



# The Science of Grammar and Its Forms in Scholars' Classifications Between Renewal and Complexity: A Reading in Literary Heritage

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**Abstract**

This research aims to shed light on “Arabic grammar between the old and the new, and to reveal the defects of grammar and the areas of complexity”. Grammar holds a prominent value in our Arab heritage, as it is the scale of the Arabic language and its impregnable fortress. It assists in identifying the correctness or weakness of Arabic structures, as well as in recognizing matters related to words in terms of their constructions. The objective of this is to avoid falling into compositional errors and to achieve the ability to convey meaning. From this perspective, linguists have recognized the importance of grammar in linguistic studies and considered it a fundamental criterion for distinguishing between overlapping meanings in various linguistic structures. Consequently, the scholars of language competed in classification in this noble art, led by the master of grammarians, Sibawayh (d.180 AH). Subsequently, classifications continued, each according to its methodology, and this was manifested in the manner of treatment and expression in many grammar books. However, some of these scholars delved excessively into complicating Arabic grammar, and matters were controlled by people who found it difficult to add anything new to its rules. Thus, this science became difficult for many, and therefore simplification and facilitation for the minds of learners became necessary, leading to what is called the simplification of grammar due to the difficulty of understanding and mastering it.

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## Introduction

Arabic grammar occupies a lofty position in our Islamic heritage, especially as it is the ideal means by which we preserve the tongue from error (*lahn*). It expresses the identity of the Arab nation, and therefore, most researchers and scholars regard it highly and resort to it to remove errors and ambiguity they face during their use of language, whether in social or educational life. The Arabs have made great efforts in the field of grammatical composition.

This began with Sibawayh's book entitled "*Al-Kitāb*" (The Book), which is considered the pioneer of the grammatical renaissance, being the first classification that encompassed the chapters of grammar in the best manner and finest form. After it, significant works followed up to our present day, and these efforts varied: some followed in Sibawayh's footsteps, while others sought different paths.

There is no doubt that Arabic grammar is not the product of an hour or two hours but rather developed through scientific movement. We find that grammar among the ancients differs from what it is for people of our age.

Al-Ṭoḥī al-Ṣarṣari (d. 716 AH) says in *Al-Ṣaqāh al-Ghaḍabiyyah fī al-Radd a la Munkiri al-Arabiyyah* (The Angry Thunderbolt in Response to Those Who Deny the Arabic Language): "I have observed in our age of tempests, and our time of sunsets and rarities, people who claim virtue with mere pretense, and collect knowledge in bound volumes, who assume the appearance of virtue while each is devoid, and boast of heroism in it with senility and falsehood, denying the virtue of the Arabic language, with the partisanship of the Shu'ubiyyah against it, to the extent that they have taken it as mockery, cast it behind their backs, considered it thirst without satiation, and judged that being free of it is better in furnishing and appearance" (Nadjemeddine, 1997, p.218).

From here, I chose to clarify some points in this intervention entitled "Grammar Between the Old and the New and the Revelation of Areas of Complexity". In light of what has preceded, the following question can be posed: What are the problems and defects of grammar books?

#### **Regarding the importance of the topic:**

It lies in the fact that the science of grammar, as one of the linguistic sciences, is closely connected to other sciences. Therefore, it was incumbent upon us to examine this science and provide a clear vision of it.

#### **Research Objectives:**

- To demonstrate the importance of the science of grammar in the Arab heritage
- To demonstrate the problems and defects of grammar books
- To examine a select group of scholars who had a major hand in enriching grammatical study
- To provide some suggestions and solutions for what are called the defects of grammar

#### **Reasons for choosing the topic:**

There are several reasons that motivated me to investigate this proposal, including:

- The study topic relates to Arabic literature, as it examines one of the foundations of the language
- Muslim generations, especially those working in literary studies, have the right to care for Arabic grammar and to benefit from this abundance. Therefore, I chose this topic to draw researchers' attention to caring about it, devoting themselves to studying it, and providing some solutions for simplification

