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Abstract This study provides a comprehensive and critical exploration of the research methodologies developed by early Arab linguists and grammarians, tracing their intellectual roots and theoretical orientations in the study of the Arabic language. It aims to elucidate the epistemological and methodological frameworks that shaped early linguistic inquiry, particularly the principles of oral transmission (al-samā'), analogical reasoning (al-qiyās), and causal explanation (al-ta'līl). Drawing upon the foundational works of Abū 'Amr ibn al-'Alā', al-Aṣma'ī, Abū 'Ubaydah, Sībawayh, and al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad, the article demonstrates how these scholars systematically codified linguistic norms by combining empirical observation with rational justification. Through a close reading of classical sources—including Qur'ānic recitations, Prophetic traditions, and early Arabic poetry—the study reveals the methodological transition from descriptive documentation to interpretive theorization. It argues that the synthesis of transmission and reasoning in early Arabic linguistics represents a distinct intellectual paradigm that predates modern empirical linguistics, embodying both scientific rigor and cultural authenticity. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of the methodological legacy of early Arab linguists and its enduring relevance to contemporary linguistic and philological studies.	
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Introduction

Arabic linguistic studies were closely intertwined with Qur'anic studies, as their primary aim was to preserve the language of the Holy Qur'an from corruption and error resulting from the distortion that accompanied the entry of non-Arabs into Islam and their subsequent intermingling with Arabs through marriage. This led to the emergence of a new generation speaking a hybrid language composed of both Arabic and foreign elements, owing to the non-Arabs' lack of mastery of Arabic. This situation prompted the guardians of the Arabic language to devise a method capable of halting the threat that had begun to endanger the Book of God and the language in which it was revealed. Thus, the science of grammar emerged, which began by deducing the rules of the Arabic language from the speech of the Arabs, including their poetry, orations, proverbs, and expressions.

A group of linguists and grammarians represented this foundational stage. Among the linguists was *Abū 'Anr ibn al-'Alā'* (d. 154 AH), who pioneered fieldwork in linguistics. His students, *al-Aṣma'ī* (d. 216 AH), *Abū 'Ubaydah* (d. between 209–213 AH), and *Abū Zayd al-Anṣārī* (d. 215 AH), played crucial roles in preserving what had reached us in the Arabic language, as the bulk of the transmitted linguistic material came through their efforts. Among the grammarians were *'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Ishāq* (d. 117 AH) and his student *'Isā ibn 'Umar al-Thaqafī*, whose intelligence and scholarly contributions marked a turning point in the history of Arabic grammatical studies. Another pivotal figure was *Yūnus ibn Ḥabīb*, whose work represented yet another key moment in the development of Arabic grammar, paving the way for the emergence of *al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī* (d. 175 AH) and his student *Ṣibawayh* (d. 180 AH). With their contributions, Arabic grammar attained maturity and perfection, reaching its zenith in the expansion of analogical reasoning and the elaboration of grammatical justifications.

Within this framework, the present article examines the research methodologies employed by early Arab linguists and explores the extent to which these methodologies are characterised by originality and innovation.

Research Problem and Hypotheses

The subject of this article is structured around the following central problem:

What are the principal methodologies employed by Arab grammarians in formulating their grammatical judgments?

On the basis of this question, the following hypothesis was formulated: early grammarians began with oral transmission (al-samā'), as their primary task was to listen to the speech of Arabs in both poetry and prose. Once they realised the impossibility of comprehensively recording all spoken Arabic, they turned to analogy (al-qiyās) and sought a justification ('illah) for each grammatical rule.

Research Methodologies of Early Arab Linguists

The methodologies developed by early Arab linguists were characterised by originality and innovation in comparison to those of later periods. Their approach was characterised by direct transmission from earlier sources and rigorous analysis according to established patterns. Many modern scholars hold that most linguistic studies conducted after the third century AH introduced little that was new beyond the achievements of early linguists; the latter works were often either mere reproduction of earlier scholarship or summaries and commentaries on it, with only a few rare exceptions that contributed original insights.

