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## The Debate Between the *Başrah* and *Kūfah* Schools in *Naḥw*: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Political Interests

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### Abstract

*The language contains an ideology that is connected to power and domination. This is because language is used depending on a particular ideological point of view and the actions of those holding power. Likewise, the differences in the schools' (understandings) of Naḥw Başrah and Kūfah are also influenced by their users' ideology and power dominance. Therefore, this study discusses the ideological dimensions and political interests in the debate between the schools of Naḥw Başrah and Kūfah. This study uses the critical discourse analysis (CDA) method on the corpus of literature and dialogues of central figures, such as Sibawayh and al-Kisā'ī, to discuss discursive practices that describe power construction and delegitimization strategies between schools. The results of this study indicate that the methodological differences between the normative Başrah and the flexible Kūfah are manifestations of ideological disputes and political interests that affect their legitimacy, not only linguistic. The delegitimization strategy is a symbolic domination tool to protect each group's intellectual authority. Therefore, the implications of this research emphasize the urgency of estimating the ideological and political background in the*

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*study of Naḥw science, especially in interpreting the polemics of the Baṣrah and Kūfah schools, so that the linguistic approach can be more comprehensive and critical of the socio-historical context.*

**Keywords:** Critical discourse analysis; delegitimization; ideology; power; *Naḥw Baṣrah* and *Kūfah*.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In today's world, many aspects of social life are not entirely free of politics, as many societal problems are generally related to power relations. In this context, language cannot be separated from politics, as its use is always influenced by the needs and perspectives of its users, especially those who wield influence in shaping discourse (Avelino, 2021). As Aristotle (cited in Desale, 2022) stated, humans are politicians who use language for their own purposes, whether for personal gain or for the benefit of a group. This is because language is not only a social practice but is also always influenced and closely related to social, political, and economic circumstances, which shape its users and its role as an object of study, manipulation, and authorization.

In language lies an ideology that is closely related to power and domination. Everything spoken or written is expressed from a particular ideological perspective (Hughes, 2020). Fowler (1991, as cited in Desale, 2022) states that the world of language use in any social practice is not the real world but rather a world that is biased and judged based on the ideological intentions of the language user. In this case, Gee (1990, as cited in Desale, 2022) also adds that ideology is the opposite of reality, indicating the role of language use in covering up or reversing reality.

Within this framework, the study of Arabic grammar (*Naḥw*) cannot be separated from the socio-political context in which it developed. Previously, the classical debate between the schools of *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* was traditionally understood solely as a methodological difference, particularly regarding the *Baṣrah* school's use of *qiyās* 'analogy' and the *Kūfah* school's use of *samā* 'oral transmission'. This understanding often reduced the debate to merely technical linguistic differences, while ignoring the broader ideological and political dimensions that shaped this scholarly tradition.

Recent research in critical discourse analysis has demonstrated that language plays a crucial role in shaping and maintaining power relations across various social contexts. For example, research examines the interconnectedness of language, power, and freedom (Obeng, 2020); changes in the language used by al-Jazeera articles over time within the context of the semiotic dimension of power, and demonstrates that changes in language within articles do not affect user comments over time (Rouhana, 2023); and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech at the UN General Assembly on September 29, 2014. This was done to analyze the language used to manipulate power and ideology, taking into account argumentative strategies and the role of social factors (Khaled, 2020). Other research even examines how rulers acquire and control power through language (Joullié et al., 2021) and uncovers the ideology embodied in the slogan of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition party in 2018 (Desale, 2022). However, studies on *Naḥw* (Arabic grammar) remain limited. This is because previous research has focused on language as a medium for establishing ideological positions and maintaining authority by shaping public perceptions.

As for the science of Arabic grammar itself, there are only a few studies and books that touch on politics or power, such as Al-As'ad's (1992) work, *Al-Wasīṭ fī Tārīkh al-Naḥw al-'Arabī*, which touches on the political background between *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah*, which caused differences between the two in the matter of *Naḥw*. Al-As'ad stated that before the debate and differences of opinion between the *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools in the matter of *Naḥw*, the two cities did have different political views (Amīn, 2005). Choirot and Haidar (2023) see how the relationship between *Naḥw* and *Sarf* (changes in the form of essential Arabic words) and power influences the growth and development of Arabic grammar. Moreover, Nurdianto (2021) discusses the efforts of classical *Nuḥāt* (Arabic grammarians) in renewing the science of *Naḥw* in their books from

various perspectives, which prove that ideological thinking influences the rationality of its owners towards the theory of language thinking, which has an impact on their *Naḥw* thinking. However, no research has been found that explicitly discusses the discursive practices of the debate between the two schools of thought in the science of *Naḥw*, in relation to its ideological dimensions and power structures through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Therefore, this study focuses on filling the gap in previous studies by directing this study to discursive practices in the debate between the *Naḥw Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools. This study examines how ideological representation, power configuration, and delegitimization strategies work in the text and context of the debate, not only looking at linguistic and methodological differences. This study, which uses the CDA method, aims to reveal the relationship between language, ideological interests, and power hidden behind the arguments of classical Arabic grammar to provide new insights into the study of Arabic linguistic history that is more political and ideological. Thus, this study situates the science of *Naḥw* within the discourse of power.

The highlight of this research is its interdisciplinary approach, which combines modern critical discourse theory with classical Arabic linguistic studies. This is considering that the differences of opinion between the *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools in the issue of *Naḥw* are not solely caused by differences in their perspectives and methods of *Naḥw* study, in the *manhaj* 'method' used, and in socio-cultural conditions. However, these differences are also influenced by the political nuances and fanaticism of the two cities. So this difference leads to delegitimization in the debate between *Naḥw* figures from *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah*, such as that between Sībawayh and al-Kisā'ī. Their debates are both suspected of having political interests, where Sībawayh wants to compete with the *Kūfah Naḥw* figure, in this case, al-Kisā'ī, to influence the development of *Naḥw* science in Baghdad. So the *Naḥw* discourse of these two schools illustrates the socio-political problems that created and influenced the growth of *Naḥw* science. Therefore, this study provides a new perspective on linguistic discourse as a tool for negotiating power and ideological formation, while also distinguishing it from previous studies that discussed methodological differences only descriptively.

