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## **Semantic Analysis of Arabic Words in Hausa and Kiswahili Languages**

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### **Abstract:**

Hausa and Kiswahili are currently among the most widely spread languages –after Arabic- in Africa. This is due to their usage in political, religious, cultural and social areas, and their relevance to the society. Scholars and students have studied them intensively and extensively at various linguistics levels. Notable among them are Greenberg and Sajo Balde, who selected some Arabic words in the two languages, and tried to bring out the semantic similarity between them. However, they did not study the Semantic Classification of these words. Therefore it is the aim of this study to further extend their works to identify and analyze the semantic classification of these selected Arabic words from the two languages. It is noted that the two languages give, with a few exception, all the Arabic words the same Semantic Classification, especially in the areas of Semantic Balance, Semantic Expansion, Semantic Shrinking and Semantic Reversal. It is therefore recommended that further studies be carried out at Semantic level in order to give deeper insight into the linguistic values of Arabic, Hausa and Kiswahili languages, and thus further enrich Afro-Arab linguistic relations.

## خلاصة المقالة

إنّ اللغة الهوسوية والسوا حلية من أكثر اللغات انتشاراً بعد اللغة العربية في إفريقيا ولهما في إفريقيا أهميتهما في المجالات السياسية والاجتماعية والثقافية والدينية. ولهذه الأهمية والخصائص اهتم الباحثون والدارسون اللغويون بدراستهما دراسة استغرقت جميع المستويات اللغوية عبر المراحل التعليمية العالية. ومن الذين درسوها الباحثان (غرنج وسجولدي)، وتوصلا إلى أنّ اللغتين اشتركتا في عدد كبير من المفردات العربية واستدلا بها وعرضا نماذج كثيرة منهما. والذي هذين الكاتبين هو أنهما لم يتطرقا إلى دراسة العلاقات الدلالية بين المفردات العربية التي وردت في كلتي اللغتين (الهوسوية والسواحيلية). وكان السؤال هو ما مدى الاتفاق الدلالي أو اختلافه بين المفردات العربية الأصيلة إذا ما قورنت لدلالاتها في اللغة الهوسوية والسواحيلية؟ ذلك لنتبين مدى تمسك اللغة العربية بأصولها الدلالية والتكوينية وحسن توظيفها في اللغات الإفريقية. لهذا اعتمد الباحث على المفردات التي اختارها من بعض المعاجم الهوسوية والسواحيلية ودرس معانيها قياسا لمعانيها العربية. وخلص إلى أنّ عدداً كبيراً من المفردات العربية في اللغتين الهوسوية والسواحيلية تندرج في الدلالة المتساوية (Semantic Balance)، كما ورد بعضها في الدلالة الواسعة (Semantic Expansion) وعدد قليل في الدلالة الضيقة (Semantic Shrinking).

## **Introduction:**

Language is one of the most important socio-cultural elements in the African continent. In fact, the continent harbors more than one-third (2,000-3,000) of the 7,000 existing and living languages of the world. (Joffe 2013-2014/Austin 2008). Out of these languages, speakers of Arabic, Hausa and Kiswahili account for close to half of the total population of the continent. Apart from the fact that Arabic ranks sixth among the famous languages of the world, Hausa and Kiswahili have the highest number of speakers in Africa after Arabic, and the two languages spread across the African continent.

The urge to write on this topic has been motivated by some factors, which include the writer's interest in promoting specialized studies on linguistic relationship between Arabic and African languages for the purpose of identifying areas of common linguistic interest between these languages. It has also been triggered by the fact that most of the studies conducted in this field (Afro-Arab linguistic relation) are usually based on Arabic and one African language (i.e. Arabic in Kiswahili or Arabic in Yoruba etc.), whereas there should be a much stronger effort to push the study further to look out for

linguistic relationship between Arabic in more than one African language.

Although Sergio Baldi (1988) exerted a strong effort to identify Arabic loan words common to Hausa and Kiswahili, his work is remarkable among African linguistic scholars. Since then not much has been added to complement his effort in this regard. However, this present work may look similar to Baldi work in the area of identification, and compilation of Arabic words in Hausa and Kiswahili. However, what makes it distinct is that, apart from identifying and compilation of Arabic words in the two languages, it also attempts to analyze these words in the areas of socio-cultural and linguistic usage among the native speakers. This will lead to semantic classification of these words into; Semantic Balance (SB), Semantic Expansion (SE) Semantic Narrowing (SN) and Semantic Reversal (SR). From the preliminary investigation on the selected Arabic words in the two languages, it appears that they contain a huge amount of Arabic words.

