25. المستشرقون الألمان تراجمهم وما أسهموا به في الدراسات العربية، ط1، دار الكتاب الجديد، (بيروت–1398هـ/ 1978م).

Language and Meaning: From Understanding to Misunderstanding

Lec. Baqir Jasim Mohammed
College of Basic Education\ University of Babylon

اللغة والمعنى: من التفاهم إلى سوء التفاهم

م. باقر جاسم محمد
كلية التربية الأساسية/ جامعة بابل
bagir_m@yahoo.com

الملخص:

بحثت هذه الدراسة في إشكالية العلاقة بين اللغة والمعنى؛ وهي إشكالية كانت، وما زالت، تمثل قضية خلافية حاضرة على الدوام في الفكر الفلسفي واللساني والاجتماعي نظراً لعلاقتها الوثيقة بمسألة التفاهم المفضي إلى التفاعل الفعال بين البشر. وعلى الرغم من أن هذه القضية المهمة، على المستويات الفكرية والاجتماعية واللسانية كافة، قد حظيت بدراسات فلسفية ونحوية ولسانية متعددة، إلا أنها ما زالت تشكل تحدياً مهماً يتطلب بذل جهود إضافية لإضاءة جوانبها المختلفة وتجلية المعضلات التي تنطوي عليها عسى أن نتقدم خطوة بسيطة نحو فهم أفضل لجوهرها. وقد ناقش الباحث أهم المحاولات اللسانية والفلسفية التي قدمها فلاسفة وباحثو ولسانيون معروفون لاقتراح حل لمثل هذه الإشكالية، فتوقف عند ما انطوت عليه جهودهم من عناصر إيجابية، وما تضمنته من نقاط ضعف. ونتيجة لذلك، فقد توصل الباحث إلى أن اللغة، من حيث هي، إنما هي أداة لسوء التفاهم بقدر ما هي أداة للتفاهم. وتضمنت الدراسة جوانب نظرية وأخرى تطبيقية في اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية. واختتمت بعدد من النتائج والتوصيات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة، المعنى، الدلالة، النحو، اللسانيات، التفاهم، سوء التفاهم، سوء القراءة.

ABSTRACT

This study has examined the problematic issue of relationship between language and meaning. It is a problem that has always been a controversial issue; moreover, it is constantly present in philosophical, linguistic and social thought because of its close relationship to human understanding which is supposed to lead to the effective interaction. Although this issue has received many studies presented by intellectuals, humanitarians, grammarians and linguists, it remains an important challenge that requires additional efforts to illuminate and clarify its different aspects. The researcher discussed the most important linguistic and philosophical attempts made by philosophers, scholars and well-known linguists to propose a solution to the problem under discussion, referring to their efforts which might include a mixture of positive elements and weaknesses. As a result, the researcher concluded that language is, in itself, a tool of misunderstanding as much as an instrument of understanding. The study included theoretical and applied aspects both in English and Arabic. It has been rounded off with a number of conclusions and recommendations.

Key Words: language, meaning, significance, grammar, linguistics, understanding, misunderstanding, misreading

1. Introduction

Language is considered the token which indicates that Man has gained what makes him different from all other animals and beings. It has long been one of the major interests of philosophers, grammarians, and linguists for its basic role in the social and psychological human experience along history. It is commonplace both in the ancient and modern linguistic thought that language is the most important tool of communication that Man has ever had. This supposition can be detected both implicitly and explicitly in the studies of language which focus on different levels of linguistic discourse, i.e., phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic studies. Scholars usually make use of the developments in several interdisciplinary fields for studying the problem of

meaning which can affect the philosophical aspects of the problem. For example, Bezuidenhout (2006: 688) states that:

"Texts in the philosophy of language frequently cite the tripartite distinction between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics made by Morris (1938). According to Morris, syntax is concerned with the structural properties of signs (i.e., with word-word relations), semantics with the relations between signs and the things they signify (i.e., with word-world relations), and pragmatics with the uses of signs by speakers and hearers to perform communicative acts (i.e., with word-user relations)."

