

## SĪBĀWAYHI'S *KITĀB* AND THE TEACHING OF ARABIC GRAMMAR

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1. As is well known, Sībawayhi's *Kitāb* does not open with a preface specifying the aims of this monumental work. Grammar books are normally expected to describe and analyze the structure of a particular language. Methods of description and analysis vary. A typical grammatical discussion starts off from a given construction, e.g. "Sentence x is composed of a verb followed by its subject followed by an object." A different kind of grammar book is a textbook designed for pedagogical purposes. It may aim at teaching the student the correct usage of a certain language (their mother tongue or otherwise) or, in other cases, present them with the structure of the language whether for academic or practical purposes such as coping with the difficulties presented by complex texts. Obviously, the latter applies especially for written languages.

A quick perusal of Sībawayhi's *Kitāb* suffices to lead to the conclusion that his book is theoretically rather than pedagogically oriented. Underlying Sībawayhi's grammatical discussion is a set of principles and rules forming a coherent theory of grammar. But what kind of theory? As is well known, the theory of *ʿamal* occupies a central position in the syntactical part of the *Kitāb* (see Peled 2009:4–10, for discussion). Moreover, in many cases Sībawayhi is concerned more with the formation of a certain construction than with analyzing it into its components, attaching a function to each constituent. His discussion of transitivity (*taʿaddin*) is a case in point. Take for example chapter 10 (*Kitāb*, vol. 1, p. 10f.), where he discusses various accusative complements (*mafʿūl*) in the verbal sentence. It is typically introduced by the statement: *hādā bāb al-fāʿil alladī yataʿaddāhu fiʿluhu ʾilā mafʿūl* ("this is the chapter on the *fāʿil* whose *fiʿl* extends beyond it into a *mafʿūl*"). I will not review here the terminological problems presented by this sentence (but see Levin 1979; Peled 1999). What is important for our discussion is that Sībawayhi's starting point is that in such cases the effect of the *fiʿl* extends beyond the *fāʿil*. He outlines a process of transitivity, involving case assignment, whose final result is a sentence displaying a verb with

two nominal complements, one in the *rafʿ* and the other in the *naṣb* case (*ḍaraba ʿAbdu llāhi Zaydan*).

That the *Kitāb* was not intended as a textbook is a fact that should be appreciated by everyone, given the size and theoretical approach of this seminal work. Yet, in recent years, with the growing concern among pedagogues and academicians in the Arab world about the low achievements of high school pupils and university students (henceforth, Arabic-speaking students) in their study of Written Arabic (*fuṣḥā*; henceforth, Arabic), one can discern a tendency to lay the blame on the mediaeval grammarians, and on Sībawayhi in particular, as the person who “laid down” the rules of the language. A much more moderate and balanced position is expressed by Baalbaki’s (2004) critical remarks concerning the relationship between modern study of Arabic grammar on the one hand, and mediaeval Arabic grammatical tradition on the other. Concentrating on the teaching of the language, he offers some solutions that are based on his personal outlook on language learning. I shall return to this later.

In the present paper I will try to do the following: (1) outline the critique of those lamenting the present situation of the Arabic language and the low achievements of its learners, (2) discuss the nature of mediaeval Arabic grammar textbooks, (3) provide some examples presenting the treatment of certain structures by modern textbooks for Arabic-speaking students, and (4) suggest an alternative methodology that is likewise based on the grammarians’ writings, but that is better adapted for the task of Arabic grammar teaching, and as a consequence, more appealing to the student in his study of the language.

2. In his article devoted to the teaching of Arabic at university level, Baalbaki (2004:85) states that “the standard of the mastery of Arabic among university students [...] has been dropping continuously and drastically over the last few decades.” Educators often point out the learners’ lack of interest in the subject, their low regard and even dislike of Arabic learning. This situation has given rise in recent years to a serious debate seeking to locate the sources of the problem and offer solutions with a view to making the subject more accessible and attractive.

Some critics see the source of the problem in the Arabic language itself. They argue that, unlike modern European languages such as English and French, Arabic is too difficult and too complicated for students to learn, and for the ordinary Arabic speaker to use in his/her daily life. And who is the “culprit” responsible for this sad situation? Their answer is clear: the mediaeval Arab grammarians. The blame is directed first and foremost at Sībawayhi who is portrayed by such writers as Ouzon

(2002) and Šūbāšī (2004) as the creator (!) of the complicated grammatical rules from which modern Arabic readers and writers suffer to the present day.<sup>1</sup> These rules, they argue, cause difficulties in, and dislike of, learning the Arabic grammar, and must, therefore, be reformulated as part of an overall reform of the language.<sup>2</sup> This, so the argument goes, could increase the students' motivation to learn the language, which, in turn, would lead to an improvement in their achievements and eventually bring about a willingness (and ability) to use the language in daily life. Demanding a reform in the language, they emphasize that Arabic is not sacred anymore than any other language, and that Sibawayhi's *Kitāb* should not be treated like the Qur'ān. Indeed, the titles of their respective books (see Bibliography) speak for themselves. In the present section, I will concentrate on Šūbāšī's arguments and on Baalbaki's (2004) critique of present day teaching of Arabic grammar. Some of Ouzon's examples will be dealt with in section 4.

Šūbāšī (2004:197ff.) blames the present situation of the Arabic language on religious conservative elements in society who, throughout history, have consistently undermined every attempt at developing and reforming the language, indeed every attempt designed to make it suitable for its contemporary users. He emphasizes (p. 201) that such a reform should by no means be aimed at the essence of the language; this should be preserved as part of the national heritage. Rather, he makes a number of suggestions with a view to simplifying the language by introducing some changes in analogy to the situation obtaining in the Arabic dialects (as well as in some Indo-European languages). Here is a critical examination of some of his examples (Šūbāšī, pp. 202–217):

(1) Proper understanding of an Arabic text, Šūbāšī argues, depends crucially on case markers. Since an Arabic text does not normally display short-vowel markers, case markers are mostly absent, and one often finds it difficult to determine the syntactical function of a constituent, in particular to differentiate between subject and direct object. This problem could be solved by introducing a rule stipulating that the function of a constituent be determined by its position in the sentence rather than by its case, in analogy to the situation in the dialects. Surely, Šūbāšī knows very well that in Modern Written Arabic, SVO is a fairly common word-order pattern, and in VSO/VOS sentences, there are other means by which the reader can determine the function of a constituent, e.g. word meaning and the *alif* marking the indefinite object.

(2) A whole sentence may be represented as one word, which makes

<sup>1</sup>Baalbaki (2008:267–268) notes that complaints about the complexity of the Arabic grammar were voiced already in the Middle Ages.

