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## **Cacophony in Arabic**

### **A Research Paper Submitted**

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### **Introduction**

This research paper touches upon weird and alien words and expressions interspersed in the verse of some prominent Arab bards. The demonstration takes into account to survey a fairly broad scope within such cacophonous evocable and forms occur. In this regard, the researcher believes it necessary to give an overview of two significant interrelated concepts, i.e. 'eloquence and rhetoric'. This contradistinction holding between the two terms is given prominence with reference to one of the most important Arabic lexicons. لسان العرب 'the speech of the Arabs' by the notable Arab lexicographer Ibn- Mandhour. All in all, the paper has been organized and itemized into:

1. An overview of eloquence and rhetoric,
2. Merits and demerits of words and word- formation,
3. Commentaries are provided wherever necessary,

4. Banality and Platitude of the usage of certain instanced words and expressions are signalized in the course of this humble study.
5. Most of the instances cited throughout the research are excerpts from the verse of some prominent Arab bards and scholars.

A conclusion is appended in which the major points are briefly forwarded. This is done as such, yet a lot more remains to be presented, demonstrated and discussed. In fact, this topic is prone to a considerable expansion and more profound exploration.

## 1. What is Eloquence?

The word ‘eloquence’ may be broadly interpreted in two ways.

### 1.1 Lexicography-based interpretation

This type of interpretation is primarily based upon the essentials laid down by the specialist Arab lexicographers. In this regard, we find in لسان العرب ‘the speech of the Arabs’, by (Ibn-Mandhour; d. H 711: 186) that expressions like:

1. يوم فصيح which means يوم لا غيم فيه ولا قرّ , i.e. a cloudless- sky day.
2. أفصح اللبن which means ذهب اللبأ عنه , i.e. skimmed milk or whey-drained milk.
3. فصَح اللبن which means اللبِن إذا أخذت منه الرغوة , i.e. skimmed milk.

4. خَلَصَ لبنها which means أفصحت الشاة أو الناقة dry.

5. بدأ ضوءه واستبان أفصح الصُّبح which means i.e. when day breaks.

are based primarily on the literal sense of the word فصاحة 'eloquence' which is entered into the lexicon as such.

## 1.2 Literary- based interpretation

This sort of interpretation is usually common amongst rhetoricians. So the same word الفصاحة 'eloquence' is entered in the same lexicon (Ibid: 186) to mean, in addition to the literal sense mentioned in 1.1 above, the extra senses relevant to speech and audition:

1. الفصاحة is adopted to mean أو البيان i.e. Explicit, lucid speech.
2. فصيح الرجل فصاحة فهو فصيح which means an 'eloquent man'; a 'man of eloquence'.
3. امرأة فصيحة which means an 'eloquent woman'.
4. كلام فصيح which signifies 'eloquent speech or statement'.
5. لسان فصيح which means 'voluble, glib tongue'.

Notice that this exemplar is corroborated further in Abu-Tammami statement;

6. أعجم في آذانها فصيحاً ,i.e. Though the utterance sounds alien, yet, to her ears, it is explicit and intelligible.

7. أخي هارون هو أفصح مني لسانا ,i.e. And my brother Aaron is more eloquent in speech than me. [v.34; Sura Al-Qasas, 'The Narration']

8. أنا أفصح العرب بيد أني من قريش ,i.e. I am the most eloquent of all the Arabs though I am from Quraish.

## 2. Demerits of Words (cacophony)

A word may have a demerit, in that it may appear in cacophony and in disharmony; this, however, results in a jarring impact on the ear. In this regard, let us mention the demerits of certain words in sound; these defects are exposed in (Ibn- Ja'afar; H337: 103) who states that;

1. A word may be coined and used within a context, not common in the language, or alien to the sensitive ear of an Arab average man, let alone an erudite one.
2. A word or expression may be used, especially by poets, in a twisted manner which could sound offensive or invective, either for rhyme-and-metre requisites or for some other purposes such as satire or rhapsody, etc.
3. A word or expression may be used in violation of the common usage known to the Arabs, i.e. in breach of the well- established metric patterns and molds.
4. A word or expression may be repeated and in a manner of circumlocution; in other words, it might be uncommendably repeated.