This text emphasizes the close connection between the linguistic findings and the philosophical conclusions. Yet, it is obvious that linguistic interrelated levels are used only by scholars for studying bits of language which are very limited in number and use compared with the unlimited diversity of daily language communication; moreover, the layman usually has no idea about them or how they work together. In fact, people usually encounter problems of misunderstanding in one way or another. Among others, Bildad (2006: 18) states that "… the smooth flow of communication may eventually stumble as misunderstanding and non-understanding creep in". Now what is meant by misunderstanding? To answer this question, an elaborate account of the different definitions of several scholars for the term 'misunderstanding' will be adopted with some modification. In his account of the definition of the term 'misunderstanding', Beldad (2006:18-19) mentions that:

"Weigand (1999) defines misunderstanding as a form of understanding that is partially or totally deviant from what the speaker [or writer in case of graphic communication] intended to communicate. For Hirst et al. (1994), misunderstanding is that instance when a participant (in the interaction) [or the writer] obtains an interpretation that he believes is complete and correct, but which is however, not the one that the other speaker [listener or reader] intended him to obtain.

In Grimshaw's definition (1988), misunderstanding is a two-stage process in which the hearer [reader] experiences understanding the first stage, and then deliberately fails to do (or give evidence of believing), the second stage. Milroy (1984) describes misunderstanding as the disparity between the speaker's [writer's] and the hearer's [reader's] semantic analysis of a given utterance [or a written text]".

These four definitions can be extended to cover the written texts without violating their basic propositions since writing is an attempt at picturing stretches of speech or thoughts in a deliberate way. Then 'misunderstanding' can be defined as the defiant understanding from the intended meaning. This kind of misunderstanding usually occurs because "Words do not have meanings; people have meanings for words." as Francis (1967: 119) states. As a result, the supposition that language is a successful means of communication should be reexamined to seek the causes of the failure of communication and the rise of misunderstanding whether linguistic or non-linguistic. This will help showing that the proposition that language is an efficient tool for communication is still valid.

Voluminous and elaborate works have been carried out in studying different aspects of language without giving the roots of misunderstanding between people enough interest. Moreover, different cultures have contributed, in one way or another, in the global efforts to find solution for this problem. Historically speaking, Islamic-Arabic contribution is one of the most early and genuine attempts in this respect.[1]

2. The Causes of Misunderstanding

2. 1. The failure of communication may be attributed to several factors some of which are textual, such as the encoder's inefficient use of his/her linguistic repertoire, or his/her equivocal intentions, or both; and the decoder's intentions, linguistic ability and agenda may have equivalent negative effects on communication. Some are contextual, such as varying psychological and ideological factors. In philosophy, the problem of language and meaning has been studied as a basic question closely related to the linguistic phenomenon and its functions on one hand and to the philosophical

categories and the problems associated with the question whether the statements are true or false on the other hand. This problem has been raised as early as ancient China and Greece. Blackburn (2012: 433) has stated that in ancient China:

"Confucius (551–479 BC), …, held that, when words go wrong, there is no limit to what else may go wrong with them; for this reason, 'the civilized person is anything but casual in what he says'."

Here, the problem of inconvenient communication is attributed o the speaker or the encoder of the message. Blackburn has also referred to Greek philosophers' contribution in this field saying that Plato (428/427–348/347 BC) in his dialogue Cratylus, " identified a fundamental problem regarding language. If the connection between words and things is entirely arbitrary or conventional, as it seems to be, it is difficult to understand how language enables human beings to gain knowledge or understanding of the world [or of each other]."

Again, the problem has not been talked adequately yet. In fact, the last citation has left the philosophical investigation concerning the metaphysics of meaning unsolved. On the same line, Baird (2003: 94) has stated that:

"after the death of Aristotle (384–322 BC) the problems in the philosophy of language tended to fall into one or the other of two broad categories. The first category concerns the relation between language and the world. Key problems in the first category include the question of what it means to possess a language. [The second] includes the use of language in understanding and conceptualization, and the nature of communication and interpretation."

Consequently, the problem of communication, which implicitly includes the problem of misunderstanding, has been noticed as early as middle of the 4th B.C. In modern interdisciplinary efforts of studying language and meaning, the function of philosophy, as Wittgenstein (1953:57) concludes:

"… is an attempt to resolve problems that arise as the result of linguistic confusion, and the key to the resolution of such problems is ordinary language analysis and the proper use of language."

