

THE TERM *ŞILA* IN EARLY ARAB GRAMMATICAL THEORY: THE CASE OF IBN AS-SARRĀĠ

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Introduction

Arab grammarians used many terms both technically and non-technically to describe syntactic, morphological, phonological, and semantic relations between the different segments of speech in an attempt to describe the Arabic language. Many of the terms which the Arab grammarians used had been in use in other disciplines in reference to concepts very similar to the grammatical concepts which the grammarians had in hand. Terms such as *qiyās*, *uṣūl*, *naql* and *madhab* appeared in early treatises of Arabic grammar and reflected the effect of theology, logic and philosophy on the newly introduced science of language.

In addition to these technical terms, other non-technical terms were used by the Arab grammarians in a way that not only reflected the original meaning of the terms, but also introduced a new dimension for their use. The term upon which this paper will focus is the term *şila*, as well as some derivatives of the root *w-ṣ-l*. The paper will try to show that the derivatives of the root *w-ṣ-l* such as *şila* and *wāşil* lend themselves to verbal sentences' analysis within the modern theory of valency. In the valency theory the verb is regarded as the central element which assigns semantic roles to the different nouns in the sentence, as well as the cohesive element that links the parts of the sentence together to form a semantic whole. This is precisely the role of the transitive verb in Arabic when it is regarded as *wāşil*.

This paper will also argue that the term *şila* was used by the Arab grammarian Ibn as-Sarrāġ who lived in the 9th and 10th centuries, to refer to the transitive verbs' object (*al-maf'ūl bihi*), and consequently to the necessary elements needed in the verbs' sphere of valence.

The paper will begin by reviewing the lexicology of *w-s-l* in *Lisān al-ʿarab* and will consider the meanings of *waṣala* in the Qurʾānic text as interpreted in the *Tafsīr* of aṭ-Ṭabarī. Finally, this paper will analyze the manne in which the terms *waṣala* and *ṣila* were used by Ibn as-Sarrāġ in his *Uṣūl fi-n-naḥw*.

The lexicology of w-s-l

The dictionary *Lisān al-ʿarab* lists the following meanings under the entry *w-s-l*:

1. *al-awṣāl* and *al-mafāṣil* both refer to joints. (The singular of *awṣāl* is *waṣil*.)
2. *waṣala kadā bi-kadā* means to gather item and to "stich" them together.
3. *wiṣla* and *wuṣla* to a certain place means to reach that place.
4. *waṣl* is the opposite of *haġr* (departing, deserting someone).
5. *waṣala* or *ittaṣala ar-raġul* means to be linked by marriage to a group of people (*intasaba*).
6. *waṣīla* is the she camel that gives birth to five or seven baby she camels followed by five or seven baby camels.
7. *waṣal aš-šāʿr* means to lengthen the hair by using artificial extension.
8. *waṣala ar-raḥim* or *ṣilat ar-raḥim*, means to have a close relationship or link with those whom you are related to by birth (*Lisān VI, 4850ff*).

More than a century later, az-Zamaḥṣarī indicated in *Asās al-balāġa* that *waṣala* means:

1. To connect/link two things together (*waṣala ṣayʿan bi-ṣayʿin*).
2. *waṣala* as the opposite of *haġara*.
3. *waṣala* is a person whom you never part with (*lā yufāriqubu*).
4. *waṣl* and *ṣilat ar-raḥim* mean to have a close relationship or link with one's blood relatives (az-Zamaḥṣarī, *Asās* 678-679).

w-ş-l in the Qur'ānic text

Derivatives of the root *w-ş-l* occur twelve times in a total of ten verses in the Qur'ān (cf. 'Abdalbāqī 1991). In the interpretation of Yusuf Ali, *waşala* was translated as "join" five times, "reach" four times, "to go towards something" once, and "to touch or come closer to someone/reach" once. The word *waşila* was translated as "a she camel that gives birth to twin baby camels" once. at-Ṭabarī (d. 310), provides us not only with an interpretation of the Qur'ānic text and lexicon, but also with some very interesting grammatical notes on the syntax and phonotactics of the Arabic language. For our present purposes, I will start by summarizing the meanings of *waşala* as they were presented by at-Ṭabarī (*Tafsīr*). Afterwards, I will discuss some of the syntactic information provided by at-Ṭabarī concerning the concept of *şila*.

