Grammar and Polyphony

From Ibn Makkī's Tathqīf al-Lisān to Modern Readings of Laḥn al-ʿĀmma Literature

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بوليفونية القواعد: من "تثقيف اللسان" لابن مكي الصقلي
إلى القراءات الحديثة في مؤلفات "لحن العامة"

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Fadi Awad ELSAID

PhD Candidate, University of Connecticut,
fadi.elsaid@uconn.edu

Abstract: As the sole grammatical treatise and historiographical source for medieval Sicilian Arabic, *Tathqīf al-Lisān wa-Talqīḥ al-Janān*, authored by Ibn Makkī al-Ṣiqillī (d. 501/1107–8), has occupied a central position in the history of *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* literature and Arabic linguistics in general. And yet modern scholars did not register enough of the underlying assumptions about language internal to Ibn Makkī's methodology and logic. In this paper, I argue that his methodological insistence on cataloging the multiple grammars of spoken, dialectical Arabic reflects a recognition of the intrinsically diachronous and polyphonic nature of Arabic. Resisting a conception of language as static and normative, Ibn Makkī refrains from labeling spoken expression as categorically "incorrect." This paper first studies the methodological shift in *Tathqīf al-Lisān* from a prescriptive to a descriptive approach to language centered on linguistic polyphony. From the formal organization in *Tathqīf al-Lisān* to its various methodological innovations, this article attempts to address significant shortcomings in modern scholarship on this grammatical treatise. Ultimately this paper reads the *Tathqīf al-Lisān* not merely as a repository of Sicilian Arabic semantic or morphological data, but rather as a milestone in the history of methodologies in premodern writings on *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma*.

ملخص: لأن "تثقيف اللسان وتلقيح الجنان" لابن مكي الصقلي (ت. 501 هـ/1107–8 م)، يعَدّ المعالجة النحوية الوحيدة والمصدر التأريخي الرئيسي للعربية الصقلية في العصور الوسطى، فقد احتل الكتاب مكانة مركزية في تاريخ أدبيات "لحن العامة" ومن ثم تاريخ كتابة القواعد العربية بشكل عام. ومع ذلك، فإن اللغويين المحدثين لم يدركوا بشكل كافٍ منطق ابن مكي ولا افتراضاته المنهجية حول اللغة وحول وظيفة القواعد. في هذه الورقة، أدفع بأن الاختيار المنهجي لابن مكي في تناول "لحن العامة في صقلية" يعكس وعيًا بزمنية اللغة وبتعدد مستوياتها لم يتحقق لدى معاصريه ولا كثيرًا من سابقيه في هذا المضمار. من خلال مقاومته لفهم اللغة ككيان ثابت لا يقبل التحول، يمتنع ابن مكي عن تصنيف التعبير العامي على أنه "خطأ" من حيث المبدأ كما جرت العادة في أدبيات "لحن العامة". تقوم هذه الورقة أولاً بدراسة التحول المنهجي في "تثقيف اللسان" من النهج المعياري إلى نهج وصفي للغة يركز على مفهوم التعدد اللغوي. برصدها لخصوصية ترتيب الموضوعات اللغوية في "تثقيف اللسان" إلى الابتكارات المنهجية المتنوعة فيه، تحاول هذه المقالة إكمال بعض ما أغفلته البحوث اللغوية الحديثة حول هذا العمل النحوي. بشكل أعم، فإن القراءة التي تقدمها هذه الورقة لكتاب "تثقيف اللسان" تتجاوز اعتبار الكتاب مستودعًا للبيانات اللغوية أو الصرفية الخاصة بالعربية الصقلية، وتنظر إليه بدلاً من ذلك كمحطة هامة في تاريخ منهجية تناول القواعد في أدبيات "لحن العامة".

كلمات مفتاحية: ابن مكي الصقلي، لحن العامة، العربية الصقلية، علم اللهجات، اللغويات الاجتماعية، تاريخ كتابة القواعد العربية، القواعد الوصفية، القواعد المعيارية.

INTRODUCTION

Around 1064 CE, four years after the Normans began to seize Arab fortifications along the Sicilian coast, Ibn Makkī al-Ṣiqillī completed the

draft of a grammatical treatise on medieval Siculo-Arabic entitled *Tathqīf al-Lisān wa-Talqīḥ al-Janān*.[1] While Arabic remained in use in Sicily until at least the end of the thirteenth century,[2] the fading of Arab hegemony limited opportunities for additional such studies: Ibn Makkī's work has thus

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[1] Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar b. Khalaf Ibn Makkī al-Māzarī al-Ṣiqillī (d. 501/1107–8) was a celebrated Sicilian grammarian, lexicographer, and Qadi. Reinhard Weipert, "Ibn Makkī", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, (ed.) Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Devin J. Stewart. Consulted online on 01 January 2024 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_30650> Apart from knowing that he lived in the period of the Norman occupation of Sicily, then, "due apparently to political pressure", he had to "emigrate to Tunis for an appointment there to the office of *qāḍī*", we don't know much more about Ibn Makkī and no books other than *Tathqīf al-Lisān wa-Talqīḥ al-Janān* were attributed to him. See Dionisius Agius, *Siculo Arabic*, (New York: Routledge, 1996), 149-150. According to Peter Molan, and ʿAbd al-Qādir Sallāmī who both relied on ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Maṭar, Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. 463/1071), who gave feedback to Ibn Makkī on a draft of *Tathqīf al-Lisān*, left Sicily to Andalusia in 1068, the book should have been written before this date. See also: Ibn Makkī al-Ṣiqillī, *Tathqīf al-Lisān wa-Talqīḥ al-Janān*, (ed.) Muṣṭafā ʿAṭā, *(Beirut:* Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1986), 3. See also Peter Molan, *Medieval Western Arabic: Reconstructing Elements of the Dialects of Al-Andalus, Sicily and North Africa from the Laḥn al-ʿĀmma Literature,* Unpublished dissertation, (Berkely: U. of California Press, 1978), 10. Sallāmī adds that since Ibn Makkī pays homage to the famous Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī (d. 456/1063–4 or 463/1071) in the book, *Tathqīf al-Lisān* should have been written after Ibn Rashīq's death in 1064. ʿAbd al-Qādir Sallāmī, *Min Turāth al-Laḥn fī l-Baḥr al-Shāmī*: *Tathqīf al-Lisān wa-Talqīḥ al-Janān* by Ibn Makkī al-Ṣiqillī, *Majallat al-Dirāsāt al-Lughawiyyah wa-l-ʾAdabiyyah*, (Ouargla: U. of Kasdi Merbah, June 2013) 116 – 127. Ibn Makkī left Sicily to Tunis a year later. See Iḥsān ʿAbbās, *Al-ʿArab fī Ṣiqilliyya*, (Beirut: Dār al-Ṯaqāfa, 1975), 188.

