| Research Article

The Structural Composition of Aḥmad Al-Maydani's "Nuzhatu T-Tarf Fi ʿilmi- S-Sarf"

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Abstract: This article is devoted to the study of the grammatical work Nuzhatu al-Ṭarf fī ʿIlm al-Ṣarf by the renowned early medieval Arab thinker and philologist Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Maydānī. Based on a brief overview of the introduction and an analysis of the structure of the work, the author identifies the main grammatical issues addressed in the text as well as the general features of Arabic naḥw (syntax) and ṣarf (morphology).

Keywords: ṣarf, naḥw, noun, verb, particle, morphology, phonetics, basmala, ḥamd, preface, verb forms.

The revelation of the Qur'an in the Arabic language significantly contributed to the systematic study of Arabic in all fields, and in the course of various scholarly investigations throughout different historical periods, particular attention has been devoted—among other sciences—to the analysis of verb morphology.

It is well known that in the early stages of the development of the Arabic language and its associated sciences, the science of ṣarf (morphology) was studied in an integrated manner alongside other linguistic disciplines, without distinct separation. During this period, scholars of ṣarf and naḥw (syntax) were collectively referred to as 'ulamāʾ al-lugha (linguists), and there was no need to distinguish their respective fields of study. Over time, however, ṣarf evolved into an independent field of study distinct from naḥw, leading to the composition of treatises dedicated specifically to this discipline.

In the medieval Islamic East, there was a tradition of composing concise grammatical treatises for use in madrasas. In such works, grammatical rules were presented in a brief, clear, and accessible style. These Arabic grammatical texts typically followed a conventional structure: beginning with syntax (naḥw), followed by morphology (ṣarf), and then phonetics.

Prominent figures in the history of Arabic morphology include Sībawayh (760–796), Abū ʿUthmān al-Māzinī (d. 249/863), Abū al-ʿAbbās Muḥammad ibn Yazīd al-Mubarrad (825–899), Ibn al-Sarrāj (d. 316/929), Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Saʿīd al-Muʾaddib, Abū ʿAlī al-Fārisī (900–987), Abū al-Fatḥ ʿUthmān ibn Jinnī (941–1002), Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Maydānī (d.

518/1124), and Maḥmūd al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1143), all of whom made significant contributions and authored foundational texts in the field.

Among these linguists, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Maydānī deserves mention for his well-known work Majmaʿ al-Amthāl. Al-Maydanī, a contemporary of al-Zamakhsharī who passed away in 1124 in Nishapur, was known by such honorific titles as "the Imam of the Imams" and "the heart of the most virtuous of scholars." He authored numerous works on Arabic grammar, jurisprudence (fiqh), and literature.

His contributions to Arabic linguistics include the following notable works:

Majmaʿ al-Amthāl, al-Sāmī fī al-Asmāʾ, Kitāb al-Hādī wa al-Shādī, Baḥth ʿan Bināʾ al-Jamʿ wa al-Ḥurūf, Risālāt al-Naḥwiyyāt al-Ṣaghīrah, Nuzhat al-Ṭarf fī ʿIlm al-Ṣarf, and Kitāb al-Naḥw al-Maydānī.

When examining Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Maydānī's work Nuzhat al-Ṭarf fī ʿIlm al-Ṣarf ("A Journey into the Science of Morphology") and its structure, it becomes evident—based on the aforementioned information—that this treatise adheres to a traditional format and specifically addresses the field of Arabic morphology within linguistic studies. The book presents Arabic morphology in a comprehensive and systematic manner, having served in its time as a foundational textbook in madrasas (islamic schools).

An illustrative example of its educational value can be found in one of its lithographed editions, preserved under inventory number 6913 in the manuscript collection of the Institute of Oriental Studies named after Abu Rayhan al-Biruni in Tashkent. This lithographed version, printed in Istanbul, forms part of a compendium comprising three separate works on Arabic grammar. This specific compilation was published by the Al-Jawāʾib Press in Constantinople in the Hijri year 1299 (1881 CE).

The first work in the compendium is Nuzhat al-Ṭarf fī ʿIlm al-Ṣarf by al-Maydānī; the second is Al-Unmuzaj fī al-Naḥw ("A Model in Syntax") attributed to the renowned grammarian of his time, Maḥmūd ibn ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī; the third is Al-Iʿrāb fī al-Qawāʿid al-Iʿrāb ("Parsing in the Rules of Iʿrāb") authored by the eminent grammarian of the late period, Jamāl al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh ibn Yūsuf ibn Hishām.