The contribution of this research is certainly not limited to the study of Arabic linguistics but also encompasses the more complex field of discourse studies by showing how conventional grammar serves as a platform for negotiating power and creating ideology. In a broader context, this research also contributes to society, specifically by advancing understanding of the influence of power structures on the acquisition of knowledge. In terms of SDG 4 (quality education), the contribution of this research is in line with the educational goals related to critical thinking, specifically in this research, on critical literacy in the field of linguistics, the aim of which is to understand that language is not only a formal linguistic system, but can also be a platform for competing for power and the formation of understanding.

Therefore, based on the above description, this research is guided by three main research problems, namely:

1. How are ideological positions represented in the debate between the *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools in the science of *Naḥw*?
2. How are power relations and socio-political contexts, including geographical and political factors, constructed and reflected in the discourse?
3. What delegitimization strategies are used by key figures such as Sībawayh and al-Kisā'ī to strengthen their arguments?

By answering these questions, this research is expected to provide a more complete understanding of the development of *Naḥw* as a discipline that is ideological and political, not merely linguistic.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The discussion related to the debate between the *Naḥw Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools has become an important study in classical Arabic linguistics. The convention is understood as a methodological conflict in the compilation of grammatical rules so far, especially in terms of the

use of *qiyās* ‘analogy’ by *Baṣrah* and *samā’* ‘oral transmission’ by *Kūfah* (Al-Ṭawīl, 1984). However, this approach often ignores the ideological dimensions and interests of power that contribute to the scientific composition of each school. Therefore, this literature review describes two main parts, namely 1) the methodological and ideological paradigms between the *Naḥw Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools, which are part of classical linguistic discourse, and 2) the theory and methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a medium to reveal the relationship between language, ideology, and power.

## 2.1 Methodological and Ideological Paradigms in the *Naḥw Baṣrah–Kūfah* Schools

In general, the *Baṣrah* school, through its application of *qiyās* ‘analogy’, is known for its deductive and normative approach. In contrast, the *Kūfah* school is more explicit in its emphasis on orally transmitted linguistic models (*samā’*). It is descriptive of the Arabic language varieties present in society, thus making it more inductive. This difference indicates the ideological direction and potential socio-political relationships of each school, rather than merely illustrating methodological differences. Previous research has shown that methodological differences between the two schools directly influence the rules governing the understanding of Arabic sentence structure, including in the translation and interpretation of the Qur’ān. The stricter *Baṣrah* approach creates a more rigid interpretation, while the looser *Kūfah* approach creates opportunities for more adaptive interpretation. Therefore, the differences among *Naḥw* scholars are not always objective but also create ideological meaning in Arabic texts (Yahya et al., 2021).

Other previous research has also described the differences between the two schools in a structured manner, providing guidelines for developing more complex Arabic language teaching materials. Although the primary focus of this study is pedagogical, it argues that the differences in views between the *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools reflect a scientific heritage tied to specific social and political circumstances in the history of classical Arabic linguistics, not merely the technical variety of grammatical analysis (Jamidi, 2021). Furthermore, previous research discusses Ibn al-Anbari’s notes, which show that the differences between the two schools involve ideological strategies, political influence, and group identity to strengthen the legitimacy of their respective sciences, not solely scientific issues (Asrina, 2016).

## 2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis of the Construction of Power in *Naḥw* Science

In discourse theory, CDA has developed into an efficient method for interpreting texts as social practices that contain power interests. Van Dijk (2006) states that discourse can produce symbolic influence, while a three-dimensional model connecting text structure, discourse production, consumption practices, and broader social practices was introduced by Fairclough (2013a). This method provides a conceptual medium for re-describing classical linguistic texts, such as Arabic books discussing *Naḥw*, as manifestations of ideological positions related to power relations, not only objective scientific texts. Through the context of the development of classical Islamic history, this discussion is relevant due to the strategic interests in standardizing Arabic developed within the framework of the caliphate institution (Al-Athīr, 1998; Amīn, 2005).

From a theoretical and methodological perspective, two relatively separate fields of study, classical Arabic linguistics and modern critical theory, are filled by this study, which previously had gaps. The use of the CDA method in this study poses a new perspective in understanding the process of the formation of classical Arabic linguistics as an element of cultural strategy, so that it not only enriches the existing literature. The main objective of this study is to explain the ideological dimensions and political interests behind the building of *Naḥw* science and to examine how linguistic discourse is used to depict and reject the influence of power. Therefore, this literature review forms an argumentative framework that supports the research objective of presenting a critical discourse analysis of the building of *Naḥw* science in a socio-political context through the lens of CDA, not only summarizing existing studies.

### 3. METHODS

#### 3.1 Research Design

This research employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and a qualitative approach to examine the relationship between language, power, and social practices. The method was chosen because CDA enabled analysis of how power relations and socio-political interests shaped scientific discourse in *Naḥw* debates between the *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools. CDA also allowed the texts to be analyzed as part of social practices that legitimized certain positions while challenging others in classical *Naḥw* studies.

Fairclough's (1995) framework, which emphasized three analytical concepts (text, discursive practice, and social practice), was used in this study. It was applied to examine the relationship between linguistic features in the texts and the production and distribution of discourse within its social context. Through this framework, the study systematically analyzed textual data as part of broader scholarly discourse.