[2] Jeremy Johns, *Arabic Administration in Norman Sicily*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 32–33. For a narrative of the conquest, see William Granara, *Narrating Muslim Sicily: War and Peace in the Medieval Mediterranean World*, (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2019). As a language of Sicily, Arabic remained in use until at least the end of the 13th century. *Ibid.* See also Agius, *op. cit.* 8:. "Historically, […] Normans never broke the attributes of Arabization and Islamization which […] had infiltrated too deeply into the island's physical and moral qualities to be wiped out." See also Alex Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily*: *Arabic Speakers and the End of Islam*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 98: "Islamic culture and the Arabic language had been a central component of the [Norman] kingdom's population and the Norman kingship itself, […] Arabic was vital to the kingdom's administration." […] "On a general level, if a turning point was required, then 1182 may be regarded as one in the decline of both Greek and Arabic as the languages of administration in Sicily, although the boundary register genre with its similar modes of expression continued into the later medieval period through the translation of registers." *Ibid.* 139-140.

proven to be the sole historiographical reference on dialectical Arabic during the medieval period on the island.[3] This treatise has occupied a central position in the history of *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* literature and Arabic linguistics in general. And yet modern scholars have failed to register the underlying assumptions about language internal to Ibn Makkī's methodology and logic. Analyzing the method and argument of *Tathqīf al-Lisān*, this article highlights what has been overlooked in modern scholarship on this treatise, contending that Ibn Makkī's examination of linguistic polyphony in the Sicilian Arabic case and his concomitant refusal to disqualify spoken language variations as "incorrect" reflect a theoretical view of language as intrinsically dynamic.[4] By admitting the differences in language varieties, Ibn Makkī makes the radical argument that the science of grammar must attend to the multiplicity and variability of language as its object of study, thus privileging language usage over its prescriptive ideal. By shifting the grammarian's approach in writing about *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* (the traditional way of incorporating the dialectal and spoken varieties), *Tathqīf al-Lisān* thus presents a turning point in the history of this literature, and possibly, in Arabic grammar writing broadly speaking. Although Ibn Makkī was not the first descriptive Arabic grammarian, he might have been the first grammarian to claim that dialectal (*ʿĀmma)* varieties might even be more "correct" than the claimed higher variety (*Khāṣṣa)*, as this article will show.[5]

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[3] Unlike al-Andalus, no Arabic folk poetry from the Medieval Sicily has survived. Moreover, there is an attested particular lack of Sicilian dialectal data in archaeological evidence. To compare with the case in Andalusi Arabic, see Otto Zwartjes, "Andalusi Arabic", in *The Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, (eds.) Kees Versteegh *et al.* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1: 96 – 101. See also, Federico Corriente, "Andalusi Arabic" in *The Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, *ibid.,* 1: 101 – 11.

[4] The term "polyphony" has a long history in literary theory and in linguistic theory. In this article, I use it as a way of indicating that as language varieties cannot be seen out of their multiplicity and their hybridity, the ultimate goal of grammar writing should be capturing this polyphony. For a brief introduction to the history of the concept, see, Christian Plantin, *Dictionnaire de l'argumentation*, (Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2016), 322–25.

[5] For more on the distinction between descriptive and prescriptive grammar writing in the Arabc tradition, see Jean-Patrick Guillaume, "Grammatical Tradition: Approach", in *The Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, (eds.) Kees Versteegh *et al.* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 2: 175–83.

True enough, Ibn Makkī's introduction justifies his work by expressing concern over the infiltration of "commoners' errors into the language of intellectuals."[6] Even so, Ibn Makkī's recognition of varieties in the same introduction occurs only while he is asserting that the "errors" of Sicilian Arabic are different from the "errors" of other Arabic dialectal varieties. Composed during a predominantly prescriptive moment in the history of *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* literature, Ibn Makkī likely felt compelled to gesture at this tradition. I argue, however, that his methodology transcends this stated adherence to the prescriptive paradigm.

Chapters 31 to 34 of *Tathqīf al-Lisān* mark a departure from the conventional approach seen in *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* treatises up to that point. Whereas the typical pattern involved linguists prescribing a "correct" form and then criticizing both the *ʿĀmma* and the *Khāṣṣa* for their variations, Ibn Makkī justifies the language use of the *ʿĀmma* by identifying a corresponding form in the preconquest "pure" language. Even though Ibn Makkī may not explicitly announce a rupture in the genre, and even if he always gestures at a classically "correct form" in the lexical items under study, his approach represents a significant change. By doing so, *Tathqīf al-Lisān* sows the seeds of a new methodology in *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* literature that would flourish in Tunisia and Egypt a few centuries later. Thus, instead of viewing *Tathqīf al-Lisān* merely as a repository of Sicilian Arabic semantic or morphological data, this paper reads it within the history of methodologies in premodern writings on *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma*.

A further methodological innovation of *Tathqīf al-Lisān* neglected by scholars is its structural organization around grammatical elements that emphasize linguistic polyphony, namely phonology, morphology, and semantics. To demonstrate and analyze the novelty of Ibn Makkī's approach, I compare the structure of his work with several preceding and subsequent treatises on *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma*. The arrangement of *Tathqīf al-Lisān*'s into the triad of phonology, morphology, and semantics reflects an attempt to codify grammar as a descriptive rather than prescriptive discipline, enabling the science of linguistics to cope not only with regional

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[6] See Ibn Makkī, *op. cit.,* 15–6.

linguistic differences, but also with varying social registers and professional idioms.

This paper engages closely with scholarship on Ibn Makkī during the second half of the twentieth century, coinciding with the emergence of interest in *Tathqīf al-Lisān* within the field of Arabic linguistics, to shine light on the radical nature of his contribution. For organizational purposes, this interest can be divided into two phases: an "editing phase" spanning the 1940s to the 1970s and a "sociolinguistic phase" from the 1970s to the 2000s. During the editing phase, scholars, in their effort to edit premodern Arabic canonical treatises and compile lists of *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* treatises, read Ibn Makkī's treatise through the lens of what they considered "modern linguistics." In this phase, I argue, scholarship was to some extent led away from Ibn Makkī's innovation due for two reasons: first, they insisted on using a modernist vocabulary and positivist paradigm in their evaluation and categorization of *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* literature; and, second, they were led astray by an admittedly misleading statement in the introduction of *Tathqīf al-Lisān*, in which Ibn Makkī affirms that "commoner's errors have become recurrent in intellectuals' language."[7] Consequently, scholars of the "editing phase" attributed Ibn Makkī's effort to a conservative linguistic attitude aiming to preserve the "purity" of the standard variety over the language of "common" use. Furthermore, this article illustrates how, towards the end of the twentieth century, amid a growing interest in Arabic historical dialectology, a sociolinguistic perspective on the history of *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* literature emerged. Scholars in this sociolinguistic phase approached Ibn Makkī's work with the aim of accurately portraying the functioning of the Arabic language in medieval Sicily. The discouraging results of this effort has, by the early twenty-first century, yielded an unfortunately dismissive attitude towards research on *Tathqīf al-Lisān* and *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* literature in general.[8]

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[7] See Ibn Makkī, *op. cit.* 15–16.
[8] See Georgine Ayoub, "Laḥn," in *The Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics, op. cit.*, 2: 628 –34. See also: Alex Metcalfe, "Sicily," in *The Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics,* ibid., 4: 215 –19.

The initial section of this paper engages with scholarship on Ibn Makkī during the editing and sociolinguistic phases of scholarship during the second half of the twentieth century. Far from asserting that the conclusions of these two phases of scholarship were incorrect, I attend to what scholars have failed to register in the *Tathqīf al-Lisān* – namely its method and argument. In the second section, I compare Ibn Makkī's approach with those of other grammarians written canonical treatises on Arabic grammar in the eleventh century CE, pointing to the implications of Ibn Makkī's conception of language on his conception and organization of the science of grammar.

Ultimately this paper reads the *Tathqīf al-Lisān* not merely as a repository of Sicilian Arabic semantic or morphological data, but rather as a milestone in the history of methodologies in premodern writings on *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma*. For Ibn Makkī, I argue, the science of grammar must acknowledge the polyphonous articulation of language between its synchronic and diachronic, standardized, and dialectical, and written and spoken forms.

