

## ARABIC GRAMMAR: PROBLEMS AND REFORM EFFORTS

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### Introduction

Arabic grammar has traditionally presented considerable difficulties for both learners and teachers of the language. Such difficulties may be attributed to the excessive amount of rules, details and the highly complex, abstract and philosophical method in which the grammar was originally presented and in which it continues to be presented. To date, except for a limited number of attempts<sup>1</sup>, Arabic grammar textbooks continue to present the grammar in more or less the same framework and with the same terminology and arguments which the earliest grammarians employed some thirteen centuries ago. Added to this is the fact that traditional presentations of Arabic grammar are not written in brief and simple language, nor are the rules presented in a clear and precise form. If anything, the rules of the grammar are written in a complex, over-detailed and difficult language replete with technical and far-fetched arguments and terminologies.

The complexity of Arabic grammatical presentations was further compounded by two factors, the development of what came later on to be known as grammatical reasons *al-'ilal an-naḥwiyya* by scholars of the second and third centuries A.H. and the fact that grammatical studies did not rise in an intellectual vacuum, but were accompanied by such disciplines as *fiqh* (jurisprudence, philology), *'ilm al-kalām* (scholastic theology), and *ī'tizāl* (religious rationalism). This led to the development of an interaction and interdependence among these disciplines as all of them had their roots and the focus of their study exclusively in Qur'ānic verses. Thus knowledge of grammar was essential for the philologist who sought to understand and interpret the content of the various verses, and knowledge of the meanings of the verses was essential for the grammarian who sought to determine the function and hence the case-ending *ʾrāb* of the words in each verse. There was also the fact that certain techniques used by one group would be used by the other group. A good example of this is the principle of analogy, *qiyās*, which was first used by the early exegetes of the Qur'ān from whom it was adopted by the philologists and then was later adopted by the grammarians (as-Sa'dī 1973:102 ff).

The techniques followed by the earlier grammarians were not without problems. It is fairly well-documented that the earlier grammarians chose as the object of their study not a single dialect but a number of dialects. The tribes concerned are the seven tribes of Qurayš, Qays, Tamīm, 'Asad, Hudayl, Kināna, and Ṭayy.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See for example the new series published by the Arabic Language Institute, University of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia entitled: *al-'Arabiyya li-l-ḥaydt*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Hassān 1979:14 ff.

### Reform Efforts: Past and Present

Attempts at reforming and eliminating unnecessary and complicated details from Arabic grammar are by no means the product of the revival movement of the nineteenth century alone.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, such efforts began in the early years of the eighth century, shortly after the publication of Sībawayhi's (d. 180 A.H.) *al-Kitāb*, the earliest and most complete presentation of Arabic grammar. We can thus refute professor Stetkevych's thesis (Stetkevych 1970:79), that dissatisfaction with Arabic grammar and attempts at reforming it are recent. Examination of the work of the early grammarians of the Basran and Kufan schools shows that a good number of the rules established by Sībawayhi and the first generation of grammarians have been the subject of scrutiny and refinement by subsequent scholars. Examples of such scholars are al-'Aḥfaṣ al-'Awsaṭ (d. 211 A.H.) and al-Mubarrid (d. 285 A.H.) of the Basran school and al-Kisāṭ (d. 189 A.H.) and al-Farrā' (d. 207 A.H.) of the Kufan school. We will not consider the views of these earlier scholars, but would rather focus on the views of those scholars who presented an integrated and full-fledged proposal for the reform of Arabic grammar. This will include Ibn Maḍā' al-Qurṭubī of the sixth century A.H. and two reformers of the present century. This will be understood to be a representative number of scholars and by no means a comprehensive or exhaustive one.

#### Ibn Maḍā' al-Qurṭubī (d. 592 A.H.):

The thrust of al-Qurṭubī's thesis was *nazariyyat al-'āmil* (the theory of grammatical government) and the problems that have arisen as a result of the adoption of this theory. There is no doubt that one of the most important treatises criticizing some of the basic tenets of traditional grammatical presentation, *ar-Radd 'alā n-nuḥāt* (Response to the Grammarians), was written as early as the last quarter of the 6/13 century. This text was written by Ibn Maḍā' al-Qurṭubī of Cordova and discovered, restored and edited in 1947 by the Egyptian scholar, Ṣawqī Ḍayf. The greater part of this book, an invaluable forerunner of the reform movement of the twentieth century, is devoted to attacking and refuting the theory of grammatical government (*nazariyyat al-'āmil*), attributing to this theory the bulk of the problems which Arabic grammar manifests. al-Qurṭubī maintains that case endings are semantic manifestations created by the speaker himself, and that preoccupation with *nazariyyat al-'āmil* has led grammarians to reject correct styles and sentences.