#### 3.2 Data Source

The data sources for this research included both primary and secondary data, which complemented each other. The primary sources of this research consisted of:

1. Texts discussing the differences between the *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools of *Naḥw*, such as the book *al-Madhāhib al-Naḥwiyyah fī Ḍaw' al-Dirāsah al-Lughawīyyah al-Ḥadīthah* (Al-Sinjirjī, 1986) and the book *al-Madāris al-Naḥwiyyah* (Ḍayf, 1968).
2. Texts discussing the history of the emergence of differences between the *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools of *Naḥw*, such as the book *Nash'at al-Naḥw wa Tārīkh Ashhar al-Nuḥāt* (Al-Ṭanṭāwī, 1997).
3. Texts discussing disputes among *Naḥw* scholars, such as the book *al-Khilāf bayna al-Naḥwiyyīn: Dirāsah wa Taḥlīl wa Taqwīm* (Al-Ṭawīl, 1984) and the book *Ṭabaqāt al-Naḥwiyyīn wa al-Lughawīyyīn* (Al-Zubaydī, 1973).

The selection of these texts was based on the content of the discussions, the arguments and evidence presented, and the reflection of scientific discourse in relation to critical discourse analysis within the context of power relations and socio-political influences.

As for the secondary sources, they included literature that:

1. Discussed the historical development of the cities of *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah*, such as the book *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh* (Al-Athīr, 1998), the book *Fajr al-Islām* (Amīn, 2005), the book *Futūḥ al-Buldān* (Al-Balādhurī, 1991), and the book *Tārīkh al-Umam wa al-Mulūk* (Al-Ṭabarī, 2001).
2. Discussed the biographies of the central figures of both schools, such as the books *Mu'jam al-Udabā': Irshād al-Arīb ilā Ma'rifat al-Adīb* (Al-Ḥamawī, 1999) and *Marātib al-Naḥwiyyīn* (Al-Lughawī, 2002).
3. Discussed Arabic grammatical rules, such as the book *al-Wasīṭ fī Tārīkh al-Naḥw al-'Arabī* (Al-As'ad, 1992), the book *al-Muḥhir fī 'Ulūm al-Lughah wa Anwā'uhā* (Al-Suyūfī, 1987), and the book *Mughnī al-Labīb 'an Kutub al-a'arīb* (Hishām & Yūsuf, 2005).
4. Consisted of relevant scientific journal articles discussing the *Baṣrah-Kūfah* debate and the relationship between language and power, such as Asrina (2016), Jamidi (2021), and Yahya et al. (2021).
5. Included journal articles employing critical discourse analysis, such as Khaled (2020), Obeng (2020), and Rouhana (2023).

These sources were selected based on their historical relevance, scientific credibility, and contribution to understanding the socio-political and intellectual context of *Naḥw* discourse.

#### 3.3 Research Instrument

This study developed an analytical framework based on the CDA method, which served as the research instrument. It provided a foundation and benchmark for reviewing, grouping, and

interpreting the data coherently. The researchers analyzed ideological positions, relations of authority within socio-political contexts, and delegitimization strategies in the discourse surrounding the debate between the *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools of *Naḥw*. These categories were operationalized into analytical indicators, including argumentation patterns, lexical and rhetorical choices, expressions of authority, and strategies for framing opposing views. Through these indicators, the instrument enabled the researchers to trace how meaning, positions, and inter-school relations were constructed within *Naḥw* discourse. Thus, the research instrument functioned not merely as an analytical aid but as an interpretive framework linking critical analysis to textual data on the ideological and social dimensions underlying the scientific debate.

### 3.4 Data Collection

This study collected data through a literature review by examining relevant primary and secondary sources thematically and linguistically. The researchers focused on identifying the ideological dimensions underlying the conceptual and technical differences between the *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools, the hegemonic elements embedded in the construction of *Naḥw* discourse, and the delegitimization strategies employed in the debates between the leading figures of the two schools, namely Sībawayh of *Baṣrah* and al-Kisā'ī of *Kūfah*. This method was to examine the ideological and political dimensions of the methodological differences between the two schools.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis technique used in this study followed Fairclough's (1995) CDA framework: description, interpretation, and explanation. In the description stage, the researchers analyzed the text by identifying linguistic features in the debate, including narrative choices, syntactic structures, language use, and rhetorical strategies employed by each school to construct scientific legitimacy. In the interpretation stage, the researchers examined discursive practices, including the production, distribution, and consumption of discourse within the power and ideological structures of each school. In the explanation stage, the researchers analyzed broader social practices to understand how the discourse reflected and functioned to justify, maintain, or challenge dominant power relations. These three stages were applied to reveal the relationship between language, ideology, and power in the construction of classical *Naḥw* discourse.

## 4. RESULTS

This study argues that ideological dimensions and political interests are present in the debate between the *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools in the science of *Naḥw*, not only in relation to technical linguistic differences. Using the CDA method, this study identified three main findings.

### 4.1 Ideological Dimensions in the *Naḥw* Debate

The differences in approach between the *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools demonstrate two opposing linguistic ideologies. The *Baṣrah* school is considered to prioritize linguistic standardization through systematic reasoning and *qiyās* 'analogy' (Al-Ṭawīl, 1984; Dayf, 1968). The *Kūfah* school, on the other hand, adopted a more descriptive approach, accepting a wider range of linguistic evidence (Amīn, 2005). This difference demonstrates an ideological, not merely methodological, difference, which can illustrate contrasting assumptions regarding linguistic authority and legitimacy, as can be seen in the following data:

- (1) The *al-Baṣrah* school has established criteria for tribes whose language can be used as a basis for establishing rules, namely tribes that live in the interior of the desert and mountains and have never mixed with foreigners, namely the *Qays*, *Tamīm*, *As'ad*, *Hudhayl*, *Kinānah*, and *al-Ṭā'īyyīn* tribes. (Al-Ṭawīl, 1984, pp. 107-108)

The data above suggest that predetermined criteria determine linguistic dominance. The *Baṣrah* school has established a distinction between acceptable and unacceptable forms of Arabic by limiting valid linguistic evidence to certain ethnic groups considered linguistically pure, not yet mixed with foreign languages. So this discourse has placed selected ethnic groups as authoritative language users while marginalizing other Arabic-speaking communities as a result of linguistic legitimacy built on social categories. In CDA's view, this discourse reflects an ideological tendency towards linguistic control and uniformity.