#### **Previous Studies:**

If I speak about previous studies that addressed this topic, they have been numerous, in various forms, including "The Simplification of Grammar Between the Ancients and Moderns: A Comparative Descriptive Study" by Zareb Tayeb; "Arabic Grammar and Attempts at Its Simplification: An Analytical Descriptive Study" by Mokhtar Bouzaouia; and indirect studies including "*Muqaddimah fī al-Naḥw*" (Introduction to Grammar) by Khalaf al-Aḥmar, "*Al-Kitāb*" (The book) by Sibawayh, "*Al-Naḥw: Uṣūluḥu wa-Usūsuḥu wa-Qaḍāyāḥu*" (Grammar: Its Origins, Foundations, and Issues) by Moḥammad Ibrahim Abdallah...

#### **Research Methodology:**

As for the methodology I followed in these lines, it is the descriptive-analytical methodology, through describing the books of some grammarians and analyzing the approaches followed during their treatment of the grammatical process.

#### **Research Difficulties:**

Like any researcher investigating issues, I faced difficulties and challenges. Among the difficulties we encountered:

- The difficulty of dealing with this topic because the science of grammar was born great and it blends the ancient and the modern
- In addition to external difficulties related to the time factor

#### **Regarding sources and references:**

I relied on a number of sources and references that varied between classical and contemporary, including: *Al-Kitāb* (The book) by Sibawayh and *Muqaddimah fī al-Naḥw* (Introduction to Grammar) by Khalaf al-Aḥmar; Mahdi al-Makhzumi (, *Fī al-Naḥw al-Arabi: Naqd wa-Tawjīh* (Criticism and guidance in Arabic grammar); Khalid Abdallah, *Al-Fikr al-Naḥwī 'inda Nuḥāt al-Andalus* (Grammatical thought among the grammarians of Andalusia) ; Moḥammed Ibrahim Abadah, *Al-*

*Naḥw al-'Arabī: Uṣūluḥu wa-Ususuḥu wa-Qaḍāyāhu wa-Kutubuhu* (Arabic grammar: its origins, foundations, issues, and books).

I have divided the research into four sections:

- **First Section:** Definition of the science of grammar and its importance
- **Second Section:** Characteristics of educational grammar books and methods of composition in it
- **Third Section:** Problems and defects of grammar books
- **Fourth Section:** Arabic grammar and attempts at its simplification and revelation of areas of its complexity

#### **First Section: Definition of the Science of Grammar and Its Importance**

##### **First: Science in Language and Terminology**

**Linguistically:** Science is the opposite of ignorance, and it comes with the meaning of certainty (al-Fayoumi, p.422).

**Terminologically:** An attribute that necessitates for its locus a distinction that does not admit the opposite (Abbes, 1997, p.42).

##### **Second: Grammar in Language and Terminology**

The term *naḥw* (grammar) is among the words that have several meanings in the Arabic language, and they have mentioned seven meanings for it, but the most famous is “direction/intention” (*qaṣḍ*), which is the most suitable and most similar of meanings to the terminological meaning. Ibn Durayd (d. 321 AH) said: “From it is derived *al-naḥw* in speech, as if it is the intention of speech” (Ibn Durayd, 1987, p.575).

##### **Grammar Terminologically:**

Among the well-known definitions of grammar is what Khalid al-Azhari (d. 905 AH) defined it as: “A science of principles by which the states of word structures in terms of parsing (*iṣāb*) and building (*bināʾ*) are known” (al-Azhari, 2000, p.14).

##### **Second: The Importance of the Science of Grammar:**

Arabic grammar has a prominent importance in understanding texts, whether religious or literary, as it is a tool for perceiving meanings, because meaning changes with the change of parsing. I will explain the values and importance of the science of grammar, especially in the field of Quranic studies.

##### **The Importance of the Science of Grammar in Interpretation:**

Among the means and tools for understanding the Quranic text is the science of Arabic grammar. The Quran was revealed in the Arabic tongue as a whole, and seeking to understand it can only be through this path, especially because Allah the Almighty says: “Indeed, We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran that you might understand” (Surah Yusuf, verse 2).