The first stage of Arabic linguistic studies, spanning from the first to the third centuries AH, is considered a period of genuine intellectual creativity. It was during this formative phase that Arabic grammar emerged, developed, and

matured into a systematic intellectual discipline. Linguists and grammarians have devoted extensive efforts to codifying and establishing the Arabic language. This is particularly evident in the intense scholarly rivalry between the scholars of Basra and those of Kufa. Their work represented one of the most demanding and complex undertakings in the history of Arabic linguistic studies.

Owing to the methodologies they devised, these scholars achieved foundational scientific outcomes that have not been replicated in subsequent linguistic and grammatical scholarship. Among these contributions were the principles of *analogy* (*al-qiyās*), *causal explanation* (*al-taʿlīl*), and the *theory of the governing agent* (*ʿāmil*).

The Emergence of Grammatical Authorship and Foundational Methodologies

Grammatical authorship began prior to the work of *Ṣībawayh*. However, none of the writings from that period have reached us in complete form except for *Ṣībawayh's Book*, which stands unparalleled as the first extant grammatical work (Habbās, 2023, p. 164). This book reflects a pivotal stage in the development of Arabic grammar, a stage characterised by maturity and perfection.

Grammar in *Ṣībawayh's Book* was articulated in the most precise scientific form attainable, a formulation to which subsequent generations added only a few definitions and terminologies. Its foundations, rules, and principles have remained as solid as enduring pillars. The analytical depth of the work reflects its primary objective: the systematic deduction of grammatical rulings.

Early grammatical thought was marked by creativity and innovation, whereas new disciplines often lack a transparent methodology in their formative stages owing to the absence of well-defined contours. From its inception to *Ṣībawayh*, grammar underwent three primary transformative stages, as outlined by *Aḥmad Makki al-Anṣārī* in three points:

1. The first turning point was initiated by *al-Ḥaḍramī*, whose efforts expanded grammatical analogy, transitioning the discipline from its rudimentary beginnings to a stage of intellectual maturity and growth cultivated through his work and that of his student *ʿĪsā ibn ʿUmar al-Thaqafī*.
2. The second turning point was led by *Abū ʿAnr ibn al-ʿAlāʾ* and his student *Yūnus ibn Ḥabīb* through their significant methodological contributions.
3. The third turning point came with the intellectual genius *al-Khaṭīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī* and his student *Ṣībawayh*, whose efforts established the third methodological current (al-Anṣārī, 1966, Vol. 2, No. 24, p. 9).

Among the scientific methodologies adopted by Arab linguists, particularly linguists rather than grammarians, is linguistic induction (*al-istiqrāʾ*), commonly referred to as *oral transmission* (*al-samāʾ*) or *narration* (*al-naql*). This was followed by another complementary methodology: grammatical analogy (*al-qiyās*), including causal explanation (*al-taʿlīl*).

Qiyās (analogy) and *samāʾ* (oral transmission) are crucial parts of Arabic grammatical methodology. These two types of evidence were selected for particular focus, as opposed to *presumption of continuity* (*istishāb al-ḥāl*) or *scholarly consensus* (*ijmāʾ*), because they were the evidence upon which grammarians reached the broadest agreement.

Oral transmission (al-Samāʾ)

The earliest stage undertaken by Arab linguists and grammarians was oral transmission, in which their primary task was to listen attentively to the speech of the Arabs in both verse and prose, including proverbs, maxims, and various expressions. Once they realised the impossibility of recording the entirety of Arabic speech, they turned to analogy, by which the ruling of one linguistic phenomenon was measured against another in Arab speech, to deduce the grammatical rules of the Arabic language.