1. *waşala* was presented in five verses as a synonym of *balāġa* (to reach; Q.28.35; 4.90; 6.136. 11.70 & 81). at-Ṭabarī commented in the interpretation of the verse of *Sūrat an-Nisā'* that some of *abl al-ʿarabiyya* had interpreted *waşala* in that verse to mean *intasaba* (to be linked or related by marriage). at-Ṭabarī supports this interpretation by a line of poetry by al-Aʿşā in which *waşala* is used to mean *intasaba*.

2. In three verses *waşala* was interpreted as the opposite of *qataʿa* (to disconnect or unrelate to). This meaning is especially linked to the concept of *şilat ar-rahim*, where *qatʿ şilat ar-rahim* means severing relations with those related to the person by birth, and where *waşl ar-rahim* means having a close relationship or connection with one's relatives (Q.2.27; 13.21 & 25).

3. Two interpretations are given by at-Ṭabarī for *waşala* in *Sūrat al-Qaşaş* where *waşala* either means 'to connect' as in *waşl al-ħibāl* (connecting ropes together in order to have a longer one), or to mean the same as *faşala* (here meaning to be distinct), or *bayyana* (to clarify).

On further occasions, at-Ṭabarī focuses on syntax to interpret further the meanings of certain lexical items and structures. As far as the term *şila* is concerned, he uses it to refer to several syntactic functions. These functions are :

1. *šila* and *tatāwul* are used interchangeably to refer to a redundant element in the sentence. This usage is called “*az-ziyāda fī l-kalām*”. *mā* is regarded as *šila* or *ḥašw* when it occurs in a sentence for the purpose of emphasis (*tawkiḍ*) and not to function as a relative pronoun (aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* IV, 289, VI, 548).

2. When *šila* is not a redundant element in the sentence, it refers in most cases to an item of speech that is linked with another for purposes of clarification and completion of a sentence’s syntax and semantics. Thus, in the interpretation of the verse Q.2.131, aṭ-Ṭabarī considers the lexeme *id* as introducing a *šila* to another sentence mentioned before it. Therefore the verse “*id qāla lahu rabbuhu aslim qāl aslamtu li-rabbi l-‘ālamīn*” is a *šila* to “*la-qad istafaynāhu fī d-dunyā*”.

Šilat al-fi’l is a term used by aṭ-Ṭabarī to refer to the object of a preposition (*al-ḡār wa-l-maḡrūr*) in a line of poetry attested to several poets where the last part of the line says “*wa-lastu muqayyadan, annī bi-qaydin*”. aṭ-Ṭabarī says that a suppressed verb is operating here and that its *šila* is mentioned, which is “*bi-qaydin*” (by/with shackles).

In the interpretation of verse Q.4.127, aṭ-Ṭabarī uses the term *wasāla* as opposed to *qata‘a* to refer to the continuity of the flow of ideas as opposed to the interruption of the stream of ideas. He says “and this is so because linking the meaning of words is more worthy whenever possible (*waslu ma‘ānī l-kalām awlā*). Therefore this verse is a *šila* of ‘*wamā yutlā ‘alaykum*’ rather an elaboration of saying “*yufīkum fihinna*” because it is closer to the latter and separated (*munqaṭi‘a*) from the former” (aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* VII, 261-262).

In the previous example, the link or *waṣl* refers both to the syntactic as well as the semantic relationship between the different parts of the sentences.

