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THE ROLE OF POETRY IN THE FORMATION OF THE ANDALUSIAN ARABIC GRAMMAR SCHOOL

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Abstract

The article examines the role of poetry in the formation and development of the Andalusian Arabic grammar school as one of the most significant intellectual trends of medieval Islamic civilization in al-Andalus. Unlike the Eastern grammatical tradition, which was primarily centered around the schools of Basra and Kufa, Andalusian grammarians approached linguistic theory through a synthesis of philology, poetry, rhetoric and literary criticism. Poetry functioned not merely as an artistic genre but also as a linguistic authority and methodological source for grammatical reasoning. Andalusian scholars widely employed poetic texts as evidence in the interpretation of syntactic structures, morphological variations and semantic subtleties.

The article also explores the contributions of major Andalusian scholars such as Ibn Mada al-Qurtubi, Ibn Malik and Abu Hayyan al-Andalusi. Their works illustrate how poetry became an essential instrument in the criticism of excessive grammatical analogy and in the establishment of a more text-oriented linguistic methodology. The study concludes that poetry played not only an aesthetic role but also an epistemological and methodological function in shaping the Andalusian Arabic grammar school and enriching the broader Arabic linguistic tradition.

Keywords: *Andalusian grammar school, Arabic poetry, Andalusian philology, Ibn Mada, Ibn Malik, muwashshah, Arabic linguistics, grammatical theory*

Introduction

The Andalusian Arabic grammar school occupies a distinctive place in the history of Arabic linguistic thought. Emerging within the multicultural environment of al-Andalus, this school developed under the influence of both Eastern Arabic grammatical traditions and the unique intellectual atmosphere of Islamic Spain. Unlike the grammatical circles of Basra and Kufa, which were largely dominat-

ed by rigid analogical reasoning and theoretical debates, Andalusian grammarians demonstrated greater sensitivity toward literary language, poetic creativity and practical linguistic usage. In this context, poetry became one of the principal foundations for grammatical analysis and linguistic interpretation.

The importance of poetry in Arabic linguistic culture dates back to the earliest stages of Arabic philology. Classical Arab

grammarians relied on pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry as the highest linguistic authority because poetic language preserved the authentic structures of Arabic before linguistic corruption and dialectal transformation. In al-Andalus, however, poetry acquired an even broader intellectual function. It was not only a source of linguistic citation but also a dynamic medium through which grammarians reconsidered the relationship between language, meaning and artistic expression.

I. Poetry as a Linguistic Authority in Andalusian Grammar

One of the defining characteristics of the Andalusian grammar school was its extensive use of poetic texts as grammatical evidence. Andalusian grammarians inherited the classical Arabic tradition of citing poetry to explain syntactic constructions and lexical meanings, yet they expanded this practice by incorporating a wider range of poetic materials into linguistic analysis. In addition to pre-Islamic poetry, Andalusian scholars also utilized Abbasid poetry, Andalusian lyrical compositions and even vernacular poetic genres (Chejne, 1974).

Poetry provided grammarians with authentic examples of linguistic usage that could not always be explained through strict analogical reasoning. The flexible structure of poetic language demonstrated the richness and adaptability of Arabic syntax. Andalusian grammarians often argued that language should be understood through actual usage rather than purely speculative rules. This perspective distinguished them from certain Eastern grammarians who tended to prioritize theoretical consistency over textual evidence.

The emergence of *muwashshah* and *zajal* poetry in al-Andalus significantly influenced grammatical thought. These poetic forms introduced new rhythmic patterns, colloquial expressions and innovative syntactic arrangements (Monroe, 1974). Although some conservative linguists criticized these genres for deviating from classical norms, Andalusian scholars frequently regarded them as evidence of the living vitality of the Arabic language. The incorporation of colloquial and regional linguistic features into poetic

composition encouraged grammarians to reconsider rigid distinctions between “correct” and “incorrect” usage.

II. The Influence of Poetry on Grammatical Methodology

The interaction between poetry and grammar in al-Andalus contributed to the emergence of a more flexible and text-centered linguistic methodology. Andalusian grammarians criticized excessive dependence on *qiyas* (analogy) and abstract grammatical causation. They argued that many grammatical explanations had become unnecessarily complex and detached from authentic linguistic practice (Menocal, 2002).

One of the most influential figures in this intellectual movement was Ibn Mada al-Qurtubi. In his famous critique of traditional grammar, he rejected many speculative principles developed by Eastern grammarians and advocated a simpler approach based primarily on actual linguistic evidence (Ibn Mada al-Qurtubi, 1982). Poetry occupied a central position in his methodology because poetic texts represented naturally occurring language rather than artificially constructed grammatical examples. Ibn Mada considered literary usage superior to excessive theoretical abstraction.

The works of Ibn Malik further demonstrate the importance of poetry in Andalusian grammatical scholarship. His famous grammatical poem *Alfiyya Ibn Malik* transformed grammar itself into poetic form. This work illustrates the deep integration of literary creativity and linguistic instruction within Andalusian intellectual culture (Ibn Malik, 2004). Through verse, grammatical principles became easier to memorize, transmit and interpret. Poetry thus functioned not only as evidence for grammar but also as a pedagogical tool for grammatical education.

Abu Hayyan al-Andalusi also emphasized the role of textual analysis in linguistic interpretation. His commentaries reveal extensive engagement with poetic sources and rhetorical structures. For Abu Hayyan, poetry represented the highest manifestation of linguistic eloquence and therefore provided essential insight into the nature of Arabic syntax and semantics.

III. Poetry, Cultural Identity and Linguistic Innovation

Poetry in al-Andalus fulfilled not only linguistic and literary functions but also cultural and civilizational roles. Andalusian poets expressed the intellectual identity of Islamic Spain through innovative stylistic forms and symbolic language. Grammarians, in turn, recognized poetry as a reflection of social and linguistic transformation within Andalusian society.

The urban culture of al-Andalus also shaped poetic language. Courtly life, musical gatherings, gardens and philosophical discussions generated a highly sophisticated literary atmosphere (Versteegh, 1997). Poets experimented with imagery, rhythm and syntactic arrangement in ways that expanded the expressive possibilities of Arabic. Grammarians studied these innovations carefully because they revealed new dimensions of linguistic structure and stylistic variation.

The role of poetry became especially important during periods of political instability and cultural decline. As Muslim rule in al-Andalus weakened, poetry increasingly functioned as a medium of memory, nostalgia and intellectual resistance. Grammarians preserved poetic texts not only for linguistic purposes but also as symbols of Andalusian cultural heritage. Through poetic preserva-

tion, linguistic scholarship became intertwined with historical consciousness.

Conclusion

The formation of the Andalusian Arabic grammar school cannot be fully understood without recognizing the central role of poetry in its intellectual development. Poetry served as a linguistic authority, a methodological foundation and a pedagogical instrument within Andalusian grammatical thought. Unlike more rigid grammatical traditions, Andalusian scholars emphasized textual evidence, stylistic flexibility and the living nature of language.

The works of Ibn Mada al-Qurtubi, Ibn Malik and Abu Hayyan al-Andalusi demonstrate that Andalusian grammar was not simply a continuation of Eastern linguistic traditions but a unique intellectual synthesis shaped by the cultural environment of al-Andalus. Poetry allowed grammarians to move beyond purely abstract theorization and toward a more dynamic understanding of language as a living artistic and social phenomenon.

For this reason, poetry played a decisive role in the formation of the Andalusian Arabic grammar school and contributed significantly to the enrichment of Arabic linguistic and literary civilization as a whole.

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