Al-Zajaji said: “If it is said: What is the benefit of learning grammar? ... The answer to that is that it should be said to him: The benefit in it is to arrive at speaking the speech of the Arabs in truth, correctly without alteration or change, (and the rectification of the Book of Allah, Mighty and Majestic), which is the foundation of religion and worldly life relied upon, and knowledge of the reports of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, and establishment of their meanings in truth, because their meanings are not understood correctly except by fulfilling their rights of parsing” (Al-Zajaji, 1997, p.95).

Abou Ḥayan al-Andaloussi said: “It is fitting for one whose soul yearns for the science of interpretation to devote himself to the book of Sibawayh, for it is in this field the relied-upon reference and the support in solving difficulties” (al-Andaloussi, 2001, p. 11).

##### **The Importance of Grammar in the Science of Hadith**

The importance of grammar in the Prophetic text becomes clear. It was narrated from Abou al-Darda, may Allah be pleased with him, that he said: The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, heard a man reciting and making an error (*lahana*), so the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said: “Guide your brother” (al-Naysabouri, 1990, p.477).

From here it becomes clear that the science of grammar has importance in the science of hadith.

##### **The Importance of Hadith for the Legal Theorist and Jurist:**

The Arabic language is considered one of the means of guidance through it to many jurisprudential rulings from the texts of Islamic law, to the extent that the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣul al-fiqh*) were made to derive from three sources, and grammar is one of them, as al-Amidi, may Allah have mercy on him, expressed: “As for that from which the principles of jurisprudence are derived, it is the science of theology, the Arabic language, and Islamic legal rulings” (al-Amidi, p.7).

Al-Thaalibi says in *Fiqh al-Lughah wa-Sirr al-Arabiyyah* (The Philology of Language and the Secret of Arabic): “Arabic is the best of languages and tongues, and devotion to it and to understanding it is part of religion, as it is the tool of knowledge and the key to understanding the religion...” (Al-Thaalibi, 2000, p.15).

Thus, Arabic grammar has great importance, as it connects to the sciences like water to the green branch. The reader must know it.

### **Second Section: Characteristics of Classical Educational Grammar Books and Methods of Composition in Them**

Grammatical books have differed in their manner of presenting the science of grammar and were characterized by their educational nature, whether lengthy or concise. Their authors took different directions in composition according to different patterns that affected the organization and arrangement of these books and the methods of presenting grammatical issues in them.

They also affected the content of these books and their educational level, and also affected other trends in classification. Among these patterns (Abādah, p. 183):

#### **1- Patterns of Grammatical Classification**

##### **First Pattern:**

Its authors were concerned with grammatical structures comprehensively without a specific clear system, such as *Al-Kitab* by Sibawayh and *Al-Muqtaḍab* by al-Moubarrad.

##### **Second Pattern:**

Its authors were concerned with objects (mamūlāt), such as the book *Al-Luma* by Ibn Jinni and the book *Al-Muqaddimah fī al-Nahw* by Ali ibn Faḍḍal ibn Ali al-Moujashi...

##### **Third Pattern:**

It includes books of governing factors (awamil) that were classified according to the type of governing factor, such as the book *Al-Fuṣūl al-Khamsun* by Ibn Muṭi...

##### **Fourth Pattern:**

This is a pattern that treated grammar from the standpoint of the elements of speech and is represented by the book *Al-Mufaṣṣal fī Ṣina'at al-ʿArab* by al-Zamakhchari and the book *Al-Kalīyah* by Ibn al-Ḥajīb.

This pattern was called the division of speech categories, meaning according to the three divisions of speech: one section for nouns, another for verbs, a third for particles, and a fourth for what is shared. There are other patterns that do not fall under what has been mentioned above, such as the book *Al-Junial* by al-Zajāji, *Al-Waḍiḥ fī Ilm al-Arabiyyah* by al-Zoubaydi, *Al-Ḍaruri fī Ṣina'at al-Nahw* by Ibn Rochd, and *Al-Muqarrab* by Ibn Ouṣfour.