I. MODERN CONCERNS ABOUT *TATHQĪF AL-LISĀN*

A.   *Tathqīf al-Lisān* in the Editing Phase

The focus of modern linguists on the genre of *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* began as early as 1871, when Thorbecke first proposed a list compiling 22 names of authors of treatises dedicated to the topic in his edition of *Durrat al-Ghawwāṣ* of al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516/1122). [9] Over time, Thorbecke's list underwent several modifications by various authors, including Goldziher in 1873 and 1881, ʿIsā ʾIskandar al-Maʿlūf in 1934, Umberto Rizzitano in 1956, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Maṭar in 1964, and Ramaḍān ʿAbd al-Tawwāb in 1967, among many others. [10]

By the mid-1950s, there was a notable increase in focus on *Laḥn l-ʿĀmma*. In 1956, the Egyptian lexicologist Hussein Nassar briefly proposed

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[9] See Ramaḍān ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, *Laḥn l-ʿĀmma wa at-taṭawwur al-lughawī,* Zahrāʾ (Cairo: al-Sharq, 2000), 72-3. See also, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Maṭar, *Laḥn l-ʿĀmma fī Ḍauʾ al-Dirāsāt al-Lughawiyya al-Ḥadītha,* (Cairo: al-Qawmiyya lil-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr, 1966), 55 – 67. Umberto Rizzitano, "*Il Tathqīf al-Lisān wa-Talqīḥ al-Janān* di Abu Ḥafṣ ʿUmar Ibn Makkī", *Studia Orientalia,* 1956, 5: 193–213.
[10] *Ibid.*

a taxonomy of the methodologies employed in medieval treatises.[11] Of particular significance to our topic, a heightened interest in Ibn Makkī's *Tathqīf l-Lisān* had already taken root by this time. In the same year, 1956, the Italian linguist Umberto Rizzitano edited *Tathqīf l-Lisān*, prefacing it with a detailed study of *Laḥn l-ʿĀmma* literature. Subsequently, in 1959, the historian of literature Ihsan Abbas briefly points out the considerable value of *Tathqīf l-Lisān* for understanding the intellectual life of Muslim Sicily.[12]

During the 1960s, two Egyptian linguists worked intensively but independently on *Laḥn l-ʿĀmma* treatises, with a specific focus on *Tathqīf l-Lisān*. In 1964, Ramaḍān ʿAbd al-Tawwāb launched a book series specialized in editing medieval literature on *Laḥn l-ʿĀmma,* in which Ibn Makkī's *Tathqīf l-Lisān* was edited.[13] In 1967, ʿAbd al-Tawwāb published "*Laḥn l-ʿĀmmah wa-l-Taṭawwur al-Lughawī*," providing a comprehensive account of the genre's history. By the time ʿAbd al-Tawwāb published the first title of his series, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Maṭar had completed his dissertation on *Laḥn l-ʿĀmmah* at Cairo University, although it would not be published until 1966.[14] Similar to ʿAbd al-Tawwāb's work, Maṭar published the first part of his dissertation under the title *Laḥn l-ʿĀmma fī Ḍauʾ al-Dirāsāt l-Lughawiya al-Ḥadītha.*[15] This was followed by his editions of three medieval treatises, including *Tathqīf al-Lisān*.[16]

While differing in specifics, linguists interested in *Tathqīf al-Lisān* in the mid-20th century were primarily concerned with the following three questions:

Firstly, building on the efforts of the preceding generation, mid-20th-century linguists devoted considerable attention to compiling lists of medieval works related to Laḥn al-ʿĀmmah. Rizzitano created a comprehensive list of primary contributions to the genre, identifying 25

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[11] Hussayn Naṣṣār, *al-Muʿjam al-ʿArbī: Nashʾatuh wa-Taṭawwuruh*, (Cairo: Dār Miṣr lil-Ṭibāʿa, 1988), 78–94.
[12] Iḥsān ʿAbbās, *op. cit.*
[13] See RamaḍānʿAbd al-Tawwāb, *op. cit.* 235. ʿAbd al-Tawwāb states that he had edited the Sicilian treatise which was to be published in 1967. See also, ʿAbd al-Qādir Sallāmī, *op. cit.*
[14] ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Maṭar, *op. cit.*
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] See Maṭar, *op. cit.* 11.

surviving and 17 lost titles. Both Maṭar and ʿAbd al-Tawwāb further refined Rizzitano's list. ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, in particular, presented his own list of 57 treatises, a compilation that has not been academically challenged since that time.[17]

Secondly, emphasizing that the primary concern of *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* authors was more normative than descriptive and advocating for a modern linguistics approach, the opening statement of ʿAbd al-Tawwāb's account on *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* was: "This research aims at studying what remains of *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* heritage in the light of linguistic evolution rules as developed by modern linguists."[18] Before delving into the detailed analysis of the 57 works he listed, ʿAbd al-Tawwāb dedicated a quarter of his book to the classification of "linguistic evolution rules according to modern linguistics." [19] Maṭar, whose book is titled "*Laḥn al-ʿĀmma fī Ḍauʾ al-Dirāsāt al-Lughawiyya al-Ḥadītha*," (*Laḥn al-ʿĀmma in Light of Modern Linguistic Studies*), also sought to evaluate the material of *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* treatises from a "modern linguistic perspective" to examine what insights these treatises could offer about the evolution of Arabic.[20]

Thirdly, this generation of modern linguists in the editing phase, including Rizzitano, Maṭar, and ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, based an important portion of their analysis on Ibn Makkī's introduction, where he criticizes the proliferation of *Laḥn*. They attributed Ibn Makkī's perspective to the prevalent conventional objective of medieval Arabic grammar writing, namely the challenging task of preserving a nostalgically idealized, universal "pure Arabic."[21] The three authors commented on Ibn Makkī's adherence to the overarching narrative of Arabic language history, as articulated in earlier canonical grammatical treatises. According to this narrative, as elucidated by Rizzitano, Arabs spoke a "pure" language until the second century of *Hijra*, when the rapid spread of the language led to the "corruption" of this pristine form by *Laḥn*. The modern authors, in their

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[17] See Rizzitano, *op. cit.* and ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, *op. cit.* 108.
[18] ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, *op. cit.* 7.
[19] *Ibid.* 39 – 66.
[20] Maṭar, *op. cit.* 11.
[21] ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, *op. cit.* 235-45.

analyses, directed their readers to the extensive material within medieval Arabic historiography that lamented *Laḥn*, driven by the motive of "*mantenere alla lingua araba la purezza delle origini*" (preserving the purity of the origins in Arabic language), as articulated by Rizzitano, who placed Ibn Makkī in this narrative.[22]

By contrasting the meanings of "*ʿĀmma*" and "*Khāṣṣa*" according to medieval treatises, linguists of the editing phase concluded that *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* treatises, including Ibn Makkī's, were not primarily focused on documenting dialectal occurrences. Instead, they were aimed at an elite audience of intellectuals and professionals, with the goal of training them to use Arabic correctly by avoiding what was claimed as common speech errors.[23] While the later scholarship would further develop the distinction between understanding '*ʿĀmma*' as the source of the material and '*Khāṣṣa*' as the target audience of the treatises, it was within this generation that the debate about the different meanings of these two terms took its modern shape. ʿAbd al-Tawwāb argued that '*ʿĀmma*' actually meant the educated class, as medieval linguists did not pay attention to the lower classes. In contrast, Maṭar posited that "*ʿĀmma*" referred to the lower classes.[24]