<sup>2</sup>For the criminalization of Sibawayhi within the context of language ideology and language reform, see Suleiman 2006.

it difficult for the reader to comprehend. This claim looks baseless, given the fact that, even in Classical Arabic, sentences such as *nāwalanīhi* (“he gave it to me”) are rare. In Modern Written Arabic, much like in the dialects, the common structure is *ʾaʿṭānī ʾiyyāhu*. Structures displaying a finite verb with an attached object pronoun constitute a complete sentence in both Written and Spoken Arabic (e.g. *raʾaytuhu*, *šuftu*). One can hardly regard this feature as affecting the readability of Arabic texts.

(3) The dual forms in Arabic are functionally redundant; the language could easily do with singular and plural, as is the case in most of the world languages. Similarly, Šübāšī argues, there is no functional reason to differentiate between masculine and feminine in the numerals, and likewise, there is no need for a special form for the feminine plural. The desired change can be made along the line of the dialects where, for instance, *ʾilli* functions as the only relative pronoun irrespective of the number and gender of the head noun. In response to this, one may adduce evidence demonstrating that Arabic writers already use, in many cases, the plural rather than the dual form (*yaktubū(na)* instead of *yaktubāni*), and occasionally use masculine rather than feminine forms. The point I wish to make is that in such cases there is no need for reform: the language develops naturally in this direction, and it looks as though it is only a matter of time until the above are accepted as grammatical features of Arabic, and described as part of the language in grammar books.

(4) The Arabic lexicon contains too many synonyms and homonyms, a situation leading, in Šübāšī’s view, to unnecessary cases of ambiguity and vagueness. Obviously, Šübāšī is right in saying that Arabic has many synonyms for “lion” and ‘horse’. But such examples are rare, and in any case, modern writers do not use more than two or three synonyms for each of the above words. A problem of ambiguity, particularly in modern texts, thus does not exist.

Whereas Šübāšī advocates a reform in the Arabic language as a solution to the present situation of the language among its users, Baalbaki (2004) concentrates on the pedagogical aspects of the problem, arguing that it is the TEACHING of the language that must undergo some fundamental changes. He outlines (p. 85) four aspects dominating the current methods of teaching Arabic at university level:

- (1) Adherence to the methods of reasoning and inquiry used by the mediaeval Arab grammarians, (2) Lack of concentration on meaning in the study of syntax, (3) Relying on Arabic script in a number of faulty grammatical rules, (4) Deficiency in comparative Semitic studies.

While appreciating the problem of relying on Arabic script and the

usefulness of comparative Semitics for the study of Arabic, I think it is the first two points above that are relevant to our discussion. In section 4 I hope to show that the methodology used in modern textbooks designed for teaching Arabic grammar to Arabic-speaking students is in many cases not a fair representation of the mediaeval tradition. Indeed, one cannot even expect modern textbooks to follow the grammarians', certainly not Sībawayhi's, reasoning. Obviously, in an academic seminar devoted to mediaeval Arabic grammatical theory, one is supposed to read excerpts from the mediaeval grammarians' writings, as well as modern publications devoted to the subject. But there is no reason why a student studying Arabic grammar for practical purposes should concern himself with the theory of *ʿamal*, for example.

While we know of several grammarians who wrote grammar books for pedagogical purposes, this does not apply to the vast majority of the grammarians' writings, certainly not to Sībawayhi's *Kitāb*. Sībawayhi, as we have indicated, was a THEORETICAL LINGUIST interested, to a large extent, in the process of sentence production in Arabic. He did not intend to analyze the structure of Arabic in the pedagogical sense of the word, let alone provide a manual for correct Arabic usage. One cannot "blame" modern textbook writers of following Sībawayhi's *Kitāb*, or for that matter, any of the theoretical treatises within the tradition. Moreover, one could hardly claim that these modern textbooks are based on the mediaeval pedagogical works: In section 3 below I argue that the mediaeval grammatical textbooks basically recapitulate the basic theoretical principles laid out and discussed in the grammarians' treatises. So, much like the *Kitāb*, these mediaeval pedagogical grammars cannot serve as a model for a manual designed to guide the student through the difficulties posed by complex Arabic texts. In section 4 I show how modern writers have actually reduced the mediaeval theoretical writings to a set of *qawā'id*, using the mediaeval terminology with no reference to the linguistic principles underlying them. No wonder the subject of Arabic grammar has often been portrayed as formal, boring, difficult etc.<sup>3</sup> To a student unfamiliar with the mediaeval theory of *ʿamal*, such concepts as *taqdīr* and *ḥadf* look as a kind of delusion (*wahm* in Ouzon's words — see, e.g. Ouzon 2002:30, 108; and cf. Baalbaki 2008:264–267). Indeed, a grammar book for a high school or university student is not supposed to deal with the principles of linguistic theory. Rather, the textbook should be designed with a view to provide them with adequate tools of analysis so as to enable them to cope with the difficulties they encounter

<sup>3</sup>Similar complaints about the study of grammar are often made by students studying other languages. But this is in most cases the result of failing to make the students aware of the practical aspects of the study of grammar (see section 5 below). It does not necessarily have to do with a particular grammatical tradition.

when reading complex passages in a language that is obviously not their native tongue.

Baalbaki (2004:86) laments the fact that textbook writers follow post-Ṣibawayhian grammarians in concentrating on the formal aspects of the grammar, *ʿiʿrāb* in particular, without paying due attention to the semantic aspects of language study. Indeed, many post-Ṣibawayhi treatises, particularly those written for pedagogic purposes, are based mainly on the formal aspects of the language. But isn't this the essence of grammatical study? And is "formal" necessarily a synonym of uninteresting, boring and useless? In my mind, studying the structure of a language can be a most rewarding intellectual experience for the student, provided the procedure of teaching meets at least one of the two following conditions: (1) The student is shown how various structures obey well-defined rules that in turn stem from basic underlying principles, (2) The study of grammar is demonstrated to student as an effective tool for dealing with complex texts in Arabic. Obviously, for the practical purposes of Arabic teaching, the second of the above conditions is the more relevant. I shall return to this in section 5.