Baldi (1988) confirmed that the two languages share five hundred and forty-one words (541) from Arabic. These words spread across social, cultural, religious and scientific areas,

However, we expect the number to be higher, as the socio-cultural and linguistic interactions that exist between the Arabs and African are growing progressively, especially in the areas of food, music, dressing, etc. Our preliminary study indicates that the two languages give similar meanings to most of Arabic words while few of these words are of either semantic expansion or narrowing.

Some of the immediate objectives of this paper include; to encourage multi-dimensional approach to the Afro-Arab linguistic relation at all linguistic levels, and to encourage the participation of linguistic and language scholars of the African continent in this field so that Afro-Arab linguistic studies would not be seen as a discipline for Arabic scholars alone. In an attempt to give this study a direct approach, a random selection of forty (40) Arabic words from the two languages were selected mostly from Hausa and Kiswahili Dictionaries, which include: Dictionary of the Hausa language (vol. 1) by Charles Henry Robinson (2013), Swahili – English Dictionary by Charles W. Rechembach (1968), English-Hausa Illustrated Dictionary by Neil Skinner (2007) and Elias Modern Dictionary by Elias A. Elias (1986).

In Addition, the work of S. Baldi (1988), entitled “A First Ethno-linguistic Comparison of Arabic loan words common to Hausa and Swahili” provides an assistance and guide in the course of this paper. Likewise the works of Alli Abubakar (1973) “*Athaqafah al- ‘Arabiyyah* (1993), “*Harakat al- Luqah Al- ‘Arabiyyah*” (The Development of Arabic language and its literature in Nigeria) and many others shall be of great importance and relevance to this research. Some other consulted references are either extracted from print or electronic media.

Meanwhile, the researcher’s experience in Arabic will be employed in identifying Arabic Words from the two Languages for further analysis. It is important to emphasize that the data to be presented for analysis may not be enough to make generalizations in this research, but it would serve as a guide for similar extensive studies in the nearest future. Among issues to be discussed are; influence of Arabic on African languages, Arabic and Hausa relations, Arabic and Kiswahili relations, and semantic Status of selected Arabic words in Hausa and Kiswahili Languages.

### **The Influence of Arabic on African Languages:**

Arabic is regarded as one of the famous languages in the world today. Some major factors that lead to this conclusion include religious, political, economic, social and linguistic ones. Its contributions to the development of Sciences, Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences date back to the Middle Ages. Most scholars believe that the language originated from Arabian Peninsula, citing some historical facts, and from there it spread to different parts of Asia, Africa and Europe. However, linguistically Arabic belongs to Afro-Asiatic group which houses all Semitic languages. Apart from Hebrew and Aramaic languages which are spoken together with Arabic language in the Middle-East, almost all the sister-languages of the group are spoken in Africa.

Among these languages are; Amharic, Coptic, Berber, Tigre, Tigrinya, Hausa, Kushitic (Somalia) and many others. This tends to suggest that Arabic may have originated from Africa a long time ago. Meanwhile, out of the estimated 300 million speakers of Arabic (as first language) world-wide (Abu-Absi, 2012), over sixty percent (60%) of them are from Africa.



This estimate covers countries like Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Sudan, and Tunisia. Arabic is also spoken as a minority language in countries like Chad, Mali, Nigeria and Niger Republic. With this, it is simple to assume that one-quarter of the African population speaks Arabic as either first or second language, including Southern Sudan, or even as an official language in countries like Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Though most of the African languages belong to the Niger-Congo family, which is characterized by tone, they are widely influenced by Arabic mostly in the aspect of lexico-semantic. This is because many Arabic words fought their ways into these African languages through religion (Islam), marriage, Arabic scholarship, Arab emigration and immigration, commercial, genetic and recently through technology and globalization. In order to establish the genetic connection of Arab with Africa, Mohammed Bello (1964) in his “*Infaq al- Maisur*” stated while describing socio-geographical feature of *Bilad al-Takrur* (presently comprising Western, Central and Eastern Africa) that the region is co-habited by Arabized African indigenes and Africanized

(Indigenized) Arabs. Furthermore, no one can really predict the exact time Shuwa-Arab (an Arab tribe) migrated to Nigeria. In the course of the socio-cultural interactions between Arabs and Africans, some Arabic words were adopted.