In summary, Rizzitano, ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, and Maṭar undertook a noteworthy endeavor in editing Ibn Makkī's work, along with other medieval authors of *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* treatises. They also made a significant contribution by compiling comprehensive lists of medieval treatises and initiating a comparison of the materials and methodologies of these treatises. Furthermore, they identified the primary questions that influenced subsequent scholarship in this field. Despite attributing medieval literature on *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* to the broader tradition of prescriptive normative grammar writing, Arabists of the mid-20th century held the belief that deeper insights into medieval dialects could be gleaned from *Laḥn al-*

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[22] See Rizzitano, *op. cit.* See Maṭar, *op. cit.,* 29–32, 38. See also ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, *op. cit., 66-72.*
[23] Maṭar, *op. cit.,* 13, 40.
[24] ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, *op. cit.,* 70. For a more detailed discussion, see Muḥammad Aḥmad Qaddūr, *Muṣannafāt al-Laḥn wa-l-Tathqīf al-Lughawī ḥattā al-Qarn al-ʿĀshir al-Hijrī*, (Damascus: Syrian ministry of culture, 1996), 57–8, 498–9.

ʿĀmma treatises.[25] To illustrate this viewpoint, Ramaḍān ʿAbd al-Tawwāb highlighted the distinction between *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* and the main tradition of positive grammar, stating that Arab grammarians after the second century of *Hijra* did not focus on documenting the language's evolution.[26] Instead, these grammarians perceived their task to be the reorganization of material collected by the first generation of lexicographers, representing "the old language" of linguistically pure tribes on the peninsula. ʿAbd al-Tawwāb affirmed that to gain insights into pre-modern common Arabic, one had to rely on the "brief fragmented comments" provided by authors of *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* treatises.[27]

B.   *Tathqīf al-Lisān* and the sociolinguistic phase

Shifting their attention to the endeavor of reconstructing medieval Arabic dialects, the subsequent generation of modern linguists took a step further in the study of medieval literature on *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma*, with a particular focus on Ibn Makkī's treatise. In his dissertation dated 1978, Peter Molan ventured into comparing the data found in medieval treatises on *Laḥn al-ʿĀmmah* that dealt with medieval western Arabic dialects to evidence from both eastern and western modern dialectal Arabic.[28] Adhering to Rizzitano's view, Molan regarded Sicilian Arabic as a branch of Western Arabic Dialects. Consequently, he concentrated on collectively studying medieval treatises on *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* originating from Andalusia, Sicily, and Tunis. Molan specified his objective as follows: providing a general description of the nature of the genre, organizing the material geographically, and analyzing the data found in works addressing modern western Arabic dialects to deduce "something of the nature of this linguistic group."[29]

Affirming that the exclusive objective of medieval treatises on *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* was to specify deviations from Classical Arabic and promote what grammarians deemed as the "correct form," Molan concluded that Ibn

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[25] See Maṭar's comment on Ibn Makki in Maṭar, *op. cit.,* 38.
[26] ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, *op. cit.,* 69.
[27] ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, *op. cit.,* 235.
[28] Molan, *op. cit.,* 4-5.
[29] *Ibid.* 3.

Makkī, akin to other medieval authors of the genre, acknowledged regional and diachronic differences between dialects.[30] Upon delving into the typology of *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* treatises, Molan argued that the grammatical comments made by these medieval authors "bear little on our attempt to gather insights into the nature of the medieval dialects."[31] Instead of focusing on their comments, Molan opted to examine the items cited in these treatises. To further this investigation, he embarked on a comparison between the material of *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* and contemporary western Arabic dialects to construct his narrative of the socio-linguistic development of this linguistic group.[32] Thus, Molan's work serves as a bridge between the editing phase and the sociolinguistic phase of dealing with Ibn Makkī's treatise.

As articulated by Alex Metcalfe, in the late 1980s and 1990s, a new theory emerged, asserting that the spread of Arabic and the subsequent development of Arabic dialects were attributed to processes of pidginization and creolization.[33] A notable representative of this later generation is Dionisius Agius, who, in 1996, significantly expanded the inquiries into Ibn Makkī's work. Metcalfe praised Agius's work as "the most ambitious linguistic work of its type to date," wherein Agius ingeniously argued that the hybrid forms found in some Sicilian documents were indicative of a pidginized form of communication on the island that blended elements of Arabic and Romance dialects.[34]

Rather than comparing the material of *Tathqīf al-Lisān* to contemporary Western Arabic Dialects like Molan, Agius took a more comprehensive approach by "combining evidence from Sicilian and Maltese dialects with data from the *Jarāʾid* private documents and the work of Ibn Makkī."[35] Based on this amalgamation of evidence, Agius introduced a new narrative for the linguistic history of Medieval Sicily. According to this narrative, a blend of Arabic and Berber had encountered the Romance

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[30] *Ibid.* 39 – 40.
[31] *Ibid.* 67.
[32] *Ibid.* 34.
[33] Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily, op. cit.,* 143.
[34] *Ibid.*
[35] *Ibid.*

dialect spoken in Sicily before Arabic became the administrative language and the official language of Islamic Sicily.[36] Subsequently, this Arabic underwent developments, acquiring new features due to its interaction with Romance dialects, resulting in a linguistic register that Agius termed *Siculo-Laḥn*. He defined *Siculo-Laḥn* as Arabic spoken by both Arabophones and "Sicilians who had acculturated entirely to Islam through marriage or conversion."[37] Expanding on this understanding, Agius made a distinction between *Siculo-Laḥn* Arabic and "*Siculo-Arabic*," which he characterized as "a hybrid composed of Arabic and Romance features pidginized then creolized."[38] A third variety introduced by Agius is Siculo-Middle Arabic, described as "the only written type that demonstrates a mixed element of Classical Arabic and dialectal features."[39] This last variety is exemplified in the language of The Sicilian *Jarāʾid*, to which Agius devoted a linguistically detailed analysis.[40] Within this diverse linguistic landscape of coexisting or mixed languages, Agius noted that "a form of high Arabic existed among the fairly educated people who constituted a minority, whereas the masses of locals spoke a form of low Arabic."[41]

Ibn Makkī's treatise, according to Agius, serves as a testimony to both high and low Arabic registers within this pluriglossic community, where Arabs, Berbers, and Siculo-Muslims shared the same high register but were distinguished by their low registers.[42] This socio-linguistic description provided Agius with a starting point to examine *Tathqīf al-Lisān*, to which he dedicates two extensive chapters in his book. Agius initiates this endeavor by asserting that it is "possible, with certain limitations, to trace back to a dialectal origin by comparing the data against itself and against parallel data from the medieval period."[43] Agius compares

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[36] See Agius: "If we compare the data given by Ibn Makkī with Berber and Romance gender assignment, we will find that most Romance cognates share their feminine gender with the Siculo-Laḥn Arabic while the Berber does not" (Agius, *op. cit.,* 267).

[37] *Ibid.* 140-1

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] *Ibid.* 444-5.

[41] *Ibid.* 123.

[42] *Ibid.* 449.

[43] *Ibid.* 149.