Mediaeval Arabic grammatical tradition is rightly regarded by Arabists and linguists alike as one of the greatest achievements of the Arab-Islamic culture. Like any other text, the mediaeval grammarians' writings can and should be subject to criticism. But to hold the grammarians responsible for the present situation of the study of Arabic among Arabic-speaking students is undoubtedly a misdirected blame. Moreover, the grammarians' writings have much to offer for Arabic teaching. Modern linguistics has proved useful for language teaching in our days, including no doubt the teaching of Arabic (both written and spoken). And precisely because the mediaeval grammarians' treatises are actually linguistic works in the modern sense of the word, some of their methods can be applied, obviously with due didactic adaptations, to the teaching of Arabic grammar. In section 4 below I will try to show that what needs to be changed is not the mediaeval Arabic grammatical tradition, but rather the current methodology of modern writers who have failed throughout to harness the grammarians' achievements to the task of producing practical, and at the same time linguistically oriented, textbooks for Arabic-speaking students. This will be followed, in section 5, by some methodological remarks pertaining to the proposed approach to Arabic grammar teaching. But before we turn to modern pedagogy, let us take a look at two mediaeval grammatical textbooks.

**3.** As indicated above, Arabic grammatical textbooks existed already in the Middle Ages.<sup>4</sup> Some of them were written by major grammarians

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<sup>4</sup>The mediaeval pedagogical approach to Arabic grammar is discussed in Owens

like Ibn Jinnī (d. 1002) and Ibn al-ʿAnbārī (d. 1187) who gained their fame as theoretical grammarians. In his preface to *ʿAsrār al-ʿarabiyya* (p. 2), Ibn al-ʿAnbārī declares:

فقد ذكرت في هذا الكتاب [...] كثيرا من مذاهب النحويين  
المتقدمين والمتأخرين من البصريين والكوفيين وصححت ما ذهبت  
إليه منها بما يحصل به شفاء الغليل وأوضح فساد ما عدها بواضح  
التعليل ورجعت في ذلك كله الى الدليل وأعفيت من الإسهاب  
والتطويل وسهلت على المتعلم غاية التسهيل.

I adduced in this book [...] much of the arguments of earlier and later grammarians, both Baṣrans and Kūfans. I introduced corrections in order to satisfy the [reader's mental] thirst, and refuted other versions using clear arguments. I based my arguments, throughout, on evidence, avoiding expatiation, so as to make [the text] easy for the learner.

No indication can be found in the above excerpt of any PRACTICAL aim envisioned by Ibn al-ʿAnbārī, such as providing the learner with a tool for coping with complex Arabic texts. Rather, what the author sets out to do is to deal with the same THEORETICAL issues to which earlier grammarians devoted their books, albeit in a concise and simplified way designed to make those issues easier for the learner to comprehend. Moreover, his striving to make his account short and straightforward does not prevent him, as he points out, from taking sides in controversial linguistic issues, adducing evidence supporting certain positions and refuting others.

For illustration, let us first take a look at how Ibn al-Sarrāj (d. 928) presents the *mubtadaʿ* in his famous linguistic treatise *Kitāb al-ʿuṣūl fī l-naḥw*. This will then be compared to the presentation of the same phenomenon in the textbooks of Ibn al-ʿAnbārī (*ʿAsrār*) and Ibn Jinnī (*Lumaʿ*).

In his *ʿUṣūl* (vol. 1, p. 58), Ibn al-Sarrāj presents the *mubtadaʿ* as follows:

المبتدأ ما جردته من عوامل الأسماء من الأفعال والحروف وكان  
القصد فيه أن يجعله أولاً لثانٍ مبتدأ به دون الفعل يكون ثانيه  
خبره ولا يستغني واحد منهما عن صاحبه وهما مرفوعان أبداً  
فالمبتدأ رفع بالابتداء والخبر رفع بهما نحو قولك: الله ربنا ومحمد

(2005). See especially pp. 106–107 and the references therein.

نبينا والمبتدأ لا يكون كلامًا تامًا إلا بخبره وهو معرض لما يعمل في  
الأسماء نحو كان وأخواتها...

The *mubtada'* is what you strip of verbs and particles acting as operators upon nouns. It is intended to be positioned as a first constituent to be followed by a second one. It is a non-verbal constituent that must be followed by its *xabar*. None of these two elements may dispense with the other. Both always take the *raf'* case: The *mubtada'* is assigned *raf'* by the *ibtidā'*, while the *xabar* is operated upon by both [i.e. *ibtidā'* and *mubtada'*]. For example: *ʿAllāhu rabbunā* (“Allāh is our God”) and *Muḥammadun nabīyyunā* (“Muḥammad is our prophet”). The *mubtada'* can never constitute a complete sentence without a following *xabar*; and it is exposed to elements operating upon nouns, such as *kāna* and sisters...

The following is Ibn al-ʿAnbārī’s (*ʿAsrār*, 66) definition of the *mubtada'*:

إن قال قائل ما المبتدأ قيل كل اسم عرّيته من العوامل اللفظية لفظًا  
وتقديرًا.

If someone asks: “what is a *mubtada'*?” the answer is: “every noun you strip of formal operators, whether formally realized or assumed.”

To a student unfamiliar with the theory of *ʿamal*, Ibn al-ʿAnbārī’s definition is utterly incomprehensible. Indeed the author subsequently goes into a lengthy discussion designed to elucidate the traditional division into formal and abstract operators (*ʿawāmīl lafziyya wa-maʿnawiyya*). This is followed by further theoretical discussions (all in the form of Question and Answer) of such controversial issues as the assigner of *raf'* to the *mubtada'*, the concept of *taʿarrīn* (“being stripped of formal operators”), the option of inversion (*taqdīm wa-taʿxīr*), etc.

It looks, then, as though Ibn al-ʿAnbārī’s *ʿAsrār* could have been used in the Middle Ages, as well as today, by students striving to comprehend the concept of *mubtada'* as presented, e.g. by Sibawayhi (*Kitāb*, vol. 1, p. 239) and Ibn al-Sarrāj (see above). Clearly, as we have seen, this was the author’s aim in writing this book. *ʿAsrār al-ʿarabiyya* was never intended as a manual guiding the student through the difficulties presented by complex Arabic texts.

Let us now turn to Ibn Jinnī. In his *Lumaʿ* (p. 12), we read the following:



اعلم أن المبتدأ كل اسم ابتدأته وعريته من العوامل اللفظية وعرضته لها وجعلته أولاً لثان يكون الثاني خبراً عن الأول ومسنداً إليه وهو مرفوع بالابتداء تقول زيد قائم ومحمد منطلق فزيد ومحمد مرفوعان بالابتداء وما بعدهما خبر عنهما.

You should know that the *mubtada'* is any noun you position at the beginning of a sentence, such that it is stripped of, but exposed to, formal operators. You make it the first [constituent in the sentence], to be followed by a second one. The second constituent functions as *xabar* to the first, i.e., assigned as a predicate to it (lit.: made to lean upon it). It [i.e. the *mubtada'*] is assigned *raf'* by the *ibtidā'*, so that you say *Zaydun qā'imun* ("Zayd is standing") and *Muḥammadun munṭaliqun* ("Muḥammad is leaving"). *Zayd* and *Muḥammad* are both assigned *raf'* by the *ibtidā'*; the following constituent [in each of the two sentences] functions as *xabar* to its respective *mubtada'*.

