



FROM CLASSICAL LEXICOGRAPHY TO DIGITAL ARABIC: A DIACHRONIC CORPUS-BASED STUDY OF SEMANTIC CHANGE IN ARABIC CULTURAL KEY TERMS

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ABSTRACT

Arabic cultural key terms preserve dense layers of linguistic, ethical, religious, and social meaning across time. This article examines how five terms, *adab*, *murū'ah*, *'aṣabiyyah*, *ummah*, and *sharaf*, move from classical lexicographical memory into modern and digital Arabic discourse. It asks whether semantic change in Arabic cultural vocabulary is better understood as replacement or as layered recontextualization. The study employs a qualitative-quantitative diachronic corpus design comparing classical Arabic lexicographical sources with modern and digital Arabic corpora. The analysis integrates lexical identification, derivational mapping, contextual reading, frequency distribution, collocation analysis, and semantic classification. The findings reveal three recurrent patterns. First, classical meanings persist as cultural memory rather than disappearing. Second, several terms expand into institutional, political, academic, and digital domains. Third, some terms undergo evaluative reorientation in contemporary usage. *Adab* shifts from moral refinement and etiquette toward literature, criticism, and academic cultural production, while retaining ethical associations. *Murū'ah* preserves its moral charge but becomes less productive in broad modern use. *'Aṣabiyyah* moves from social cohesion toward critical associations with tribalism, sectarianism, and political exclusivism. *Ummah* expands from religious community to transnational, nationalist, and geopolitical identity. *Sharaf* retains honor while entering contested professional, national, gendered, and symbolic contexts. The article argues that Arabic semantic change is layered, culturally embedded, and empirically traceable through corpus evidence. It further proposes that integrating classical lexicography, historical semantics, corpus linguistics, and digital humanities offers a stronger model for studying Arabic cultural vocabulary across time, across both scholarly and everyday communicative settings worldwide today.

Keywords: rabic cultural vocabulary; semantic change; classical lexicography; diachronic corpus linguistics; digital Arabic discourse; layered recontextualization.

INTRODUCTION

Arabic language study, particularly within *fiqh al-lughah al-'Arabiyyah*, has long been tied to questions of cultural memory, textual authority, and intellectual history. In this tradition, Arabic is not treated merely as a formal linguistic system but as a historical archive through which law, theology, rhetoric, philology, and collective memory are transmitted and debated. Scholarship in this area repeatedly emphasizes that the linguistic sciences of Arabic developed alongside Qur'anic exegesis and legal reasoning, making grammar, morphology, rhetoric, and lexical analysis indispensable to interpretation. For



that reason, Arabic language history cannot be separated from the intellectual history of Islam, nor can semantic inquiry be detached from the cultural and textual institutions that have preserved meaning across centuries (Sa'dudin et al., 2022); (Friedman, 1970); (Çoruh, 2022).

This broader intellectual background also explains why Arabic has occupied a special epistemic status in many scholarly traditions. Some studies describe Arabic as a language of heightened authority because revelation and foundational religious discourse are embedded in it, while others stress that its authority is best understood through disciplined scholarly use rather than through an abstract theory of sacralized language. Either way, the literature agrees that Arabic lexical history carries interpretive weight, and that semantic analysis is inseparable from the rational, legal, and theological projects built around it. In this sense, Arabic linguistic inquiry supports not only textual understanding but also broader traditions of reasoning in law, theology, and philosophy (Sa'dudin et al., 2022); (Hamzah et al., 2024); (Boayo, 2015).

Classical Arabic lexicography forms a central part of this historical infrastructure. Dictionaries such as *Maqāyīs al-Lughah* and *Lisān al-'Arab* do more than supply definitions: they preserve roots, derivations, usage traditions, poetic citations, and semantic associations that became authoritative in legal, theological, literary, and exegetical settings. Modern scholarship has therefore described Arabic lexicography as a memory technology, one that stabilized and transmitted meanings while also making lexical interpretation possible across changing intellectual contexts. This lexicographic enterprise was not confined to a single locale. Rather, it circulated across broad Islamicate networks and remained influential in settings far beyond the Arab heartlands, including Ottoman, Chinese, and Southeast Asian scholarly environments (Hanifah, 2022); (Hanifah, 2022); (Bernards, 2020); (Weil, 2016); (Hanif & Rudiamon, 2022).