Ibn Makkī's data to evidence from the Maltese dialect and material from the *Jarāʾid*, drawing comparisons, too, with other Western *Laḥn* treatises, such as Ibn Hishām al-Lakhmī's (d. 577/1181-1182) *Madḫal ilā Taqwīm al-Lisān wa-Taʿlīm al-Bayān*.[44] Despite his fascination with Ibn Makkī's work, Agius encounters one disappointment after another in his investigation. First, the ambiguous meanings of ʿ*Āmma* and *Khāṣṣa* persisted.[45] Second, Ibn Makkī exhibited no genuine desire to describe the Arabic of Sicily.[46] Third, the morphological information gathered from *Tathqīf al-Lisān* provides limited guidance in reconstructing morphological rules in *Siculo-Laḥn* Arabic.[47] Fourth, similar to other medieval literature on *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma*, there is a lack of syntactic evidence in Ibn Makkī's treatise.[48] Faced with these challenges and others, Agius concludes that "the merit of this treatise is that we are able to form a picture of the dialectal consonantal system allowing some reservations on certain Romance interferences."[49] Ultimately, Agius reaches the unsatisfying conclusion that relying on Ibn Makkī in the project of reconstructing Medieval Sicilian linguistic features has no promising future.[50]

During the same period, other scholars challenged Agius's perspectives on the distinction between ʿ*Āmma* and *Khāṣṣa*, as well as his views on the influence of Romance languages on the Arabic of Sicily. Annliese Nef (1997) contends that Agius's claims lack convincing arguments for the weight assigned to the Romance influence on Arabic. Instead, Nef proposes giving more consideration to the Greek element.[51] However, Nef ultimately arrives at the same conclusion as Agius, asserting that the data and material quoted in Ibn Makkī's work do not necessarily

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[44] *Ibid.* 125.
[45] *Ibid.* 154.
[46] *Ibid.* 158.
[47] *Ibid.* 168.
[48] *Ibid.* 170.
[49] *Ibid.* 449.
[50] *Ibid.* 448.
[51] Annliese Nef, « L'analyse du *Tatthqīf al-Lisān* d'Ibn Makkī et son intérêt pour la connaissance de la variante sicilienne de l'arabe : problèmes méthodologiques », *Oriente Moderno*, (Rome : Istituto per l'Oriente C. A. Nallino, 1997), *Nuova serie*, Anno 16 (77), Nr. 1 (1997), 1-17.

differ from other works of the same genre treating Maghribi Arabic. This lack of originality, according to Nef, renders the material insufficient to provide insights into any precise linguistic situation in Sicily.[52]

By the beginning of the 21st century, the scholarly interest in *Laḥn l-ʿĀmma* and, specifically, in *Tathqīf al-Lisān* had relinquished the task of reconstructing Medieval Arabic dialects relying on *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* treatises.[53] In 2003, Alex Metcalfe argues that "the work of Ibn Makkī is, unfortunately, a linguistic minefield. Not only were his aims as a prescriptive grammarian unclear, but his key distinction in pronunciation between the 'the general population' *ʿĀmma* and 'the social elite' *Khāṣṣa* is so vague as to be barely coherent now, if indeed, it ever was coherent."[54] Metcalfe notes that although Agius's '*Siculo-Arabic*' indirectly sheds light on the many complexities of this most deceptive of subjects, many Arabists have come to challenge the pidginization theory as the medium for the spread of Arabic in general.[55] Similarly, Metcalfe adds, studies based on *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* literature have generally turned out to be disappointing, and it was accepted by 2003 that "it would be wrong to assume that we can reconstruct the vernacular on the basis of this material."[56]

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[52] *Ibid.*

[53] See Ayoub, *op. cit.* Metcalfe, "Sicily", *op. cit.* and Metcalfe, *Muslims and Christians in Norman Sicily*, *op. cit.* 142.

[54] *Ibid.*

[55] *Ibid.*143: "As he considers his work to stop well short of a pidginization theory in Norman Sicily, he argues that during the ninth to thirteenth centuries there were sufficient conditions to have given rise to a long period of bilingualism of varying types."

[56] *Ibid.*This does not mean the interest in *Laḥn l-ʿĀmma* has entirely vanished by that time. Two examples I would still like to mention are: First, the work of Qaddūr 1996, *op. cit.* which, although written from a conservative perspective, provides detailed comparative insights on which I relied often in drafting this paper. Second, the use of *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* literature in scholarship concerned with the theory of "Language Error Monitor". As this exceeds the scope of this paper, more details could be found in: Ahmed Guerriche, "The Methodology of Monitoring Linguistic Errors and its Classification and Treatment: A Comparative Approach between Ancient Arabic Studies and Modern Western Studies", (Alger: *Jīl for literary studies*, 2019),
URL: , last viewed January 1, 2024. See also, Mohamed Sami Anwar, "The Legitimate Fathers of Speech Errors", *Historiographia Linguistica,* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1981), 8:2/3, 249–265.

Having traced the history of modern research on Ibn Makkī's treatise, I will now suggest some correctives to the methods and aims of the principal scholarly actors. The mid-20th century generation, primarily concerned with editing the medieval treatise and applying "modern linguistics" to Ibn Makkī's work, focused their comments on scattered examples from *Tathqīf l-Lisān*. These comments were limited to explaining the concept of "semantic evolution" in modern linguistics, as offered by ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, or the concept of "correctness criteria," as proposed by Maṭar. Secondly, the subsequent generation, primarily focused on determining the sociolinguistic significance of Ibn Makkī's material and comments, studied his work within the context of other treatises dealing with Western Arabic Dialects. Consequently, the attention of both generations was diverted from providing a more detailed evolution of the art of writing on *Laḥn* as represented by Ibn Makkī. As such, one may claim that the modern tradition of studies on *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* and *Tathqīf al-Lisān* did not sufficiently explore the influence of earlier (particularly Eastern Arabic) treatises on Ibn Makkī nor the influence of his work on later treatises.

II. INNOVATION IN *TATHQĪF AL-LISĀN'S* METHODOLOGY

While I am convinced that an exhaustive automated exercise comparing the methodology, approach, and material of *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* authors should be conducted, I believe introducing a sample of what this comparison would reveal can be done in the rest of this paper. For the sake of brevity, I will limit this work to comparing Ibn Makkī to his predecessor authors. Such a comparison serves two main objectives: First, it helps situate our author's approach on the continuum of prescriptive to descriptive grammar. This aids any future project interested in tracing the roots of the development leaning towards descriptive grammar, as seen in later treatises from the 16th to the 18th centuries in Egypt, for instance.[57] Secondly, this comparison addresses a significant gap in the modern study of Ibn Makkī regarding the highly formal way in which he organizes his material. In the rest of this article, I will elaborate on these two points in reverse order.

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[57] See Qaddūr, *op. cit.* 66.

A.   Material Organization

To appreciate how innovative Ibn Makkī was in organizing his material, it is essential to define his place in the history of the genre and how his work represents a rupture in its evolution. According to the most elaborate list of works in the genre proposed by ʿAbd al-Tawwāb (1967), *Tathqīf al-Lisān* chronologically holds the number 26 out of 57 works. The first work in this list dates back to 189 AH. (805 CE.), while the last dates to 1383 AH (1969 CE.).[58] Among the 25 titles preceding Ibn Makkī's, only 10 have survived. The question is not which of these books Ibn Makkī may have read, as what is lost today might not have been lost in the eleventh century. Moreover, the spread of comments on *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* exceeds by far the treatises devoted to it. Additionally, although Ibn Makkī quotes several authors belonging to this shortlist of 10, he neither limits himself to these authors nor to their works on *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma*.[59] Instead, the question is whether the material organization of these books has left a trace on his work.