## 3. Merits of Word- Usage (or euphony)

Words can be utilized euphoniously and euphemistically only when certain rules are pursued; some of these rules include:

### 3.1 Diversity of Place of Articulation

A word has to be coined mainly of sounds which are supposed to be produced at variant places of articulation. A good example of a cumbersome tongue- twister word is **الهُعُغُغُ** which was coined by a Bedouin desert Arab when once asked about the whereabouts of his she-camel. This word appears in his retort.

1. **الهُعُغُغُ** تركتها ترعى **الهُعُغُغُ**, i.e. I left it (the she-camel) grazing **الهُعُغُغُ** which means a type of ‘thistle’ favored by animals, especially camels.

Notice the fact that the word **الهُعُغُغُ**, i.e. thistle is weighty and thus cacophonous due to the peripheral **هاء** and **عين** sounds which are glottal and pharyngeal respectively, i.e. they both are produced at almost the same place of articulation at the adjacent glottis and pharynx. In this regard, Ibn Sinan cited in (Matloub 1990: 48) states: “glottalics and pharyngeal are characterized by being cacophonous in case they occur in vicinity and succession”. In this concern, a comparison is drawn between the mixing of colors and the succession of sounds, so it is equally significant for a painter to harmoniously mix his colors on the palette and for a linguist or speaker to euphoniously piece together letters of sweet sounds.

### 3.2 Proportionality of Already Variant-Positioned Sounds

A word of harmonious sounds, i.e. those produced at variant places of articulation should be coined in proportion to the sounds used. In other words, the succession of such sounds has to be carefully and strictly observed as there may co- occur sounds that are repellent. Of the sounds that ought to be harmoniously stringed are عین , ذال and باء constituting the word عذب; in this respect, we come to hear words like;

1. العُذیب, i.e. a name of a location.
2. عُذیبة, i.e. a name of a female.
3. عذب, i.e. fresh (of water, etc.); rarefied (of air, etc.)

It is worth mentioning that the sweetness and euphony of words is due to two reasons;

- a.the combination of sounds with variant places of articulation, and
- b.even within this combination, there is supposed to be a specific concatenation and arrangement of sounds mentioned in (a) above.

By this, we mean that if, for instance, the ذال of عذب is made to precede the عین of the same word, we'll get ذعب which is a rather jarring word, and the euphony of the word عذب will definitely be marred. This, however, means that there must be a well-proportioned balance which organize the stringing- together of such sounds. To further enhance the idea, let us put forward the following:

4. عُسلوج a 'twig' is more euphonious than الغصن.

5. عُسلوج a ‘sprout’ is more euphonious than الفتن.

6. أغصان البان ‘twigs of ben tree’ has a much greater pretty impact on the ear than عساليج الشوحط

Another illustrative example is a line of verse by Al-Mutannabi cited in (Al-Khafaji; d.H466: 76):

7. إذا سارت الأحداج فوق ثباته      تفاوح مسك الغانيات ورنده

In this example, we see that the word تفاوح, i.e. ‘emit fragrant scent is a sweet- sounding word which is said to have been adopted to transmit the sweetness of odor inherent in the word فاح through the equilibrium of the sounds فاء, ألف and حاء respectively.

Conversely, in another line of verse by Al- Mutannabi cited in (Al-Qizwini; d.H739:4), there comes over to our ears a word with a rather jarring, grating impact, it is الجَرشَى in:

8. مبارك الأسم أغرّ اللقب      كريم الجَرشَى شريف النسب

Notice that the word الجَرشَى which is supposed to mean ‘mind’ or ‘self’ is offensive-sounding; and as such, it stands in blatant contradistinction to كريم النفس (or lofty-minded). So one can so easily and rather readily elicit out the disparity between كريم الجَرشَى and كريم النفس.

### 3.3 Oddity

The word ought not to be odd nor rarely-used; notice, for in

Stance, the word كهلا in the following line of verse by Abu-Tamm'm which is cited in Matloub and Al-Baseer (1990: 51).