Yet, the key to the resolution by focusing on ordinary language analysis has not been as successful as Wittgenstein suggested in "Philosophical Investigations". The failure of the Wittgenstein's key is expected because the problems of meaning and significance do not arise "as the result of linguistic confusion" only; in fact they arise as a result of a variety of linguistic and contextual factors. According to Glüer (2012:86) one of the solutions of the problem of significant sentences goes back to Wittgenstein. She States that:

For Wittgenstein, this connection [between form and meaning] essentially involves the idea that the meaning of a sentence is what a competent speaker of specific language understands, or knows. But how can we get exact knowledge of what the listener understands from a sentence or an utterance? And what does a speaker knows? Wittgenstein's idea is "under what conditions is a sentence true", which is in German "Einen Satz verstehen, heisst, wissen was der Fall ist, wenn er wahr ist".[2] … In this way, meaning is essentially bound up not only with truth, but also with the activities and the psychology of competent speakers".

Again, the encoder's intention is under focus, whereas nothing is said about the role of the decoder or receiver of the message. This situation has been spurred Strawson (1950, 325) to state that:

"… the question whether a sentence or expression is significant or not has nothing whatever to do with the question of whether the sentence, uttered on a particular occasion, is, on that occasion, being used to make a true-or-false assertion or not, or of whether the expression is, on that occasion, being used to refer to, or mention, anything at all… the fact that [a sentence] is significant is the same as the fact that it can be correctly used to talk about something and that, in so using it, someone will be making a true or false assertion."

Therefore, the hearer's assertion and not speaker's, which might be considered a vital aspect of the forthcoming pragmatic studies, is an important factor in determining whether a linguistic message is true or not. Nevertheless, there are two distinct issues: the speaker's intention and the hearer's

assertion which are involved in any linguistic message. These two issues may be so divergent, i.e. using a variety of premises and avoiding common assumptions in making deductions will inevitably lead to the highly unexpected sorts of misunderstanding.

2. 2. Linguistically speaking, the problem of meaning in language, i.e. the drastic issue in human communication, has been subject to profound speculations by some of influential linguists. For example, Bloomfield (1933: 39-40) states that:

"We have defined the meaning of a linguistic form as the situation in which the speaker utters it and the response which it calls forth in the hearer.... In order to give a scientifically accurate definition of meaning for every form of a language, we should have to have a scientifically accurate knowledge of everything in the speakers' world. The actual extent of human knowledge is very small compared to this.... The statement of meanings is therefore the weak point in language-study, and will remain so until human knowledge advances very far beyond its present state." (emphasis added)

Two things should be noticed here: First, although Bloomfield's statement describes the situation of arts in 1933, our knowledge of different aspects of language and human society has largely developed since then; yet, this knowledge is still 'the weak point in language-study' which cannot enable us to find a completely successful answer to the problem of meaning. Second, it is clear that the "meaning of a linguistic form" mentioned by Bloomfield is the meaning of a word and not a sentence or a series of sentences which are left out. This situation has urged Koerne (1970:162) to express his contentment that:

"The problem of semantic formalization in descriptive terms has been tackled from various sides, yet the results are still far from satisfactory to the linguist. 'Meaning,' whatever its nature may be, appears to remain a hardly perennial [issue], and perhaps not only in the field of linguistic science." (emphasis added)

In the same period, a similar contentment has been echoed in a statement by Lewis (1972: 19):

"I distinguish two topics: first, the description of possible languages or grammars as abstract semantic systems whereby symbols are associated with aspects of the world; and, second, the description of the psychological and sociological facts whereby a particular one of these abstract semantic systems is the one used by a person or population. Only confusion comes of mixing these two topics."

It is obvious that the first topic causes a serious problem since it consists of "abstract semantic systems" whereas it is supposed to associate linguistic symbols with the aspects of reality or the world. Moreover, the gap between the two topics should be abridged to get the aggregation of these two topics or branches of linguistics so that Man can be able to diminish the sources of misunderstanding.

Approaching the problem of significance as a matter of the effect of an utterance on the listener has initiated what can be called the pragmatic era of studying the problem of meaning. Substantial works have been devoted to study the effects of contextual factors on the significance of a linguistic utterance. Some of which was Grice's book "Logic and Conversation" (1975). In this book, Grice has introduced four main conversational maxims with some other subsidiary ones. They are:

1. The maxim of quantity which includes:
a. Make your contribution to the conversation as informative as necessary.
b. Do not make your contribution to the conversation more informative than necessary.
2. The maxim of quality which includes:
a. Do not say what you believe to be false.
b. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
3. Maxim of Relation:
a. Be relevant.
4. Maxim of Manner which includes:
a. Avoid obscurity of expression.
b. Avoid ambiguity.

c. Be brief.
d. Be orderly.