As mentioned earlier, the target of the bulk of al-Qurṭubī's criticism is *nazariyyat al-'āmil*, the backbone of Arabic grammar, which he points out as the root of all the problems that have plagued Arabic grammar. In the introduction to the book he writes:

My purpose in writing this book is to eliminate from Arabic grammar that which the grammarian can do without, to point out the errors which they (the grammarians) have committed such as claiming that the accusative, and

<sup>3</sup> See Stetkevych 1970:79. Professor Stetkevych maintains that calls for simplification of Arabic grammatical presentation are recent.

genitive case-endings (of nouns) as well as the jussive and subjunctive moods (of verbs) are triggered only by governing words *'āmil lafẓī* in the same sentence and that the nominative case-ending (of nouns) and indicative mood (of verbs) are triggered only by semantic government *'āmil ma'nawī*. In his book *al-Ḥaṣṣā'is* Ibn Ḥinnī, following a statement on governing words *'āmil lafẓī* and semantic government *'āmil ma'nawī* writes "In effect and in truth, effecting such case-endings and moods as nominative, accusative, genitive and indicative, jussive and subjunctive respectively belongs to the speaker himself and nothing else." (al-Qurṭubī, *Radd* 18).

Dissatisfaction with the traditional theory of grammatical government was by no means new at the time of al-Qurṭubī. What is interesting about al-Qurṭubī's treatise is the amount of detail, thoroughness and exhaustiveness which characterize his refutation of this theory. He goes into great lengths in presenting one argument after another to undermine the very foundation of the theory as represented by the question of *'rāb* (desinential inflections) and the vowels it employs *ḥarakāt 'rābiyya*. Thus the classification of words in a given sentence as *'awāmil* (governing words) which govern other words *ma'mūlāt* (governed words) is "invalid, intellectually and legally" (al-Qurṭubī, *Radd* 19). Elaborating on the reasoning behind this view, al-Qurṭubī (*Radd* 19) writes:

One such reason is the condition that the doer *fā'il* exist whenever the action is carried out. However, *'rāb* (assignment of desinential inflections) takes place after the doer is no longer there. Thus in *'inna zaydan ...*, the noun *zaydan* assumes the accusative case only after the particle *inna* has disappeared.

al-Qurṭubī further explains that the action of the doer *fā'il* or *'āmil* is carried out through the exercise of one's will as is done by humans or animals or by the effect of the constitution of doer as in the case of the action brought about by such elements as water and fire. Governing words *'āmil* or *fā'il* "are not actual doers as the grammarians claim" (al-Qurṭubī, *Radd* 20). To imagine then that such governing words are *'awāmil* "is mere illusion" (al-Qurṭubī, *Radd* 20). al-Qurṭubī then dismisses the assumption that "imagining that such governing words *'awāmil* exist may have the advantage of facilitating Arabic grammar and making it easier to learn". This, he says, "makes Arabic speech appear deficient and less articulate as it forces us to imagine deletions and assumptions which the (early) Arabs did not intend when they spoke".

al-Qurṭubī takes exception with what the early grammarians had called the deletion of the governing words *'awāmil maḥḍīfa*. He points out three types of deletions. These include deletions which the speaker is aware of such as the deletion of the verb *darastu* (I studied) in a response to the question *māḍā darasta l-yawma?* (what did you study today?) to which the addressee would say *al-'arabiyyata* (Arabic) rather than *darastu l-'arabiyyata* (I studied Arabic). The second type of deletion is that which al-Qurṭubī calls 'unnecessary' as in *'a-zaydan qarabtahu* (Zayd, did you hit him?). Here the grammarians would maintain that originally the sentence contained another verb which occurred before the noun *zaydan* in the sentence, but that the first verb was deleted. Thus in their reinterpretation *ta'wīl* of what would appear to be a simple and spontaneous sentence, the grammarians would maintain that originally the sentence must have been *qarabt zaydan qarabtahu* (hit + Zayd + hit + you +

him), or else how would it be possible to explain the assignment of the accusative case to the noun *zaydan*. Certainly, according to their rules, it could not have been the second verb since for this verb to govern the noun it must precede and not follow that noun. This is again another complication entailed by the rule that maintains that a governing word may not be preceded by the word it governs, hence the need for the grammarians to look outside the sentence for a 'deleted' word which could fill the function of *'āmil* and govern the *ma'mūl* in the sentence, namely the noun *zaydan*. al-Qurṭubī blames this 'far-fetched' complication on the philosophical belief on the part of the grammarians that every phenomenon (a case-ending,...etc.) must have been caused by some kind of agent or doer. The rule goes *kulla manṣūb lā budda lahu min nāṣib*. al-Qurṭubī would reject these reinterpretations as "illusionary" dictated only by the rule and not by the intention of the speaker" (al-Qurṭubī, *Radd* 21). The third type of deletion is described by al-Qurṭubī as even more rigid and superfluous. Such deletions are so far-fetched and unthinkable that were they to be added to the sentence or clause in question the meaning would be changed. Thus the grammarians maintain that simple vocative sentences of the type *yā 'ahmad* (Ahmad!) were originally such that the vocative noun was the direct object of a verb and that verb had been deleted. The deleted verb is the verb *'aḏ'ū 'ahmada* (I call Ahmad). al-Qurṭubī rejects this as 'bad judgement' on the part of the grammarians as it creates problems which make the grammar even more complicated. As al-Qurṭubī explains, one such problem is the fact that adding the verb *'aḏ'ū* would in fact change the sentence from vocative to declarative. al-Qurṭubī adds that this problem could have serious consequences as it will lead the grammarian to add words and meanings which the speaker had not intended. He further adds that is particularly so with reference to the holy Qur'ān.