We can see, then, common elements in the above three excerpts. Compare, for example, Ibn Jinnī's presentation of the *mubtada'* with that of Ibn al-Sarrāj's. Both include the following features: the *ta'arrin* of, but exposure to, formal (as opposed to abstract) operators, the indispensability of the *xabar* and the *'amil* assigning *raf'* to the *mubtada'*.<sup>5</sup> All in all, it should be clear now that the mediaeval grammatical textbooks, while presenting lucidly and concisely the grammarians' theoretical principles, were not, indeed did not intend to be, practical manuals for the learner of literary Arabic (*fushḥā*). This required then, as it requires today, a different pedagogical approach.

4. Coming now to modern textbooks such as 'Anṭākī's and those referred to by Ouzon (2002), the present section is intended to illustrate the current methodology of Arabic grammar teaching to native speakers of Arabic (dialects), and propose an alternative way. I will adduce six examples, looking in each case at the problems of the current methodology and the advantages of the proposed system for the student of Arabic grammar. I will try to show, throughout, that the proposed methodology is not only more useful to the student, it is also consistent with the mediaeval tradition, without imposing controversial concepts which do

<sup>5</sup>Comparing the three excerpts, one can also point to some minor differences of which I will mention the following: Ibn al-'Anbarī does not emphasize the indispensability of the *xabar*, and Ibn Jinnī does not raise the issue of the *'amil* assigning *raf'* to the *xabar*; In 'Asrār this question is discussed in *bāb xabar al-mubtada'* (Ibn al-'Anbarī 'Asrār, p. 75).

not contribute to the teaching and learning of the language. The examples are taken from Ouzon (2002) and from 'Anṭākī's book *al-Minhāj fī l-qawā'id wa-l-'rāb*. These two books seem to be representative of the method currently used for teaching Arabic grammar to Arabic-speaking students. However, while 'Anṭākī's book is a textbook, Ouzon's is a critique, indeed a ridicule of that method.

Consider first the following sentence:

(1) خالدٌ قائدٌ بطلٌ لا يهاب الأعداء<sup>6</sup> “Xālid is a brave commander, unafraid of the enemies” (Ouzon 2002:27).

This is the analysis prescribed by Arabic grammar textbooks, as cited by Ouzon:

خالد: مبتدأ مرفوع وعلامة رفعه الضمة الظاهرة في آخره.  
 قائد: خبر أول مرفوع وعلامة رفعه الضمة الظاهرة في آخره.  
 بطل: خبر ثان مرفوع وعلامة رفعه الضمة الظاهرة في آخره.  
 لا يهاب الأعداء: جملة فعلية في محل رفع خبر ثالث.

Before we look into the above syntactical analysis, one methodological remark is in order, concerning the expression *علامة رفعه الضمة الظاهرة في آخره*. In a non-vocalized text the *damma* is not normally *zāhira*. The student should be taught how to determine the grammatical function of a constituent in the absence of case markers. Obviously, the case marker should be determined by the syntactical function of the constituent, and that, in turn, is determined by such factors as word order, grammatical agreement etc. In other words, correct reading of the text should result from a correct analysis and lead further to correct understanding — not the other way around.

A striking feature in the above analysis is the absence of the concept Noun Phrase. Owens (1988:158–159) indicates that there is “evidence that might suggest that the grammarians recognized NP as a structural unit.” Indeed, Sībawayhi's assertion (vol. 1, p. 221; and cf. 'Astarābādī, vol. 2, pp. 307–308 and Owens's references) that in *هذا الرجل منطلق* (“this man is leaving”)

<sup>6</sup>All vocalization markers in the cited examples occur in the original.

الرجل صفة لهذا وهما بمنزلة اسم واحد كأنك قلت هذا منطلق

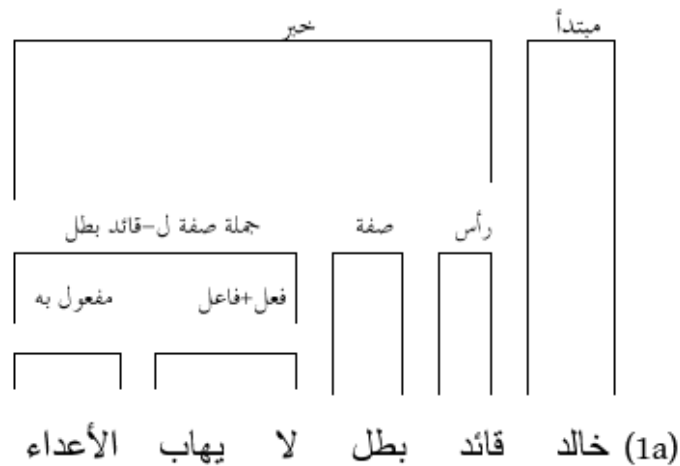
*al-rajul* is an attribute to *hādā*, [the two constituents] having the status of one noun, as if you said *hādā muntaliqun*

— this assertion leaves no doubt that he recognized هذا الرجل as one syntactic unit even though, as Owens (1988:161) indicates, he never formally established a structural category such as NP. It may thus be argued that Sībawayhi would consider لا يهاب الأعداء as one syntactic unit, even though he would probably refer only to قائد as the *xabar* of the sentence. In any case, the analysis of قائد, بطل and لا يهاب الأعداء into three consecutive *xabars* is by no means grounded in mainstream mediaeval Arabic grammatical theory. Moreover, the mediaeval grammarians in general fully appreciated the function of the *xabar* as conveying the new information about the referent of the *mubtada'* (see, e.g. Ibn Yaʿīš, *Šarḥ*, vol. 1, pp. 85–86; and cf. Peled 2009:111f.). In accordance with this principle, the student should be taught that a nominal sentence (*jumla ismiyya*) should first of all be divided into two units, *mubtada'* and *xabar*, with the latter consisting, in principle, of all constituents falling outside the domain of the former (assuming, obviously, that the *mubtada'*, as a noun phrase, may likewise consist of a head followed by a complement — see below). It seems, then, that analyzing بطل as *šifa* to قائد, and لا يهاب الأعداء as *jumlat šifa* to بطل قائد would best represent the position of the Arab grammarians regarding sentences like (1) above.