Analogy (al-Qiyās)

Analogy constitutes a fundamental principle of scientific reasoning. It was *Ibn Abī Ishāq* who first directed grammarians towards the proper methodological path in approaching this discipline. *Šbawayh* adopted and extensively applied this principle in the formulation of grammatical rules. He grounded his analogical reasoning on what was most frequent and regular in Arab speech, making it the standard against which other forms were measured.

Importantly, analogy (al-qiyās) and causal explanation (al-ta‘līl) are inseparable. Analogy is founded upon a causal rationale (*‘illah*), which represents an essential component of the analogical process. Consequently, grammatical rulings rarely involve analogy without an accompanying causal explanation.

Arab linguists and grammarians employed analogy extensively in their grammatical judgments, constructing their grammatical system upon it and seeking a justification for every rule. Their analogical reasoning was characterised by coherence and accuracy, as it was based on what was most prevalent and widely attested in the speech of the Arabs. They deliberately avoided building rules on rare or anomalous forms. However, they did not disregard or discredit these exceptional forms together; instead, they regarded them as particular dialectal usages, except for *‘Abd Allāh ibn Abī Ishāq al-Ḥaḍramī*, who frequently rejected and deemed erroneous the speech of those who deviated from the standard analogy. In this respect, his approach differed from that of the Kufans, who were known to base analogy even on anomalous forms.

Causal Explanation (al-Ta‘līl)

For causal explanation, early grammarians employed it extensively, particularly *Šbawayh*, whose book is replete with grammatical justifications, as he sought a cause (*‘illah*) for every rule. His explanations were directly connected to linguistic usage. They did not rely on logical or philosophical reasoning, as later found in the works of *al-Širāfi* and *al-Mubarrad* towards the end of the third century AH, or subsequently in the writings of *Ibn Mālik*.

Among the more discursive examples of causal explanation is his discussion of the similarities between pronouns and particles with respect to their morphological fixity, which he states in the chapter on pronouns:

“The pronoun is built due to its similarity to the particle in form, dependency, and rigidity...” (Ibn Mālik, Vol. 1, p. 185).

Evidential Citation (al-Istishhād)

In addition to causal explanations, evidential citations represent the widest dimension of linguistic argumentation in Arabic grammar. This methodology relies primarily on four sources:

1. The Qur’anic text,
2. Its canonical readings,
3. Prophetic Hadith,
4. The poetic and prose speech of the Arabs.

A close examination of *Šbawayh’s Book* reveals that the author relied extensively on textual evidence and citations. The work comprises a vast collection of linguistic proofs and textual excerpts that he gathered over a considerable period through careful listening to the Bedouins, memorising their language, and systematically inducing, measuring, and analysing linguistic forms. His methodology involved two primary techniques:

- **Direct dictation** from informants,
- **Structured questioning and inquiry**, meticulously recording every response, opinion, and linguistic example narrated by Arab speakers (Shawqī Dayf, p. 57).

The Qur'an

Early grammarians developed a distinct evidential methodology in their citations, placing clear emphasis on the Qur'anic text, which they regarded as the principal source for establishing the rules of Arabic grammar. They also relied on the Qur'anic readings, as Arabic grammar itself emerged within this milieu.

The earliest grammarians themselves accomplished Qur'anic reciters, including *Abū al-Aswad al-Du'alī*, *Naṣr ibn 'āṣim*, *'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Hurmuz*, *Yahyā ibn Ya'nūr*, *Maymūn al-Aqrān*, *'Anbasah al-Fīl*, *'Anūr ibn al-'Alā*, and *'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Ishāq*, among many others. Their dual expertise in grammar and recitation profoundly shaped the methodological foundations of early Arabic grammatical studies.

As is well known, the Qur'anic readings are distinct from the Qur'an itself. The Qur'an refers to the divine revelation sent down to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace upon him), including the readings through which it was recited. Qir'ā'āt, on the other hand, denotes the various accepted modes of reciting the Qur'anic text. Scholars have attributed these multiple modes of recitation to a noble and significant purpose: facilitating the pronunciation and recitation of the Qur'an for the Muslim community.