- (2) The *al-Kūfah* school uses all the languages used by the entire *al-'Arab* tribe as the basis for establishing the rules of *Naḥw*.  
(Al-Ṭawīl, 1984, p. 108)

The *Kūfah* school, however, did not prioritize restrictions but rather established inclusive linguistic dominance. As in the data above, "all languages" here refers to all forms of language, demonstrating *Kūfah*'s ideological priority in recognizing linguistic diversity. *Kūfah* legitimized a broader range of linguistic practices rather than limiting grammatical evidence to a small number of Arab tribes. Based on this, this discourse demonstrates that *Kūfah* did not prioritize strict linguistic standardization but rather prioritized a descriptive linguistic ideology that prioritized actual language use.

- (3) The prominent inhabitants of *Baṣrah* were generally experts in logic, philosophy, and science. Their expertise in logic, philosophy, and science directly influenced their methodology for studying grammar.  
(Al-Ṭawīl, 1984, p. 70)

This discourse demonstrates that grammatical methodology is closely linked to a broader intellectual tradition. The scholars of *Baṣrah* and their scholarship can be traced back to the early Abbasid period, when the movement to translate foreign books into Arabic was encouraged and flourished. Consequently, many *Naḥw* scholars were interested in the study of Philosophy and *Kalam* (logic) (Al-Ṭawīl, 1984; Dayf, 1968), thus influencing and helping them legitimize analytical concepts such as classification, the theory of *Al-'Āmil* (factors that cause changes in vowel and meaning of words in sentences), and *Ta'līl* (explanation or reasoning behind a law or phenomenon). Furthermore, Mu'tazilite theological thought (a school of Islamic theology that emphasizes the use of reason (rationality) in understanding religious teachings) also influenced the concepts of thought and perspectives of the people of *Baṣrah* (Al-Ṭawīl, 1984). This discourse thus explains how rational analysis was used to reinforce an ideology that valued systematic reasoning and was a source of scientific authority in grammatical inquiry.

- (4) When *Baṣrah* submitted to the language rules they had established as general norms, *Kūfah* really respected all existing *lahja*t (dialects) and made them into rules that could be followed and used.  
(Al-Ṭawīl, 1984, p. 71)

The data above shows that in *Kūfah*, they adapted their analysis of *Naḥw* to the reality of Arabic language use in society, prioritizing a more empirical and descriptive approach. Therefore, in compiling *Naḥw* rules, *Kūfah* was more flexible by using the *samā'* method, 'oral transmission'. This was based on its figures. Before they studied *Naḥw*, they were directly involved in the study of *Fiqh*, *Hadith*, *Qirā'ah* 'reading the Qur'an', and literary studies. When they began to enter the realm of *Naḥw* studies, the *manhaj* 'method' used also influenced their study of *Naḥw* (Amīn, 2005).

These findings have a different ideological orientation. The discourse revealed demonstrates that linguistic variation cannot be assessed simply as a deviation from standard norms, but rather as a source of legitimate linguistic rules. Therefore, it can be concluded that the exclusive tendencies of the *Baṣrah* tradition were challenged by *Kūfah*, which positioned itself as a school that valued empirical linguistic evidence.

Thus, the findings of this study demonstrate that the differences between *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* in the science of *Naḥw* extend beyond mere technical grammatical differences. Both schools gave

birth to opposing linguistic ideologies regarding dominance, legitimacy, and linguistic evidence. *Baṣrah* introduced a normative ideology grounded in analogy and selective linguistic sources, while *Kūfah* adopted a more comprehensive, descriptive ideology that recognized a broader diversity of language use. This ideological contrast, then, contributed to the development of distinct scientific characteristics and deepened the knowledge struggle between the two cultures.

#### 4.2 Political Interests and Geographical Factors

Political interests and geographical conditions influenced the conflict between the *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools, not just linguistic and methodological differences. The development of each school occurred within a specific social and political context that provided opportunities to achieve scholarly dominance, legitimacy, and influence. Thus, their political support and geographic location played significant roles in shaping the power struggle in the history of Arabic grammar studies and in establishing the intellectual prestige of both schools. This can be seen in the following data:

- (5) The Abbasid Caliphate's political policies, which accommodated the interests of the *mawālī* (non-Arab population) and appointed ministers, governors, commanders, and officials from the *mawālī* class, especially those of Persian descent, demonstrated a harmonious reciprocal relationship between the government's political policies and the figures of *Kūfah*'s *nahwu* (Islamic jurisprudence).  
(Al-Makhzūmī, 1958, p. 331)

These data demonstrate that the development of linguistics was closely linked to political authority. Because *Kūfah*'s linguistic orientation was more inclusive, the facilities and conveniences provided to *mawālī* by the Abbasid Caliphate benefited *Kūfah*, embracing a variety of dialects and welcoming language users from diverse groups. This enabled Kufa to have greater opportunities to collaborate with the government, aligning with Abbasid political ideology, which accommodated all language groups. In CDA's view, this discourse demonstrates the role of political institutions in legitimizing certain intellectual traditions. Based on this, linguistic dominance can be reinforced by political patronage and state support, not just through scholarly arguments. As further explained in the following data:

- (6) Kufa was closer to Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid dynasty, which gave it easier direct access to political power and court legitimacy. Furthermore, al-Kisā'ī served as the tutor of Harun al-Rashīd and his two sons, al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn.  
(Al-As'ad, 1992, pp. 68-69; Hammud, 2003, p. 74)

Based on the data above, the geographical location of *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* played a significant role in constructing the political and symbolic power of each sect. Before the Battle of Jamal in 36 AH (656 AD), the cities of *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* were relatively free of conflict (Al-Athīr, 1998; Al-Ṭabarī, 2001). However, during the Battle of Jamal, the people of *Baṣrah* joined forces with 'Āishah, Ṭalhah, and al-Zubayr, while the people of *Kūfah* joined forces with 'Alī, and *Kūfah* later became the capital during 'Alī's Caliphate. Since then, the two cities have had different political views and support. Moreover, the people of *Kūfah* fully supported the power of the Abbasid Caliphate, which in turn fostered a reciprocal relationship, enabling the Caliphate to support the development of *Kūfah*'s language and grammar.

This discourse demonstrates that political ties played a significant role in establishing *Kūfah*'s dominance in scholarship. *Kūfah*'s proximity to Baghdad enabled it to maintain stronger ties with government officials and state institutions. The *Kūfah* school's intellectual authority was further institutionalized with the selection of al-Kisā'ī as the teacher of Harun al-Rashīd and his sons, al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn. In CDA's view, knowledge and power mutually reinforce one another through these relationships. In this case, scholarly legitimacy was strengthened through access to political networks and royal support, rather than solely through linguistic expertise. Thus, the *Kūfah* school gained greater symbolic power and social standing, enabling it to exert greater influence in debates over linguistic rules and to advance Arabic scholarship further.

- (7) *Baṣrah* was close to the Bedouin Arabs (inland), whose language had not been contaminated by the language of foreigners living in the cities. They had close ties with the Bedouin Arabs. They met the Bedouin Arabs who came to *Baṣrah* and adopted their language, or, conversely, those who visited the Bedouin Arabs to seek evidence for establishing the rules of grammar.  
(Al-Ṭawīl, 1984, pp. 36-76)

These data indicate that geographical proximity can confer linguistic legitimacy. To the west, *Baṣrah* is adjacent to *Wādī Nejed* and to the south to *Bahrayn* (Al-Ṭanṭāwī, 1997; Al-Ṭawīl, 1984). *Baṣrah* is also close to *al-Marbad*, a renowned Arab art market in the early Islamic period. This art market is similar to the *‘Ukāz* art market in the pre-Islamic era. This market was a gathering place for Arabs and the people of *Baṣrah*, where they exchanged ideas and information. Even the inhabitants of *Baṣrah* themselves possess a deep-rooted and fundamental linguistic fluency, as they come from tribes whose languages have not yet been mixed (Al-As‘ad, 1992; Al-Sinjirjī, 1986; Al-Ṭawīl, 1984). Therefore, this discourse, by focusing on the purity of Bedouin Arabic, has positioned *Baṣrah* as the guardian of the original Arabic language. This forms a structure of linguistic dominance, in which certain groups of speakers are prioritized over others. In the CDA view, geographical regions serve as symbolic references to legitimize certain linguistic ideologies.

- (8) Although there were Bedouin Arabs in *Kūfah*, their numbers were very small, and their fluency was lower than that of the inhabitants of *Baṣrah*.  
(Al-Balādhurī, 1991, p. 276; Al-Ṭanṭāwī, 1997, p. 82)

The above data demonstrate that diverse geography can impact the advancement of *Kūfah*’s linguistic dominance. These data demonstrate that *Kūfah*’s social characteristics are related to its interactions with the broad diversity that characterizes its heterogeneous environment. Therefore, *Kūfah* adopted a more inclusive approach to linguistic evidence and reduced its rigidity regarding linguistic purity. From the CDA perspective, geographic settings influenced the construction of linguistic dominance and shaped the broader epistemological orientation of the *Kūfah* school.

These findings demonstrate that political and geographical factors are inseparable from the development of the *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools. The *Kūfah* school gained broader legitimacy, recognition, and institutional support through its ties to the Abbasid Caliphate. At the same time, *Baṣrah* became the guardian of authentic Arabic through its close ties with the Bedouin Arab community. Thus, these factors influenced the distribution of symbolic power and scholarly authority, but were not limited to the production of grammatical knowledge alone. Therefore, the linguistic arguments and broader socio-political interests involved in the dispute between the two schools must be understood as contested.

#### 4.3 Delegitimization Strategy in Debate Discourse

The debate between Sībawayh and al-Kisā’ī demonstrates a systematic practice of delegitimization. Al-Kisā’ī utilized his proximity to power and rhetorical strategies to directly counter Sībawayh’s theoretical approach, asserting the superiority of Arabic-language practices. The findings of this study will explain the delegitimization that occurred, the resistance to it, the legitimization achieved through external authority, and the group’s recognition of authority.

A brief chronology of the debate began with Sībawayh’s visit as the imam or central figure of *Naḥw Baṣrah* to the city of *al-Barāmīkah*, one of the cities in Baghdad, in the hope of taking an important step to get closer to the caliph and the rulers, as had been achieved by the figures of *Naḥw Kūfah*. Therefore, Sībawayh met Yaḥyā bin Khālīd al-Barmakī, a minister in the government of Hārūn al-Rashīd, and asked Yaḥyā to bring him together with al-Kisā’ī in a debate forum in the presence of the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (Al-Ṭanṭāwī, 1997). However, before the debate between Sībawayh and al-Kisā’ī began, there was an opening debate between Sībawayh and al-Aḥmar (Al-Zubaydī, 1973), as in the following quote:

وحضر سيبويه فأقبل عليه الأحمر فسأله عن مسألة فأجابها سيبويه.  
فقال له: أخطأت.