As mentioned earlier, the initial steps of this exercise have already been taken. Since 1956, scholars interested in the question had to devise a classification of the medieval treatises on *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma*. Ḥussayn Naṣṣār briefly categorizes them into three groups: one with no clear system, a second that organizes its material alphabetically, and a third, to which Ibn Makkī's work belongs, where material is organized according to formal linguistic topics.[60] Molan, who has conducted an extensive investigation into the classification of *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* treatises, dedicates one-third of his first chapter to proposing a typology of these works.[61] According to Molan's view, the genre includes lexicographical works or topic-ordered works. Lexicographical works are closer to vocabularies than to dictionaries due to their lack of any internal arrangement of the material. These include authors

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[58] ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, *op. cit.* 105 – 106.

[59] All of the following authors have been mentioned several times in Ibn Makkkī's treatise. I will give one page where each is referred to al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822) , p. 104; Kisāʾī, p. 172; al-Sijistānī (d. 255/869), p. 137; Ṭaʿlab, p. 26; Ibn l-Sikkīt, p. 41; Ibn Qutayba, p. 70; and al-Zubaydī, p. 18. Ibn Makkī never referred to the books of these authors as sources *Laḥn*.

[60] Naṣṣār, *op. cit.* 79.

[61] Molan, *op. cit.* 41 – 60.

such as al-Kisāʾī (d. 188/804), al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516/1122), al-Lakhmī (d. 577/1181-1182), and probably Abū Bakr al-Zubaydī (d. 379/989).[62] The topically ordered treatises can be divided into two categories. First, general manuals of the language including chapters dealing with *Laḥn* written by authors such as Thaʿlab (d. 291/904), Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), and Ibn al-Sikkīt (d. 247/ 861). Second, those who devoted their treatises to *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma*, such as al-Jawālīqī (d. 539/ 1144) and Ibn Makkī.[63]

In addition, modern linguists, particularly those interested in Ibn Makkī, emphasize the central place he holds in the classification of *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* treatises. Rizzitano, recognizing Ibn Makkī's advanced formal linguistic skills compared to other authors of the genre, notes that Ibn Makkī's purpose was to encompass "*tutti gli aspetti di quelle corruzioni linguistiche*" (all aspects of those linguistic corruptions).[64] Molan, after analyzing several medieval treatises, concludes that "Ibn Makkī has arranged his work in the most rational and formally organized way with which we have met among the *Laḥn* authors."[65] Agius takes a step further, contextualizing Ibn Makkī within the schools of grammar in 8th-century Iraq, namely the schools of *Samāʾ* in *Kūfa* and *qiyās* in *Baṣra*, to which he attributes Ibn Makkī.[66] Agius describes Ibn Makkī's material organization by asserting his motivation by a "didactic approach," to arrange his work into three main parts: (a) phonology, (b) morphology, and (c) semantics.[67] This emphasis on Ibn Makkī's formal and rational organization sets him apart within the *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* genre.

While in earlier scholarship attention was drawn to Ibn Makkī's formal and rational organization, a deeper analysis reveals that his approach goes beyond what was described by this scholarship. Examining Ibn

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[62] *Ibid.*

[63] *Ibid.*

[64] Rizzitano, *op. cit.*

[65] Molan, *op. cit.,*49.

[66] Agius, *op. cit.,* 149: "[T]he school of Baṣra was based on the systematic structure of the language by analogy, *qiyās*, such as Ibn Makkī al-Ṣiqillī's *Tathqīf al-Lisān*; while that of *Kūfa* emphasized the diversity of language and subscribed itself to the rule that different variants of Arabic are all correct. Such was the position, for example, of Thaʿlab (d. 291/903-4) in his work, *Kitāb al-Faṣīḥ."*

[67] *Ibid.,*153.

Makkī's chapter division, I find it evident that he not only categorized his work into the triad of Phonology, Morphology, and Semantics, as outlined by Agius, but also added five chapters addressing 'errors' common in specific professions. Furthermore, Ibn Makkī included nine chapters on various aspects of confusing similarities in both oral and written varieties. Contrary to the perception of these chapters as scattered appendices, as posited by Agius, they can be seen as integral to Ibn Makkī's corrective approach to linguistic "error." These nine chapters serve as a collection of linguistic nuances derived from prior treatises, presenting a pattern where instead of the format: "Yaqūlūna X* and the correct form is X," Ibn Makkī employs the pattern "X means Y, whereas X' means Z."[68] See the attached table.

Nº	Formal categories	division
1	Phonology	1 – 13
2	Morphology	14 – 25
3	Semantics	25 - 35
4	Language in professional use	35 - 40
5	Selections of confusing similarities (All semantics except 43, and most of the material is brought form specific mentioned sources like Ibn Qutayba for orthograph)	41 - 50
Total		50

To delve into the main influences on Ibn Makkī concerning material arrangement, we must examine the 10–11 available treatises authored before his work. Before Ibn Makkī, only three treatises were organized based on a formal understanding of linguistic topics: Ibn as-Sikkīt's *Iṣlāḥ al-Manṭiq*, Ibn Qutayba's *Adab al-Kātib*, and *Thaʿlab*'s *al-Faṣīḥ*. These three works, composed in Iraq during the 9th century CE, are considered highly

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[68] See ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, *op. cit.,* 135–148, 173–180, 184–199. See also Qaddūr, *op. cit.*, 63.

influential in the history of Arabic grammar writing.[69] In comparing the methodology of these three books with *Tathqīf al-Lisān*, we can note the following four points:

1. None of the three authors focused exclusively on *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma*; instead, they included a few chapters on *Laḥn* within their broader linguistic manuals.[70]

2. The chapters on *Laḥn* in *Iṣlāḥ al-Manṭiq*, *Adab al-Kātib*, and *al-Faṣīḥ* are scattered throughout their works and do not exhibit the high degree of formal coherence found in Ibn Makkī's outline.[71]

3. In *Adab al-Kātib*, the third part titled *Kitāb Taqwīm al-Lisān* by Ibn Qutayba primarily summarizes the material already presented in Ibn al-Sikkīt's *Iṣlāḥ al-Manṭiq*, and the same can be said about Thaʿlab's book.[72]

4. Ibn Makkī references works by these three authors in his book, although not necessarily to their specific treatises relevant to *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma*.[73]

This comparison highlights the scattered nature of *Laḥn*-related content in the earlier treatises and emphasizes the formal coherence introduced by Ibn Makkī in his work.

Indeed, when examining the tables of contents of these works side by side, it becomes evident that Ibn Makkī drew significant inspiration from the three prior treatises. However, he expanded upon their work, both in terms of material selection and arrangement. While there are similarities in several chapter titles, very few are identical across Ibn Makkī and the earlier authors. This indicates shared concerns but differing methodologies. Ibn

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[69] See ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, *op. cit.,* 105–8.

[70] *Ibid.,* 135–148, 173–180, 184–199. See also: Molan, *op. cit.,* 44.

[71] See Molan, *op. cit.*

[72] Ibn Makkī, *op. cit.,* p. 305–7. See also Ibn Qutayba al-Daynūrī, *Adab al-Kātib,* (ed.), ʿAlī Fāʿūr, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1988), 439–448. See Ṯaʿlab, *al-Faṣīḥ*, (ed.), ʿĀṭif Madkūr, (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1984), 328–9. See also, Yaʿqūb Ibn al-Sikkīt, *ʾIṣlāḥ al-Manṭiq,* (ed.), Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir and ʿAbd al-Salām Hārūn, (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, s.d.). And ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, *op. cit.,*140–8, 191.