1. لقد طلعت في وجه مصر بوجهه بلا طائر سعدٍ ولا طائرٍ كهلٍ

is odd and alien to the linguistic-minded average Arabs. This, however, is emphasized by Al-Asma'ie who is narrated to have proclaimed that such a word does not exist or appear except in the verse indited by some bards from Hothail; in support of this view of oddity, Al-Asma'ie cited in (Al-Khafaji; ibid: 76) declaims:

2. فلولا أن سلمى جاره أو أجاره رياح بني سعدٍ رده طائر كهلٍ

In the above line of verse, the word الكهل means الضم, i.e. 'stalwart' and though it is an inoffensive word in spirit, yet it is odd and alien, even to an erudite man like Al-Asma'ie. This accounts above all for the inclination of witty poets to select and adopt lovely down-to-earth names, especially in their love-poetry and for houses and women. Thus they tend to shun the use of all words that appear alien and abstruse.

Moreover, such poets criticize Jareer for his use of the word بوزع in this line of verse mentioned in (Al-Khafaji; Ibid: 76):

3. وتقول بوزع قد دببت على العصا هلاً هزئنا بغيرنا يابوزع

of which it is narrated that Al-Waleed Ibn Abdel-Malik has said critically: "You have marred your poetry by using the word بوزع". Similarly, Ibn-Sinan is narrated to have criticized Kothair Ibn Abdel-Rahman saying: "It really sounds repugnant to me that



Kotheir Ibn Abdel-Rahman, Azza' lover, should versify the following:

4. وماروضة بالحزن طيبة الثرى يمّجّ الندى جثجاثها وعرارها

However, Ibn-Sinan accounts for his disfavor of Kotheir's use of the word جثجاث saying that it is odd and thus inappropriate in this context; furthermore, he adds up that Kotheir should have better used a milder, more common, sweet-sounding word instead.

Another exemplar can be elicited out in the following line of verse by Abu-Tammam:

5. قف بالطول الدارسات علاثا أضحت حبال قطنيهن رثا

Notice that the words علاثا and رثا sound odd and bizzare due to the cacophonous use of ثاء more than once. Such oddity may, at times, be justified due to the constraints and requisites of metre through the poet-exclusive right known as "poetic licence".

### 3.4 Colloquiality (or commonplaceness)

In order for a word to be received with favour and approbation, it should not be colloquial, slang, or commonplace. To verify the defect, let us cite this instance; it is a line of verse by Abu-Tammam quoted by Matloub and Al-Baseer (1990:50):

1. جليت والموت مبدٍ حرّ صفحته وقد تفرعن في أفعاله الأجل

As you see, the word تَفْرَعْنَ is trite and slang, being derived from the name فرعون 'phataoh'. In the slang, we also hear تَفْرَعْنَ فُلَانٌ when we want to 'brand someone as being tyrannical'.

Another prop-up example of a commonplace, banal, slang word is that which can be fingered out in a line of verse by Abu-Nasr Abdul Azeez Ibn-Nubata:

2. أقام قوام الدين زيغُ قناته وأنضج كيّ الجرح وهو فطيرُ

In this line of verse, there is the word فَطِيرُ which is arather slang word which could have been superseded by elegant lofty-status word. Besides, of such lowly-status trite words is the word قَابِرِي used in this line of verse by Abu-Tammam:

3. قد قلت لَمَّا لَجَّ في صدِهِ أعطف على عبادك يا قابري

Notice that the word قَابِرِي, in addition to its being down-to-earth, it is also peculiarly jargonized by common women. This word can be replaced by another standardized one.

Another platitudinous word appears in a line of verse by Ibn-Nubata.

4. فقد رفعت أبصارها كلَّ بلدةٍ من الشوق حتى أوجعتها الأخادع

The word that draws our attention as such is أَوْجَعْتَهَا which could have been substituted for by another milder, even more sweet- sounding one. To further enhance the colloquiality of word-usage, let us adduce the following illustrative example, which is a line of verse by Al- Mutannabi:

5. تستغرق الكف فوديه ومنكبه وتكتسي منه ريح الجورب الخلق

Notice, however, the word الجورب which is definitely rather slang with stench-arousing connotation. We believe that this very word is being utilized by Al-Mutannabi quite deliberately only to satirize someone as being stinking rotten and nose-snuffling out of shabbiness, dirtiness and slovenliness.