It is noticed here that although Grice's maxims are important in the development of human efforts to promote our understanding of the problem of meaning, they have not reduced the chances of misunderstanding because they might not be followed sincerely. However, the following critique against them can be stated:

1. They are rather pedagogical. Practically speaking, people do not strictly follow them.
2. They depend highly on the good intentions of both the speaker and hearer.
3. They are all subject to personal estimation. For example, in the third maxim of relation, ideas of the users of language may considerably differ concerning whether an utterance is relevant or not.

Furthermore, some scholars believe that the Gricean maxims do not cover all the supposedly maxims. For example, after introducing his account of the Gricean interpersonal role of Cooperative Principle (1983: 79-102), Leech declares that there is a politeness principle which should be followed by the participants in any conversation. He states that "Politeness is not in the content of conversation, but also in the way conversation is managed and structured by its participants." But what is the Politeness Principle? (p. 139) Leech introduced conversational maxims to represent it. They are: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy.

The first maxim of tact has nothing to do with the politeness principle since it is a matter of linguistic experience which varies from one person to another. The second maxim of generosity and the fourth maxim of modesty are rather ethical in nature, therefore they cannot be adequately measured. The third maxim of approbation, as Leech himself designates it, is "the flattery maxim'. (cf. p. 135) This designation shows that it might be rejected for it contradicts the Gricean maxim of quality. Yet. it is rather ideological since we usually approve or praise what does not contradict our own beliefs, therefore it does not work when the decoder and encoder are of two incongruent ideologies. As for the fifth maxim of agreement, which we have no enough evidence for it, he spells his opinion out that "… there is a tendency to exaggerate agreement with other people, and to mitigate disagreement by expressing regret, partial agreement, …" (cf. Leech, 1983: 138) But this is a kind of belief without enough empirical evidence. The sixth maxim of sympathy, which includes a minor category of expressions of congratulations and condolences, can be violated by the fact that hypocrisy and deception might be involved. Generally speaking, we can notice that these maxims vary from one culture to another, i. e. what might be considered polite in one culture might be strange or even thoroughly rude in another,; moreover are rather subjective; therefore, they can hardly be useful to eliminate the possibility of misunderstanding.

This situation can be attributed to several factors among which many disputes, stated by Abbot (1999: 17),:

" … about whether certain aspects of sentence meaning (in a broad sense of 'meaning') belong to semantics or pragmatics -- aspects such as presupposition, conversational implicature, and illocutionary force."

It is evident that The realm of understanding is still vague because "The relation between language and mind remains at present a very murky one." cf. Abbot (1999:16); therefore, the list of the causes of dispute can be supplemented by the decoder's and encoder's mental abilities, agendas, biases and psychological preferences.

3. Two Cases of Misunderstanding

3. 1. Linguistically speaking, language is usually defined as a system or a means of communication; but this communication has not been efficiently protected from misusing because it is always affected by human wills, wishes, priorities and agendas. Hence, language does not always do its main function of communication successfully. Of course, there are many decent philosophical and linguistic treatises on language, its structural facets and functions, written by smart scholars, but the problem of meaning has not been successfully solved yet. As a result, misunderstanding still

occurs for the good reason mentioned above. For pillaring this discussion on practical bases, two kinds of written texts have been chosen according to the following criteria:

a. Written texts are rather stable linguistic messages which are not usually affected by the differing contextual circumstances concerning the encoding process.
b. They usually give the decoder or addressee a better chance to carefully consider and reconsider their purports.
c. Both the two chosen texts and the comments on them, which reflect the decoders' misreading, have been written by excellent writers so as to avoid the factor of inefficiency of the language sender. The decoders or readers of the texts are also experts in the realm of the topics under discussion.
d. The texts are chosen from two distinct registers, i.e., linguistics and history. They are taken from two distinct languages and cultures, i.e. English and Arabic.