[73] Ibn Makkī, *op. cit.* 70, 187.

Makkī is notably closer to Ibn Qutayba and Thaʿlab, demonstrated by his use of similar terminology, such as employing *Ḥurūf* to mean words. This connection is further exemplified by the repetition of certain chapter titles, like those addressing "Words similar in form and different in meaning" and "Words that have more than a correct pronunciation." Additionally, the chapter on orthography in Ibn Makkī's work is a summary of Ibn Qutayba's *Kitāb Taqwīm al-yad*, the second part of *Adab al-Kātib*.[74] Let's delve into a few examples of different linguistic topics to explore the similarities and differences among these four authors.

First, consider chapters 16, 17, and 18 of Ibn Makkī's treatise, which address the male and female questions (*"Mā dhakkarūhu min al-muʾannath," "Mā ʾannathūhu min al-mudhakkar,"* and *"Mā yajūzu taʾnīthuhu wa-tadhkīruh".*)[75] In Ibn Makkī's work, these chapters are organized in a logically exhaustive order. This is in contrast to the three other treatises:

1. Ibn as-Sikkīt covers the same question from only one aspect in his chapter titled "what could be masculine and feminine."[76]

2. Ibn Qutayba devotes several chapters to the same question in *Kitāb l-Maʿrifah*, the first part of *Adab l-Kātib*, and not in its third part, *Kitāb Taqwīm l-Lisān*, which, according to several modern linguists, is the part concerned with *Laḥn*.[77]

3. In *al-Faṣīḥ*, this topic occupies three chapters out of 30, with titles like "*Bāb mā yuqāl lil-muʾannath bi-ghayr hāʾ,*" "*Bāb mā udkhilat fīhi al-hāʾ min waṣf al-mudhakkar,*" and "*Bāb mā yuqāl lil-mudhakkar wa-l-muʾannath bi-ghayr hāʾ.*" The material included isconcerned with the

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[74] Ibn Makkī, *op. cit.,* 305–7. See also Ibn Qutayba, *Adab l-Kātib, op. cit.,* 439–48 and Thaʿlab, *al-Faṣīḥ, op. cit.*, 328–29.

[75] Ibn Makkī, *op. cit.,* 137–145. (Respectively: "Feminine rendered as masculine", "Masculine rendered as feminine," and "What could be masculine and feminine."

[76] Ibn al-Sikkīt, *ʾIṣlāḥ al-Manṭiq, op. cit.,* 358. See also, Thaʿlab, *al-Faṣīḥ, op. cit.*

[77] See ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, *op. cit.,* 173–80. See also: Qaddūr, *op. cit.* and Molan, *op. cit.*, 40-1.

influence on meaning by the existence or absence of the female noun marker.[78]

This reveals a difference in perspective, as Ibn Makkī is more concerned with the logical ways in which speakers may make mistakes in their use of masculine and feminine, whereas the other authors approach the topic differently.[79]

As a second example, let's consider the topic with the famous title repeated in several treatises on *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma*, "*Mā Waḍaʿūhu fī ghayr Mawḍiʿih*." The results reveal some differences:

1. Ibn l-Sikkīt treats the subject at least twice in his book with two chapters bearing the same title. However, these chapters are not consecutive, one occupies the pages 284 to 287 and the second starts on page 313.

2. In *Adab l-Kātib*, this title is placed as the first chapter of *Kitāb al-Maʾrifa*, not *Kitāb Taqwīm l-Lisān*, and it is covered in only one chapter.[80]

3. Ibn Makkī differs from the others; he elaborates on it with three different consecutive chapters following the bulk of semantics chapters. Although he uses the same sort of terminology, he classifies the material more rationally.[81]

In summary, even though there are several similar aspects between Ibn Makkī's treatise and the three earlier works, it's evident that *Tathqīf al-Lisān* not only exceeds the limits of the morphological aspects discussed by earlier treatises but also reorganizes a significant part of the same material in

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[78] Ṯaʿlab, *op. cit.*, 308–310. (Respectively: "Chapter on feminine with no *hāʾ", Chapter of masculine adjectives suffixed with hā"* and "Chapter on what could be masculine and feminine with no *hāʾ*."

[79] Ibn Makkī, *op. cit.*, 137–45.

[80] Ibn Qutayba, *op. cit.,* 23. No such a chapter title exists in *al-Faṣīḥ*.

[81] See Ibn Makkī, *op. cit.: "*What has been used in a different meaning from its original," Ch. 25, 160;

"What had two meanings or more and was reduced in use to only one" ch. 26, 170; "What had one meaning and was used in two or several meanings", Ch. 27, 176. See also, Qaddūr, *op. cit.* 508.

a more formal way. The pattern is clear: while both Ibn Qutayba and Thaʿlab are highly influenced by Ibn al-Sikkīt's work, the work of Ibn Makkī is methodologically a reappropriation of these three works (and possibly others), adding his own remarks on the material he collected from Sicily and reorganizing it in a more formal manner.

B.   Ibn Makkī the First Medieval Arabic Grammarian to Tolerate and Defend ʿĀmma Against *Khāṣṣa*

In his analysis of Ibn Makkī's work, Molan describes the medieval author as "more human" than his counterpart authors on *Laḥn*.[82] Despite this way of acknowledgement of Ibn Makkī's descriptive approach, scholars like Molan and Qaddūr still emphasize that he ultimately conformed to the mainstream narrative of Arabic language history as recounted from a prescriptive point of view.[83] Molan, in particular, notes that Ibn Makkī, like other grammarians, sees dialects as deriving from Classical Arabic and believes that good written and spoken language should be identical.[84] While recognizing Ibn Makkī's tolerance with the language "errors" of the commoners, scholars tend to downplay its significance, attributing it to a broader trend within the genre. Modern scholarship, influenced by Ibn Makkī's adherence to the prevailing medieval narrative in his introduction, might not have given enough attention to the distinctive features of his approach.

It is true that Ibn Makkī himself justifies his work by expressing concern over the infiltration of "commoners' errors into the language of intellectuals."[85] However, in chapters 31 to 34 of Ibn Makkī's book, there is a departure from the conventional approach seen in *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* treatises up until that point. Whereas the typical pattern involved linguists prescribing a "correct" form and then criticizing both the ʿĀmma and the *Khāṣṣa* for their misuse of it, Ibn Makkī introduces a different pattern, where the linguist focuses on justifying the language use of the ʿĀmma by finding a corresponding form in the preconquest "pure" language. Even

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[82] Molan, *op. cit.,* 49-50.
[83] Qaddūr, *op. cit.,* 65.
[84] *Ibid.*
[85] See Ibn Makkī, *op. cit.,* 15–6.

though Ibn Makkī may not explicitly announce a rupture in the genre, his approach represents a step toward a significant change. It is crucial to closely examine these four chapters to understand the nature of this departure from the traditional norm.

"31. What *Khāṣṣa* denies of *ʿĀmma's* correct usage

32. What *ʿĀmma* and *Khāṣṣa* use differently while both are wrong

33. What has two different registers the best of which was used by *ʿĀmma*

34. What the *ʿĀmma* used correctly and the *Khāṣṣa* used incorrectly"[86]

These titles of chapters 31 to 34 in Ibn Makkī's book indicate a departure from the established norm in *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* treatises for two main reasons. First, while they show a degree of inspiration from similar titles in works like *Adab al-Kātib* and *al-Faṣīḥ*, Ibn Makkī's perspective is notably more descriptive than that of his predecessors. For example, while Ṯaʿlab has a chapter on "What has two different registers," [87] and while Ibn Qutayba has a chapter on "What has two different registers, the weaker (less correct) of which is used by the people," [88] Ibn Makkī's corresponding chapter is "What has two different registers, the best of which was used by *ʿĀmma*."[89] Moreover, Ibn Makkī doesn't merely devote one chapter to this descriptive approach; he includes three additional chapters that explore different aspects of the same question, consistently giving more credit to the language used by the commoners. This shift reflects a more descriptive attitude in Ibn Makkī's work compared to his predecessors.

