

MA'ANI

Harpur College
State University of New York
Binghamton, New York

Khalil I. H. Semaan

In foreign language studies at the university level PROFICIENCY is neither the native's acquaintance with his native tongue nor the basis of principles developed and used in some other discipline, e.g., Linguistic Science. Furthermore, proficiency is not the ability to read and translate from a foreign language with the help of dictionaries, informants, or both, or the fluency in speaking a dialect of that language in some imaginary or even real situation.

Proficiency, as it is understood in foreign language studies at the university level, is all that and a great deal more. It is the specialist's scientific knowledge of the structure (phonology and syntax) of the foreign language he teaches or studies, his knowledge of the variety of linguistic usage prevalent among its native users (i.e., speech, oral and written, in prose and in poetry, on a variety of subjects, in formal and informal situations), his ability to analyse and make sound linguistic and literary judgment on that usage, his knowledge of the history and development of the language and its native users, and his fluency in expressing himself in it clearly and correctly, in speech and in writing. Of course, this last characteristic applies only to living languages.

It is obvious that, at this stage of the development of Arabic studies in America, we possess neither a large number of specialists who are proficient nor is this unfortunately the objective aimed at in the majority of our centers for Near Eastern Studies. This is not a situation we can remedy overnight. It is, however, a deficiency that we Arabists must vigorously attack and urgently eliminate.

In previous publications and addresses, I have tried to show some of the deficiencies in Arabic textbooks and among Arabic specialists in this country. I have pleaded with those in charge of the administration of Arabic language studies to establish rigorous standards, re-

quiring in Arabic the same kind of proficiency they aspire to in other foreign languages. So far, some progress has been made: at Harvard, for instance, where one who specializes in Arabic, in some cases, is required to scientifically edit a brief text in manuscript form as a part of his training; at California, Chicago, Georgetown, Indiana, Minnesota, and New York University where courses in Arabic literature are now offered; and at our own University Center, State University of New York at Binghamton, where the student must successfully complete, in addition to four language and linguistics courses in Arabic, a course in the historical development of Arabic literature, a course in the Arabic Novel and Short Story, and a course in a selected topic in Arabic, ordinarily Arabic Poetry, Ibn Khaldûn, Tabari, Jahiz, etc, in order to qualify for the Bachelor's degree in this field. Let me hasten to say

that, at the institutions I have just mentioned, the initiative was that of their own able administrators and capable professors of Arabic. Let us hope that at other venerable institutions where Arabic is taught by Arabists, similar literacy requirements will be instituted, and that the overall structure of Arabic curricula will be developed. For, although this first step towards viability in Arabic studies represents progress, the goal is still distant and greater efforts must be exerted if the Arabic specialists whom we produce in his country are to compare favorably with their counterparts in Europe and elsewhere.

As a further contribution toward improving Arabic curricula and teaching in the United States, I am now addressing myself to a topic that has hitherto been neglected, namely, Ma'ani, a field of Arabic learning whose know-

ledge is a must for all practicing and budding Arabists. This paper summarizes the first in a series of essays on Balaghah and Naqd, which I am working on at the present time.