Before studying the two cases of misunderstanding, it is necessary to state that the term 'misreading' is also a kind of failure of communication. As a result, it can be understood as a synonym of misunderstanding. Moreover, 'misreading' according to Joseph (1990: 51-52), "… is not to be considered an error. It is quite possibly integral to change and progress." Therefore, the conception of the term 'misreading' can be understood as an equivalent of the conception of the term 'misunderstanding'.

3. 1. 1. The Case of "Cours de lingustique générale":

De Saussure's "Cours de linguistique générale" (henceforth CLG) is one of the most influential texts in the history of linguistics. It is expected that a genuine and initiative treatise, like the CLG, might be subject for differentiation of interpretation by different scholars; yet it is not expected that the same scholar introduces differing interpretations of the same text. This has happened when the CLG has been discrepantly evaluated by two influential and authoritative linguists, such as Bloomfield and Chomsky, in several stages of their career as the following discussion will show.

3. 1. 2. In Linguistics: Bloomfield's reading of CLG

Between the years 1923-1933, Bloomfield has presented different and even contradictory statements and comments on the nature and value of de Saussure's contribution in the development of modern linguistics as presented in CLG. In a review of the CLG, Bloomfield acknowledges that "Saussure is the founder of modern general linguistics." (cf. Bloomfield 1923: 317) Then he declares that "… has given us the theoretical basis for a science of human speech (ibid. 318). These two strong statements might be understood as an explicit admission of Saussure's authentic contributions both in the methodology and in the new binaries of concepts in modern linguistics, such as 'langue' vs. 'parole'; 'synchronic study' vs. 'diachronic study'; 'signifier' vs. 'signified'; 'internal linguistics' vs. 'external linguistics'; 'syntagmatic' vs. 'paradigmatic'; and 'linguistic sign' & 'arbitrariness' of the linguistic relation between the signifier and the signified. Yet this strong statement is unexpectedly followed by underestimating one when he states that:

"The value of the Cours lies in its clear and rigorous demonstration of fundamental principles. Most of what the author says has long been 'in the air' and has been here and there fragmentarily expressed; the systematization is his own. (cited in Hockett 1970: 106).

Thus, nothing new could be attributed to de Saussure since its value lies only in its clear account of fundamental principles and systemization of some widely known linguistic facts. Thus, it is logical to ask: why has Bloomfield designated de Saussure the father of modern linguistics if he has only one merit of 'clear and rigorous demonstration of fundamental principles'? Moreover, Bloomfield restates his negative attitude against de Saussure by saying that "Now, de Saussure seems to have had no psychology beyond the crudest popular notions, and his phonetics are an abstraction from French and Swiss-German which will not stand even the test of an application to English." (ibid: 317) This statement goes further in diminishing de Saussure's efforts in modern linguistics to only 'crudest popular notions', and a type of borrowed phonetics 'which will not stand even the test of an application to English'! This inconsistency in Bloomfield's attitude towards de Saussure's contribution in

developing linguistic studies can be fairly considered a typical case of misunderstanding committed by one of most convenient users of language. Of course it might be said that Bloomfield's capricious attitude towards de Saussure is a type of misinterpretation of CLG; yet, It is obvious that the two terms of misinterpretation and misunderstanding can be interchangeably used in this situation since they are identical meaning.

3. 1. 3. Chomsky's Reading of CLG

Although there are certain similarities between Chomsky's binary concepts of 'competence' & 'performance' and Saussure's concepts of 'langue' & 'parole, Chomsky's interpretation of these two Saussurean concepts has not been stable; moreover, it has been capriciously changed as we shall see. For example, Chomsky(1965: 4) asserts that:

"The distinction I am noting here is related to the langue-parole distinction of Saussure; but it is necessary to reject his concept of langue as merely a systematic inventory of items and to return rather to the Humboldtian conception of underlying competence as a system of generative processes". (emphasis added)

Here, the Saussurean binary of the langue-parole is refused by Chomsky because it is rather mechanical or "merely a systematic inventory of items"; therefore, it does not fit with the Chomsky's conception of generative grammar, therefore it is neglected for the sake of "Humboldtian conception of underlying competence as a system of generative processes". But this attitude will soon differ. Chomsky (1986: 19) states that:

"In Saussurean structuralism, a language (langue) was taken to be a system of sounds and an associated system of concepts; the notion of sentence was left in a kind of limbo, perhaps to be accommodated within the study of the language use." (emphasis is mine)