Scholars like Ogunbiyi (1984) opine that the presence of Arabic words in the Yoruba language is not by religion but by genetic relation between the Yorubas and the Arabs because the Yorubas believe that their ancestors migrated from the Middle-East.

For example, words like “*O ya*” (*Hayya*–Arabic) meaning “it is time”, “*Omi*” (Arabic - *Mai*) meaning “water”, “*Aso*” (*Ath-thaub* – Arabic) meaning “cloth” are not of religious import. Though some could not be applied to many other African languages, some of the languages affected by the religious factors are; Mandingo, Fulfulde, Ga, Dendi, Nupe, Wolof and Malagasy etc. It is pertinent to state that the influence of Arabic is not confined to African languages only but it also greatly influence many aspects of human lives like literature, autography (*Ajami*), history, culture, arts, etc. In fact, the history of East and West African sub-continent could not be completed without Arabic.

### **Arabic-Hausa Relationship:**

Hausa people are called Hausawa. In the present day, Hausa constitutes the largest ethnic group in Nigeria, Niger and West Africa in general, and indeed in the entire African continent after the Arabs.

Other places where Hausa language is spoken are Northern Ghana, Northern Cameroon, Southern Libya, Chad, Benin, Togo, and Central African Republic, as well as in Sporadic parts of Sudan and Saudi Arabia. While the Hausa language occupies a socio- political position in the aforementioned countries, e.g. it is a national language in Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon, it is a minority language in Chad and the Central African Republic. Though in other countries Arabic is not an officially recognized language, it is spoken by immigrant communities. Therefore, Hausa language is the first language of over 24million people whereas it is the second commercial and religious language for many others.

T.M. Daud (2001) classifies Hausa into Afro-Asiatic of Western-Chadic sub-group. This group comprises Semitic languages such as Arabic, Hebrew, Barbar, Coptic, Kushitic, and many Chadic languages. This suggests that Hausa and

### Semantic Analysis of Arabic Words in Hausa and Kiswahili Languages

Arabic have linguistic connection in their developmental stages. Apart from this typological connection, Arab and Hausa have genetic relationship. Consequently, the linguistic relationship between the two languages is by direct contact. Therefore, any linguistic study between the two languages could be best done through Comparative Method/Analysis. With this assertion in view, it is believed that any Arabic word found in Hausa language is not a loaned or borrowed word.

Like many other languages, Hausa has a lot of dialect spread across areas where it is spoken, but the one that is judged to be the standard is Kananci (Kano) dialect. Other dialects include Bausanchi (Bauchi), Dauranchi (Daura), Sakkwatanci (Sakkatu) and Zazzaganci (Zaria). (Wikipedia 9, Dec., 2014). Scholars of languages and linguistics have written intensively and extensively on the grammar of the Hausa language. The area covers phonology, noun plurals, verbal tense, verbal idioms and proper names. Among scholars who have written on these aspects is Paul Newman of Yale University in America.

Studying the linguistic relationship between Arabic and Hausa has been a major concern to scholars and institutions of

higher learning at different levels across the National and International arenas. Notable among them are Sajo-baldi (1986), Al-Amin Abu-manga (1994), Alli Abubakar (1973), Galadanci (1993), and T.M. Daud (2001). There are other scholarly works written in tertiary institutions both at Local and International levels to expose or analyze similarity or dissimilarity between the Hausa and Arabic languages, especially in the areas of phonology, morphology, syntax, structure, semantics etc.

Among the major linguistic differences between Arabic and Hausa is that Hausa begins its sentences with subject followed by verb and object (SVO) while Arabic starts with verb, followed by subject and object (VSO). Also, there are some Arabic sounds that are not existing in Hausa sound system such as *ث* (*th*), *ح* (*H*), *خ* (*kh*), *ذ* (*dh*), *ص* (*S*), *ض* (*d*), *ظ* (*z*), *ع* (*á*). However, according to T.M. Daud, (2001), there are several aspects where Hausa relates strongly with Arabic. Despite this, there are many linguistic features which are yet to catch the attention of scholars like Supra-Segment dialectology.