#### **Manifestations of Variation Among Grammatical Works:**

If we come to highlight the manifestations of variation among grammatical works in their scholarly material, not among students, we mention the following basic points (Abada, p.256):

##### **a) Variation in chapters and issues:**

The most prominent aspect of this variation is consideration of the level for which the book was written. For the beginner, it is limited to presenting what relates to the signs of parsing... There are some chapters and issues that the grammarian does not address at the first level, leaving them for a higher level. We find that Ibn Jinnī in his book *Al-Luma* does not address distress calls, specification, or warning...

##### **b) Variation in citations and examples:**

The variation occurs in how grammarians employ them in their works according to their type and according to scarcity and abundance. Some are found to cite frequently from the Noble Quran for reasons including: that the Noble Quran is memorized in the hearts of learners, or because these citations help in understanding it, or because of the author's keenness to present eloquent styles, as Ibn Hishām did in his book *Chudhour al-Dhahab* (Fragments of Gold), when he cited several Quranic citations to clarify the use of jussive particles and relative nouns.

Among the grammarians are those who use examples that they themselves formulate to clarify the rule and establish a practical aspect with them, and this is a phenomenon in the books of grammarians since Sibawayh. They use them to facilitate understanding for learners, among them Abou Djafar al-Nahḥes in his book *Al-Tullāḥah fī al-Nahw* and al-Zamakhchari in his book *Al-Ummudhaj fī al-Nahw*, two books devoid of Quranic and poetic citations.

#### **3- Variation in Terminology and Definitions:**

The grammatical works of the ancients have varied in terms of their mention and employment of these terminologies and definitions, especially the educational ones. Variation also appears in terms of maintaining the same designation, its maturation, or its change in a subsequent work.

**Example:** The term “five examples” (*al-amthilah al-khamsah*) is not mentioned by Sibawayh, but he indicates it by: “Know that when the dual is attached to present tense verbs as a sign of two agents, an *alif* and *nūn* are attached to it... and likewise when femininity is attached in the second person, except that the first is a *yā'* and the *nūn* is opened” (Sibawayh, pp.19-20).

As for al-Zajaji, he says: “The *nun* is a sign of the nominative case in verbs specifically, and they are five examples from the verb, which are: *yafaluni, yafaluna, tafaluna, tafalina*” (al-Zajaji, 1985, p.3).

There are terminologies that did not appear among the ancients but were used by later scholars who multiplied them. Among their examples:

Estimated parsing – original signs – secondary signs – passive verb – deputy agent – *lā* negating the genus – quasi-sentence – interpreted infinitive – annexed to the dual – copular verbs – circumstantial adjective – actual adjective (Abada, p.268).

### Third Section: Problems and Defects of Grammar Books

Composition in Arabic grammar since Sibawayh has varied in forms and types. Among the authors are those who took the path of elaboration, appendage, and justification, and among them are those who took the path of brevity and compression. However, these books have not been free from defects and problems known in our current age as the problems of grammar.

#### 1- Overlap of chapters and confusion of titles:

Grammar books suffer from confusion in the succession of chapters and in the distribution of the particulars of a single chapter, as well as ambiguity in titles, with the absence of precision in terminology and the difficulty of being guided to grammatical issues and the non-correspondence between the title and what is under it.

We give examples of this, including what appears in the book of Sibawayh (d. 180 AH), for it is the best model for these judgments, even though it represents the most complete and mature attempt in grammatical composition, both ancient and modern (al-Azzaoui, p.15).

#### 2- Difficulty of language in grammar books:

Among the defects that characterized classical grammar books is the rigidity and awkwardness of language. In many of these books, we find language crowded with significations, allusions, and grammatical rulings difficult to understand.

The clearest example of these two: the book of Sibawayh, which represents in many aspects the language of the Arabized Persian, in its brevity and in its crowding with meanings and purposes, a crowding that may reach the point of surfeit, with awkwardness at times and disability reaching the point of accent at other times. Or we find brief, terse language like the language of *mutUn* (didactic texts) and the like (Abbes, p. 225).

#### 3- Repetition and padding:

“Among what classical grammar books suffer from is excessive length arising from repetition, digression, and padding, and treatment of foreign issues that have no connection to grammar. What also contributed to this is the obsession with debate and verbal discussions, and excess in pursuing justifications and tracking lapses even if they were stylistic...” (Mabrouk, p. 27).