Undoubtedly, this tripartite compendium was designed as a didactic tool for madrasa students, as such collections typically comprised the most celebrated and widely taught works of the time. The fact that Nuzhat al-Ṭarf fī ʿIlm al-Ṣarf occupies the opening position in the collection signifies its stature and popularity among contemporary scholarly circles. Historical records further indicate that al-Maydānī was a master of Arabic grammar and engaged in witty scholarly debates with figures such as al-Zamakhsharī.

Structurally, Nuzhat al-Ṭarf fī ʿIlm al-Ṣarf consists of an introduction (muqaddima), ten primary chapters (abwāb), and several smaller sections and subchapters. The first chapter is entitled التصريف فى مقدمة ("An Introduction to Morphology"). The work begins with the traditional basmala ("In the Name of God") and expressions of praise, in which God is glorified and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his Companions are lauded. Following the customary phrase (وبعد)("and thereafter"), the author outlines the significance and features of the science of morphology, stating:

سعة كلام العرب. و منه يتدرج فان التصريف أحد اركان لأدب. و به يعرف الى اللغة العربية. و يتصل الى حال العويصات الابية.

➤ "Morphology is one of the pillars of the Arabic literary sciences. Through it, one comprehends the breadth of the Arabic language. The journey to mastering Arabic begins with it, and through it, one ascends to the heights of eloquence."

In the preface, the author also explains the rationale and objectives behind composing this work:

المقدمون قد صنفوا فيه كتبا جمة القوائد. علية الشرف متينة القوائد. غير ان الطباع تميل الى كل جديد. و ان لم يكن فوق ما الفوه من مزيد. فعلى هذه القضية جمعت هذا الكتاب على ترتيب المصادر المتداول. ليكون سهل المأخذ قريب المتداول. سميته "نزهة الطرف فى علم الصرف". و اودعته ما يحتاج اليه فى عشرة ابواب. واعقبتها امثلة فى التصريف من كل باب.

➢ "Our predecessors have authored many books encompassing the rules of morphology—books of great merit and firm foundations. Yet human nature inclines toward what is novel, even if it does not surass earlier works. Therefore, I compiled this book according to the well-known order of verbal roots, so that it may be easily accessble and widely usable. I have named it Nuzhat al-Ṭarf fī ʿIlm al-Ṣarf. In it, I have included all necessary principles of morphology across ten chapters, each followed by relevant morphological examples."

Furthermore, within the introduction, the author specifies the intended dedicatee or recipient of the work, as can be seen from the following statements (not included in the excerpt above but alluded to in the closing sentence). This practice reflects the scholarly convention of offering a text either in honor of a patron or for pedagogical purposes.

The author dedicates the work as a valuable gift to one of the most prominent figures of his time, an individual of high social and intellectual standing. This is clearly expressed in the following words:

و جعلته تحفة لمجلس الكياء العميد الجليل السيد أبى بكر سعيد مسعود أبى نصر شهريار بن شيرزاد المستوفى أقسام الكمال. في الفضل الأفضال. المختص من الملك الرفيع بالقبول و الإقبال

➢ "I have composed this work as a gift to the esteemed assemblies of the venerable leader, the noble gentleman Abu Bakr Saʿīd ibn Masʿūd Abū Naṣr Shahriyār ibn Shīrzād, a man of complete virtues and exemplary merits, distinguished by his elevated status and noble acceptance by the ruling class."

The author praises the recipient for his refined appreciation of knowledge and his elevated capacity for understanding the science of morphology:

لما علمت من شغفه بهذا الفن. علما ليس يدخل في حير الظن ومعرفة بأنه الذي يعرف قدره. ويطلع من أفق النباهة بدره. و يكسوه بقبوله زهوا. بنى له فوق الكواكب بهوا

➢ "For I have perceived his deep passion for this discipline, a knowledge that lies beyond any doubt or uncertainty. I am also aware that he is among those who truly appreciate its value. From the horizon of intelligence, his full moon has risen; his acceptance of this work brings it honor and pride, and a lofty abode has been built for him above the stars."

Following these laudatory statements, the author concludes the preface with a supplication: هذا ثبت العشرة الأبواب. والله الموفق للصواب

➢ "This is the list of the ten chapters. May Allah grant us correctness."