Within the same lines, aṭ-Ṭabarī uses *waṣl* as the antonym of *waqf* in a morpho-phonetic sense where *waqf* means separation in pronunciation, whereas *waṣl* means continuation or joining of the sounds/letters together. The idea of continuity and linkage is actually very clear in this case: here we can actually hear two words as one.

aṭ-Ṭabarī himself uses the terms *waşala* and *şila* to refer to connecting discourse or connecting stream of sounds and thoughts in numerous occasions in his *Tafsīr*. His interpretations of the derivatives of *w-ş-l* correspond with their general meanings in the dictionaries contemporary with and preceding his time, as well as the use of *waşala* and *şila* in the poetry of his contemporaries (especially al-Mutanabbī).

I would like now to turn to a grammarian who represented the thinking of both the Başran and Kūfan schools: Ibn as-Sarrāğ. He was a Bağdādī, who lived at the end of the third century and died six years after aṭ-Ṭabarī in 316 of *hiğra*. Ibn as-Sarrāğ wrote a remarkable work called *al-Uşul fī n-nahw*, in which the terms *waşala* and *şila* are used to reflect the general meanings of the terms as used in poetry, dictionaries, and Qur'anic interpretations noted above, in addition to referring to the semantic role of both the verb and the different NPs which are used with it.

*The Use of waşala, waşl, and şila in Ibn as-Sarrāğ's al-Uşul:
An Overview*

Ibn as-Sarrāğ uses the term *şila* with the particle *mā*, with the relative pronoun *alladī*, with the particle *ayy*, with the verbal noun that is equivalent to 'an with the verb', and with *al-qasam*. In all those cases, the term *şila* referred to an item that is connected with a noun in order to form a "complete" structure on both the syntactic and the semantic levels. This paper will concentrate on the issue of transitivity of verbs so as to examine the various meanings and functions of *şila*.

Verbs' Transitivity:

1. *wāşil* = transitive

In his categorization of verbs according to their transitivity, Ibn as-Sarrāğ uses the term *wāşil* to refer to transitive verbs which are usually

referred to as *af'āl muta'addiya*¹ (*Uṣūl* I, 73).

Ibn as-Sarrāğ describes the verbs which are *wāṣila* in terms of the actions and events they denote and the role of their agents. Thus the verb *daraba* as a *wāṣil* verb denotes an action that goes from the agent to the object, whereas other transitive (*muta'addiya*) verbs such as *zanna* are not to be considered *wāṣila* because they do not describe an action that goes from the agent to the object.

Ibn as-Sarrāğ also makes a distinction between the two verbs *'alima* (to know) and *a'lama* (to cause someone to know). He argues that the verb *a'lama* is a verb *wāṣil* because when one uses it, one causes something to happen to someone other than oneself. But with the verb *'alima*, one refers to something that happens to oneself (i.e. the speaker's self). Consequently *'alima* and *zanna* are considered by Ibn as-Sarrāğ as *af'āl ġayr wāṣila* (*Uṣūl* I, 187).

Ibn as-Sarrāğ goes on to explain the meaning of *wāṣil* by making a comparison between *ism al-fā'il* and the *ṣifa muṣabbaha* on the basis of transitivity. Ibn as-Sarrāğ says that when *ism al-fā'il* is transitive – as in “*Zayd dāribun 'Amran*” (Zayd is hitting 'Amr) – the [action] of hitting has extended from Zayd and reached 'Amr (*inna d-darb qad wašala minhu ilā 'Amr*). But if one says: *Zayd ḥasanu l-wağhi* (Zayd is good in the face), you realize that Zayd did not do any thing to the face (*wağh*; *Uṣūl* I, 131-132).

2. *wašala* = ‘reach/operate’

The verb “reaches/operates” (*wasala l-fi'l*) is used by Ibn as-Sarrāğ in many incidents in *al-Uṣūl*. For example in the section where he discusses the *maf'ūl ma'ahu* he maintains that since the *wāw* does not

¹ It should be noted that the term *wāṣil* had been used before Ibn as-Sarrāğ at least by two earlier Baṣran grammarians, Sibawayhi and al-Mubarrad. It was used in a very limited way in Sibawayhi's *Kitāb*, while al-Mubarrad used the term more widely. With Ibn as-Sarrāğ's *Uṣūl*, it became obvious that the term *wāṣil* began to be used as a technical term.

operate on verbs but on nouns, and since it occurs before both nouns and verbs, the verb which is used before it reaches (*yaṣilu*) to what is after it (i.e. the *maf'ūl ma'abū*), and operates on it (*Uṣūl* I, 209).