Compared to his contemporaries as well, this shift in perspective observed in Ibn Makkī's work, particularly in chapters 31 to 34, appears to

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[86] See Ibn Makkī, *ibid.*, p. 186 – 201. (Respectively: "Bāb mā tunkiruh al-Khālṣṣa ʿalā l-ʿĀmma wa-laysa bimunkar," "Bāb mā khālafat al-ʿĀmma fih al-Khālṣṣa wa-jamīʿuhum ʿalā ghalaṭ," *"Bāb mā jāʾa fīh lughatān istaʿmala al-ʿĀmmah afṣaḥahumā,"* and *"Bāb mā al-ʿĀmma fīh ʿalā ṣawāb wa-l-Kaāṣṣah ʿalā khaṭaʾ"*

[87] Ṯaʿlab, *op. cit.*, 313–15 *"Mā yuqāl bi-lughatayn"*

[88] See Ibn Qutayba, *op. cit.*, 274 *"Bāb Mā ǧaʾa fīh lughatān ʾistaʿmala an-nās ʾaḍʿafahumā"*

[89] Ibn Makkī, *op. cit.*, *"Bāb mā jāʾa fīh lughatān ʾistaʿmala al-ʿāmmah afṣaḥahumā"*

be unique to his approach. If we look back to ʿAbd al-Tawwāb's chronological list on which Ibn Makkī's number is 26, we see that numbers 24 by Abū Aḥmad al-ʿAskarī (d. 382/993), 25 by Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī (d. 400/1010) and 27 by the famous al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516/1122) have something in common. [90] I am not making conclusions on these books out of reading their titles; even so, it is noteworthy that the first two titles are lost and the third by al-Ḥarīrī is known by his "dismissal tone" towards the ʿĀmma.[91] All the three treatises were still primarily focused on criticizing the errors of the Khāṣṣa. In their works, the criticism of errors had become so pervasive that it extended from the ʿĀmma to the Khāṣṣa. Unlike these authors, Ibn Makkī introduces a more descriptive element in his approach, attempting to justify the language use of the ʿĀmma. His work stands out by presenting a contrast between the perceived hypercorrections of the Khāṣṣa, whom he somewhat satirically refers to as "al-Mutafaṣṣiḥūn" (those who pretend eloquence), and the language of the commoners.[92] This distinction sets Ibn Makkī apart from his contemporaries and predecessors in the genre.

Ibn Makkī's approach, marked by a more descriptive perspective toward the language of the commoners, did not lead to an immediate and widespread change in the writing on Laḥn al-ʿĀmma. Nevertheless, later works appearing on the same list of ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, like Nº 31, Ibn Hishām al-Lakhmī's *Al-Madkhal ilā Taqwīm l-Lisān* (d. 577 AH.) echo Ibn Makkī and his approach. A few centuries later, his attitude becomes mainstream in works like like *Baḥr al-ʿAwwām fīmā Aṣāba fīh al-ʿAwāmm* by Ibn al-Ḥanbalī (d. 971/1563 Aleppo), *Dafʿ al-ʾIṣr ʿan Kalām Ahl Miṣr* by Yūsuf al-Maghribī (d. 1019/ 1611 Egypt), and *al-Muqtaḍab fīmā Wāfaqa Lughat Ahl Miṣr min Lughat al-ʿArab* by Ibn Abī al-Surūr al-Bakrī (d. 1087/1676 Egypt), texts occupying positions 44, 48 and 49 on ʿAbd al-Tawwāb's list. [93] The relation between these texts and Ibn Makkī's descriptive method merits further study.[94]

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[90] See ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, *ibid.,* 106.
[91] *Ibid.,* 232–33. For the "*dismissal tone*", See *ibid.,* 248.
[92] For *Mutafaṣṣiḥūn*, see, Ibn Makkī, *op. cit.,* 150, 187, 197, 198.
[93] See Qaddūr, *op. cit.,* 66.
[94] See Molan, *op. cit.,* for a comparison between both authors of the 6th century AH. See also ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, *op. cit.*, 268 where he explains how *Ibn Hishām al-Lakhmī* blamed

III.   CONCLUSION

Both in his methodology and his approach, Ibn Makkī introduced methods that had never existed before his work and that became significantly influential in the later history of Arabic language theory. In modern scholarship on Ibn Makkī's treatise, the attention of two generations of scholars was diverted from providing a detailed evaluation of the significance of *Tathqīf al-Lisān* in the art of writing on *Laḥn*.

Exploring the innovation in formal material organization and the descriptive aspect in *Tathqīf al-Lisān*, I conclude that this treatise exceeds the limits of the morphological aspects discussed by earlier treatises and reorganizes a significant part of the same material more formally. Compared to his contemporaries, too, the shift in perspective observed in Ibn Makkī's work, particularly in chapters 31 to 34, appears to be unique.

The investigation into Ibn Makkī's work highlights the challenges of using *Tathqīf al-Lisān* as a source for reconstructing the features of Arabic as practiced in medieval Sicily. However, this should be viewed as a current limitation, and there are reasons for hope:

1. Future archaeological research may uncover new evidence that could provide insights into the linguistic practices of medieval Sicily. As more archaeological evidence becomes available, a reevaluation of the utility of Ibn Makkī's work may be warranted.

2. Advances in language processing software present an opportunity for a more thorough comparison of material across *Laḥn al-ʿĀmma* literature. Such tools could help differentiate commonly transmitted material from the authentic contributions of each author, aiding in discerning possible geographical significance.

In terms of the evolution of the genre, I propose that future research follow and account for the following historical phases of linguistic writing:

Ibn Makkī for considering an error what is *correct.* We can see how Ibn Makkī's perspective was used even against him.

1. **Early Period (2nd to 4th centuries AH):** Treatises mainly from Basra Iraq aimed at purifying the *Badw* language from urbanization influences and emphasizing the difference between Baṣra and Kūfa.

2. **Fourth to Tenth Centuries AH:** The objective shifted to protecting intellectual linguistic practices from the impact of commoners' language, influenced by new dialects and neighboring languages. During this phase, prescriptive attitudes prevailed, with Ibn Makkī representing a relative exception.

3. **Tenth Century AH Onward:** A different attitude emerged, justifying deviations in the low forms by tracing their origins to historiographically registered high forms. This shift is reminiscent of later linguistic attitudes in regions like Egypt during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries CE, continuing until the establishment of Majmaʿ al-Lugha al-ʿArabiyyah in Cairo in 1932.[95]

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[95] See the objectives of establishing the Cairo Language Academy in 1932. Kamal Bishr, Majmaʿ al-Lugha al-ʿArabiyya fī Khamsa wa-Sabʿīn ʿĀman, in, *al-ʿĪd al-Māsī li-Majmaʿ al-Lugha al-ʿArabiyya*, (Eds.) Maḥmūd Ḥāfidh and Fārūq Shūsha (Cairo: Majmaʿ al-Lugha al-ʿArabiyya, 2007), 28 – 45.

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