ثم سألته عن ثانية فأجاب فقال له: أخطأت.  
ثم سألته عن ثالثة فأجابها فيها فقال له: أخطأت.

- (9) Sībawayh arrived, and al-Aḥmar approached him and asked him questions, which Sībawayh answered. al-Aḥmar said to him, “You are wrong.” Then he asked a second question, to which Sībawayh answered, and al-Aḥmar said to him, “You are wrong.” Then he asked a third question, to which Sībawayh answered, and al-Aḥmar said to him, “You are wrong.” (Al-Asʿad, 1992, pp. 104-109; Al-Ḥamawī, 1999, pp. 111-120; Al-Suyūṭī, 1987, p. 67; Al-Ṭanṭāwī, 1997, pp. 30-32; Al-Ṭawīl, 1984, pp. 90-91)

In the debate, all of Sībawayh’s answers, namely answering several questions raised by al-Aḥmar, were declared wrong by al-Aḥmar with the phrase *akhṭaʿta* ‘your answer is wrong’ (Al-Ḥamawī, 1999, p. 111). al-Aḥmar repeated the phrase *akhṭaʿta* ‘you are wrong’ as an attempt at direct delegitimization. al-Aḥmar deliberately repeatedly rejected Sībawayh’s responses, instead of discussing the meaning and content of Sībawayh’s arguments. In this debate, Sībawayh was dissatisfied and stated that what al-Aḥmar did to him was unethical. As in the following quote:

فقال له سيبويه: هذا سوء أدب.

- (10) Sībawayh said to him, “This is disrespectful behavior.” (Al-Asʿad, 1992, pp. 104-109; Al-Ḥamawī, 1999, pp. 111-120; Al-Suyūṭī, 1987, p. 67; Al-Ṭanṭāwī, 1997, pp. 30-32; Al-Ṭawīl, 1984, pp. 90-91)

The data above shows that, after being repeatedly blamed, Sībawayh no longer defended himself with direct arguments from rules or grammar, but instead offered a counter-discursive response to the delegitimization. Sībawayh here opposed the interactive attitudes adopted by his opponents. Sībawayh’s remarks calling his opponents impolite indicate that the debate also concerned opposing statements about proper scientific behavior, not just linguistic issues.

The attitude shown by al-Aḥmar, representing the al-Kisāʾī group, actually wanted to influence Sībawayh before debating with their Naḥw imam, namely al-Kisāʾī. Finally, Sībawayh, who felt cornered, insisted on meeting and debating with al-Kisāʾī immediately. Until then, al-Kisāʾī arrived with a group of Arabs; then, after sitting down, he immediately spoke, asking who among them would ask a question. Sībawayh then invited al-Kisāʾī to ask. al-Kisāʾī asked as follows:

فقال له الكسائي: كيف تقول: قد كنت أظن أن العقرب أشد لسعة من الزنبور فإذا هو هي، أو فإذا هو إياها؟ فقال سيبويه: فإذا هو هي ولا يجوز النصب. فقال له الكسائي: لحنت، ثم سألته عن مسائل من هذا النوع (خرجت فإذا عبد الله القائم) أو (القائم)؟ فقال سيبويه: في ذلك كله بالرفع دون النصب. فقال الكسائي: ليس هذا من كلام العرب، العرب ترفع في ذلك كله وتنصب.

- (11) al-Kisāʾī asked him, “How do you read: (قَدْ كُنْتُ أَظُنُّ أَنَّ الْعَقْرَبَ أَشَدُّ لَسَعَةً مِنَ الزُّنْبُورِ، فَإِذَا هُوَ هِيَ أَوْ فَإِذَا هُوَ إِيَّاهَا؟) Sībawayh replied, “The correct one is the first, which is (فَإِذَا هُوَ هِيَ) with *Rafʿ* (هي) (the ruling of reading in grammar, which is marked by *ḍammah*, *wāw*, *alif*, and *nūn*), and it is not permissible to subtract (فَإِذَا هُوَ إِيَّاهَا) al-Kisāʾī said, “You have made a grammatical error.” Then he asked him about a similar case: (خرجت فإذا عبد الله القائم) أو (القائم)؟ Sībawayh replied, “In all these cases, the correct one is the *Rafʿ* (القائم) and not the *Naṣb* (القائم).” al-Kisāʾī said, “The Arabs used both *Rafʿ* and *Naṣb*.” (Al-Asʿad, 1992, pp. 104-109; Al-Ḥamawī, 1999, pp. 111-120; Al-Suyūṭī, 1987, p. 67; Al-Ṭanṭāwī, 1997, pp. 30-32; Al-Ṭawīl, 1984, pp. 90-91)

al-Kisāʾī criticized Sībawayh’s opinion. Even the people of Kūfah who were present also criticized Sībawayh’s opinion. Moreover, when al-Kisāʾī asked a similar question with a different example, everyone still criticized Sībawayh. Instead of changing his opinion, Sībawayh maintained his opinion, namely that the correct Arabic rule is the *Rafʿ* (القائم) not the *Naṣb* (القائم). Likewise, al-Kisāʾī maintained his opinion that the Arabs used both *Rafʿ* and *Naṣb*. The debate continued, but both remained firm in their respective opinions until Yaḥyā bin Khālīd commented on the matter, which al-Kisāʾī then answered by bringing in Arabs from the interior.

فقال له الكسائي: هذه العرب في بابك قد جمعته من كل أوب، ووفدت عليك من كل صقع، وهم فصحاء الناس وقد قنع بهم أهل المصريين، وسمع أهل الكوفة وأهل البصرة منهم فيحضرهم ويسألون.

- (12) al-Kisā'ī said: "Those who will decide are the Arabs who are behind the door; they have come from various parts of the tribe, and they are *Fuṣṣāḥā*' (people who speak good language); their language has been used as a basis by the *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools. What if we bring them and ask about this problem?"