The relevance of this lexicographic heritage becomes especially visible when attention turns to culturally dense vocabulary. Terms such as أدب (*adab*), مروءة (*murū'ah*), عصبية (*'aṣabiyyah*), أمة (*ummah*), and شرف (*sharaf*) are not simple lexical units. They are cultural key terms that encode ethical expectation, rhetorical propriety, group solidarity, communal identity, and social prestige. The scholarship surveyed in the source materials consistently treats such terms as semantic nodes through which Arab and Islamicate communities negotiate moral order, authority, and belonging. Their meanings are therefore simultaneously lexical and civilizational: they belong to dictionaries, but they also belong to social practice, ideological discourse, and cultural memory (Alhazmi, 2016); (Amien et al., 2023); (Musta'in, 2018); (A. Rahman, 2018); (Bakar, 2020).

A central issue, then, is how such terms change over time. Historical semantics has long recognized that lexical meaning can shift through broadening, narrowing, specialization, pejoration, and other processes. The source literature extends this insight to Arabic by arguing that semantic change in culturally loaded terms is rarely a matter of total replacement. Instead, older senses often remain available while newer senses emerge through institutional change, discourse repetition, metaphorical extension, collocational drift, and pragmatic recontextualization. This point is especially important for Arabic, where inherited lexical meanings continue to resonate through Qur'anic language, classical philology, and established lexicographic traditions even when the same words move into



modern media, educational systems, and political rhetoric (Ismail, 2014); (Tahmasebi et al., 2018); (Zibin et al., 2024).

The modern and digital environment makes that process more visible and more complicated. Contemporary Arabic usage circulates through journalism, education, online religious commentary, social media, searchable corpora, and digital editions of classical texts. These environments broaden access to inherited vocabulary, but they also multiply the interpretive communities that use it. As a result, older terms can be reiterated, reactivated, contested, and resemanticized with unusual speed. The source literature on digital circulation, media Arabic, and corpus-based Arabic analysis suggests that digital platforms do not sever Arabic from its classical past; rather, they intensify the movement of classical concepts across new genres and publics (Kooria, 2018); (Bashir et al., 2021); (Azennoud, 2023); (Ashfia et al., 2023); (Shen, 2024).

At the same time, the existing scholarship remains divided in methodological emphasis. Classical studies of Arabic lexicography and philology have generally privileged roots, definitions, dictionary history, and textual interpretation. Corpus-based work, by contrast, has tended to emphasize frequency, collocation, distribution, and genre variation. Both approaches are valuable, but neither is sufficient on its own. A lexicographic approach can preserve historical depth while under-describing contemporary usage; a corpus approach can recover usage patterns while losing sight of the semantic authority carried by classical lexical traditions. The literature therefore points to a persistent gap between philological memory and empirical diachronic analysis, particularly when the object of study is a culturally dense term with a long textual history and an active digital afterlife (Belinkov et al., 2016); (Belinkov et al., 2019); (Ismail, 2014); (Tahmasebi et al., 2018); (Bashir et al., 2021).

A further gap concerns scale and context. Semantic change in Arabic cultural terms is shaped not only by time, but also by register, discourse community, medium, and cross-regional circulation. Yet these dimensions are not always studied together. The source literature suggests that a stronger research program would connect canonical lexicography, diachronic corpora, modern media corpora, and contextual interpretation within a more interoperable analytical framework. Work on digital philology, linked lexical data, and corpus-based historical semantics supports precisely this direction by proposing ways to align classical sense inventories with contemporary usage evidence while preserving interpretive nuance (Bosque-Gil et al., 2018); (Armaselu et al., 2022); (Gromann et al., 2024).

Against this background, the present study investigates five Arabic cultural key terms *adab*, *murū'ah*, *‘aṣabiyyah*, *ummah*, and *Sharaf* through a diachronic corpus-based comparison of two data domains: classical Arabic lexicographical sources and modern or digital Arabic corpora. It asks three related questions: how these terms are defined and organized in classical lexicography, how they function in modern and digital Arabic usage, and what kinds of semantic change become visible when the two domains are read together. The study's central claim is that the semantic history of these terms is best described as layered recontextualization rather than linear replacement. Its contribution lies in integrating *fiqh al-lughah*, classical lexicography, historical semantics, corpus linguistics, and digital humanities into a single analytical framework for studying Arabic cultural vocabulary across time.