It thus appears that the analysis proposed below (1a) does not diverge substantially from that of the Arab grammarians. However, the concept PHRASE does require the introduction of some linguistic terms that do not form part of the mediaeval tradition. The notion of phrase presupposes a head constituent and a complement. In this regard I would suggest following Fassi Fehri's (1993) terminology. Thus, *murakkab ismī* may be used for noun phrase, with *ra's* denoting the head, and the familiar *šifa* — the attribute. In the case of a genitive construct (*'iḍāfa*), *mudāf* and *mudāf 'ilayhi* may appropriately be used to denote the head and

the complement respectively. An adjectival phrase, where the head is an adjective, can be referred to as *murakkab waṣfī*. Finally, *murakkab ḥarfī* may be used for prepositional phrase, where the head is a preposition governing a nominal element. The concept verb phrase need not be introduced in our system, since in Written Arabic a verb phrase has the status of a clause, with the potential to function as an independent sentence.

We are now in a position to suggest an alternative analysis to sentence (1) above:



A notable advantage of the graphic analysis,<sup>7</sup> as can be seen in (1a), is that it lucidly demonstrates the relations of constituency as well as the syntagmatic relationships between the sentence constituents. This kind of analysis, representing as it does the structure of the sentence, can lead the student to an understanding of the content or the meaning of the sentence. And the more complex the sentence, the more evident is the role of the graphic analysis in the decoding procedure.

Let us now turn to our next example:

<sup>7</sup>For a detailed illustration and discussion of the graphic analysis of Arabic sentences, the reader is referred to Peled (1998, especially chapters 1 and 2).

(2) “the city, its streets are clean” (Ouzon 2002:28).  
المدينة شوارعها نظيفة (2)

The analysis, as cited by Ouzon, is as follows:

المدينة: مبتدأ مرفوع وعلامة رفعه الضمة الظاهرة في آخره.

شوارعها: شوارع مبتدأ ثان مرفوع وعلامة رفعه الضمة الظاهرة في

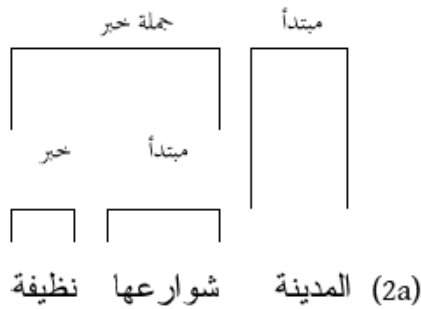
آخره، والهاء ضمير متصل في محل جر بالإضافة.

نظيفة: خبر (شوارع) مرفوع وعلامة رفعه الضمة الظاهرة في آخره

وجملة (شوارعها نظيفة) جملة اسمية في محل رفع خبر المبتدأ الأول

(المدينة).

Much as in the case of sentence (1), the above analysis of (2) reduces the sentence to a list of words, actually a list of morphemes, to be treated individually. However, while, as we have noted, the traditional analysis of (1) fails to recognize *قائد بطل لا يهاب الأعداء* as a noun phrase, the above analysis of (2) admits *شوارعها نظيفة* as a clausal *xabar* to *المدينة*. The reference to the topic of the *xabar* clause as *mubtada' tānin* is traceable to the mediaeval grammarians (see, e.g. Ibn Ya'īs, *Šarḥ* I, 89, who also refers to the *mubtada'* of the whole sentence as *mubtada' 'awwal*). However, the graphic presentation, as can be seen below, obviates such terms as *mubtada' 'awwal* and *mubtada' tānin*, since it clearly demonstrates the difference in grammatical status between *المدينة* and *شوارعها*; in other words, it shows that *نظيفة* functions as *xabar* to the latter, not to the former.



Note that (2a) makes no specific reference to the pronoun **ها** in **شوارعها**. The reason for this is obviously that EVERY pronoun attached to a noun functions as *muḍāf ʿilayhi*, that is, *fī maḥall jarr bi-l-ʿidāfa*. Likewise, I find it utterly unnecessary to indicate for each constituent its case value (*rafʿ/jarr/naṣb*, or otherwise *fī maḥall rafʿ* etc.), since that is self-explanatory: *mubtadaʿ* and *xabar* take *rafʿ* by definition. Obviously, the situation is different when the sentence is introduced by *ʿinna*, *kāna* etc. But in these cases one would use the traditional terms *ism ʿinna*, *xabar kāna* etc., which naturally obviate the indication of case. The statement that **شوارعها نظيفة** is *fī maḥall rafʿ* as *xabar*, echoes the grammarians' stipulation that the *xabar* is in principle a phrase (*mufrad*), and that a clausal *xabar* is a secondary (*farʿ*) construction. The latter occupies the position of a phrasal *xabar*, and is, therefore, by analogy, *fī maḥall rafʿ*. The question, however, is whether this detail should be part of the required analysis. My answer is in the negative, since the student is not (and should not necessarily be) familiar with the mediaeval principle underlying the definition *jumla ismiyya fī maḥall rafʿ xabar al-mubtadaʿ al-ʿawwal*.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Indeed, the grammarians themselves did not regard this principle as self-explanatory. See, e.g. Ibn Yaʿīš (*Šarḥ*, vol. 1, p. 88) for a detailed discussion designed to explain why a clausal *xabar* should be regarded as different in status from a phrasal one.

In our third example, the *xabar* position is occupied by a prepositional phrase:

(3) *الطفل في المنزل* “the child is in the house” (Ouzon 2002:29).

The traditional analysis runs as follows:

الطفل: مبتدأ مرفوع وعلامة رفعه الضمة الظاهرة في آخره.

في المنزل: جار ومجرور متعلقان بخبر محذوف تقديره (كائن).

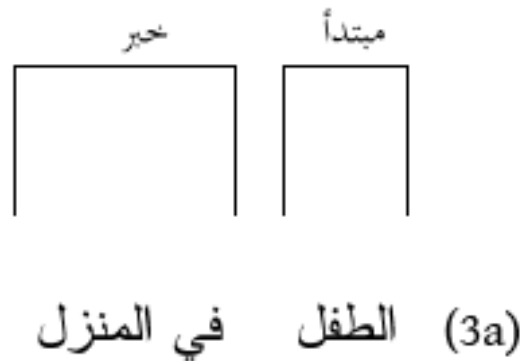
Sentences such as (3) presented a major theoretical problem to the mediaeval grammarians' theory of *'amal*: what is the exact function of *في المنزل* and what is the operator (*'āmil*) assigning it case. In cases such as (1) above, the *mubtada'* and the noun phrase following it are coreferential, so *قائد* etc. could be analyzed as *xabar* taking the same case (*raf'*) as the *mubtada'*. By contrast, in cases such as (3) it was noted that the prepositional phrase is non-coreferential with the *mubtada'*: rather than conveying a property of *الطفل* it states the child's location. Some of the later grammarians therefore concluded that it cannot function as a real *xabar*, and must consequently be assigned the *naṣb* case. Since the assigner of *naṣb* is, in principle, a verb, an underlying (*muqaddar*) verbal (or participial) *'āmil* was assumed, usually *istaqarra/mustaqirrun*, but also *kā'inun*, *ḥāllun* etc.<sup>9</sup> This underlying element was presented by these grammarians as the “real” *xabar* (for further discussion, see Peled 2009:152–155).