### 3.5 Deviance (or substandardness)

A word supposed to be used should be in conformity with the conventions and norms known to the linguistic-minded Arabic-speaking community, i.e. the indigenous Arabs well-versed in making sound judgments on the rightness and wrongness of an utterance neither be deviant from the standard norms, nor substandard. This accounts for the reason why Abu -Shees cited in Matloub (Ibid: 50) comes under scathing criticism for versifying this line:

1. وجناح مقصوص تحيف ريشه ريب الزمان تحيف المقراض

Contemporary Arab grammarians and others state that the word المقراض is alien to the sensitive ears of the Arabic-speaking community; this is as such due to the fact that this word المقراض does not conform to the word-forming moulds known to the grammar-oriented Arabs in general and to well-versed scholars in particular. The deviance from the norm can best be clarified if we

come to know that the word المقراض is normally used by the Arabs in the dual مقراضان. On the other hand, a certain word of Arabic origin could be twisted out of its inherent sense so as to express some sense other than that for which it is originally formed. Such a word adopted by Al- Buhturi in this line of verse:

2. يشق عليه الريح كلّ عشية جيوب الغمام بين بكر وأيم

It is apparent that the word الأيم is contextualized interchangeably with the word الثيب, yet this is inadmissible due to the fact that in Arabic الأيم does not mean الثيب. Rather الأيم means ‘the woman who has no husband, whether she be virgin or not’.

There is another word that is de-contextualized to convey a quite diagonally opposite meaning for which it is originally formed. This is exemplified in the following line of verse by Al-Buhturi:

3. شَرطيّ الإنصاف إن قيل إشرط و صديقي إذا صافى قَسَطُ

Notice that the word قَسَطُ above is utilized to mean عَدَل, they must use أَقْسَطُ, while قَسَطُ originally signifies جَار ‘be unjust or unfair’, which is a lucid contradiction. This last- stated sense is unequivocally explicated in the holy Qur’an in the following verse:

[V.15; Sura Al-Jinn ‘the Jinn’]

4. وأما القاسطون فكانوا لجهنم حطبا

You see that this verse from Sura Al-Jinn ‘the Jinn’ which means “And as for those who are unjust, they are firewood for hell, “accounts for the veritable inherent meaning of being ‘unjust’.

Furthermore, deviance could well be viewed in the omission of a letter from a word which may very possibly result in obscurity. This type of omission is sometimes affected for metre- and-rhyme purposes which lie within the exclusive inalienable privilege known as the ‘poetic license’. An example of such omission is viewed in Ru’aba Ibn Al-A’jaj’s line of verse:

5. قواطناً مكة من ورق الحما

Notice that the clipped word الحما is formed by clipping away the final ميم of the genuine word الحمام. Though such clipping seems weird, yet it is obligatory for the poet’s requisites of rhyme. Appendage of a letter or more so as to

Conversely, a word could occasionally be elongated by the appendage of a letter or more so as to meet the requirements and constraints of rhyme. This elongation is exemplified in this line of verse:

6. وأنت على الغواية حين ترمي وعين عيب الرجال بمنترح

The word, in origin, is مُنترِح, yet for restrictions of rhyme, the word is elongated through the augmentation of the vowel-sign “fatha” [ َ ] over the letter زاي into أليف ‘alif’. All those examples

constitute a sort of deviation from the well- attested norms known to the majority of Arabs.

### 3.6 Non- Familiarity (or Unaccustomedness)

Some other words could occur out of the ordinary. These are only used on rare occasions, especially in verse. To illustrate such occurrence, let us quote the following line of verse by Al-Buhturi;

1. متحيرين فباهت متعجب مما يرى أو ناظر متأمل

In this example, the word *باهت* is being used in rather pallid manner and thus could be euphonized by another familiar word. The poet seems to have adopted this word for considerations of rhyme and metre.

A word has to instill and impress a pleasant impact through its being familiar and well-accustomed to. This, however, necessitates that it should not insinuate some detestable sense; otherwise, it would be pinned down as cacophonous and offensive. What is presented can well be exemplified in this line of verse indited by Al- Sharif Al-Radhi:

2. أعزز عليّ بأن أراك وقد خلت من جانبيك مقاعدُ العوَاد

It is worth mentioning that the word *مقاعد* here is correct, but it is intended to indicate that which is detested and unfamiliar, especially when it is in construct with *العوَاد*; if it had been out of

construct with such a word, then it would have been recommendable and desirable.