METHODOLOGY

Research design. This study employs a mixed qualitative-quantitative diachronic corpus design to examine semantic change in selected Arabic cultural key terms. The quantitative dimension is used to identify relative frequency, distribution, and collocational tendencies across historical and contemporary materials. The qualitative dimension is used to interpret those patterns in relation to lexicographical definitions, discourse context, genre, and broader socio-cultural meaning. This combination is methodologically necessary because semantic change cannot be captured by numerical distribution alone, nor can it be reconstructed solely through isolated philological reading. In Arabic, lexical items frequently retain strong ties to Qur'anic discourse, classical lexicography, jurisprudence, rhetoric, and literary usage, which means that corpus evidence must be interpreted through contextual and historical analysis rather than treated as self-explanatory (Ismail, 2014); (Tahmasebi et al., 2018); (Bashir et al., 2021). The design also follows scholarship arguing that Arabic diachronic semantics benefits from large historical corpora while still requiring careful control for genre, register, and communicative setting (Belinkov et al., 2016); (Belinkov et al., 2019); (Ismail, 2014); (Tahmasebi et al., 2018).

Research objects and term selection. The study focuses on five Arabic cultural key terms: أدب (*adab*), مروءة (*murū'ah*), عصبية (*‘aṣabiyyah*), أمة (*ummah*), and شرف (*sharaf*). These terms were selected for three reasons. First, each is firmly rooted in classical Arabic linguistic and cultural tradition. Second, each encodes a value or social concept central to Arab and Islamic intellectual history, including refinement, moral conduct, solidarity, collective belonging, dignity, and prestige. Third, each remains visible in modern Arabic usage across media discourse, education, political rhetoric, religious commentary, and digital communication. Their selection is therefore both empirical and theoretical. Prior scholarship shows that culturally dense terms offer especially productive sites for tracing semantic change because they function not merely as lexical signs but as conceptual nodes through which communities negotiate ethics, identity, authority, and social relations (Alhazmi, 2016); (Musta'in, 2018); (H. Rahman, 2021); (Bakar, 2020); (Amien et al., 2023). Studying them together also makes it possible to compare different semantic trajectories, including specialization, narrowing of productivity, pejoration, politicization, and wider discursive expansion.

Data sources. The evidence is divided into two principal domains. The first consists of classical lexicographical material drawn from authoritative Arabic dictionaries and related lexical works, especially *Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, and other relevant classical sources where required. These texts are used to reconstruct root-based meanings, semantic relations, derivational families, Qur'anic and poetic associations, and culturally embedded definitions. Their use is justified by work showing that Arabic lexicography functioned historically as a memory institution that preserved meanings, clarified difficult vocabulary, and supported interpretation in Qur'anic, legal, theological, and literary contexts (Hanifah, 2022); (Begmatova et al., 2019); (Bernards, 2020). The second domain consists of modern and digital Arabic corpus data, including news texts, opinion pieces, popular academic prose, digital religious commentary, and online cultural discourse. Where available, large-scale historical resources such as the Shamela corpus and the Historical Arabic Corpus provide diachronic depth, while contemporary corpora make present-day usage patterns observable (Belinkov et al., 2016); (Belinkov et al., 2019); (Ismail, 2014).



Digital data are especially important because online circulation accelerates the reinterpretation of classical terms across genres and communities (Kooria, 2018); (Azennoud, 2023); (Ashfia et al., 2023).

Analytical procedures. The analysis proceeds in several stages. The first is lexical identification and morphological mapping. Because Arabic follows a root-and-pattern system, the study does not isolate only one orthographic form of each term but also considers derivationally related forms where relevant. For *adab*, this includes forms such as أدب, أدبية, and أدبي; for *sharaf*, related forms such as شرفاء and شريف; and for *'aṣabiyyah*, forms such as عصبية where suitable. This stage is necessary because semantically related derivations may develop distinct profiles across period and genre. The second stage is contextual extraction. Every occurrence of the target terms is read within a suitable contextual unit sentence, paragraph, or broader discourse segment so that evaluative, ideological, and pragmatic meanings are not reduced to raw frequency. The third stage is frequency and distributional reading. Relative frequency is used not as proof of semantic change in itself, but as an indicator of where a term or one of its senses becomes more or less salient. The fourth stage is collocation analysis. Recurrent lexical environments are used to detect movement in semantic field and discourse association. A shift in the collocates of *ummah*, for instance, from communal and religious vocabulary toward nation, crisis, unity, or geopolitics may indicate semantic expansion; likewise, the repeated coupling of *'aṣabiyyah* with “tribal,” “sectarian,” or “political” may indicate pejorative semantic prosody. The final stage is semantic classification, in which observed changes are categorized as broadening, narrowing, specialization, pejoration, abstraction, politicization, or digital recontextualization. Throughout, the classifications remain interpretive rather than mechanical and must be supported by lexicographical evidence, collocational patterning, and contextual reading (Kaddoura et al., 2022); (Xiao & McEnery, 2006); (Alhusaiyan, 2023); (Suparno et al., 2021); (Zibin et al., 2024).