(Al-As'ad, 1992, pp. 104-109; Al-Ḥamawī, 1999, pp. 111-120; Al-Suyūfī, 1987, p. 67; Al-Ṭanṭāwī, 1997, pp. 30-32; Al-Tawīl, 1984, pp. 90-91)

Then, in that situation, Yahya, the minister, and his son Ja'far ordered that they be told to enter. Among the group were Abu Faq'as, Abu Dithār, Abu Al-Jarāh, and Abu Tharwān. Then they were asked about the issue debated between al-Kisā'ī and Sībawayh; they confirmed al-Kisā'ī's opinion. This means that the answer and argument presented by Sībawayh were wrong (Al-As'ad, 1992; Al-Ḥamawī, 1999; Al-Zubaydī, 1973). This action taken by al-Kisā'ī shows that he used a legitimacy step through external authorization to strengthen his argument. Because the Arabs were considered the purest speakers of Arabic, any statement they made was considered the most authentic and correct use of the language. This resulted in a shift in authority from grammatical argumentation to socially recognized linguistic expertise.

Following the incident, Sībawayh returned to Persia and withdrew from many social and scholarly gatherings, choosing a more isolated life. He never forgot the debate in which he had been publicly humiliated. He did not return to *Baṣrah* and remained in Persia until his death. According to Al-Zubaydī (1973), Sībawayh died at the relatively young age of thirty-three during the reign of Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd in 180 AH. The debate between al-Kisā'ī and Sībawayh became one of the most famous and contentious debates in the history of Arabic grammar, symbolizing the intellectual rivalry between the *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools.

On the other hand, in the debate between al-Kisā'ī and Sībawayh, according to the *Baṣrah* school, the Arabs they brought and used as references were from the *al-Hutamiyah* group, namely a group of shepherds who stopped in Baghdad, and they were not from the Arab group that was fluent in their language. Even the Sībawayh group accused the al-Kisā'ī group of giving bribes (*rishwah*) so that they would follow and defend al-Kisā'ī's opinion. Because the al-Kisā'ī group had created a scenario that would decide the "winner" in the debate, it is the interior Arabs. As stated by Ibn Khalkān in Al-As'ad (1992), the debate had been engineered and scripted to fight and defeat Sībawayh. al-Amīn, the crown prince of the caliph Harun al-Rashīd and a student of al-Kisā'ī, was one of those who helped shape Sībawayh's defeat in the debate. al-Amīn had paid the Arabs (a group of Arabs from the interior) to follow al-Kisā'ī's opinion and confirm it.

From the findings of this study, it can be seen that al-Kisā'ī's argument has gained greater authority, while Sībawayh, who sought to compete, has been increasingly marginalized. This is because the debate involved a discursive struggle over authority, legitimacy, and recognition, not just disagreements over linguistic rules. Delegitimization, resistance, external legitimacy, and collective validation emerged as the primary means by which the competing figures sought to establish the superiority of their respective positions.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Different approaches used between the *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools regarding the science of *Naḥw* illustrate two major currents in linguistic ideology, namely the normative-logical approach of *Baṣrah*, which prioritizes *qiyās* 'analogy', namely logic-based construction; and the empirical-descriptive approach of *Kūfah*, which prioritizes *samā'* 'oral transmission', namely a theoretical construction that is more accommodating to the variations of spoken language used by non-Quraysh Arab communities (Al-Ṭawīl, 1984; Amīn, 2005). Therefore, this finding indicates that their debate is not sterile from external linguistic interests, but is instead full of practices of reinterpretation of linguistic authority that seek to establish its framework as a depiction of legitimate Arabic.

Amīn (2005) stated that the heated debate between *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* on the issue of *Naḥw* was motivated by their fanaticism in politics and the interests of power. The practice of delegitimization practiced by Al-Kisā'ī against Sībawayh shows part of an effort to strengthen the influence of *Kūfah*'s dominance, which happened to be supported by the government, namely the Abbasid Daulah. Al-Kisā'ī used claims of authenticity and pragmatic dominance to mislead his opponents as foreign to the reality of Arabic. This is a classic technique in discourse that aims to weaken ideological opponents (Fairclough, 2013a; Hamid et al., 2021). Because language, both word choice and grammatical structure, is understood as a choice, which one chooses to express carries a specific ideological meaning (Statham, 2022). In general, ideology shows how one group tries to win public support and how other groups try to be marginalized through specific language and grammatical structures (Aiseng, 2024).

Language is a battlefield where one social group and class seek to instill its beliefs and understanding through linguistic arguments against opposing groups to assert authority, as al-Kisā'ī did against Sībawayh. Based on this, meaning cannot simply be considered as reproduction in language, but rather a social struggle, a struggle to win discourse (Obeng, 2020). *al-Munāẓarah* 'debate' here is used to present perspectives to provide meaning to an issue, trying to highlight the basis of each interpretation, claims, and arguments so that their views are more accepted by the public. In the CDA view, ultimately, it is the dominant group that has the power and influence to dominate the conversation and determine the arena of discourse.

The above explanation explains that language is not only a system of arbitrary and conventional meaningful and articulated sound symbols used as a means of communication by a group of humans to express thoughts and feelings alone, but in the context of the debate between al-Kisā'ī and Sībawayh, language is present as one of the media of power that reflects the dominant power structure and process, language appears as an interest of al-Kisā'ī to obtain, use, maintain or control power as one of the *Naḥw Kūfah* figures who had previously obtained a high position as a palace teaching staff during the time of the Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (Alejandro, 2021).