When Ibn as-Sarrāğ introduced *al-istiṭnā'*, he explained that with the particle *illā* the meaning of *istiṭnā'* takes place and the verb reaches and goes beyond (*waṣala*) to what is after *illā* and causes the noun to be in the accusative (*Uṣūl* I, 281).

3. *waṣl* = 'connection'

According to Ibn as-Sarrāğ, "*al-waṣl*" happens between two items that complement each other and together they form a semantic entity (*ism marwṣūl bi-ṣay' ka-t-tamām labu*). Similar to the *iḍāfas* where each noun is added to (*maḍmūm ilā*) another which is its *tamām* (i.e. forms a semantic entity with it), Ibn as-Sarrāğ cites examples where two elements of the sentence are linked together to form a semantic entity. Some of these examples are: "*yā ḥayran min Zayd aqbil*" (O!, you better than Zayd, come here!), "*yā ḍāriban rağulan*" (O!, you hitting Zayd), "*yā qā'imān fī d-dār*" (O!, you standing in the house). All of the previous examples include two NPs which together form a semantic entity. All of the examples either feature the second noun in the accusative, or link to a prepositional phrase. (*Uṣūl* I, 344).

The importance of *ittiṣāl* in the forming of *tamām* or a semantic entity had been mentioned before Ibn as-Sarrāğ's time by al-Ḥalīl for Ibn as-Sarrāğ quotes him as having said that in the sentence "*lā āmirān bi-l-ma'rūf*", if you make "*bi-l-ma'rūf*" semantically related to the first NP (*min tamām al-ism al-awwal*); *āmirān*, and you make it linked with (*muttaṣilan bihi*), it will be as if you say "*lā āmirān ma'rūfan*" (*Uṣūl* I, 387).

al-Ḥalīl must have been trying to distinguish between verbs which take an object (*maf'ūl bihi*) and those which do not. The structural difference in the above example between '*bi-l-ma'rūf*' and '*ma'rūfan*' is that the former is a prepositional phrase whereas the latter is an object of the verb. If by "*muttaṣil*" and "*tamām*" al-Ḥalīl is referring to the

semantic completion of the verbal notion then it should not have mattered whether or not the verb takes a direct object or an object of a preposition, assuming that both are in fact the semantic object of the verb's action. The only possible interpretation of al-Ḥalīl's saying is that he made the inclusion of an object of the verb in the sentence a prerequisite for the terms "*muttaṣil*" and "*tamām*" to be meaningful. For the verb's meaning would be incomplete unless a preposition is used and then the verb would be *wāṣil* by means of a preposition.

According to Ibn as-Sarrāğ, the verb which occurs with a prepositional phrase in the syntactic slot of the verb's object is regarded as *wāṣil* by means of a preposition. He said, "and the object of the preposition is in fact the verb's [semantic] object. An object which is reached at or linked with a verb by a preposition is [equivalent] in meaning to that which the verb reaches or links with by itself. That is because your saying 'I passed by Zayd' (*marartu bi-Zaydin*) means 'I visited Zayd' (*ataytu Zaydan*)" (*Uṣūl* II, 13).

In many incidents in his book, Ibn as-Sarrāğ deals with what he calls *ṣila* referring to the constituents of verbal sentences. In one incident he cites the following two examples: "*a'ğaba rukūbu d-dābbata Zaydun 'Amran*" and "*a'ğaba rukūbu Zaydun ad-dābbata 'Amran*". Ibn as-Sarrāğ says then that one can not prepose the word "*dābba*", nor can put the word "*Zayd*" before the word "*ar-rukūb*" because they are "*min ṣilatihī*", meaning they are *min ṣilat ar-rukūb*, "*fa-qad ṣarā minhu ka-l-yā' wa-d-dāl min Zayd*" (*Uṣūl* I, 138).