### 3.7 Long- Windedness

A word should be constituted of a fairly moderate number of letters. If a word to be rendered too long, it would bear down on the hearer and would thus be deemed repugnant. A good example in which such a word appear is a line of verse by Abu-Nasr Ibn-Nubata who is cited in Matloub (Ibid: 52):

1. فإيّاكم أن تكشفوا عن رؤوسكم إلا أن مغناطيسهنّ الذوائب

We can see that the word مغناطيسهنّ is such a lengthy word that it stirs up a sort of repugnance on the part of the hearer. Likewise, another example displays another lengthy word; it is a line of verse by Abu- Tammam.

2. فلأذربيجان إختيال بعدما كانت معرّس عبيرةٍ ونكالٍ  
سُمّحتُ ونبضها على استسماجها ماحولها من نَضرةٍ وجمالٍ

Notice that the word استسماجها is uncommendable on account of its longness makes it deviant from that which is customary. Another breath-consuming word can be viewed in one of Al-Mutannabi's lines of verse:

3. إن الكريم بلا كرام منهم مثل القلوب بلا سويداواتها

Obviously, you can judge for yourself that the word سويداواتها is a rather long-winded one which is weighty and cumbersome.

### 3.8 Diminution

A word in the diminutive could well fit into the context if manipulated ingeniously by the user, be he a poet, a scholar, or else. Notice, however, how a diminutive is efficiently wielded in this line of verse by Omer Ibn Abi-Rabie'a:

1. وَغَابَ قُمْمِيرٌ كُنْتُ أَرْجُو طُلُوعَهُ      وَرَوْحَ عِيَانٍ وَنَوْمَ سَمْرُ

The diminutive form قُمْمِيرٌ is derived from قَمْرٌ, and it is being splendidly utilized to convey the sense intended, i.e. the sense of endearment through diminution. Other diminutives include words like لُجَيْنٌ and ثُرَيَّا, though they are not so befitting as the diminutive قُمْمِيرٌ is there remain one significant fact to mention about the diminutives لُجَيْنٌ and ثُرَيَّا, it is that both these forms are only used in the diminutive, and as such we find no euphony in them.

### 3.9 Uncommendable Repetition

By and large, when words are unnecessarily repeated, there ensues a feeling of boredom and repugnance. Such repetition might very possibly result in tongue-twisting. We, at times, may come across words that are hard to utter due to the recursiveness of a single word twice, or even more. The following line of verse by Al-Jahidh is a salient example of repetition; this illustrative example is cited in (Al-Qizwini; d.739:5):

وَقَبْرُ حَرْبٍ بِمَكَانٍ قَفْرٍ



## وليس قرب قبر حرب قبر

Through this example, we come to the conclusion that is it not necessarily to have one single word repeated, but rather we may view words having similar sounds, i.e. sounds with almost the same place of articulation. Such words with similar sounds are unrecommendable as they bear down on the tongue. Besides these words are characterized by being cumbersome and weighty. The following example cited in (AL-Jorjani;d: 48) further corroborates the unrecommendable repetition.

2. كريمٌ، متى أمدحهُ أمدحهُ والورى معي، واردُ أالمئهُ لئمه وحدي

It goes without saying that the word أمدحهُ is being repeated; So is the word لئمه. This repetition causes heaviness, weightiness as well as cumbersomeness. All in all, such words are regarded cacophonous and if repetition is abolished, cacophony will certainly be superseded by euphony.

## Conclusion

This humble work is an attempt at the particular presentation and discussion of cacophony in Arabic. This, however, includes oddity of certain words and expressions used in the versifications of some outstanding Arab bards. The research paper has come up with the following findings:

1. In Arabic, there are odd and bizarre words and expressions, even in the best-kint sturdy verifications indicted by eminent Arab poets as well as in some statements made by phenornenal scholars.
2. Cacophonous words are due to a number of reasons and motivations.

3. There are some guidelines that ought to be pursued and applied if euphony were to be attained and established.

It is hoped that this study would prove beneficial as well as up to the standards required.

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