The early Arab linguists relied exclusively on the canonical readings unanimously agreed upon by the imams, namely, the seven readings, which are transmitted in mass (*mutawātir*) from the Prophet Muḥammad (peace upon him). These may also be expanded to ten readings, on the basis of *Ibn Jinnī*'s classification of irregular (*shādh*) readings as those not included among the seven readings and *Ibn al-Jazā'irī*'s definition of them as readings not included among the ten readings.

Notably, early grammarians did not use irregular readings as evidence in their grammatical arguments. However, the term “irregular” in this context does not imply weak transmission or the presence of nonstandard linguistic features. Instead, as explained by *Ibn Jinnī* and *Ibn al-Jazā'irī*, irregular readings refer to those outside the canonical seven or ten readings.

Sībawayh used Qur'anic readings as linguistic, grammatical, and morphological evidence in his analyses of language and in establishing grammatical rules. One of his citations appears in the chapter “What may be expressed with the nominative although it is normally accusative in definite expressions,” where he says: “This is your saying: *hādhā 'Abdu Allāh muntaliq* (‘This is 'Abd Allāh, departing’). Its nominative case results from the implicit *hādhā* or *huwa*. Thus, we say that *hādhā muntaliq* (‘This is departing’), just as the nominative applies when ‘Abdu Allāh *muntaliq* serves as the predicate of *hādhā*. They claim that this occurs in the reading of Abū 'Abd Allāh (Ibn Mas'ūd): *hādhā ba 'lī shaykh*” (Sībawayh, Vol. 2, p. 83; Sūrat Hūd, 11:72).

Sībawayh was among those who regarded the canonical readings as authoritative and did not accept irregular (*shādh*) readings. In the chapter “Particles treated like those of interrogation, command, and prohibition,” he says the following verse: “*Innā kulla shay' in khalaqnāhu biqadar*” (Sībawayh, Vol. 1, p. 148; Sūrat al-Qamar, 54:49): “This is like your saying: *Zaydan qarabtuhu* (‘Zayd, I struck him’). It is a common Arab expression. Some have read: *'Wamamā Thamūda fahadaynāhum* (‘As for Thamūd, We guided them’). However, the reading remains authoritative, for the reading is *sunnah*.”

The use of irregular readings as evidence also appeared among later scholars, including Ibn Mālik, who used both canonical and irregular readings. At the same time, they tended to avoid citing Prophetic Hadith as linguistic evidence.

Prophetic Hadith

The use of Prophetic Hadith as linguistic evidence was avoided mainly by early grammarians, with the exception of *Sībawayh*, who cited a minimal number of Hadiths compared with later scholars such as *Ibn Mālik* and *Ibn Khurūf*, both of whom broke with this tradition. Historical sources confirm that *Sībawayh* relied on a few Hadiths to support some of his grammatical rules. ‘*Abd al-Salām Hārūn*, in his critical edition of *Sībawayh’s Book*, noted that *Sībawayh* cited eight Hadiths in total, including the following:

- “Indeed, Allah forbids you from gossiping and idle talk.”
- “I am a servant of Allah; I eat as a servant eats and drink as a servant drinks.”
- “Subbūḥun Quddūs, Lord of the angels and the Spirit” (*Sībawayh*, Vol. 3, p. 268; Vol. 2, p. 80; Vol. 1, p. 327).

However, *Khudayjah al-Ḥadīthī* mentions in her book *Abū Ḥayyān al-Naḥwī* that *Sībawayh* did not cite a single Hadith in his book. The main reason that early grammarians such as *Sībawayh* and his contemporaries refrained from using Hadith as a source of linguistic evidence is that Hadith transmission often occurred by meaning rather than by exact wording, leading to variation in expressions conveying the same meaning.

