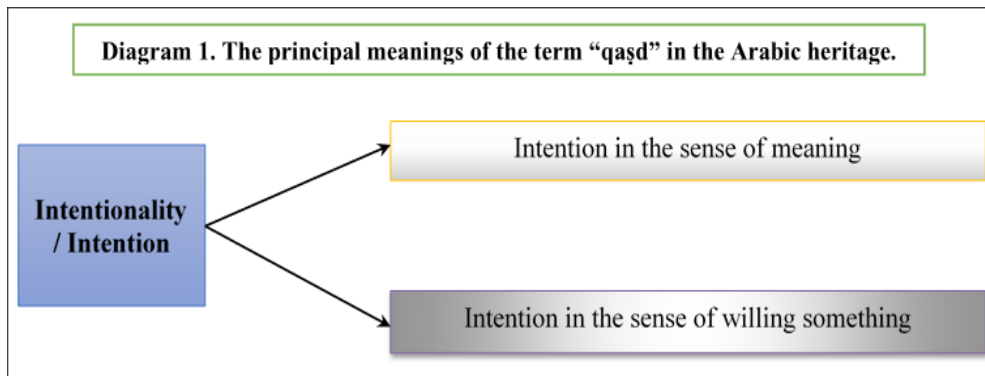
¹² Washn Dalāl, “Intentionality from the Philosophy of Mind to the Philosophy of Language,” *Journal of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences*, University of Biskra, no. 6 (January 2010).

¹³ Abū Hilāl al-‘Askarī, *al-Furūq al-Lughawiyyah*, pp. 34–35.

¹⁴ *Pragmatics among Arab Scholars*, p. 150.

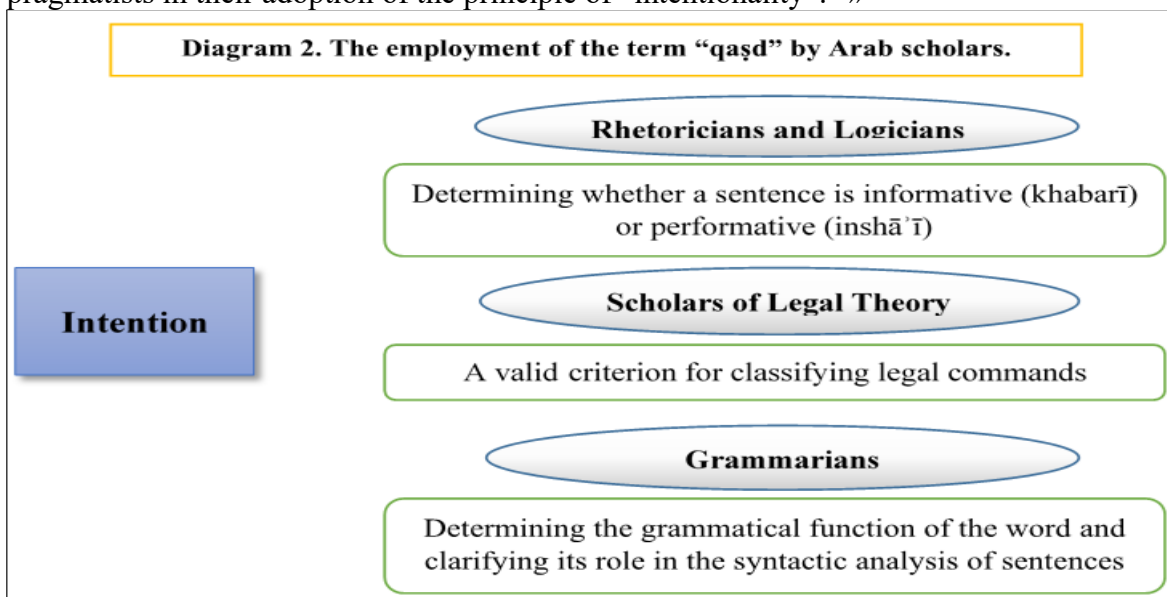
¹⁵ Mīlūd Muṣṭafā ‘Ashūr, “Intentionality and Acceptability between Critical Heritage and Modern Linguistic Study,” p. 353.