The heated debate between al-Kisā'ī and Sībawayh was a practice of delegitimization that emphasized that al-Kisā'ī's group was right. At the same time, Sībawayh's group was wrong, unworthy and illegitimate. al-Kisā'ī's group received intellectual support from al-Kisā'ī's colleagues, the minister Yaḥyā bin Khālīd and, of course, the people of Baghdad, who listened more and submitted to al-Kisā'ī's words compared to Sībawayh. This authority emphasized that only al-Kisā'ī was worthy to speak, felt legitimate and had a specific intellectual authority, while Sībawayh was considered illegitimate; his actions were wrong and violated the rules.

Thus, based on the analysis of the debate between al-Kisā'ī and Sībawayh, it is very clear that the science of *Naḥw* has been used to gain popularity and political power interests. al-Kisā'ī, as a figure of *Naḥw Kūfah*, has taken refuge behind the science of *Naḥw* to secure his position as a palace teaching staff member and to gain trust as the number one scientist. Meanwhile, Sībawayh, with his predicate as a figure of *Naḥw Baṣrah* who had not yet gained trust in the eyes of the caliph and the rulers of Baghdad, tried to show that he was not inferior to al-Kisā'ī. However, in the end, he still did not gain the trust and legitimacy of the caliph and the public.

This study found that the differences between *Naḥw Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* were caused by the political interests of each city in forming group identity and maintaining scientific authority. In his research, Obeng (2020) also found that Ghanaian political discourse is influenced by the socio-cultural and political context in which the discourse occurs, the language and cultural ideologies, and the goals and outcomes desired by the participants. He added that language, power, and freedom exchange information, and powerless political actors, through language, can demonstrate resistive practices to 'talk back' honestly and passionately to power about their political beliefs, criticize power, and ask for freedom.

In addition, the choice of strategies, words, and grammatical structures used in language grammar can lead to certain positions or ideologies (Wang & Ma, 2022). This is what al-Kisā'ī did in his debate with Sībawayh: he strategized and used language that could corner and stigmatize Sībawayh. This finding aligns with Khaled's (2020) research on the language used by Netanyahu in his speeches, which reflects his policy agenda and ideology and seeks to influence others.

Similarly, research by Desale (2022) found two polarized ideologies, namely the status quo versus the reformist ideology, which are considered competing discourses. Some parties describe themselves as pro-reformist in their slogans, while others describe themselves as anti-reformist.

This study also found that the authority or power possessed by al-Kisā'ī has helped him to smooth his delegitimization strategy by setting the debate scenario and controlling others to support his arguments in the debate. This finding is in line with the research of Joullié et al. (2021) that the language of power in the context of leadership can activate certain linguistic functions in a way that is determined to control power in an authoritarian manner. This is because authority is the capacity to carry out reasonable elaboration, a quality of communication that makes it acceptable. Likewise, the findings of Rouhana's (2023) research questioned the social structures and processes that form the context in which the discourse takes place as a power relationship in creating meaning through text by stating that society in his research is an instrument controlled by the political elite.

Therefore, this study states that the dimensions of power and authority of the ruler often emerged in the power struggle between the *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools. This aligns with Fairclough's (2013b) view that language is not seen as natural or objective, but rather as a form of power struggle. Therefore, the theoretical implications of this study are that the function of *Naḥw*, or Arabic grammar in general, should again focus on the process of grammar formation, its interpretation, and its delegitimization in certain historical settings. In addition, this study has practical implications as a reference and consideration in the development of methods, teaching materials, and strategies for Arabic language learning that take into account the ideological and historical dimensions that influence grammatical rules.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study found that the differences between the *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools of thought in *Naḥw* were manifestations of a struggle for power and for dominance over knowledge. Moreover, most surprising is that the debate was fraught with systematic delegitimization practices, as in the case of Sībawayh and al-Kisā'ī. Their debate not only encompassed aspects of scientific argumentation but also aimed to weaken the opponent's integrity and strengthen the influence of one's own school as a scientific force. Therefore, this study reveals that language is used as a tool of control and to strengthen group identity in the discourse of *Naḥw* knowledge, an arena of complex social and political competition.

The scientific contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that the debate between the *Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools was also driven by the desire to gain linguistic authority and legitimacy, not merely by differences in grammatical rules. The findings of this study reveal three interconnected parts. *First*, ideological differences in the use of linguistic evidence and in the construction of linguistic dominance: *Baṣrah* prioritizes linguistic uniformity, while *Kūfah* prefers a more comprehensive approach. *Second*, geographical location and political interests contributed to the unequal distribution of scientific influence, especially in *Kūfah*, which maintained strong ties with the Abbasid Caliphate. *Third*, the discourse in the debate between Sībawayh and al-Kisā'ī served as a delegitimizing measure, as reflected in their controversy. Based on this, this study emphasizes that classical *Naḥw* studies must also be seen as a space where ideologies and group interests were formed and maintained, not just as a system of formal language rules.

A limitation of this study is that it does not detail the differences between the *Naḥw Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools of thought that influence the learning of the Arabic language and literature or their development. Future similar research should address the influence of the differences between the *Naḥw Baṣrah* and *Kūfah* schools on the development of Arabic, Arabic language learning, and Islamic studies. This study also has implications for sociolinguistic research more broadly. Therefore, this study recommends conducting a broader linguistic study of the discourse in accordance with its ideology, context, actions, and history.

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## CRediT authorship contribution statement

- M.A.H. – Conceptualization, Methodology, Data collection, Formal analysis, Writing – Original Draft, Final approval.  
S.B. – Validation, Writing – Review & Editing, Final approval.  
L.O.I. – Validation, Writing – Review & Editing, Final approval.  
K. – Validation, Writing – Review & Editing, Final approval.  
M.S. – Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing, Final approval.  
U. – Writing – Review & Editing, Final approval.

## Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

The authors used AI-assisted tools (e.g., ChatGPT and Grammarly) to improve the clarity and language quality of the manuscript. All content was carefully reviewed and edited by the authors, who take full responsibility for the content of this publication.

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