Thereafter, the table of contents (فهرست هذه المجمعة) of the work is presented:

1. Chapter One: Introduction to Morphology (الباب الأول) – في مقدمة التصريف

2. Chapter Two: Patterns of Nouns (الباب الثاني) – في أبنية الأسماء

3. Chapter Three: Patterns of Verbs (الباب الثالث) – في أبنية الأفعال

4. Chapter Four: Classifications and Meanings of Verb Forms (الباب الرابع) – في ألقاب الأنواع و معاني الأمثلة

5. Chapter Five: Verbal Nouns (Masdars) (الباب الخامس) – في المصادر

6. Chapter Six: Active Participles and Imperatives (الباب السادس) – في أمثلة الفاعل و الأمر

7. Chapter Seven: Elision and Augmentation of Letters (الباب السابع) – في الحذف و الزيادة

Following the ten main chapters, several subsections are presented, including:

فصل في الإعلال الشاذ، فصل في التصحيح الشاذ – Sections on exceptional cases of phonological weakening and correction;

أمثلة التصريف وجوه الماضي من النصر (و هذا باب فَعَلَ، يَفْعُلُ) – Examples of past tense conjugation of the verb naṣara in the pattern faʿala yafʿulu;

باب فَعَلَ يَفْعِلُ بفتح العين في الماضي و كسرها في المستقبل – Chapter on the pattern faʿala yafʿilu, with a fatḥa in the middle root letter in the past tense and a kasra in the future;

باب فَعَلَ يَفْعَلُ بفتح العين في الماضي و المستقبل – Chapter on the pattern faʿala yafʿalu, with fatḥa in the middle root letter in both past and future;

باب فَعِلَ يَفْعَلُ بكسر العين في الماضي و فتحها في المستقبل – Chapter on the pattern faʿila yafʿalu, with kasra in the past and fatḥa in the future;

باب فَعُلَ يَفْعُلُ بضم العين في الماضي و المستقبل – Chapter on the pattern faʿula yafʿulu, with ḍamma in the past and future;

باب فَعِلَ يَفْعِلُ بكسر العين في الماضي و المستقبل – Chapter on the pattern faʿila yafʿilu, with kasra in both past and future;

After these illustrative examples, the author provides an index of triliteral and quadriliteral verb forms, expressed through their corresponding verbal noun patterns, such as:

باب التفعيل، باب المفاعلة، باب الافتعال، باب الانفعال، باب التفاعل، باب الافعيلال – Chapters on the morphological patterns tafʿīl, mufāʿala, iftiʿāl, infiʿāl, tafāʿul, and ifʿīlāl

Each pattern is explained thoroughly with analysis and illustrative examples.

The final section of the book is described as follows:

في الفرق بين اللازم و المتعدى و هو خاتمة الكتاب

➢ "On the difference between intransitive and transitive verbs – this marks the conclusion of the book."

From the structure of the table of contents, it is evident that the scholar has comprehensively addressed the principal areas of investigation within the field of ʿilm al-ṣarf (Arabic morphology). The work encompasses numerous topics, ranging from the derivation of nouns (asmāʾ) and verbs (afʿāl), to verbal nouns (maṣādir), participles (ṣifāt mushtaqqa), phonological changes involving weak letters (ḥurūf al-ʿilla), rules of the glottal stop (aḥkām al-hamza), the various verbal patterns (abwāb al-fiʿl), as well as the processes and phenomena involved in verb conjugation (taṣrīf al-afʿāl).

In conclusion, Muḥammad al-Maydhānī's Nuzhatu al-Ṭarf fī ʿIlm al-Ṣarf is a comprehensive and representative work that fully encapsulates Arabic morphology. Its introduction is composed with rhetorical elegance and crafted in a rhymed prose style (saʿj), reflecting a high degree of literary and scholarly competence, and it incorporates valuable linguistic insights.

Given that verbs (afʿāl) constitute the core of morphological analysis in Arabic, this work devotes its primary focus to them, systematically examining their intrinsic characteristics and the rules associated with their usage. Based on the thematic structure found in the introduction's table of contents, it can be deduced that the author employed maṣādir (verbal nouns) to denote the various

verb forms, indicating his reliance on and alignment with the methodological approach of the scholars of the Kūfan school.

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