### **Arabic-Kiswahili Relationship:**

*Sawahili*, derived from the Arabic word Sahil, means people of the Coastal area of East Africa, where this language developed. The area is regarded as a meeting point where Arabs from - Gulf and Southern Arabian Peninsula and the people of East Africa converged to form another socio-cultural and linguistic transformation distinct from the Arab and African extraction. Swahili people consist of originally Bantu tribes and later co-opted many other peoples that include Arabs, Indians, Persians, etc. These people are mainly found in Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and Mozambique. There are conflicting reports on the exact period when the interaction between the Arabs and Swahili people began. Some put it at the first millennium while others suggest that it was in the seventh and eight centuries. **B**ut it is certain that trade was the main factor that united them before religion and others followed.

Kiswahili language is grouped under Niger-Congo major group and has its origin from Bantu of Shamaki extraction. However, scholars, like the late Ali Mazrui, believe that Swahili is deeply rooted in Arabic, especially when we look at

the verse number of Arabic words in the language; though discussion continues on the issue. About 140,000,000 people speak Kiswahili as the language spread across countries like Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Congo, Rwanda, Southern Somalia, Northern-Malawi, Mozambique, Comoros and Zambia. Kiswahili language is an official and national language to some of these countries, while in many others it is either an educational, social, commercial or religious language.

Kiswahili language is studied at all levels of educational strata in some East-African higher institutions because of its prominence, importance, educational value and political relevance.

Kiswahili language, like many other African languages, is generally characterized with SVO word order. It is also known to have prevalent of Affixes, especially prefixes which are used to generate new meaning. Another area which receives attention of the scholars is Kiswahili lexicon. Scholars like Rechenbach, Charles W. (1967) and many others have compiled Swahili-English Dictionaries which are found useful for the native speakers, scholars and students alike. Baldi, Sergio, (1988) also studied the comparative similarity between

Kiswahili and Hausa words from Arabic origin. Many other linguistic studies are still ongoing at different levels of Education both at home and abroad towards the understanding of Kiswahili language and its relationship with many other languages in the world.

**Semantic Status of Selected Arabic Words in Hausa and Kiswahili Languages:**

Semantic is all about meaning and its relation to the word and the sentence expressed. However, it is not the concern of this work to discuss the rudiment of the aspect of science of language (Ronnie et al. 2009) nor does it intend to dabble into various approaches to semantic analysis (Cliff Goddard 2011). Furthermore, it will not analyze challenges in doing semantics (John I. Saeed 2009). Our main works here are to compile selected Arabic words which are found in the two languages, and to identify the meaning of these words in the context of semantic levels for the purpose of determining their relativity to the original Arabic words. In order to achieve this, forty (40) words were randomly selected mainly from downloaded Hausa-English and Kiswahili-English dictionaries while Elias Modern Arabic dictionary serves as a guide in determining the Arabic meaning.



Below is a table of nine (9) columns. Column two (2) and three (3) contain Arabic words and its meaning while columns four (4), five (5) and six (6) contain the Hausa equivalent meaning and its semantics status. Columns seven (7), eight (8) and nine (9) relay the Kiswahili counterparts.

Before we proceed to the presentation of the table, there is a need to explain some of the terms expressed therein: SB means Semantic Balance which indicates a phenomena when the Hausa/Kiswahili language have similar meaning with original Arabic words. SE i.e. Semantic Expansion, is used when Hausa/Kiswahili meaning is wider in scope than that of Arabic meaning. On the other hand, SN (Semantic Narrowing) is a term used when the Hausa/Kiswahili meaning is narrower than the Arabic meaning. In the case of SR (Semantic Reversal), it is used to express a situation where Hausa/Kiswahili meaning is opposite to the original Arabic meaning of a particular word. On the basis of these terms, we shall analyze the selected works.