Another problem which al-Qurṭubī points out has to do with the grammarians' reinterpretation of sentences in which prepositional phrases occur as predicates *ḥabar* as in *zaydun fī d-dār* (Zayd is in the house), part of a relative clause *šila* as in *ra'aytu lladī fī d-dār* (I was that who is in the house), adjectives *šifa* as in *marartu bir-raḡulin min Qurayš* (I passed by a man from Qurayš) or part of a circumstantial clause *hal* as in *ra'ā zaydun al-hilāla fī s-samā'* (Zayd saw the moon in the sky). For each of these occurrences of the prepositional phrase, the grammarians assume the existence of a deletion, namely a governing word *'awāmil* to which these prepositional phrases are attached. The deleted words are *mustaqirrun* (situated, positioned), *istaqarra* (was situated, positioned), *kā'inun* (to be, Nom.) and *kā'inan* (to be, Acc.) respectively. These governing words are further classified as *zāhir* (explicit) as in *zaydun qā'imun fī d-dār* (Zayd is situated/positioned in the house) and *muḏmar* (implicit) as in *zaydun fī d-dār* (Zaydun is in the house). al-Qurṭubī attributes these complications to the rule that stipulates that every case-ending must be caused by a governing word, whether such word is explicit or implicit. Had the grammarians not bound themselves with the theory "they would not have had to resort to these reinterpretations" (al-Qurṭubī, *Radd* 24). All the sentences mentioned here are "all complete sentences which express the speaker's complete idea" and hence there is no "need for any *ta'wīl* reinterpretation." "Such reinterpretations", says al-Qurṭubī, "Are the creation of the grammarians and therefore belong to them. It is therefore necessary that we abolish such reinterpretations and the theory of grammatical government which entails them" (al-Qurṭubī, *Radd* 25).

Another area of Arabic grammatical presentations which al-Qurṭubī criticizes as an entailment of *nazarīyyat al-ʿāmil* is the chapter entitled *Bāb at-tanāzuʿ fī l-ʿamal* (The Chapter on the Rivalry Among Governing Words). An important concept of the theory of grammatical government, this chapter examines the problems that arise when two governing words *ʿāmilan* jointly govern one the same word *maʿmūl* in a given sentence. Here the grammarians would use the term *tanāzuʿ* which has in Arabic the basic meaning 'rivalry, dispute, contest' with the implication that there is some type of 'rivalry', as it were, between the two governing words over one and the same word in the sentence. Given the rules of the theory of government, such a situation is unthinkable. If such a situation occurs, it must be reinterpreted in such a way as would show that such an occurrence does not contradict the rule. The overriding consideration here is to protect the integrity of the rule. The problem with such an approach is that the grammarian may find himself rejecting sentences uttered by articulate speakers or trying to reinterpret such sentences to protect the rule. This raises the question of whether it serves any purpose for the grammarian to start his examination by trying to apply the rule he has at hand rather than by examining the data he has by trying to construct a rule that would accommodate the greater bulk of his data. According to the rules of the chapter on *tanāzuʿ*, sentences of the type *ḥaḍara wa-darasa kullu ṭ-ṭullāb* are not acceptable as they show two governing words *ʿawāmīl*, in this case the two verbs *ḥaḍara* and *darasa* operating on one and the same word, namely, the subject *ṭullāb*.<sup>4</sup> As it stands, this sentence violates the rules of the grammar and is therefore judged as unacceptable. In order for this sentence to be acceptable it must be reinterpreted so as to allow only one of the two verbs it has to operate on the subject. To reinterpret this sentence, the Kufan grammarians would allow only the second one to operate on the subject, the reason being its proximity to the subject. According to both schools, the other verb, the one excluded from operation on the subject, must be reinterpreted in such a way as would make it the governing word *ʿāmil* of an 'implied' subject. Hence, according to the Kufan grammarians a reinterpreted version of this sentence would be as follows (i.e. only the first verb operates on the subject): *ḥaḍara wa-darasū 'hum' at-ṭullāb*. The first verb *ḥaḍara* precedes and thus operates on the explicit subject *at-ṭullāb* while the second verb *darasū* operates on the 'implied' subject *hum*. Conversely, according to the Basran grammarians, a reinterpreted version of this sentence would be as follows (i.e. only the second verb operates on the subject): *ḥaḍarū 'hum' wa-darasa at-ṭullāb*. The second verb *darasa* precedes and thus operates on the subject *at-ṭullāb* while the first verb *ḥaḍarū* precedes and operates on the 'implied' subject *hum*. As al-Qurṭubī indicates, adherence to this theory, while it has added an immeasurable amount of detail and complication to Arabic grammar, has led the grammarians to reject valid and grammatical sentences and to create instead strange and awkward sentences which can only be found in grammar manuals.

al-Qurṭubī examines other elements of *nazarīyyat al-ʿāmil* and the problems it has entailed. One such element is what has traditionally been termed *Bāb al-iṣṭijāl*. Examples of this point is the occurrence of a governed word *maʿmūl* in a position

<sup>4</sup> as-Strāfi, *Aḥbār* Question No. 368. as-Strāfi tells us that al-Farrā' considers both verbs in this type of sentence to be operating on the subject. See also al-Qurṭubī, *Radd* 108, fn. of Dayf.