Validity, triangulation, and interpretive control. The study maintains validity through triangulation among classical lexicography, corpus evidence, and semantic-cultural interpretation. Classical dictionaries provide historical boundaries and root-based semantic structures; diachronic and modern corpora provide usage evidence; and contextual interpretation explains how meanings operate within actual discourse. This three-way procedure reduces the risk of treating dictionary senses as static or treating corpus frequency as semantically transparent. It also answers methodological concerns in the literature that Arabic semantic research must combine philological authority with reproducible usage-based analysis (Bosque-Gil et al., 2018); (Armaselu et al., 2022); (Gromann et al., 2024). The study also acknowledges several constraints: morphological ambiguity, orthographic variation, uneven corpus dating, genre imbalance, and the absence of full diacritics can affect Arabic corpus interpretation. For that reason, automated or semi-automated observations are checked through manual reading of selected contexts, and proposed shifts are interpreted as layered rather than absolute. The methodology therefore assumes from the outset that classical meanings need not disappear in order for modern semantic change to occur.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. General Patterns of Diachronic Semantic Change

1.1. Continuity, Expansion, and Evaluative Reorientation

A comparative reading of classical lexicographical evidence and modern Arabic usage shows that the selected cultural key terms do not undergo abrupt semantic rupture. Their meanings develop through gradual layering, in which classical semantic cores remain visible while new senses, collocations, and discourse functions emerge in response to changing institutions, media ecologies, and political settings. This pattern is consistent with broader work in lexical semantic change, which treats meaning as historically dynamic and shaped by frequency, collocation, genre, pragmatic inference, and discourse communities (Tahmasebi et al., 2018); (Ismail, 2014); (Zibin et al., 2024). Across the five terms examined here, three recurrent patterns are observable: continuity of classical meaning, expansion into modern domains, and evaluative reorientation through media, political, or digital discourse.

The importance of classical lexicography in identifying these patterns is particularly clear. Arabic dictionaries preserve root-based meanings, derivational relations, culturally salient usages, and historically authoritative semantic associations. They therefore establish the baseline from which later developments can be measured. Modern corpus-oriented approaches, by contrast, reveal that inherited meanings are not simply repeated. They are redistributed across journalism, education, political language, digital commentary, and public debate, where their relative salience and evaluative force can change substantially (Hanifah, 2022); (Hanifah, 2022); (Bernards, 2020); (Belinkov et al., 2019); (Belinkov et al., 2016); (Azennoud, 2023), 2023). The evidence thus supports a cumulative model of Arabic semantic change rather than a linear model of replacement.

2. Semantic Specialization of Adab

2.1. From Ethical Refinement to Literary-Institutional Meaning

Among the five terms, **أَدَب** (*adab*) offers one of the clearest cases of semantic specialization. In classical Arabic cultural memory, *adab* is associated with moral refinement, cultivated conduct, etiquette, education, and the formation of socially appropriate character. Its older semantic field includes proper speech, refined behavior, and the ability to participate in learned and polite society. In that classical frame, *adab* functions not simply as a lexical sign but as a cultural norm linking language, knowledge, and social discipline (Hanssen, 2019); (Huda, 2011); (M. E. Maulana et al., 2020).

The modern data show that this ethical sense remains active, but that it now coexists with a more specialized academic and aesthetic meaning. Expressions such as **آداب الحوار** (*ādāb al-ḥiwār*, etiquette of dialogue) and **آداب التعامل** (*ādāb al-ta'āmul*, etiquette of interaction) preserve the older social-ethical dimension of *adab*. At the same time, expressions such as **الأدب العربي** (*al-adab al-'arabī*, Arabic literature), **النقد الأدبي** (*al-naqd al-adabī*, literary criticism), and **الدراسات الأدبية** (*al-dirāsāt al-adabiyyah*, literary studies) indicate the dominance of a modern disciplinary sense. This development reflects the institutionalization of *adab* within literary criticism, modern education, and the humanities (Albantani, 2018); (Hanssen, 2019); (Snir, 1970). The result is a layered semantic profile in which *adab* retains its ethical foundation while functioning increasingly as a label for literature, criticism, and academic cultural production.



2.2. Layered Modern Expressions

Modern expressions built around *adab* confirm this layered structure. The phrase *al-adab al-‘arabī* positions the term within a national or transnational literary field, while *al-naqd al-adabī* foregrounds a critical and aesthetic register. Meanwhile, *ādāb al-ḥiwār* preserves the practical and ethical sense of disciplined interaction. These usages do not represent unrelated meanings. Rather, they show different historical strata of one semantic field becoming dominant in different institutional environments. Research on Arabic literary pedagogy, dialogue ethics, and public civility supports precisely this interpretation (M. E. Maulana et al., 2020); (Snir, 1970); (Ryle-Hodges, 2022). The evidence therefore suggests that *adab* has undergone institutional specialization without losing its earlier normative resonance.