One verb with which Ibn as-Sarrāğ uses the term *min ṣilatihī is zanna*. Ibn as-Sarrāğ gave the examples: "*zanantu Zaydan la-fī d-dār qā'imān*". He says that if the phrase "*fī d-dār*" is a *ṣila* of *zanna*, then the *lām* should occur with the phrase. If, on the other hand, the phrase is in the *ṣila* of the word "*qā'im*", then the *lām* should occur before *qā'im* as in '*zanantu Zaydan la-qā'im fī d-dār*'. Ibn as-Sarrāğ comments on this by saying that the *lām* should introduce what is in reality the predicate (*ḥabar al-mubtada*). It is worth noting that the predicate is now an object of the verb *zanna* (*Uṣūl* I, 261).

The term *min şilatibi* is used by Ibn as-Sarrāğ in a way that is very similar to what Michael Carter (1985) noted with regard to Sībawayhi's use of the term *min sabab* in his *Kitāb*. Carter translated the term *min sabab* as "semantically related". I would translate Ibn as-Sarrāğ's *min şilatibi* in the same way but with one reservation. This translation is only valid as long as it is used to refer to a verbal construction. It is worth mentioning that Ibn as-Sarrāğ uses the term *min sabab* in the same way as Sībawayhi does – that is, to refer mainly to non verbal constructions especially with noun-adjective phrases.

In the chapter on "*al-ihbār 'an al-fā'il wa-l-maf'ūl li-l-fi'l alladī yata'addā ilā maf'ūl wāhid*". Ibn as-Sarrāğ says, "*wa- hādā l-bāb lā budd an yakūn fī ḡamīr masā'ilibi ismān; fā'il wa-maf'ūl*". Thus, if Zayd is the predicate (*al-ḡabar*) one must say: "*alladī ḡaraba 'Amran Zaydun*", where *alladī* is the *mubtada'*, *ḡaraba 'Amran* is its *şila*, and *Zayd* is the *ḡabar*. Note the coupling of the *fā'il* and the *maf'ūl* in this example as well as the way in which the *şila* includes the *maf'ūl*. If one adds this to the fact that the *şila* makes the *mawşūl* a complete semantic entity, and that the *şila* itself consists of a complete thought (*kalām tāmm*), then one can claim that this is an indication of how the *maf'ūl* is regarded as a part of the semantic entity of the *şila*, and consequently of the verb in it (*Uşūl* II, 280).

4. *şila* = a connected item

In the chapter on *taqdīm* and *ta'hīr*, the first item that can not be preposed is the *şila*: Ibn as-Sarrāğ states here that the reason for not preposing the *şila* to the *mawşūl* is that the *şila* is like "*ka-ba'dibi*". According to the rules of *taqdīm* and *ta'hīr* Ibn as-Sarrāğ mentions that any part of the *şila* as well as the *şila* as a whole can not be preposed to the *mawşūl* (here; *alladī*, *an*, and the *alif lām*). He adds that "*wa kull mā kāna min şilat şay' min ism aw fi'l mimma lā yatimm illā bihi fa-lā yağūz an tafşil baynahu wa-bayna şilatibi bi şay' ḡarīb minhu*". (The phrase "*şay' ḡarīb minhu*" is semantically unrelated to the *şila*, and "*lā*

yatimm illā bi-ṣ-ṣila” means that the *marwṣūl* does not form a semantic entity except through its linkage with its *ṣila* (*Uṣūl* II, 222-223).

waṣala with the prepositions

In the definition of the prepositions (*ḥurūf al-ḡarr*), Ibn as-Sarrāḡ says, “the *ḥarf* links (*yaṣilu*) what is before it with what is after it, so it links the noun with another noun and a verb with a noun”. “*Ammā iṣāluhā al-ism bi-ism fa-qawluka; ad-dār li ‘Amr, wa ammā waṣluhā al-fi‘l bi-l-ism fa-qawluka: marartu bi-Zayd. fa-l-bā’ hiya allatī awṣalat al-murūr bi-Zayd*”. (Compare this part with the equivalent part in Sībawayhi’s use of the word “*adāfa*” rather than “*waṣala*”). (*Uṣūl* I, 408).