where it is not immediately preceded by the word which governs it *'āmīl*, as when the direct object precedes the verb as in *'a-'aliyyan ra'aytahu?* (Ali, did you see him?) or *'a-'anta, 'aliyyan ra'aytahu?* (You, Ali, did you see him?) and as a result a pronoun suffix referring to the object must be added to the verb. al-Qurṭubī reviews the tremendous amount of detail and philosophical arguments involved in this chapter such as the form of the verb in this type of sentence and whether the verb is the predicate *ḥabar* or otherwise; if otherwise, the verb can be in the imperative, *'amr*, negative imperative *nahy*, interrogative *istifhām*, exclamatory *ta'aḡḡub*,...etc. The case-ending on the noun in each one of these sentences is determined in accordance with the form of the verb in each. Thus in the imperative and negative imperative the noun must be in the accusative case, even though it may take the nominative case (al-Qurṭubī, *Radd* 118). The type of pronoun attached to the verb also affects the case-ending on the noun. So, if the pronoun is a subject pronoun *ḍamīr raf'*, the initial noun will be in the nominative case. However, it may happen that a sentence will have two pronoun suffixes, a subject pronoun *ḍamīr raf'* and an object pronoun *ḍamīr naṣb* in which case the noun can take either the nominative or the accusative cases. al-Qurṭubī remarks that the grammarians list hundreds of cases and examples reflecting various possibilities of deletions and how each one of these affects the case-endings in the sentence. What he finds amazing is that the great majority of such sentences are not taken from actual speech, but rather invented by the grammarians to demonstrate the applicability of the rule. The pedagogical or practical value of such detail and complication is called into question by al-Qurṭubī (*Radd* 127) as he remarks:

Overdetailing these imaginary and unpractical issues is unnecessary for those who believe that only actual and practical issues should be considered.

al-Qurṭubī also notes the cumbersome tasks the grammarians set themselves in presenting a chapter of this nature, their classification of what should be in the nominative or accusative case-endings, and what may possibly take both case-endings. He also notes that the greater part of these discussions is based on "deletions which have no existence in the speaker's intention" (al-Qurṭubī *Radd* 29). Rather, says al-Qurṭubī (*Radd* 29), "it is the analogies and rules of the grammar which determine such deletions and require us to follow them".

### Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafā

Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafā's *'Ihyā' an-naḥw* (The Revival of Grammar), first published in 1937, was the first entire book devoted to the subject of reforming Arabic grammar in the twentieth century. The book was hailed by many scholars as a landmark in the Arabic grammar reform movement. Although there were those who were critical of the book, those who praised it maintained that Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafā said what they had wanted to say but were not forthcoming enough to do so. It was not possible in the 1930's to publish a book containing such strong and controversial views on Arabic grammar without risking a confrontation with conservative scholars and writers who did not share the author's views. In his foreword to the book, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, one of the most prominent Arab scholars and educators of the twentieth century, writes:

This book does not portray the frame of mind of the author alone, but portrays my mental framework as well...I don't think I will be mistaken if I said that a great many people will resent the book, and may attack it; this is so because the book is new in its form and essence, and it therefore disagrees with many long-established concepts, and it may change a great many of such concepts (Muṣṭafā 1959:H).

Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafā advocates a new approach to the grammar which would make it more accessible and easily learned. In the course of his critique, Muṣṭafā raises a number of important questions regarding some of the fundamental and long-established areas of the traditional presentation of Arabic grammar. He also calls attention to the difficulties and complexities that have become symptomatic of Arabic grammar and which have rendered the learning of the grammar an unrealistically exacting task. The elimination of these hindrances can make the study of Arabic grammar "more rewarding and purposeful" (Muṣṭafā 1959:D). Muṣṭafā is particularly critical of what he saw as lack of adequate and accurate understanding on the part of those engaged in the field of grammar. Thus Muṣṭafā (1959:1) notes that:

They believed that the ultimate goal of the grammar was to determinate the case endings *ʾrāb* fore each word as well as the rules governing such case endings. This was so much so that some scholars called grammar "the science of case endings"...This is a severe limitation of the scope of grammatical study. Grammar as we see it should be concerned with the rules governing the composition of speech, the position of a word in the sentence, and the combination of a sentence with another sentence to express a complete meaning.

Muṣṭafā takes exception with what appears in traditional grammar to be the tendency to place too much emphasis on the case-endings of the final letter of a word and the grammarians' focus on the single word, rather than on the total meaning of all the words in a sentence. The meaning a word has in isolation may not be identical with the meaning "it has when combined with other words in one sentence" (Muṣṭafā 1959:2). Muṣṭafā explains that his understanding of grammar is that it is the system which governs the composition of sentences. He writes (Muṣṭafā 1959:2):

The rules governing the arrangement of words into sentences in a given language are cultivated in the disposition and talent of its speakers; once such rules have been discovered and documented they will then constitute the grammar of that language.

Muṣṭafā emphasizes the existence of a system which governs the composition of words and the arrangement of those words into phrases or sentences. Without knowledge of such a system, understanding how a given language will not be possible even if we knew the meaning and structure of its individual words. Thus, Muṣṭafā (1959:2) remarks:

If you were presented with a sentence from a language which you do not know, and if each of the various words in that sentence was explained to you, that would still not be adequate for you to understand the total meaning of that sentence. In order for you to understand the total meaning of that sentence, it will be necessary to know the system of that language, the system whereby it composes its words and sentences, for that system would constitute the grammar of that language.