**Selected Hausa-Kiswahili Arabic Related Words:**

**Table I:**

Arabic	Meaning	Hausa	Meaning	Semantic Status	Kiswahili	Meaning	Semantic Status
Tajribah	Experience	Jarubawa	Examination	SN	Jeribio	Experiment	SN
Adab	Politeness (moral)	Ladabi	Education (training)	SB	Adabu	Good manner	SB
Adhabu	Punishment	Azaba	Pain, Punishment	SB	Adhabu	Punishment, penalty	SB
Zuhr	Noon; midday	Azahar	Time around 2.00pm	SN	Adhuhuri	Noon, midday	SB
'Afiyah	Health	Lafiya	Health	SB	Afiya	Health	SB
Al-Haqq	Truth	Haka	Right, Truth	SB	a Haki	Right	SB
Khatar	Danger	Hatseri	Danger, peril	SB	a hatari	Dangerous	SB
Al-'Aibu	Defect	Aibi	Defect	SB	Aibu	Shame	SN
'Ajab	Wonder	Ajaba	Wonder	SB	Ajabu	Marvel, wonder	SB
Ajal	Period	Ajali	Destiny, Day of Death	SN	Ajali	Accident	SN
Qa'idah	Bases	Kaida	Rule, law	SB	a kawaida	Regular, usual	SB
'Aql	Brain	Hankali	Sense	SE	Akili	Intelligence	SE
'Alamah	Mark, sign	Alama	Sign	SB	Alama	Sign, mark, spot	SB
Amma	But	Amma	But	SB	Ama	or	SR
Al-Amr	Matter, order	Alamari	Work, task	SN	Amri/Amru	Order; command	SB
'Arus	Bridegroom	Arusi	Bridegroom	SB	Arusi	Marriage/wedding	SE
Zaman	Time	Zamani	Period	SE	a zamani	Old; ancient	SE
Bunduqi-yyah	Gun	Bindiga	Gun	SB	Bundu ki	Rifle, gun, weapon	SE
Daftar	Notebook	Tira	Charm/Book	SN	Daftari	Book, Register	SE
Dalil	Guide, proof	Dalili	Cause/Proof	SB	Dalili	Sign	SB
'Ilm	Knowledge	Ilmi	Education, science	SN	Elimu	Education/Learning	SB
Fitnah	Infatuation	Fitina	Annoy	SN	Fitina	Dispute	SN
Hisab	Reckoning/Computation	Lisafi	Bill	SN	Hesabi	Maths, calculate	SB
Hirz	Guard	Hirisi	Protection (spiritual)	SN	Hirizi	Charm	SN
Khutbah	Speech	Hutsuba	Sermon	SN	Hotuba	Speech	SB

Janazah	Funeral rite	Janaza	Funeral	SB	Jeneza	Bedstead for carrying a corpse, burial	SN
Jawab	Answer	Jawabi	Speech	SE	Jibu/Majibu	Answer	SB
Maqsud	Aim	Makisudi	Aim	SB	Makusudi	Aim	SB
Labudd	Unavoidable	Labuda	No doubt	SB	Labda	May be, perhaps	SR
Ma'na	Meaning	Maana	Meaning	SB	Maana	Cause, reason	SN
Ma'adan	Mineral	Madini	Mineral	SB	Madini	Metal	SN
Mas'alah	Issue/Question	Matsala	Problem/Issue	SE	Masahala	Question	SB
Saff	Line	Sahu	Line (especially for people)	SN	Safu	Line of object	SN
Sarf	Morphology	Sarfu	Morphology	SB	Sarufi	Grammar	SE
Shugl	Business/Occupation	Shagali	Occupation	SB	Shuguli	Occupation/Affair	SB
Wajib	Necessary	Wajibi	Necessary	SB	Wajibi	Duty	SE
10							
Ziyarah	Visit	Ziara/Ziyarah	Visit	SB	Ziara, Ziyaah	Grave	SN
Qarib	Close (Relation)	Muqarrabi	Close associate	SE	Karibu	Close/Relation	SB
Bayan	Clear	Bayani	Manifest	SB	Bayani	Clear, Plain	SB
Solat	Prayer	Salla	Prayer & festival	SE	Sala	Prayer	SB

### Comment on Table One (1):

Here we shall explain some of the Arabic words and their Semantic classifications in the two languages. For example, the words “*Adab*” (2), *Adhabu* (3), ‘*Afiyah* (5), *Al-Haqq* (6), and *Khatar* (7), etc are grouped under Semantic Balance (SB). This is because, despite the interference of local environment, morphological imbalance and the loss of syntactic accuracy; the two languages still maintain the original meaning of Arabic words. On the other hand, words like ‘*Aqlu*’