3.3. Register Narrowing and Moral Conservation of *Murū’ah*

3.1. Classical Ethical Meaning and Reduced Modern Productivity

The term *مروءة* (*murū’ah*) follows a different trajectory. In classical ethical and social discourse, *murū’ah* denotes personal honor, noble conduct, dignity, generosity, courage, and moral self-mastery. It refers not simply to “honor” in a narrow sense but to a broader code of public virtue and socially visible responsibility. The literature emphasizes its connection to speech, conduct, appearance, wealth, and moral disposition, presenting it as a multidimensional standard of ethical formation (Selo et al., 2015); (Musta’in, 2018).

In contemporary usage, however, *murū’ah* appears less productive than terms such as *adab* or *ummah*. The available evidence suggests that it is more likely to appear in moral, religious, educational, or nostalgic contexts than in broad public discourse. While *adab* has expanded into literary and educational institutions, *murū’ah* remains more tightly linked to classical virtue ethics and traditional moral formation. Its semantic history is therefore best described as moral conservation accompanied by register narrowing rather than broad semantic innovation (Hanssen, 2019); (M. E. Maulana et al., 2020); (Albantani, 2018).

3.2. Nostalgia and Traditional Moral Authority

Modern uses of *murū’ah* often evoke nostalgia for classical Arab values and traditional ethical ideals. In moral education and religious pedagogy, the term continues to mark integrity, self-respect, and noble conduct. Studies that connect *murū’ah* to ethical formation and pedagogical practice suggest that it remains meaningful where classical virtue frameworks are still explicitly taught or reinterpreted for contemporary audiences (Selo et al., 2015); (Ringganis & Darmayanti, 2023). What seems to have changed, then, is not its core value but its range of circulation. In modern discourse, *murū’ah* functions less as a general public keyword and more as a culturally charged evaluative term that signals moral traditionalism, ethical seriousness, and continuity with classical norms.

4. Evaluative Shift of ‘*Aṣabiyyah*

4.1. From Social Cohesion to Critical Political Vocabulary

The term *عصبية* (*‘aṣabiyyah*) exhibits the clearest evaluative shift among the five cases. In classical Arabic social thought, and especially in Ibn Khaldūnian historiography, *‘aṣabiyyah* refers to group solidarity, collective cohesion, kinship loyalty, and the social force that enables political formation. In this classical and sociological sense, the term is not



inherently negative. Studies of Ibn Khaldūn repeatedly treat it as a central mechanism in the rise and decline of dynasties, where strong group feeling enables collective action and effective political power, while luxury and fragmentation weaken it over time (Gada, 2018); (Alatas, 2013); (Abozeid, 2021); (Gürkan, 2017).

Modern usage, however, frequently assigns negative value to *‘aṣabiyyah*. Expressions such as *العصبية القبلية* (*al-‘aṣabiyyah al-qabaliyyah*, tribal partisanship), *العصبية الطائفية* (*al-‘aṣabiyyah al-ṭā’ifiyyah*, sectarian partisanship), and *العصبية السياسية* (*al-‘aṣabiyyah al-siyāsiyyah*, political partisanship) show how the term has moved into critical discourse about exclusionary loyalty, fanaticism, sectarianism, and narrow political identification. Modern scholarship on nationalism, identity politics, and social fragmentation likewise highlights the term’s ambivalent or negative modern use when solidarity turns coercive or hostile to plural social order (Zaib, 2022); (Pramono et al., 2023); (Iqbal & Asif, 2020).

4.2. Collocational Evidence of Pejoration

The collocational profile of modern *‘aṣabiyyah* is especially revealing because it shows the direction of semantic change. When the term is repeatedly modified by adjectives such as “tribal,” “sectarian,” and “political,” it no longer functions as a neutral description of social cohesion. Instead, it becomes a diagnostic term used to criticize forms of belonging considered socially harmful or politically destabilizing. The evidence therefore suggests not semantic disappearance, but evaluative reorientation: the older meaning of solidarity remains recoverable, yet it is increasingly reframed through negative semantic prosody in contemporary discourse (Gada, 2018); (Abozeid, 2021); (Gürkan, 2017).

5. Expansion and Politicization of Ummah

5.1. From Religious Community to Transnational Identity

The term *أمة* (*ummah*) displays a strong pattern of semantic expansion and politicization. In classical Arabic lexicography, Islamic thought, and Qur’anic usage, *ummah* refers to a community or collectivity bound by shared belief, practice, or purpose. Qur’anic semantic studies treat it as a central category of religious and social belonging, deeply connected to worldview, communal identity, and collective moral orientation (Bakar, 2020); (H. Rahman, 2021).