Muṣṭafā further argues (1959:2) that there are languages which do not exhibit any inflectional patterns, yet such languages have "grammars and detailed rules which explain the method of word and sentence composition". Muṣṭafā is referring here to natural languages in which the end of the word does not change from one position in the sentence to another, but whose grammars adequately explain how words are put together to form meaningful sentences.

Muṣṭafā attempts to distinguish between the discipline which deals with the placement of diacritical marks at the end of words *ʾrāb* and the grammar discipline which deals with the arrangement of words into sentences and of sentences into larger units of discourse. He argues that Arab grammarians have severely "restricted the domain of grammar by limiting their concern to word endings and the rules governing them" (Muṣṭafā 1959:3). Muṣṭafā maintains that such areas as the types of sentences, negative, emphasis, inversion, among others, were briefly touched upon by the grammarians without careful study except "as much as they related to *ʾrāb* and its rules, thus missing significant areas of the Arabic language, its philology and styles" (Muṣṭafā 1959:3). The thrust of his critique here is that *ʾrāb* was so much emphasized that other areas of the grammar appeared as though they were there only to explain the assignment of case-endings.

Perhaps one of the most innovative proposal in the book is the one in which he gives his own account of the function of the short vowels, *fatha*, *ḍamma* and *kasra*. The short vowels should be viewed, not as the effect of the governing words *ʿawāmil* in the sentence, but as being there to convey certain meanings. This approach will eliminate a highly intricate area of the grammar, and will reduce significantly the difficulty and complexity of Arabic grammar. In explaining his theory on the function of the short vowels in Arabic, Muṣṭafā rejects the view of some orientalists, notably Wright and Brockelmann, concerning case-endings.<sup>5</sup> These Orientalists maintain that the case-endings, i.e. *fatha*, *ḍamma*, and *kasra*, were originally part of affixes that were connected to words in Semitic languages; then the affixes were dropped but the case-endings remained (Muṣṭafā 1959:43 ff). Muṣṭafā perceives the case-endings, not as appendages that were left behind after the suffix was dropped,<sup>6</sup> but as devices conveying certain meanings. Muṣṭafā believes that it would be easier to teach case endings and thus increase reading comprehension if the endings were viewed as semantic rather than syntactic devices.

In this semantic approach to the short vowels, *al-ḥarakāt al-ʾrābiyya* in Arabic, Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafā draws attention to the striking consistency that distinguishes the function of these short vowels. The *ḍamma*, the marker of the nominative case, is invariably assigned to nouns when these nouns are in an *ʾisnād* position, i.e. when they constitute the topic or central theme of the proposition. This is always the case when the noun occurs as the subject of an equational sentence i.e. *mubtadaʿ*, the subject of an active verb, i.e. *fāʿil* or the subject of a passive verb *al-mutaḥaddaṭ ʿanhu*. Thus in each of the three sentences below, the noun *ad-darsu* is the central theme and is therefore assigned the nominative case:

<sup>5</sup> The terms short vowels, *ḍamma*, *fatha*, and *kasra* as well as the term case-ending will be used somewhat synonymously in this text for ease of reference.

<sup>6</sup> This is the view of the Orientalists referred to in the earlier sentence. Cf. Muṣṭafā 1959:43.

- *ad-darsu sahlun* (The lesson is easy)
- *intahā d-darsu* (The lesson ended)
- *kutiba d-darsu* (The lesson was written)

The theme in each one of these sentences revolves around the nominative noun *al-ism al-marfūʿ*; the other elements in the sentence, the predicate adjective *sahlun*, the active verb *intahā*, and the passive verb *kutiba* provide information about that noun. Thus a noun chosen as the central theme of a sentence will invariably be assigned the nominative case. Muṣṭafā then would see the assignment of the case-ending as initiated in the speaker's mind together with the thought-processing. A speaker decides that the central theme of his utterance will be a certain noun, so he utters that noun with the nominative case.