¹⁶ *Pragmatics among Arab Scholars*, p. 186.



In the second chapter of *Pragmatics among Arab Scholars*, Ṣaḥrāwī sought to study the criteria Arab scholars relied upon to distinguish between *khabar* and *inshāʿ*. He arrived at a number of findings, namely that they relied, in the early stages of their inquiry, on the criterion of “admitting truth and falsity”; then, at a later stage, they adopted the criterion of “correspondence to an external relation”; and, in a subsequent stage, they relied on the criterion of “bringing an external relation into existence” in order to distinguish between the two.

However, some scholars gave weight to the criterion of «the “indicator of intention” as a fundamental distinguishing criterion that, on its own, suffices to determine whether a sentence is informative (*khbarī*) or performative (*inshāʿī*)¹⁷». Ṣaḥrāwī considers that «adopting this criterion contributed to shifting Arabic linguistic thought from its dry logical level to a pragmatic horizon¹⁸». The researcher then draws two conclusions: first, «that the logical basis alone was no longer sufficient to distinguish between *khabar* and *inshāʿ*, leading the scholars of that stage to make the distinction on pragmatic grounds¹⁹»; and second, «that al-Dasūqī, along with those scholars who preceded him, converges with Austin and contemporary pragmatists in their adoption of the principle of “intentionality”.²⁰»



¹⁷ Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 68.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 68.

It is worth noting that the term “intention” (qaṣd) was by no means confined to one group of scholars to the exclusion of others. Rather, as we have seen, it was addressed by numerous scholars across different fields of specialization. This is the case, for example, with the scholars of legal theory, who made «the application of the principle of “intentionality” to legal commands a valid and precise criterion for classifying them—as in the case of al-Shāṭibī (d. 790 AH), for instance²¹». Likewise, al-Ghazālī (d. 505 AH) gives priority to «meaning and purpose—that is, intention—over formal expression whenever the latter is affected by something that impairs its performative force; for, in the view of legal theorists, what ultimately matters is purposes and meanings, not merely words and structures. The same tendency is²²» found among grammarians, for whom «“taking into account the purpose of speech” commonly serves as an indicator that helps determine the grammatical function of a word and clarify its role in the syntactic analysis of the sentence (...)—these being the very notions that contemporary scholars have come to designate by the term “intentionality”. It thus becomes²³» clear to us how much attention Arab scholars devoted to this concept.

4- Conclusion:

- Although the author refers to the term “intentionality” in various places throughout Pragmatics among Arab Scholars as one of the accepted premises of pragmatics, this concept, in our view, still requires further elaboration through independent sections devoted to discussing it in greater detail.

- We also note that some pragmatic terms—such as “intentionality,” for example—appear in more than one field of knowledge among Arab scholars. This may be due to the fact that, in studying such phenomena, they were often intended as a means to something else rather than as an object of inquiry in and of themselves; hence, they were «a means rather than an end. 24» As the author of the book states, inquiry into these matters extended beyond grammarians, rhetoricians, and legal theorists to include philosophers and logicians as well.

- We further observe that Arab scholars, across their various disciplines, employed numerous terms to express a single concept. Thus, we have seen that they expressed “intention” through terms such as: meaning, purpose, aim, need, the speaker’s will, and the end the speaker seeks to attain, among others.

- Pragmatics among Arab Scholars by Mas‘ūd Ṣaḥrāwī may be regarded as a serious, important, and rigorous study, as ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Yūsuf described it in his article entitled “Pragmatics and the Diversity of the References of Discourse.” The book is also of considerable importance in laying the foundations for pragmatic inquiry in Arab thought, especially in its presentation of texts and its elicitation of the terms and concepts embedded in them. Even so, we would have preferred the author to include a glossary of the pragmatic terms appearing in the book, so as to make it easier for the reader to refer back to them.

- This study—Pragmatics among Arab Scholars—and other similar studies could well serve as a key step toward the creation of a pragmatic dictionary of Arabic terms, figures, and works, both classical and modern.

²¹ Ibid., p. 156.

²² Ibid., p. 171.

²³ Ibid., p. 200-201.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

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