#### 3- Defects of grammarians' methodologies:

##### - Confusion of composition and classification methodology:

The truth to which grammatical vision leads is that the methodology in establishing grammar was unclear in features, and this affected the books of classical grammarians, especially in terms of composition and classification.

##### - Absence of objectives and goals:

This element is among the defects that continue to be scattered in the books of classical grammarians, as al-Azzaoui expressed: “If we trace the methodologies of grammarians in composition and classification, we find that they were based on foundations that distanced grammar from its function and the goal sought from it (al-Azzaoui, p.18).

##### - Instability of grammatical rules:

What increased the confusion of grammarians' methodologies was the instability of grammatical rules and the grammarians' reliance on poetry as a primary source for deriving these rules and their rulings.

##### - Influence by other intellectual methodologies:

- Grammar's influence by theology (*ilm al-kalam*) (Theology) (al-Moubarak, pp.80-89)

- Grammar's influence by Greek philosophy:

The philosophical method affected grammatical study, as it emerged from its linguistic form to a Greek philosophical form, so it came to bear the name only. Mahdi al-Makhzoumi says: “From here, grammar began to deviate from its path,



and began to transform little by little into a strange, contrived lesson, having nothing of the characteristics of linguistic study except its appearance and form... and it became a lesson in dialectics in which grammarians displayed their ability in intellectual analysis..." (al-Makhzoumi, p.14).

#### **4- Defects in grammatical material:**

- **Overlap of terminologies and multiplicity of concepts** (al-Faouzi, p.164)

- **Impractical exercises:**

The impractical exercises they created for practice and linguistic exercise. From this is Sibawayh's statement: "As for the saying of grammarians *qad aṭahuka* and '*aṭahum*', it is only something they analogized that the Arabs did not speak with, and they put speech in a place not its own, and the analogy of this, had it been spoken with, would have been easy" (Sibawayh, p.364).

- **Clear disagreement in grammatical rules:**

This is among the common defects in grammarians' books. Ḥasan Abbes says: "Moreover, disagreement and division in many grammatical rules was the most apparent of defects in them and the greatest of obstacles in acquiring them..." (Abbes, p. 73).

- **Multiplicity of opinions and statements in grammatical issues:**

Among the defects and problems of grammar is the abundance of opinions and statements, for they did not agree on a single rule to regulate them, but rather they had opinions, which made grammar vast. Ḥasan Abbes says: "And at the head of these defects is the multiplicity of opinions and abundance of disagreements concerning a single issue..." (Abbes, p.72).

Thus, it can be said that Arabic grammar, even though it is among the characteristics of Islamic civilization and represents its identity, has nevertheless become an obstacle for generations due to the problems and defects that afflict it, which made it appear in a form from which souls recoil. Therefore, it was necessary to provide another vision for this noble art, and thus appeared what is called the simplification of grammar.

#### **Fourth Section: Arabic Grammar and Attempts at Its Simplification, and Revelation of Areas of Its Complexity**

The undisputed truth is that issues, no matter how difficult, must have ways and paths to facilitate and ease them. Grammar, as we expressed in the preceding lines, was born great, and problems and defects emerged in its folds that made the student and the one approaching its understanding recoil from it and fear it.

From here appeared studies that gave another vision to Arabic grammar and wanted to bring it out in a new form, and they called it the simplification of grammar. Khalaf al-Aḥmar says in his book *Muqaddimah fi al-Nahw* (Introduction to Grammar):

"When I saw that grammarians and scholars of Arabic had employed lengthening and multiplied justifications and neglected what the learner and the one seeking sufficiency in grammar needs from the concise and Arabic methods and the approach that facilitates memorization for the beginner, works in his mind, and encompasses it in his understanding, I gave deep consideration and thought to composing a book in which I would gather the fundamentals, tools, and governing factors according to the principles of beginners, so that the beginner would be self-sufficient with it from lengthening.

So I made these pages, and I did not leave in them a principle, a tool, an argument, or an indication without dictating it in them. Whoever reads them, memorizes them, and debates over them will know all the fundamentals of grammar" (al-Aḥmar, pp.33-34).