Abū Ḥayyān confirmed that early grammarians from both the Basran and Kufan schools, as well as later scholars, did not use Prophetic Hadith as evidence. He states that the first architects of Arabic grammar, who derived its rules from the language of the Arabs, such as *Abū ‘Anr ibn al-‘Alā*, ‘*Īsā ibn ‘Umar*, *al-Khaṭīl ibn Aḥmad*, and *Sībawayh* from the Basran school, and *al-Kisā’ī*, *al-Farrā*, ‘*Alī ibn Mubārak al-Aḥmar*, and *Hishām al-Ḍa’ir* from the Kufan school, did not employ Hadith as evidence. This methodological stance was subsequently adopted by later grammarians from both schools, as well as by Baghdadi grammarians and the Andalusian school (*al-Ḥadīthī*, p. 332).

The Speech of Arabs

In their use of Arabic speech as linguistic evidence, early grammarians adopted a rigorous and highly selective methodology. *Sībawayh* relied exclusively on authentic linguistic citations transmitted from eloquent Arab speakers, ensuring the reliability of his grammatical rules and analogies, which became more precise and authoritative than those of many later grammarians.

In *al-Zubaydī’s Ṭabaqāt*, the following is reported:

“When *Sībawayh* died, *Yūnus* was told: ‘*Sībawayh* has written a book of one thousand pages on the science of *al-Khaṭīl*.’ *Yūnus* replied: ‘And when did *Sībawayh* hear all this from *al-Khaṭīl*? Bring me his book.’ When he examined it and saw what was narrated, he said: ‘This man must have been truthful in what he narrated from me.’” (*Sībawayh*, Vol. 1, pp. 19, 49)

Source Tribes of Linguistic Evidence

Early grammarians strictly limited their linguistic evidence to speech transmitted from tribes renowned for their linguistic purity, whose Arabic was considered a reliable model. These tribes were as follows:

- Quraysh was regarded as the eloquent of the Arabs. In *al-Muzhir*, it is stated that “*Quraysh are the most eloquent of the Arabs in speech and the purest in language, for Allah chose them from among all the Arabs.*”
- Qays, Tamīm, and Asad.
- Hudhayl, and some of Kinānah and Ṭayy.

Al-Suyūṭī noted that no linguistic evidence was taken from other tribes, since these were the only ones recognised for their linguistic eloquence.

In contrast, later, grammarians did not observe these restrictions. *Ibn Mālik*, for example, cited linguistic material transmitted by tribes such as Lakhm, Juthām, and Ghassān, which earlier grammarians had not accepted as sources of linguistic evidence. *Abū Ḥayyān al-Nahwī* criticised him for this, stating that the speech of the Arabs **was** to be used only when verified as belonging to tribes known for their linguistic authenticity and that “*this was not the custom of the leading grammarians.*”

Ibn Mālik, by taking evidence from sedentary tribes such as Lakhm and Juthām, who were neighbours of the Copts and Egyptians, as well as from Ghassān, who were neighbours of the Syrians, most of whom were Christians, and by reading Hebrew, departed clearly from the classical method.

Sībawayh’s linguistic standard

Sībawayh took evidence only from Arabs whose language was trusted, that is, eloquent speakers whose Arabic had not been altered. For him, eloquence (*faṣāḥah*) meant linguistic authenticity, that the speaker’s Arabic was pure and that their speech could be used as reliable linguistic evidence. This quality was attributed not to all native speakers but only to those whose language remained unaffected by foreign influence (‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Hāj Ṣāliḥ, pp. 39, 91–92).

An example of this methodological precision appears in *Sībawayh’s* discussion in the chapter “*On times and declension*”, where he states:

“*Know that ghuduwa and bukra were each made into names of a specific time, just as they made aḥbīn into a proper name for an animal. Similarly, the Arabs say: hādhā yawm al-ithnayn mubārakan fīhi (‘This is Monday, blessed’), and ataytuka yawm ithnayn mubārakan fīhi (‘I came to you on Monday, blessed’). They made ithnayn a proper noun, as they make it a name for a man.*” (*Sībawayh*, Vol. 2, p. 5).