Indeed, this was a matter of controversy among the grammarians, to the extent that some of them regarded sentences such as (3) as represent-

<sup>9</sup>Ouzon (2002:29–30) ridicules the stipulation that the underlying *xabar* in such cases is particularly *kā'in* (or *mawjūd*) and not some other participle or adjective such as *masjūn*, *ḥazīn* or *sa'id*. As I will argue below, positing an underlying *xabar* in such cases is altogether unnecessary, even from the point of view of (some of) the grammarians. In any case, the choice of *istaqarra/mustaqirrun/kā'inun*, etc. is based on the semantics of these elements as conveying the notion of existence which, in itself, can easily be retrieved from context and need not, therefore, be lexicalized in cases such as (3). If, however, the predicate is designed to convey a specific quality/state that is unrecoverable from context, then it must be appropriately expressed by the relevant verb/participle/adjective (see, e.g. Peled 2009:154 n. 24 and the references therein).

ing a sentence type in its own right.<sup>10</sup> Admittedly, the idea of positing an underlying element in order to account for an accusative *xabar* (actually functioning as *ḥāl*) can be traced back to Sibawayhi (see, e.g. *Kitāb*, vol. 1, pp. 222–223). But in his *bāb al-ibtidāʿ* (*Kitāb*, vol. 1, p. 239), Sibawayhi states in the clearest possible way that the *mubtadaʿ* may be followed by three different types of *mabnī ʿalayhi*<sup>11</sup> (= *xabar*): *šayʿ huwa huwa* (i.e. coreferential with the *mubtadaʿ*), [<sup>ʿaw</sup> *yakūn fī*] *makān* (adverbial of place), [<sup>ʿaw</sup> *zamān*] (adverbial of time).<sup>12</sup>

In view of the above, I can see no reason to avoid the following simple analysis for sentence (3):



Once the student is familiar with the concept prepositional phrase (*murakkab ḥarfī*), there is no need to make specific reference to *في* and *المنزل* separately: in such a phrase, a noun phrase is, by definition, immediately dominated by a preposition assigning it *jarr*. The main advantage of this analysis is that, unlike the one cited by Ouzon, it does not require familiarity, on the part of the student, with the mediaeval theoretical controversy over the status of the prepositional phrase in such sentences. The study of such issues should rather be postponed to a seminar devoted to the writings of the mediaeval grammarians. In any case, as we have just seen, our proposed analysis is consistent with that

<sup>10</sup>For *jumla zarfiyya*, see, e.g. Ibn Yaʿīš *Šarḥ*, vol. 1, p. 88f.; and cf. our discussion of sentence (6) below.

<sup>11</sup>For the term *mabnī ʿalayhi*, see a detailed discussion in Levin 1985.

<sup>12</sup>Baalbaki (2004:86–89) proposes that students be given a number of examples in order to convince them that the mediaeval grammatical theory could “go wrong or be replaced by other methods of analysis”. As one such example he mentions (p. 88) the grammarians’ “insistence [...] on restoring an elided predicate instead of admitting that this function can be filled by a preposition or an adverb with their genitive”. As we have just seen, this “insistence” does not represent a consensual position among the grammarians.



of Sībawayhi's, and cannot, therefore, be claimed to run contrary to the mediaeval tradition.

Consider now the fourth example:

(4) أخوك حسن وجهه “your brother, his face is nice” (ʿAnṭākī, p. 30).

Here is ʿAnṭākī's analysis:

أخوك: مبتدأ مرفوع بالواو لأنه من الأسماء الخمسة والكاف ضمير متصل في محل جر مضاف إليه.

حسن: خبر مرفوع بالضمّة.

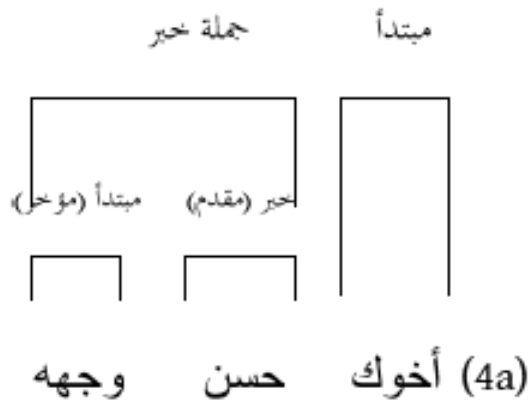
وجهه: فاعل للصفة المشبهة (حسن) مرفوع بالضمّة والهاء ضمير متصل في محل جر بالإضافة.

One can hardly understand why أخوك should require any detailed analysis beyond stating its function as *mubtada*<sup>7</sup>. A student analyzing أخوك as *mubtada*<sup>7</sup> can be assumed to have already identified the و in this word as a *raf*<sup>c</sup> marker. Any reference to ك (as well as to the attached pronoun هُ in وجهه) is redundant, as I have already indicated (cf. (2a) above).

Once we accept the definition of the *xabar* as the predicative constituent representing the new information about the *mubtada*<sup>7</sup>, then we must analyze حسن وجهه, not just حسن, as the *xabar* of أخوك. But what is the syntactical relationship between وجهه and حسن? Here the grammarians differed. Some claimed that حسن, being analogous to an active participle (*ṣifa mušabbaha bi-smi l-fā'il*) has a verbal meaning (*ma'nā fi'l*), and as such it must relate to the following noun as *fi'l* to *fā'il*. Since, however, حسن is a nominal element occupying clause-initial position, it was analyzed by some of the later grammarians as *mubtada*<sup>7</sup> followed by a *fā'il sadda masadd al-xabar* (a *fā'il* substituting for a *xabar* — for a detailed discussion, see Peled 2009:138–147). ʿAnṭākī's analysis

above seems to be based on this kind of argumentation, and the real problem here is that students are required to recite this kind of analysis without being familiar with the theory behind it. No wonder they regard the whole procedure as meaningless, useless and boring.