First , nothing concerning the Saussurean conception of Parole is mentioned although generating new sentences occurs within it. Second, a question might appropriately be raised: where can the association of sounds and concepts be found in the Saussurean tradition? Definitely speaking not in the Saussure' conceptualization of the 'langue', but in his explanation of notion of the concept of 'linguistic sign' which can be found elsewhere in the CLG. The linguistic sign, according to Saussure, is arbitrary but is not open for free choice; its meaning is composed of a signifier or the linguistic form, and the signified which might be understood as the meaning or concept associated with the signifier. It is imposed on the users of a certain language by their linguistic surrounding. Thus, the Saussurean notion of linguistic sign is only part of the broader concept of langue and not equivalent to it. Moreover, langue can only be realized by parole or paroles of its users. Actually, parole is composed of sentences; therefore the sentence has never been "left in a kind of limbo," since it is de facto found sentences in any parole though they have not been elaborately studied. Chomsky himself (1963: 327) asserts this conclusion when he states that:

"Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) drew a fundamental distinction between what he called langue and parole. The first is the grammatical and semantic system represented in the brain of the speaker; the second is the actual acoustic output from his vocal organs and input to his ears."

It is clear that the acoustic output is nothing but the utterances or sentences produced by the users of language. How can we account for this shift from one attitude to another? It may be a kind of contradiction, or a kind of misunderstanding, and can be ascribed to Chomsky's desire to implicitly show the superiority of his model of transformational generative grammar to the Saussurean model of structuralism since the term syntax has a fundamental status in transformational generative grammar whereas it has not been adequately investigated in the CLG.

It might be said that this misunderstanding has occurred because of the manifestations of linguistic vagueness[3] in the Saussurean account of the langue. But the deliberate reading of Saussure's extracts concerning the terms under discussion shows that they are so explicit and straightforward that they can never cause any confusion for the reader since they include no vague expressions.[(3)] The close

reading of the Saussurean text reveals that it has been precisely worded. To prove this claim, lets consult the French version of the CLG. The French version of the CLG (1916: 31) reads:

"Elle est la partie sociale du langage extérieure a l'individu, qui a lui seul ne peut ni la créer ni la modifier; elle n'exist qu'en vertu d'une sorte de contact passe entre les membres de la communauté."

The text can be translated into 'langue' is "… the social part of language which is external to the individual, who alone can neither create it nor modify it; it does exist by the virtue of a sort of contact agreed upon by the members of the community". Hence, it can be stated that Chomsky's statement reflects some sort of misunderstanding of the Saussurean concept of 'langue' since it includes an unexpected type of confusion between two Saussurean concepts of 'langue' and 'linguistic sign'. This unstable evaluation of Saussurean contribution in linguistics has been reflected in Chomsky's later statement concerning the developments in the history of linguistics where he (1965: 7-8) states that:

"It is worth noting that this naïve view of language structure persists to modern times in various forms, for example, in Saussure's image of a sequence of expressions corresponding to an amorphous sequence of concepts".

Here, Chomsky considers Saussure's contribution not only naïve, but also not genius since it is a kind of some earlier trends in linguistics persisting to modern times and reflected in Saussurean conception of langue. According to Joseph (1990:72) this unstable attitude can be designated as a sort of 'misreading', which is a kind of 'misunderstanding' as termed in this paper.

3. 1. 3. In Historical Discourse:

The relationship between history and language is so important that a good historian must be an expert in all manifestations of written language since all history is in the form of written texts. Parthes (1967: 9) explains the intermingled relationship between history and language by saying that:

"… all systems of signs are based on the model of language, then history, which attempts to read all the signs, is primarily a language skill".

Thus, language is very important to the historian since it enables him understand all the purports of historical texts. In the following, an expert both history and language will [mis]read a historical text. In his study, "The Confusion of the Concept of Renaissance in the Intellectual Project of Renaissance"[4] R. J. Ziyadah presents a short text for Kh. Ziyadah. This short text reads:

"تبتدئ النهضة مع محاولات التحديث في مصر مع محمد علي باشا في النصف الأول من القرن التاسع عشر، وفي بلاد الشام مع إطلاق التنظيمات في الدولة العثمانية، وفي تونس في عهد الباي أحمد والباي محمد صادق، وتتوقف النهضة مع التدخل الغربي في تونس في العام 1881، وفي مصر في العام 1882، وفي سوريا ولبنان، مع تعليق الدستور، العام في 1876 وبداية عهد عبد الحميد الثاني".