The *kasra* (marker of the genitive case) on the other hand, indicates that the noun which carries it is combined with the preceding word in an *'idāfa* construction, i.e. the noun itself is *muḍāf 'ilayhi*.<sup>7</sup> As the term indicates in Arabic, *'idāfa* refers to the placement side by side of two nouns the first one of which (here the order is from right to left) is the one known as *muḍāf* (added, related) and takes the nominative case, while the second one is known as *muḍāf 'ilayhi* (added or related to) and takes the genitive case *kasra*. The semantic relationship between the two nouns is one of 'possession' or 'belonging', the first noun being the noun which belongs to or is possessed by the second noun. The *kasra* (genitive case) then signals that a given noun is in an *'idāfa* position, i.e. it is combined with the preceding noun to form a semantic unit. Thus in the sentence, *hunā baytu l-mudarrisi* (here is the teacher's house), the noun *al-mudarrisi* is *muḍāf 'ilayhi* (i.e. the noun to which the preceding noun is related/added), while *baytu* is the noun that is being related to the second noun. The *kasra* then is to be viewed as a semantic device which the speaker uses to convey the concept of *'idāfa* (i.e. association with, belonging to, possession,...etc.). The *fatha* (marker of the accusative case) is not a legitimate short vowel *ḥaraka 'rābiyya* according to Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafā since it does not have the semantic property which the *ḍamma* and *kasra* have. It is "the easier and favourable movement to the Arabs" (Muṣṭafā 1959:79). Muṣṭafā goes to the great lengths in citing evidence to demonstrate that the *fatha* is not only easier to produce in terms of its production and articulation but that it also is used considerably more frequently than the other two movements. So, in Muṣṭafā's grammar the two legitimate movements *ḥarakāt 'rābiyya* are the *ḍamma* and the *kasra*. These two movements should be viewed not as manifestations or effects of any other word in the sentence, i.e. *'awāmil*, but as devices triggered by the semantic content of the speaker's message.<sup>8</sup> Muṣṭafā then would see the assignment of the case-ending as initiated in the speaker's mind together with the thought-processing. A speaker decides that the central theme of his utterance will be a certain noun, so he utters that noun with the nominative case. By the same token, the *kasra*, the marker for the genitive case, will be triggered if a noun is to be combined with a preceding noun in the same sentence so that the two

<sup>7</sup> This is an Arabic construction which covers both compound noun and genitive constructions as in 'City Hall' and 'John's Car', respectively.

<sup>8</sup> Muṣṭafā 1959:79. See the sections on *ḍamma* and *kasra* p. 53, 72 ff.

nouns can form a semantic unit in which the first noun the *muḍāf* is assigned the *ḍamma* while the second noun the *muḍāf 'ilayhi* is assigned the *kasra*. The most important point in this approach is the association that must be created between the short vowels and the meaning intended by the speaker. This will require the Arabic language teacher to explain to his students such concepts as *'isnād* and to train thoroughly in cultivating the association in their minds between the short vowels and meaning.

### Fu'ād Tarzī

Fu'ād Tarzī, evincing a thorough understanding of the problems of teaching Arabic grammar in his text, *Fī sabīl taysīr al-'arabiyya wa-tahḍīhā* (Towards Simplification and Modernization of Arabic), which was published in 1973, twenty years after Frayha's book, also attributed the problems involved in the learning and teaching of Arabic to the very complex and archaic nature of the traditional presentations of Arabic grammar. He called for simplifying the description and presentation of the standard written language *fushḥā* so that it could be easily learned, become more and more popular and eventually replace the colloquial dialects, thus eliminating the linguistic dichotomy in the Arabic-speaking world (Tarzī 1973:4). In calling for the simplification of the description of Arabic grammar, Tarzī, like Frayha and others, exceeded the goal he set for himself, namely the simplification of the presentation of grammar, in attempting to reform the language itself.

Tarzī based his goal for simplifying the presentation of the Arabic language on the following principles: 1) the need for Arabic linguistic theory to be consistent with modern theory, thus the concepts and terminologies used in describing Arabic would be familiar to the learner; 2) the need to narrow the gap between the written language and everyday speech; this, notes Tarzī, would make the transition less drastic and the learning process less tedious; 3) elimination of differences among dialects, especially with respect to vocabulary items, their meanings, derivations, and syntactic features; 4) elimination of differences of opinions among the grammarians regarding the presentation of the grammar rules; 5) making the presentation of the grammar more flexible through a greater use of the principle of analogy and the elimination of rare and archaic forms, and 6) improvement of the Arabic script to reflect the spoken language and pronunciation more effectively.

The general objections Tarzī raises about Arabic grammatical presentations as they were written several centuries ago and as they remain today, include the use of a large number of rules and subrules; the inclusion in the grammatical presentation of different usages and forms as a result of the multiplicity of dialects during the first and second centuries A.H. (7/8 centuries A.D.) when the grammar was written; the differences among the grammarians, especially those of the Kufan and Basran schools; the use of the 'Government Theory' (*nazariyyat al-'āmil*), as well as case endings in the description and presentation of Arabic grammar.

More relevant to our topic, some of Tarzī's most interesting recommendations concern the way Arabic grammar is presented to the learner. For example, traditional presentations of Arabic grammar classify speech into nouns, verbs and particles. The chief problems Tarzī sees in this classification are the existence of words that cannot be placed in any one of these categories, necessitating the invention of a new

category; the incorporation in some of these categories of forms that do not belong there (e.g., pronouns, adjectives and adverbs in the category of the noun), and lack of proper delineation of the categories of speech. An example of such loose definitions of speech categories, notes Tarzī, is found in the definition of the noun as "that which takes nunation, the definite article, or can occur in 'idāfa" (al-Farrā' as quoted in Ibn Fāris, *Fiqh* 83), whereas there are many instances of nouns occurring without nunation, the definite article, or 'idāfa.

Other equally relevant areas of grammatical presentations in which Tarzī cites the need for simplification include the verbal noun, the dual system of nouns, and the broken plurals. The Form I basic verb *fa'ala* has over thirty patterns for deriving verbal nouns, whereas other Semitic languages possess no more than one or two patterns for such derivations (Tarzī 1973:31). Furthermore, many Form I basic verbs have more than one verbal noun as a result of the different dialects. For example, the verbal noun of the verb *makaṭa* (to stay) can be *makt*, *mukt*, *mikt*, *makāṭ*, *mukīṭ*, or *muktān*.