The preposition “*alā*” is said to link (*tūṣil*) the active participle *nāzil* (is staying with) with ‘*man*’ in the example, “*‘alā man anta nāzil?*”. If we rewrite this example as a statement it will read as: *anā nāzil ‘alā man*, in which case ‘*alā*’ links ‘*nāzil*’ with ‘*man*’ (*Uṣūl* II, 345).

5. *ittiṣāl* = semantic connection

Ibn as-Sarrāḡ adds that (contrary to Sībawayhi) *rubba* does not “*tudīf*” “*az-ẓarīf*” to “*ar-raḡul*” in “*rubba raḡul ẓarīf*” because, according to Ibn as-Sarrāḡ, “*ittiṣāl al-awwal bi-t-tānī yuḡnī ‘an al-idāfa*”, that is *ittiṣāl aṣ-ṣifa bi-l-marwṣūf* is already maintained and there is no need for any other factor, in this case *rubba*, to help maintain the *idāfa*.

Ibn as-Sarrāḡ summarizes his ideas on *ṣila* by stating that the *ṣilāt* cannot be broken. Any of the words in the *ṣila* can be qualified only after the *ṣila* is completed as an entity. Thus in the sentence “*marartu bi-lladīna aḡma‘īn fi d-dār*”, the word *aḡma‘īn* should occur at the end, after the phrase ‘*fi d-dār*’ (*Uṣūl* II, 331).

Another of Ibn as-Sarrāḡ’s examples of how the *ṣila* forms one semantic entity which cannot be broken is a long verbal sentence with *fā‘il* and *maf‘ūl*. The implication here is that one cannot separate the individual items which form the *ṣila* if the *ṣila* is to be coherent (*Uṣūl* II, 336).

The *ṣila* is therefore an intrinsic part of the noun with which it is linked (*al-ism al-mawṣūl*), for as Ibn as-Sarrāğ mentioned several times earlier, the *ṣila* is equivalent to the letters which together form one noun (*bi-manzilat ḥurūf al-ism*) (*Uṣūl* II, 342).

A *ṣila* constitutes a complete thought. If there are two verbs and the thought is completed after the first verb, then the second one is not considered part of the *ṣila* (*Uṣūl* II, 349).

Conclusion

The term *waṣala* was used by Ibn as-Sarrāğ as an equivalent to the term *mutaʿaddī* in order to cover the semantic role of verbs and to express the verbs' power in operating on those nouns that fall within their valence.

This interpretation, if accepted, explains Ibn as-Sarrāğ's inclusion of both the *fāʿil* and the *mafʿūl* in the *ṣila* of the *fīʿl*, as well as his placing of the object of a preposition in the syntactic slot of the *mafʿūl*. It also justifies the definition of *ṣila* as the completion of the *mawṣūl* (*ka-tamām labu*).

In this approach *waṣala* conforms with the explanations given earlier by *Lisān al-ʿarab* and aṭ-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr*. It is the thing that links, joins, and connects. The most interesting definition of *waṣala* as far as the theory of valence is concerned is the concept of *waṣl al-ḥibāl*. If, as this paper has argued, Ibn as-Sarrāğ uses *waṣl* to refer to a semantic link between the different components of the sentence, we may then be able to claim that his approach to language was semantically based, for he regarded language as a connected stream of ideas.

How much of these ideas had already existed before Ibn as-Sarrāğ wrote his *Uṣūl*? How much was his own contribution? How much was elaborated by his students? These are questions that must be addressed by future research.

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