Kh. Ziyadah's text can be translated into English as follows: "The renaissance [in Arab countries] has begun with the attempts of modernization in Egypt by Mohammed Ali in the first half of the nineteenth century, and in Sham region by the release of the organizations in the Ottoman state, and in Tunisia in the reigns of the Bai Ahmed and the Bai Mohammed Sadiq,[5] and it has stopped with the western intrusion in Tunisia in the year 1881, and

in Egypt in 1882, and in Syria and Lebanon with the suspending of the [Ottoman] constitution in the year 1876 at the beginning of the reign of [Sultan] Abdul-Hammed II".

Then, he comments on the above text by saying that:

"وهكذا تبتدئ النهضة وتتوقف وفقاً لقرار رئاسي أو سلطاني، ويغيب المعنى الاجتماعي للنهضة، الذي يكسبها بعدها الحضاري الحقيقي"

This comment can be translated as follows: "Thus, the renaissance is initiated and stopped according to a president's or sultan's decision, hence, the social significance of the renaissance, which gives it its real civilizational dimension, vanished".

Now, does Kh. Ziyadah's text include anything referring to 'president's, or sultan's, decisions to begin the renaissance or to put an end for it? Reading the text carefully shows that it has never referred to the decisions of the rulers; instead, it has referred the reigns of the rulers, and these reigns have been usually used by the historians as historical time indicators without restricting the movement of society to the wills or decisions of these rulers only. In fact, these reigns include several internal social factors as well as some other external factors such as the foreign interventions and occupations. And in the

case of Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria in the second half of the 19th century, the latter factors, i.e. foreign interventions and occupations, have played great roles in the social and political developments in Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria in the following decades.

It is obvious that this defiance from the obvious intended content to misreading expresses some sort of misunderstanding. It has occurred because the encoder has been spurred by his prior intention to prove that there is a kind of 'confusion of the concept of renaissance" in the intellectual, or elite, project of renaissance as represented by Kh. Ziyadah's short text.

4. Results and Conclusions

The texts chosen for discussion are taken from two distinct disciplines, linguistics and history and from different languages and cultures. In linguistics, although Saussure's CLG has been well written, and the readers of this text, i. e. Bloomfield and Chomsky, are very excellent experts both in language and linguistics, their writings show several manifestations of misunderstanding. These manifestations have been reflected in their differing and unstable attitudes expressed in different occasions. As a result, Their attitudes have been fluctuated between accepting Saussure's tenets and magnifying his contributions in the development of the newly merging discipline of linguistics in certain occasions, and belittling these tenets and contributions in other.

In history, a short text has been read by R. J. Ziyadah, who is an expert in history and language, but his reading has not been without a kind of misunderstanding since he has ascribed to text what is not implicitly or explicitly said. J. Ziyadah, the reader of the short historical text, has been motivated by his prior intention to find out evidence for his proposition that there has been a kind of confusion in the concept of renaissance committed by the Arab elite.

These two examples show that misunderstanding occurs even when the texts are well written and the readers are excellent both in the disciplines and language. Due to the fact that differing mental abilities, agendas, ideologies or psychological preferences of the readers themselves affect their points of view concerning the same texts in differing stages of their career, misunderstanding will inevitably emerge and lead in one way or another.

A. NOTES:

1. In fact, Arabic-Islamic efforts in studying linguistic problems concerning language and communication within Arabic culture have not been studied in detail by the linguists in western traditions of the discipline.
2. Wittgenstein's statement is in German and its translation can be "To understand a sentence (or a proposition) means to know what is the case, if it is true."
3. For a more elaborate account of the linguistic vagueness, see: "Clark, Billy, 'Ambiguity/Vagueness' in Chapman, Siobhan, and Christopher Routledge (2009) (eds.) Key Ideas in Linguistics and the Philosophy of Language, Edinburgh University Press. P3.
4. The citation is in Arabic:

د. زيادة، رضوان جودت، الإيديولوجيا المستعادة: **"النهضة في الخطاب العربي المعاصر"** مجلة عالم الفكر، العدد 4، المجلد 33، أبريل-يونيو 2005. (الصفحات 7 – 38) ص 18.