Tarzī observes that the dual system of the noun in its comprehensive form exists only in Arabic of all Semitic languages. Other Semitic languages use the dual system, generally only in reference to bipartite parts of the body. For example, in Ethiopic, the dual is seldom used (Wright 1890:149); the dual is used only referring to bipartite body parts in Aramaic (Rosenthal 1961:31-32), and in Hebrew the dual is used for bipartite body parts, and is used for a small number of words which have two parts, such as scissors (*misparayim*). In Arabic, the dual is applicable to all nouns and has two case endings represented by differences in spelling: the nominative by *-āni* and the genitive/accusative represented by *-ayni*. Although Tarzī feels that the dual in Arabic in "conducive to accuracy of expression" (Tarzī 1973:33), he finds the two different forms confusing and recommends that the use of the dual be confined to the form ending in *-ayni*, the form used in all other Semitic languages. Since the *-ayni* ending for the dual is also the ending used in spoken Arabic, Tarzī contends that this change would also bring the written language closer to the spoken language.

Discussing the basis for his proposals for a simplification of the presentation of the plural system of Arabic, Tarzī considers the broken plural to be a remnant of a primitive stage of the language, preceding the adoption of the principle of analogy, and notes that other Semitic languages, with the exception of Ethiopic, do not have the broken plural (i.e., nouns that form the plural through internal vocalic change). Tarzī argues that the multiplicity of broken plurals for a single noun in Arabic is a burden on the student; for example, the noun *qaws* can have the broken plurals *qisīyy*, *qusiyy*, *'aqwās*, *qiyās*, *'aqwus*, or *'aqyās*. In addition to the number of possible broken plurals for one noun, there are also other plural patterns in Arabic, including the sound plural (i.e., nouns that form the plural simply by attaching a plural morpheme to the noun without making any vocalic changes) and the feminine sound plural, and a large number of rules and subrules apply to each of these patterns.

Calling for the simplification of the presentation of the plural system in Arabic, Tarzī proposes the elimination of the non-analogical plural and subjection of all plural nouns to analogy as in other Semitic languages. Tarzī also proposes grouping masculine broken plurals with masculine sound plurals and feminine broken plurals with feminine sound plurals. He recommends a plural system involving the addition of the *-īna* suffix to the masculine singular and the *-atun* suffix to the feminine

singular. This system for the plural would be simple and predictable and, as with Tarzī's proposal for the dual, would narrow the gap between the written and the spoken language.

The proposal to drop the *ūna* sound plural form is not as drastic as it may seem. There is evidence, as Ibn 'Aqīl points out (*Ṣarḥ*, 64) in his explanations on the *Alfiyya* of Ibn Mālik, that there were tribes that used only the *ūna* plural, such as the tribes of Banū Tamīm and Banū 'Āmir.

Central to our discussion on the pedagogical reform of grammatical presentations, Tarzī thoroughly addresses the problems involved in presenting the grammatical rules for verbs in Arabic, giving recommendations for the simplification of these rules. One such problem is the many past tense patterns possible for Form I verbs. For example, some verbs have either the past tense form *fa'ala* or *fa'ula* ("to do"), as in *ḡamada* or *ḡamuda* ("to be frozen"); the past tense of other verbs may be in the patterns *fa'ila* or *fa'ala*, as in *nakiba* or *nakaba* ("to distress"), and still other Form I verbs may take the pattern *fa'ila* or *fa'ula*, as in *ba'ada* or *ba'uda* ("to be distant"). Other verbs may occur either with *yā/y/* or *wāw/w/* a in *mahaytu* or *mahawtu* ("erased"), *raṭaytu* or *raṭawtu* ("eulogized"). There is even a group of Form I basic verbs that may have three different patterns, all with the same meaning, as in *bara'a*, *bar'a*, or *barū'a* ("to excel"). Verbs in other forms may occur with or without *hamza* (glottal stop), as *'arḡa'tu* or *'arḡaytu* ("postponed") (Form IV). Tarzī contends that the presentation of these multiple patterns is rather complicated and confusing pedagogically, and he recommends that the presentation of such verb patterns rather than all uncommon and archaic forms.

With respect to the present tense (imperfect), Tarzī notes that the subject marker prefix can take *ḡamma* as in Forms II, III, and IV, but the subject marker takes *fatha* in all other basic and derived forms (i.e. Forms I, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X). Sībawayhi mentions (*Kitāb* II, 306) that all the Arabs, with the exception of the inhabitants of the Hīḡāz area, also used the *kasra* with subject markers of all imperfect verbs. Tarzī again proposes the solution recalling the earlier practice, which makes the written language closer to the spoken: the use of the *kasra* for the subject markers of all verbs in the imperfect. This will simplify the presentation of these verbs and make the learning process less difficult.

Equally important for our purposes here is Tarzī's call for the simplification of the presentation of imperfect verbs. Tarzī observes two groups of verbs in the imperfect which can have more than one stem vowel: verbs where a change in the stem vowel signals a change in meaning as in *ṭala'a/yaṭla'u* ("to ascend") and *yallu'u* ("to appear"), and verbs with two different stem vowels without any difference in meaning as in *masaka/yamsiku* or *yamsuku* ("to hold"), *raṣada/yarṣudu* or *yarṣidu* ("to refuse"). Tarzī proposes that the stem vowel for all verbs in the imperfect be the same vowel to facilitate learning for the student of Arabic.