(12), and *Zaman* (17), are grouped under Semantic Expansion (SE), this is because, the meaning of these words carry a heavier and more expansive meaning compared to the original Arabic words. For instance, *hankali* (Hausa) and *Akili* (Kiswahili) are used to mean sense/intelligence which of course carry an expanded meaning in the original Arabic word that only means Brain. In the same vein, few of Hausa and Kiswahili words of Arabic origin could be classified under Semantic Narrowing (SN) i.e. these words carry a less or insignificant meaning compared to the Arabic source as we can see in *Tajribah* (1), *Ajal* (10), *Fitnah* (22), *Hirz* (24) and *Saff* (33). Meanwhile, the other Semantic level which is referred to as Semantic Reversal (SR) are not many out of the numbers of the Swahili words extracted. The words, *Ama* (14) and *Labuda* (29) are the only words that fit in for this classification. They all mean opposite of what they are referred to in Arabic. The reason for this Semantic Somersault could be traced to some factors which include social, lexical etc.

Another Semantic Phenomenon that was observed in the table is Semantic Imbalance. By this we mean, area(s) where a Semantic classification of a particular language like Hausa is

different from that of Kiswahili. For instance, *Azuhur* (4) means Noon or Midday in Arabic but it's narrowed down to time around 2.00 PM in Hausa (SN) while in Kiswahili, it still retain its original meaning in Arabic (SB). There are cases of such in the table as we can see in Nos. (8, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, etc). Some of the reasons responsible for the Semantic Imbalance may include difference in the areas of levels of usage, over generalization or under conceived from the original meaning, religious, social and cultural affiliation attached to these words in their respective local environments. There are (21) areas discovered for this Semantic Imbalance whereas the two languages maintain Semantic Agreement (SA) in (19) areas. Below is a table that analyses various Semantic variables in this work in number and percentages as they appear in this work.

**Table II**

S/N		Total no	Hausa	Kiswahili
1	SB	44(55%)	23(57.5%)	21(52.5%)
2	SE	13(16.25%)	6(15%)	7(17.5%)
3	SN	21(26.25%)	11(27.5%)	10(25%)
4	SR	2(2.5%)	0(0%)	2(5%)
5	SA	19(47.5%)	-	-
6	SI	21(52.5%)	-	-

**Conclusion:**

Arabic has had a great influence in the development of Sub-Saharan Africa and the world at large in all human, social, political, scientific and technological endeavours. Its influence on African languages in general is quite enormous. Among the languages that are greatly influenced by Arabic are Hausa and Kiswahili. The influence permeates all linguistic strata among which are Semantics.

In this study, we highlighted some linguistic relationship between Arabic, Hausa and Kiswahili, especially in the meanings of Arabic loan words in the other two languages. From this research, it is concluded that the two languages

engage Arabic in four Semantic classifications in the course of attaching meaning to Arabic words. These levels are Semantic Balance (SB) which has 55% of the total words selected for the research, while Semantic Expansion (SE) has 16.25%, Semantic Narrowing (SN) has 26.25% and lastly Semantic Reversal (SR) carries 2.5% only. For more details, see table I and II. We are also able to give some factors that may lead to the areas of Semantic Imbalances between the two languages. These include social, lexical, linguistic and religious factors. However, we need to emphasize the fact that the data selected for discussion are not enough to make generalization, our conclusion is on the two major languages, but it may serve as a guide for more comprehensive and extensive study for other researchers into the same or similar topic.

This research would like to recommend to researchers in linguistics and Arabic studies to promote further researches into linguistics relationship between Arabic and other languages in Africa, Asia and Europe. Furthermore, a centre or institute may be established in the University to promote research and scholarship in the field of Afro-Arab linguistic relations. This effort, if improved upon, may generate other

benefits, not only in linguistics but also in the areas of politics, economics, science, technology and other human endeavours.

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# حَوْلِيَّاتُ الْحَرْفِ الْعَرَبِيِّ



مجلة علمية محكمة - سنوية.  
يصدرها مركز يوسف الخليفة لكتابة اللغات بالحرف العربي  
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