5. The term 'Bai' is a title used for the rulers of Tunisia during the late Ottoman period.

B. Bibliography:

1. In English: Books

Abbott, Barbara, 'The Formal Approach to Meaning: Formal Semantics and its Recent Development' in Journal of Foreign Languages, Shanghai, January 1999, 119:1. (pp 2-20)

Bailey, Benjamin, "Misunderstanding" in Allesandro Duranti (ed) (2004), A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology, MA. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Barthes, Roland (1967) Elements of Semiology, (trans. Lavers, Annete and Colin Smith) London, Hill and Wang.

Bezuidenhout, A. (2006) Semantic-Pragmatic Boundary. In Brown, Keith, Alex Barber, and Robert J. Stainton (2010) (eds.) Concise Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Language and Linguistics. Oxford, Elsevier Ltd. (pp. 688-695)

Blackburn, Simon, W. in "language, philosophy of" Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2012.

Bloomfield, Leonard (1923) Review of F. de Saussure (1922) Cours de linguistique générale, in Modern Language Journal 8: pp. 317-319. Rep. in C Hockett (ed.)

---------- (1933) Language, New York, Holt Rinehart Ink.

Chomsky, N. (1963) 'Formal Properties of Grammar', in R. D. Luce, R. R. Bush and E. Galanter (eds.) Handbook of Mathematical Psychology, New York and London: Wiley, pp. 322-418.

---------- (1986) Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origin, and Use, New York: Praeger.

Clark, Billy, 'Ambiguity/Vagueness' in Chapman, Siobhan, and Christopher Routledge (2009) (eds.) Key Ideas in Linguistics and the Philosophy of Language, Edinburgh University Press. Pp. 3-4.

Crystal, David. (1997) A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonology. 4th edition. Blackwell Publishers. Oxford.

Francic, N. (1967) The English Language: An Introduction, London:: English University Press.

Glüer, Kathrin, (2012) "Theories of Meaning and Truth Conditions", in. García-Carpintero, M and M. Kölbel, (eds) (2012) The Continuum Companion to the Philosophy of Language. London. (pp.84-105)

Hockett, C. (ed.) (1970) A Leonard Bloomfield Anthology, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Joseph, John, E. (1990) 'Ideologizing Saussure: Bloomfield's and Chomsky's Readings of the cours de linguistique générale, in Joseph, John, E and Talbot J. Taylor (eds.) (1990) Ideologies of Language. London, Routledge. Pp. 51-78.

Koerne, E. F. K. The Bloomfieldian Linguistics and the Problem of Meaning, in Jahrbuch für Amerikstudien, Universitätsverlag. Heidelberg, WINTER, 1970. (pp. 162-183) p. 162.

Leech, Geoffrey, (1983) Principles of Pragmatics. Longman, London.

Lewis, D. "General Semantics" In G. Harman and D. Davidson (eds.) (1972) Semantics of Natural Languages. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Pub.

Parthes, Roland (1967) Elements of Semiology. Lavers, Amette and Colin Smith (trans.) London. Cited in Struever, Nancy S. "The Study of Language and the Study of History" Journal of Interdisciplinary History, IV:3 (winter 1974) pp. 401-415.

Strawson, Peter Frederick. 1950. "On Referring." In Mind Vol. 59, 320-344.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1994 [1953]. Philosophical Investigations, trans., G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell.

2. Unpublished works:

Beldad, Ardion D. (2006) Misunderstanding and Non-understanding in the Usage of English as a Common Language in Helpdesk Encounters Involving Nonnative Speakers, An unpublished M. A. thesis submitted to The University of Twente, the Netherlands.

3. In French:

Saussure, Ferdinand de, (1916) Cours de la linguistique générale, Puplié Charles Baily et Albert Séchehaye avec la collaboration de Albert Riedlinger, Édition critique par Tullio de Mauro. Paris, Grand Bibliotéque Payot.

4. In Arabic:

زيادة، رضوان جودت، الإيديولوجيا المستعادة: "**النهضة**" **في الخطاب العربي المعاصر**" مجلة عالم الفكر، العدد 4، المجلد 33، أبريل– يونيو 2005.