Lesson One: Mapping the Arabic Language

Figure 1.1 presents a map of the Arabic language. This chart provides an overview of the task at hand and establishes a framework for future learning.

PRINCIPLE ONE

The term articulation (لَفْظ)\(^1\) refers to all words that are produced by the tongue. Articulations (لَفْظ) are divided into (1) words that are meaningful (مُوَضْعُوْع) and (2) words that are meaningless (مَهَّمَل). Meaningful (مُوَضْعُوْع) articulations have established, understood meanings. For example, the Arabic word kitab (كتب) means, “a book.” On the other hand, meaningless (مَهَّمَل) articulations lack established meanings. Consider, for example, the word “Pepsi.” If articulated five hundred years ago, before the advent of this now famous beverage, this word would have had no meaning.

PRINCIPLE TWO

Meaningful (مُوَضْعُوْع) articulations can be further divided into (1) single (مُفْرَد) and (2) compound (مَرْكَب). If an articulation is composed of one word, it is called single (مُفْرَد); whereas, if it is composed of more than one word, it is called compound (مَرْكَب). For example, the word kitab (كتب) is single (مُفْرَد), while the phrase rasul-Allah (رسُولُ الله),\(^2\) made up of two words, is compound (مَرْكَب).

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1 Lafad (لَفْظ) is derived from the verbal noun “to throw.” Arabic grammarians use this term to refer to articulations because speech involves “throwing” sounds from the tongue.

2 رَسُولُ الله means, “Messener of Allah.”
PRINCIPLE THREE

All **single** (مفرود) words are classified into one of three types:

1. noun (اسم)
2. verb (فعل)
3. particle (حرف)

Stated otherwise, every word in the Arabic dictionary fits into one of these three categories.

PRINCIPLE FOUR

**Compound** (مركب) articulations are made up of two or more words. Such combinations are either **beneficial** (معيد) or **non-beneficial** (غير معيد). **Beneficial** (معيد) groups of words express a complete idea and join together to form a complete sentence. **Non-beneficial** (غير معيد) groups of words express an incomplete idea and join together to form a phrase, or an incomplete sentence.

This volume deals with **single** (مفرود) words and emphasizes conjugating verbs and nouns.

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3 A *phrase* is defined as two or more words that form a syntactic unit that is less than a complete sentence.
FIGURE 1.1
A MAP OF THE ARABIC LANGUAGE