Conceptualization of the figure of sayyid in pre-Islamic Arabic society.
A Cultural Linguistic study

The figure of *sayyid* might be considered as the role model of behavior for Arabs living before Islam in the so called second *al-Ǧāhilīya* ([the time)] of ignorance), i.e., in the 6th and early 7th c. It can be defined as someone following the honorable code of conduct. The behavior of *sayyid* was expected first of all from a tribal chief, but generally, it was perceived as the ideal conduct of any man. Therefore, pre-Islamic Arabs had a precisely defined recipe for such a role model, which consisted of six honorable traits: *saḫāʾ* 'generosity and hospitality', *naǧda* 'bravery and loyalty', *ṣabr* 'patience', *ḥilm* 'forbearing, clemency', *tawāḍuʿ* 'humbleness', and *bayān* 'eloquence'.

Despite the fact that this figure was an important element of the culture of pre-Islamic Arabs, it hasn't yet been thoroughly studied. **Therefore, in this project, I would like to propose to fill in this gap by conducting a cultural linguistic study, describing the characteristics of the native conceptualization of *sayyid*,** and enhancing thereafter our understanding of some aspects of life of Arabs before Islam. In this study, I consider medieval Classical Arabic dictionaries (MCAD), as well as the corpus of Early Arabic Poetry (EAP) from the 6th and early 7th c. as historical sources, to which I plan to apply methods elaborated within the frame of cultural linguistics and akin to ethnolinguistic studies.

Thus, in this project, **I plan to represent the pre-Islamic Arabic cultural model of *sayyid* on the basis of a study on the lexicon of pre-Classical Arabic (PCA) – the language of EAP**. In other words, I aim to provide an insight into the imagery of pre-Islamic Arabs, which seems to be accessible only through this language. **Hence, the ultimate goal of my project is to answer the question about how pre-Islamic Arabs used to imagine *sayyid*.** I propose to represent **the cultural model of this figure**, by rendering schematized knowledge of each of the six aforementioned honorable traits. Such schematized definition **will consist of descriptions of conceptualizations they evoke – <u>role schemas</u> (assumed as scripts of behavior the traits entail), <u>cultural categories</u> (i.e., the behaviors which fall upon the category of each of the traits), and cultural/<u>conceptual metaphors</u>**. In the study, **I plan to apply Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) methodology**, as a precise tool of explicating cultural meaning, into the definition of role schemas (scripts of behavior). In such a way, I believe, the project will provide an extensive and complete description of the pre-Islamic figure of *sayyid*.

Furthermore, in my study, **I will explore the impact of environmental factors on the emergence of the conceptualizations in question.** I hypothesize that the set of the six honorable traits emerged as a result of the specific experience of the dwellers of the harsh environment of Arabia, and each of those traits might be traced back to its original socio-environmental role. Moreover, assuming that the pre-Islamic Arabic conceptualization of *sayyid* was in fact a source model for adoption of this figure by the Islamic culture, I believe that acquired results **will contribute to our understanding of the emergence of Muslim ethics** that must have stemmed to a certain degree from pre-Islamic Arabic morality, which in its core, contained the honorable conduct of *sayyid*.

In general, the study will attempt to investigate the history of the culture, which underlies the conceptualization processes discernable in the PCA lexicon. **Hence, it will be the first application of cultural linguistic methodologies to the study of the culture of Arabs living in the 6th and early 7th c.**