- **Reasons that led to the simplification of grammar in ancient times:**

Among the reasons that made researchers pursue the simplification and facilitation of grammar for the rising generation, we mention:

- The attempt to summarize the rules and rulings of grammar, refine its principles and examples, bring its treatment closer to learners, present what is necessary from it, make it suitable for their levels and fulfill their scientific and practical needs, and form linguistic skill in them (Kabbaoua, 1999, p. 22).
- The early grammarians' awareness of the difficulty of their works, as the tender minds of speakers could not absorb grammar as the grammarians wished it to be... so they collided with aversion and became aware of the necessity of simplification (Abd, 1993, p. 57).
- The efforts and studies that revolved around Sibawayh's book, as they deepened the complexity of Arabic grammar until it became difficult for many Arabs, especially the Arabs after the fourth century AH... Therefore, it was incumbent upon grammarians to take paths that lead to the simplification of grammar (ʿAbd al-Ilāh, p. 88).

I may give some reasons that led to the simplification of grammar in our current age. Among the reasons that made researchers pursue the simplification of grammar in our present age are two reasons:

- **The first reason** relates to scientific upbringing, especially linguistic upbringing. Linguistic faculties have disappeared in our time, and linguistic sense has no contact with social life. Rising generations develop their faculties through linguistic sense, but colloquial dialects have predominated in human relations. Eloquent linguistic vocabulary is not heard in expression and conversations except rarely. The observer of grammar books does not interact with grammatical rules because he did not find a trace of them in the conversational process. Thus, the result leads to the strangeness of this science, which is what made scholars adopt the facilitation of grammar.

- **The second reason** relates to methodologies. The methodologies in classical grammar books contain confusions and overlaps, considering that they were composed in the age of eloquence when it remained unchanged radically. Compared to our current age, we find that the linguistic character has changed methodologically, terminologically, and conceptually.

### Conclusion

After this literary tour through grammar books and in light of what has preceded, we can conclude with the most important results:

- The science of grammar is among the instrumental sciences that a person needs in his scientific and practical life. This science arose for multiple purposes, including safeguarding the Quranic text and preserving it from error. It is also closely connected to the sciences of Islamic law generally, so it absolutely cannot be neglected.
- Arabic grammar, since its inception, was born great and has become, over the passing ages, highly complex and artificial. Its methodologies, terminologies, and aspects have multiplied, which contributed to aversion from it by both the elite and the common people.
- The problems and defects of grammar books are summarized in the fact that these books have multiplied in their chapters, in the language in which they were written, in the strength of their terminology, and in the confusions of their rule rulings.
- Our scholars and ancestors recognized the difficulty of Arabic grammar, so they set about seeking ways to simplify it and reveal the areas of its complexity, as Khalaf al-Ahmar did in *Muqaddimah fi al-Nahw* (Introduction to Grammar), and this continued after him for decades. The educational aspect predominated, and their authors directed their simplification toward abbreviation, omission, and simplification.
- Among the defects of grammar books is that their authors inclined toward Greek philosophical thought and Aristotelian logic, so grammatical schools appeared and the conflict intensified among grammarians, each supporting his opinion, whether traditional or rational rules.
- There is no doubt that contemporary linguists have given another vision to Arabic grammar between authenticity and modernity for simplification and facilitation in its rules. However, they failed from the methodological aspect, as they favored theory over practice, so they did not bring anything new except reform in appearance and elegance in production. As for the rules, they are what they are, and as for the topics, they are as we inherited them—renewal has not affected them except for a small share, with profusion in terminologies and concepts and ambiguity in the language of definitions that sometimes appear as riddles and symbols that the student's mind cannot expand to understand and grasp their meanings.

### Ethical Considerations

This study is based on analytical and interpretive research of classical Arabic grammatical and literary sources. It does not involve human participants, surveys, interviews, or experimental procedures. Therefore, no ethical approval was required. All primary and secondary sources have been cited appropriately, and the research adheres to academic integrity standards, including respect for intellectual property and scholarly attribution.

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The author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to the publication of this article.

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