Even more interesting for our purposes is Tarzī's further discussion of ways of simplifying the presentation of the various verb moods and forms. Tarzī notes that apart from the vowel movements which vary from *ḡamma* (indicative) to *fatha* (subjunctive) to *sukāin* (jussive), the only difference between the subjunctive and jussive moods on the one hand and the indicative mood on the other, is the presence of the *nūn* in the five verbs (third person, dual and plural, and second person with the exception of *'anta*). Tarzī then goes on to show how the traditional grammarians

made their presentations complicated by adding certain elements to verbs, elements which they thought were part of the verb, but which Tarzī contends are not. Hence, the *nūn* mentioned above was not originally part of the verb, nor is it a vowel movement.

Tarzī then explains how the traditional presentations of Arabic grammar made the verb in Arabic look more complex than the verb in other sister languages in the Semitic family. Thus, in Syriac the verbs had one form, with the *nūn*, and in Hebrew the verbs have only one form without the *nūn*. The forms of the verb both with and without the *nūn*, notes Tarzī, were used by the ancient Semitic tribes and were then inherited by the Arab tribes. The early grammarians, attempting to distinguish between the two forms, made the form with *nūn* the expression of the indicative case, and the form without the *nūn* an indication of the subjunctive and jussive cases. However, the problem is not one of grammar, but of dialects, a problem still present in modern Arabic, where the *nūn* is currently used in the spoken language in Iraq and the Gulf area, but has disappeared from the spoken language of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and other Arab countries. For the simplification of the presentation of this area of the verb, Tarzī proposes the dropping of the *nūn* suffix altogether, and the use of only one form for the present tense: the jussive form. Through the use of the jussive form, vowel movements would also be eliminated. The advantages of Tarzī's proposal are the simple structure of the jussive case and its closeness to the spoken language, with the exception of the dual and feminine plural of the jussive, for which there is not parallel in the spoken language. Moreover, Tarzī's proposal for simplifying the presentation of this area of the grammar would have important pedagogical implications as it would facilitate the teaching of Arabic, for the students would not have to fluctuate between the indicative, subjunctive, and jussive cases.

### Conclusion

The views of the above scholars by no means represent an exhaustive sampling of the efforts for simplifying Arabic grammatical presentations. However, al-Qurṭubī, Muṣṭafā, and Tarzī presented thorough and comprehensive proposals, each devoting an entire book to the subject. The sketchy and fragmented nature of the proposals presented by other scholars warrants the concentration on the efforts of these three scholars as representative of the movement.

Each of the three scholars discussed above, understood clearly the problems presented by the traditional presentations of Arabic grammar. They clearly indicated that such problems stem from the complex, philosophical and argumentative nature of such presentations. Furthermore, each one of them made it clear that his goal was to present Arabic grammar and structure in a clearer, less complicated and more integrated manner. Their views on the subject are presented here to show the extent to which their enthusiasm carried them.

Tarzī addressed problematic areas of grammatical presentations that neither Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafā nor al-Qurṭubī dealt with thoroughly, including the presentation of the plural system (both sound and broken plurals) and the various patterns for presenting the perfect and imperfect forms of the verbs. The presentation of the grammatical rules involved in these areas continues to be extremely confusing and

difficult for the student of Arabic, and Tarzī's proposals, if implemented, would serve to simplify the learning process.

Since the publication of Ibrāhīm Muṣṭafā's book in 1937, there does not appear to have been much progress in the implementation of reform, but awareness of the problems in the Arabic language continues to be strong as reform efforts are made. Tarzī went further than Muṣṭafā in making very specific proposals, which are more drastic in nature. The best one can hope for is to encourage trends toward uniformity in the presentation and description of the Modern Standard language.

Tarzī's proposals essentially call for flexibility in the presentation and description in the language and thus are easier to accept. We already see some signs of the flexibility advocated by Tarzī in verbs which have two different vowel patterns for the past tense, such as the patterns *fa'ila* and *fa'ula*; at some point, one pattern will disappear, and the other will become dominant. Moreover, such natural evolution has occurred in the spoken language, where verbs with more than one pattern for the past tense have dropped all but one pattern. Furthermore, Muṣṭafā and Tarzī note that the occurrence of all perfect form of the verb in colloquial with *sukān*, as is the case with the imperfect, indicates that case endings (*ʿrāb*) are not essential for meaning. This would be the case if the word order in a sentence were fixed.

The proposals of the reformers have not as yet been implemented, and the problems involved in Arabic grammatical presentations still persist. However, those working in the field of Arabic grammar should not be discouraged from persevering in the task of reforming Arabic grammatical presentations. The number of those interested in learning Arabic continues to grow; however, the complex and philosophical nature of the description and presentation of Arabic language and grammar may not be conducive to acquiring mastery of the language in a reasonably short time. True, the time has not been propitious to fully adopt the proposals of the reformers, but the challenge remains for modern Arabic linguists and teachers to continue the reform effort to make Arabic a more pedagogically accessible language.

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