But the student can be offered a simpler and much more intuitive analysis that is equally consistent with the mediaeval tradition. Sībawayhi in his *Kitāb* (vol. 1, p. 239) cites his teacher al-Xalīl as claiming that such cases as قائم زيد (“standing is Zayd”) may be viewed as inverted *ibtidāʿ* sentences, i.e. be analyzed as cases of a *xabar* followed by a *mubtadaʿ*. By the same token one may regard حسن وجهه in (4) as a case of *taqdīm wa-taʿxīr*, where the *xabar* is preposed (*muqaddam*) to the *mubtadaʿ*. Adopting this type of analysis, we may suggest the following alternative to ʿAnṭākī’s analysis:



To my mind, (4a) is a simple, yet adequate, analysis of (4), and at the same time it does not diverge from the mediaeval tradition.

Let us now turn to our fifth example:

(5) ان الله على كل شيء قدير (5) “God is omnipotent” (cited by Ḥanṭākī, p. 205, from Qurʾān 2:20).

Ḥanṭākī's analysis is as follows:

ان: حرف مشبه بالفعل يدخل على المبتدأ والخبر فينصب الأول ويرفع الثاني.

الله: لفظ الجلالة اسم (إنّ) منصوب بها.

على كل: جار ومجرور متعلقان ب(قدير).

شيء: مضاف إليه مجرور.

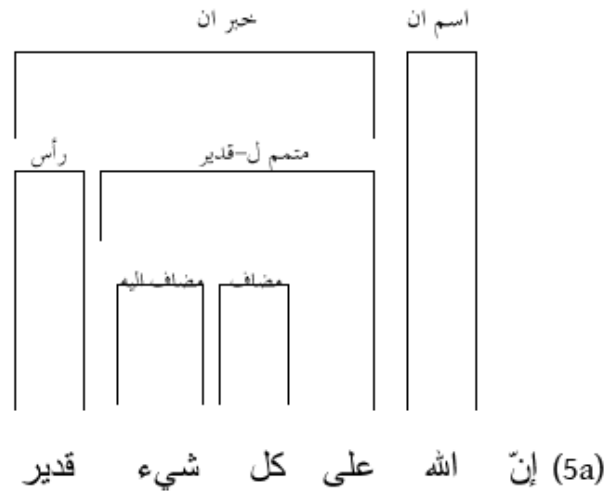
قدير: خبر (إنّ) مرفوع بها.

At this point it should already be clear that the first line in the above analysis is absolutely redundant. The student should be taught how to identify ان as إن (rather than أن or إنّ) by the position of the word in the sentence and the kind of word following it. In our case, for instance, the particle is recognized as إن since it occurs at the beginning of the sentence and is followed by a noun. This now means that the portion of the sentence starting with الله should be divided into two parts: *ism ḥinnā* and *xabar ḥinnā*.

But the most problematic issue in Ḥanṭākī's analysis above is his treatment of على كل شيء قدير. Being the part of the sentence following *ism ḥinnā*, it should be analyzed as *xabar ḥinnā* to الله. Now, Ḥanṭākī's analysis apparently recognizes that على كل شيء قدير forms one phrase whose head is قدير — but fails to spell it out. Rather, sticking to his method of treating the sentence as a list of words each requiring its individual label,<sup>13</sup> he analyzes as *xabar ḥinnā* the word قدير only. Having advocated introducing the noun phrase into the system, we now introduce the adjective phrase (مركب وصفي) whose head is an adjective (قدير).

<sup>13</sup>Oddly enough, Ḥanṭākī treats على كل as one constituent, separated from شيء. As a result, his analysis presents شيء as *muḍāf ḥilayhi*, but not شيء كل as *ḥidāfa* (governed by على) in which كل functions as *muḍāf*.

in our case) rather than a substantive. With this in mind, consider the following as an alternative analysis to sentence (5):



Note that *قدير* functions, like other adjectives, analogously to a verb. The phrase *على كل شيء* may therefore be analyzed as indirect object to *قدير*. But instead of introducing a term that is evidently unfamiliar within the mediaeval tradition, one may choose to indicate (as in (5a) above) just the function of *على كل شيء* as a complement (*mutammim*) to *قدير*.

Let us now turn to our sixth example:

(6) *من جاء بالحسنة فله عشر أمثالها* “whoever does good will be repaid tenfold” (cited by <sup>ʿ</sup>Anṭākī, p. 106, from Qurʾān 6:160).

<sup>ʿ</sup>Anṭākī offers the following analysis:

من: اسم شرط جازم مبني على السكون في محل رفع مبتدأ.

جاء: فعل ماض مبني على الفتح في محل جزم فعل الشرط. والفاعل مستتر تقديره (هو).  
 بالحسنة: جار ومجرور متعلقان ب (جاء).  
 فله: الفاء رابطة لجواب الشرط، (له) جار ومجرور متعلقان بخبر مقدم محذوف.  
 عشر: مبتدأ مؤخر.  
 أمثالها: مضاف إليه مجرور و(ها) مضاف إليه.  
 مجموع جملتي الشرط والجواب في محل رفع خبر (من).

The mediaeval grammarians provide lengthy discussions of *mā* and *man* functioning both as relative and conditional elements. In these contexts both are assumed to be basically nominal (rather than particles). Sībawayhi (*Kitāb*, vol. 1, p. 389) refers to them as *الأسماء التي يجازى بها* “the nominals functioning as conditionals, having the status of *alladī*.” He states further:

إذا جعلتها بمنزلة الذي قلت ما تقول أقول فيصير تقول صلة لما حتى تكمل اسماً فكأنك قلت الذي تقول أقول.

If you use [these nominals] analogously to *alladī*, you say: ما If you use [these nominals] analogously to *alladī*, you say: ما so as to form with the latter a complete nominal, as if you said: الذي تقول أقول.

Clearly, then, Sībawayhi regards *mā/man* etc. as nominals which in conditional contexts may function as relatives. By no means can *man* in (6) above be analyzed as *mubtada'* with the rest of the sentence functioning as its *xabar*, as stipulated by 'Anṭākī. Indeed, such an analysis would lead to an incomprehensible interpretation of the sentence. In any case, it is utterly incompatible with Sībawayhi's position.