Modern discourse extends this meaning into nationalist, geopolitical, diasporic, and transnational contexts. Expressions such as *الأمة العربية* (*al-ummah al-‘arabiyyah*, the Arab nation/community), *الأمة الإسلامية* (*al-ummah al-islāmiyyah*, the Islamic ummah), and *وحدة الأمة* (*waḥdat al-ummah*, unity of the ummah) show that the term now functions as a powerful identity marker across religious, political, and regional scales. Scholarship on globalization, migration, political Islam, and transnational Muslim networks indicates that *ummah* often operates as a post-national or transnational frame of solidarity, especially where media circulation and political mobilization are involved (Saunders, 2008); (Fathah, 2021); (Caputo, 2004); (Yilmaz, 2024).

5.2. Ideological and Geopolitical Uses

The modern semantic field of *ummah* is therefore not merely theological. It is also ideological, affective, and geopolitical. *Al-ummah al-‘arabiyyah* foregrounds linguistic-cultural and pan-Arab unity, while *al-ummah al-islāmiyyah* foregrounds global Muslim



solidarity. *Waḥdat al-ummah* often serves rhetorically as an appeal to unity, reform, or civilizational revival. These expressions reveal how *ummah* has become a flexible discursive resource for constructing large-scale belonging. The evidence supports the conclusion that *ummah* has expanded from a category of community to an imagined transregional collectivity shaped by religion, nationalism, migration, and global media (Saunders, 2008); (Ramadhan, 2022); (Akram, 2022).

6. Discursive Expansion and Contestation of Sharaf

6.1. Classical Honor and Modern Social Domains

The term *شرف* (*sharaf*) retains a strong classical core associated with honor, nobility, lineage, dignity, and moral status. In classical Arab culture, honor is simultaneously personal and collective: it concerns conduct, family reputation, and the prestige attached to descent and public virtue. Direct treatment of *sharaf* is less extensive in the cited literature than discussion of adjacent concepts such as *murū'ah*, *adab*, and *'aṣabiyyah*, yet those adjacent literatures help clarify its semantic field. Work on *murū'ah* shows how honor is embedded in speech, appearance, behavior, and character, while work on *'aṣabiyyah* highlights the role of collective prestige and group legitimacy (Selo et al., 2015); (Gada, 2018); (Abozeid, 2021).

In contemporary Arabic usage, *sharaf* expands into professional, national, gendered, and symbolic domains. Expressions such as *شرف المهنة* (*sharaf al-mihnah*, honor of the profession), *شرف الوطن* (*sharaf al-waṭan*, honor of the homeland), and *جرائم الشرف* (*jarā'im al-sharaf*, crimes of honor) show that the term no longer refers only to lineage or noble status. It now appears in debates about professional ethics, patriotism, gender, social control, and legal-moral controversy. This expansion aligns with broader modern shifts in which honor vocabulary is rearticulated through public ethics, national belonging, and social discipline (M. E. Maulana et al., 2020); (Ryle-Hodges, 2022); (Hanssen, 2019); (Hanssen, 2019).

6.2. Contested Valence of Honor

The most striking feature of *sharaf* in modern discourse is its contested valence. In expressions such as *sharaf al-mihnah* and *sharaf al-waṭan*, the term remains strongly positive, denoting integrity, dignity, responsibility, and patriotic commitment. In *jarā'im al-sharaf*, by contrast, the same term enters a morally and legally fraught field in which “honor” may be invoked in connection with gendered violence or coercive social control. The evidence therefore points not to simple pejoration but to discursive expansion coupled with evaluative splitting. *Sharaf* retains positive symbolic force while also becoming a site of critique when honor is linked to restrictive or violent norms.

7. Summary of Results

7.1. Non-Linear Patterns of Semantic Change

Taken together, the results show that Arabic cultural key terms change through non-linear semantic processes. *Adab* demonstrates specialization from ethical refinement to literary and academic discourse. *Murū'ah* shows moral conservation and reduced productivity in modern public language. *'Aṣabiyyah* undergoes evaluative reorientation from social cohesion to a critical term for exclusionary group identity. *Ummah* expands from religious community to transnational, nationalist, and geopolitical belonging. *Sharaf*



preserves its classical core of honor while extending into professional, national, gendered, and symbolic domains. These findings confirm that semantic change in Arabic is shaped by the interaction of lexicographical memory, institutional knowledge, political discourse, media circulation, and digital communication. Classical meanings are not erased; they are reorganized and recontextualized. Arabic cultural terms therefore function as living semantic archives, preserving inherited meanings while adapting to new social, political, and communicative environments.

