



**AMERICAN
UNIVERSITY
OF BEIRUT**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUB Press Hosts a Conversation with Professor Ramzi Baalbaki on the Arabic Language

The American University of Beirut (AUB) Press hosted a dialogue on the Arabic language at the Issam Fares Institute featuring Professor Ramzi Baalbaki, who holds the Jewett Chair in the Arabic Department at the university, and Charles al-Hayek, researcher and TV presenter. The event was moderated by Professor Bilal Orfali, the Sheikh Zayed Chair of Arabic and Islamic Studies at AUB. In collaboration with Heritage and Roots, the Jewett Chair, and the Sheikh Zayed Chair, the gathering brought an audience of linguists and intellectuals from various academic and cultural institutions across Lebanon and the Arab world. The event concluded with a reception, during which copies of Professor Baalbaki's book, *Muqawwimāt al-Nazariyya al-Lughawiyya al-'Arabiyya*, were distributed to attendees.

Charles al-Hayek engaged Baalbaki in a thought-provoking discussion, posing a series of questions about the past, present, and future of the Arabic language. The conversation provided attendees with a comprehensive understanding of Arabic in all its dimensions. Baalbaki began with a historical overview, tracing the origins of Arabic through ancient inscriptions and linguistic evidence. He explored the regions where Arabic first emerged and discussed the evolution of its phonetics, which eventually necessitated standardization to eliminate errors.

He then highlighted several unique features that distinguish Arabic from other languages, particularly its Semitic counterparts. Among these is the presence of specific morphological patterns that convey particular meanings—such as *Fu'ala* (فُعَلَة) for remnants of things and *Fu'al* (فُعَال) for sounds. He also emphasized Arabic's precision in expression, including the existence of distinct terms for each hour of the day, as well as its structural flexibility, which allows for diverse syntactic constructions, each carrying nuanced meanings. Baalbaki further examined the relationship between classical Arabic and colloquial dialects, shedding light on how certain linguistic phenomena from different tribes influenced standard Arabic and vice versa. He concluded by explaining the foundational linguistic theory underpinning Arabic, detailing its key pillars: 'Amal (government), *Ta'īl* (causation), *Qiyās* (analogy), *Aṣl* (origin), and *Taqdīr* (assumption).

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Afterwards, members of the audience asked Professor Baalbaki several questions, prompting him to reflect on the future of the Arabic language and the positive indicators that ensure its continuity. He also addressed a concerning trend: the general lack of respect among Arabs for their language, as seen in their failure to master it and use it correctly in public discourse. Additionally, Baalbaki highlighted the pioneering role of AUB in promoting and preserving Arabic, emphasizing how it continues to distinguish itself from other universities in Lebanon and the broader Middle East.

Visit AUB Press on YouTube to watch the full discussion.

ENDS

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 750 full-time faculty members and a student body of over 8000 students. AUB currently offers more than 140 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 365-bed hospital.

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