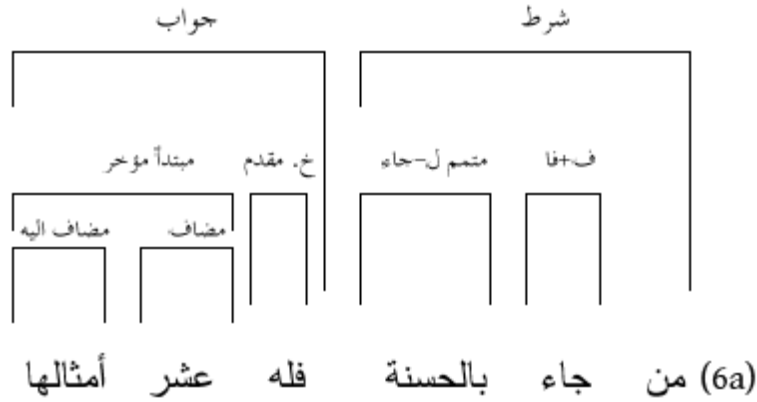
Further, why refer to *من* as *ism šarṭ jāzim* and to *جاء* as *fī maḥall jazm*? Indeed, Sībawayhi (*Kitāb*, vol. 1, p. 386) states that *حروف الجزاء تجزم الأفعال*. But, as we have indicated above, in cases where the conditional is an *ism* functioning analogously to *alladī*, this rule does not apply. Besides, 'Anṭākī's reference to the morphology of *جاء* (فعل ماض مبني على الفتح) is redundant since in most cases this is self-

explanatory. Indeed, it is the perfect-verb form of جاء that leads to the identification of من as a conditional element in our case. And the consequent analysis of the sentence into *šarṭ* and *jawāb* naturally obviates spelling out that function of من.

Within the framework of our discussion of sentence (4) above we argued that a sentence/clause consisting of an adjective followed by a substantive may appropriately be analyzed as *xabar muqaddam*+*mubtada'* *mu'axxar*. This is equally applicable to cases where the substantive is preceded by a prepositional phrase, as in sentence (6): له may be analyzed as *xabar muqaddam* and عشر أمثالها as *mubtada' mu'axxar*. No deleted element should be posited. As a matter of fact, some grammarians regarded cases such as له عشر أمثالها as representing a sentence type in its own right (*jumla zarfiyya* — cf. our discussion of sentence (3) above). And there are, indeed, some good reasons to advocate a division into three basic sentence types in Arabic (rather than two). But that is not necessary: one may stick to the mainstream two-type division and analyze له عشر أمثالها as an inverted *jumla ismiyya*.<sup>14</sup>

Once the sentence is recognized as a conditional sentence, the next step is to draw the line between the *šarṭ* and the *jawāb*. In our case the ف in فله functions as *jawāb* introducer, a fact that is demonstrated graphically in (6a) much better than by 'Anṭākī's indication that الفاء الفاء رابطة لجواب الشرط. Then, each of the two clauses can be analyzed separately, as indicated above, with the final result looking as follows:

<sup>14</sup>For a detailed discussion of *jumla zarfiyya*, see Peled 2009:172–179.



5. As we saw in section 3, Arabic grammar textbooks existed already in the Middle Ages. But as a matter of fact they were no more than concise and considerably simplified versions of the theoretical grammatical treatises, some of which were written by the same grammarians themselves. Much like Sibawayhi's *Kitāb* they were not designed as manuals teaching the learner how to reach a proper understanding of a sentence by way of analyzing it.

Modern textbooks like 'Anṭākī's are intended, on the one hand, to offer a method of syntactical analysis drawing upon mediaeval Arabic grammatical tradition. On the other hand they set out, and are justifiably expected by modern scholars (cf. section 2 above), to teach the student the structure of Written Arabic by way of providing them with a tool that should enable them to read and write in *fushā*, both classical and modern. In particular, the method of analysis is expected to be devised with a view to training the student to cope with the complexities of a language that is basically a written language and not his mother tongue. But as we saw in section 4, none of the above is achieved: These textbooks do not deal adequately with (and occasionally misrepresent) the grammarians' theoretical principles; they definitely do not simplify them, contrary to such mediaeval textbooks as Ibn Jinnī's *Luma'* and Ibn al-'Anbārī's *ʿAsrār*. On the other hand, they fail to provide a practical and effective tool for training the learner towards the task of reading and writing in *fushā*.

For illustration of the methodological issues involved, let us take the subject of mathematics. In academic teaching the student is taught the rationale behind the formula presented to him. By contrast, when teaching the basics of mathematics, the formula is provided, normally without an attempt on the part of the teacher to justify or explain its

background. However, good teaching requires that the student be shown how he/she can use the formula to solve mathematical problems that are directly related to daily life. In other words, the student should be shown the usefulness of learning mathematics.

In my view, the same approach should be applied to the study of Arabic grammar. Assuming that Arabic grammar is not essentially complex or difficult anymore than the grammar of most other languages, there is every reason to expect that teaching Arabic grammar should require a methodology applicable to the teaching of other languages. The theory of *ʿamal*, for example, with all its *ʿillas* (and *ʿillas* of *ʿillas*) is unnecessary for students learning the structure of the language. Given that the target language is a written language, they should be presented, rather, with such grammatical phenomena and structures that are needed in order to cope with complex texts. Then they should be taught how to identify in such complex texts the structural phenomena they had learned, so that, guided by the output of parsing, they would be able to attain full understanding of the text. This, in turn, will make the students realize the usefulness of Arabic grammar learning and increase their motivation.

In typical classes of Arabic, students are required to read sentences fully vocalizing them (with special attention to *ʾiʿrāb*). But here the student often feels himself caught in a vicious circle: “how can I vocalize properly a sentence I don’t understand, and how can I possibly understand a sentence prior to vocalizing it?” In my view, the only way to break this vicious circle is to teach the student a technique of parsing, based on the model of immediate constituents, taking account of both the hierarchical and linear relationships between the sentence constituents (cf. section 4 above). The students should be instructed to start the whole process with analysis; they should be shown how, by following a certain procedure of formal analysis, they can cope with sentences that initially seem intractable, until the stage where they finally can read the sentence properly and fully understand it. It should be emphasized to the students that reading with correct *ʾiʿrāb* and understanding should be the result of correct analysis, and not the other way round. If the student has already read the sentence and understood it properly, what’s the point in parsing it? Surely, this way of teaching grammar is no easy task, for students tend to be skeptical as to their ability to parse a sentence they do not understand. But with the instructor’s patience and insistence on following the whole procedure in the right order of stages, asking the right questions at each stage, the students will eventually get used to this kind of learning. They will come to realize that ‘formal’ does not necessarily mean ‘boring’ and ‘difficult’. And once that happens, they will appreciate this method as an effective tool for dealing



with complex sentences in their language, indeed, in any language.

The system of analysis proposed in the present paper is substantially different from that presented by ʿAnṭākī and cited by Ouzon (2002). Yet, as I hope to have shown, it is consistent with mainstream Arabic grammatical tradition. As a matter of fact, it represents the mediaeval grammarians better (occasionally even more accurately) than the one offered by textbooks like ʿAnṭākī's. Above all, it is much more effective and, judging by my experience, far more attractive to the student. In other words, it shows that old and new can be combined to produce for the learner of Arabic grammar a method of teaching that is both practical and intellectually rewarding.

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