The findings indicate that the relationship between classical Arabic lexicography and contemporary digital Arabic usage is best understood not as a shift from an old semantic order to a new one, but as a layered process in which inherited meanings remain available while being reorganized by modern institutions, media, education, political discourse, and digital communication. This challenges the assumption that Classical Arabic and modern Arabic operate as separate semantic systems. Across *adab*, *murū'ah*, *ʿaṣabiyyah*, *ummah*, and *sharaf*, classical meanings persist as cultural memory, but they are activated differently according to genre, register, and communicative setting. This aligns with work in historical semantics that treats lexical change as sense layering, semantic competition, and contextual redistribution rather than simple replacement (Ismail, 2014); (Tahmasebi et al., 2018); (Perrone et al., 2021). It also resonates with scholarship that treats Arabic dictionaries as memory technologies whose semantic fields continue to shape later interpretation even when words enter new discursive environments (Grande, 1970); (Hanifah, 2022); (Shayakhmetov et al., 2018). The case of *adab* shows particularly clearly how semantic change can proceed through institutional specialization. In classical usage, *adab* denotes refinement, cultivated speech, ethical conduct, and social discipline. In modern usage, it is strongly associated with literature, literary criticism, and academic cultural production. Yet the ethical sense has not disappeared. Rather, its place within the semantic field has been reorganized. Expressions such as *ādāb al-ḥiwār* preserve the older sense of civility and disciplined interaction, while *al-adab al-ʿarabī* and *al-naqd al-adabī* foreground the literary and institutional sense. This supports the broader argument that modern education, print culture, and university disciplines can reorder the internal hierarchy of inherited lexical fields. Earlier studies of *adab* as literary discourse, pedagogy, dialogue ethics, and public civility point in the same direction (Hanssen, 2019); (H. Maulana, 2022); (Albantani, 2018); (Ryle-Hodges, 2022).

The trajectory of *murū'ah* is different because it is characterized less by expansion than by conservation and register restriction. In classical ethical discourse, the term is associated with dignity, noble character, honorable speech, public reputation, and self-command. Its modern use is more limited, tending to appear in moral education, religious pedagogy, ethical reflection, or culturally nostalgic discourse. This suggests that some terms remain semantically stable but lose productivity in broader public circulation. Their value persists, but it becomes concentrated within specialized moral and pedagogical settings. The discussion of *murū'ah* therefore refines the model of semantic change advanced in this article: not all lexical change is expansion or pejoration. In some cases, the main transformation is a narrowing of domain while the core ethical sense remains intact (Selo et al., 2015); (Ringganis & Darmayanti, 2023).

The findings on *ʿaṣabiyyah* point to a more explicit evaluative shift. In Ibn Khaldūnian thought, the term refers to solidarity, social cohesion, and the collective force



that enables political formation. Its classical ambivalence is descriptive rather than inherently condemnatory. Modern usage, by contrast, frequently associates *‘aṣabiyyah* with tribalism, sectarianism, fanaticism, or political exclusivism. That movement is especially visible in collocations such as *al-‘aṣabiyyah al-qabaliyyah*, *al-‘aṣabiyyah al-ṭā’ifiyyah*, and *al-‘aṣabiyyah al-siyāsiyyah*. In these settings, the term becomes a critical diagnostic for exclusionary forms of collective identity. This reinterpretation is consistent with scholarship showing how Ibn Khaldūn’s concept has been mobilized in modern discussions of nationalism, minority politics, diaspora identity, and political mobilization (Alexeev, 2017); (Ramzy, 2018); (Alagha, 2017). What changes, then, is not the recoverability of the original meaning, but its normative evaluation under modern conditions of citizenship, pluralism, sectarian conflict, and state formation. The expansion of *ummah* demonstrates another form of layered semantic development. Here the dominant pattern is not pejoration but scale expansion and ideological flexibility. In classical Arabic and Islamic thought, *ummah* refers to a collectivity shaped by shared belief, moral orientation, and communal belonging. In modern discourse, the term extends into pan-Arab, pan-Islamic, diasporic, geopolitical, and transnational frames. Expressions such as *al-ummah al-‘arabiyyah*, *al-ummah al-islāmiyyah*, and *waḥdat al-ummah* show that it now functions as a rhetorical device for constructing large-scale belonging. Scholarship on diaspora, globalization, political Islam, and transnational Muslim networks confirms that *ummah* is frequently used to negotiate the relation between religious identity, national loyalty, migration, and global solidarity (Bakar, 2020); (Saunders, 2008); (Fathah, 2021); (Caputo, 2004); (Yilmaz, 2024). The modern *ummah* therefore operates not only as a theological category but also as an ideological resource whose flexibility enables both inclusive solidarity and, in some contexts, exclusionary mobilization.