Definition (al-Taḥdīd)

Definition refers to presenting a concept through a precise boundary that distinguishes it from other concepts, thereby ensuring its clarity and specificity. Among Arab grammarians, definition was recognised as one of the methodological tools of linguistic inquiry.

However, as a formal research method, the definition or *ḥudūd* was not systematically developed among early grammarians, as it was among the later scholars. In *Sībawayh’s* work, definitions appear only rarely. He typically introduced linguistic issues directly, mentioned the chapter title, and then presented the phenomenon through examples and descriptions without explicit definitional statements. For instance, in the chapter “*Concord between the adjective and the definite noun*”, he writes:

“This chapter concerns the concord between the adjective and the definite noun. A definite noun is of five types: proper names, nouns annexed to definites if no meaning of numation is intended, nouns with the definite article, demonstrative nouns, and pronouns.” (Shawqī Dayf, p. 95)

This does not mean that *Ṣībawayh* was unfamiliar with definition as a methodological principle; rather, its systematic application emerged more prominently with his student, *al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ*, who paid far greater attention to definitions and conceptual boundaries than did his teacher. According to *Shawqī Dayf al-Madāris al-Nahwiyyah*, *al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ* was the one who brought *Ṣībawayh*’s book into wider circulation through *al-Māzinī* and *al-Jarmī* (Habbās, 2023, p. 171).

Al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ was considered the most brilliant and dedicated of *Ṣībawayh*’s students, and he often disagreed with his teacher, especially in his greater reliance on definitions, unlike *Ṣībawayh*’s more descriptive approach (Ibn Ya‘īsh, Vol. 5, p. 87).

Classification (al-Tartīb)

Classification and ordering were key methodological principles in the work of early Arab linguists and remained in use across successive generations of scholars.

A study of this method in grammatical classification, such as the categorisation of definiteness (*ma‘ārif*), reveals differences in how scholars divide and order linguistic categories. *Ibn Ya‘īsh* discusses the order of definiteness, stating:

“The most definite is the pronoun, then the proper noun, then the demonstrative, then the noun with the definite article, while the annexed noun is considered according to what it is annexed to.”

Conclusion

The issue of the research methodologies employed by Arab linguists, both early and later, to derive the rules of Arabic constitutes one of the most significant topics in the history of Arabic linguistic and grammatical studies. These methodologies provide a fundamental basis for evaluating the results of the codification and standardisation of Arabic grammar.

The findings of this study indicate that early scholars identified and employed scientific methodologies from the very inception of Arabic grammar, beginning with *Abū al-Aswad al-Du‘ālī* (d. 69 AH) and continuing to the end of the second century AH with *Ṣībawayh* (d. 180 AH). The latter played a decisive role in preserving and systematising the intellectual legacy of both his predecessors and contemporaries by transmitting and documenting their linguistic insights.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, analytical, and historical-comparative approach, combining textual analysis with epistemological critique. Primary sources include classical grammatical treatises such as *Kitāb Ṣībawayh*, *al-‘Ayn* by al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad, and linguistic collections by al-Aṣma‘ī and Abū ‘Ubaydah. These texts are analyzed thematically to trace the evolution of methodological principles from observation to reasoning. Secondary sources—modern linguistic studies, historical analyses, and comparative works—are used to contextualize the development of early Arabic linguistic thought within broader traditions of rational inquiry. The methodology emphasizes intertextual reading and hermeneutic interpretation to uncover implicit theoretical assumptions underlying early grammatical judgments.

Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to academic research ethics as outlined by the University of Algiers and international scholarly standards. All referenced materials are duly cited according to APA 7th edition guidelines. The study involves no human or animal subjects, and no confidential or sensitive data were used. The author acknowledges the intellectual property rights of all classical and modern authors referenced in this work, ensuring transparency, accuracy, and respect for original contributions.

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