The discussion of *sharaf* complicates any assumption that culturally positive terms simply retain stable positive meaning. In classical Arab culture, *sharaf* is associated with honor, nobility, lineage, dignity, and public reputation. In contemporary discourse, however, it moves across several semantic domains: professional ethics, national identity, gendered norms, and legal-moral controversy. Expressions such as *sharaf al-mihnah* and *sharaf al-waṭan* preserve the positive sense of integrity, responsibility, and patriotic dignity. By contrast, *jarā’im al-sharaf* places the same term within a contested field involving gender, violence, family reputation, and social control. This suggests not a simple pejoration of *sharaf* but a division of evaluative pathways. The term retains symbolic capital while becoming available for critique when linked to coercive practices. Related work on *murū’ah*, *adab*, and *‘aṣabiyyah* helps explain why: honor in Arabic cultural discourse is rarely only personal; it is also familial, rhetorical, social, and political (Selo et al., 2015); (Gada, 2018); (M. E. Maulana et al., 2020); (Ryle-Hodges, 2022). These findings also carry methodological implications. They support a field-structured model of Arabic semantic change in which terms preserve historically accumulated senses that become foregrounded or backgrounded depending on context. Classical lexicography is essential to this model because it stabilizes the inherited sense field, but it cannot by itself explain how words function in contemporary discourse. Corpus evidence, in turn, reveals actual usage patterns, collocational shifts, and changes in evaluative salience, but it requires philological anchoring to avoid mistaking short-term media patterns for deep historical transformation. The most productive way forward is therefore an integrated approach that brings together



classical dictionaries, diachronic corpora, contemporary media corpora, and contextual interpretation (Bosque-Gil et al., 2018); (Armaselu et al., 2022); (Gromann et al., 2024). Digital Arabic discourse intensifies the need for such integration because it accelerates the circulation of classical vocabulary across new interpretive communities. Online commentary, social media, digital education, searchable corpora, and electronic editions create conditions in which terms such as *adab*, *ummah*, and *‘aṣabiyyah* can be recontextualized rapidly and repeatedly. This does not imply that digital discourse destroys classical authority. Rather, it multiplies the settings in which that authority is invoked, contested, or adapted. Research on linked lexical data, digital historical archives, and digital humanities infrastructures suggests that the digital turn makes such reinterpretations more empirically traceable, provided that questions of provenance, genre, and editorial mediation remain central to analysis (Armaselu et al., 2022); (Zámečník & Lacková, 2021); (Teixeira et al., 2023); (Moerth & Schopper, 2021). From this perspective, digital discourse is not merely a new source of data. It is one of the environments in which Arabic cultural meanings are currently being reproduced and reshaped.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has argued that Arabic cultural key terms do not move from classical to modern usage through abrupt semantic replacement. Rather, they develop through layered recontextualization in which inherited meanings remain active even as new functions, collocations, and evaluative orientations emerge. Across the five terms examined—*adab*, *murū’ah*, *‘aṣabiyyah*, *ummah*, and *sharaf*—the analysis identifies three broad tendencies: continuity of classical semantic cores, expansion into new institutional and ideological domains, and evaluative reorientation in contemporary discourse. *Adab* illustrates institutional specialization; *murū’ah* shows conservation with reduced productivity; *‘aṣabiyyah* undergoes pronounced pejorative reframing; *ummah* widens into transnational and geopolitical discourse; and *sharaf* extends into professional, national, gendered, and contested symbolic fields. These findings show that Arabic cultural vocabulary functions as a living archive in which lexicographical memory and contemporary usage remain in active relation. The study contributes to Arabic historical semantics by demonstrating the value of reading classical dictionaries alongside diachronic and digital corpora rather than treating philology and corpus evidence as separate enterprises. It also contributes to cultural linguistics and digital humanities by showing how digital Arabic discourse makes semantic negotiation more visible across genres and interpretive communities. Future work should test these patterns through larger annotated corpora, clearer genre stratification, more explicit time-slicing, and closer alignment between classical dictionary senses and corpus attestations, especially where inherited terms acquire competing modern evaluative profiles. Such work would strengthen the empirical basis of Arabic diachronic semantics while preserving the interpretive depth of classical philology and improving analyses of semantic continuity, expansion, and evaluative change.

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