

The Effective of Syntax in Semantic: Cases in Arabic Grammar

Solehah Yaacob⁺ and Adli Yaacob

Department of Arabic Language & Literature, International Islamic University Malaysia, Malaysia

Abstract. The research studies the role of the Grammatical Government in interpreting Vowel and Semantic Changes in Arabic grammar in explaining the semantic changes resulting from phonetic changes, especially in respect to vowels. In order to signify the changing of vowel, the role of grammatical government will be accounted based on some cases in Arabic grammar.

Keywords: Normative, Accusative, Declension, Tenses, Case Endings and Sentences.

1. Introduction

According to al-Jurjani, the relationship between syntax and semantics was not effectively clarified within the framework of traditional Arabic grammatical theory. In his commentary¹ he differentiated between meaning and form of a given sentence. This concept was directed not to linguists, but to theologians (to be more specific, the Mu'tazilah) in order to emphasize the need to study not only theology but also grammar and literary theory in proving the inimitability of the Qur'an. In this case, the concept of cohesion (*naẓm*) contained three aspects; the bearing utterance (*lafẓ 'āmil*), that through which meaning is established (*ma'nabihiqā'im*), and (*ribādlahumānāẓim*). This valuable contribution showed al-Jurjani's intellectual capacity, particularly when he asserted that the correct meaning of any given phrase or statement could not be established if not framed according to the aforesaid.

2. Logical Idea Been Signified by Meaning Expression

In other words, even those who attained the highest level of eloquence in Arabic were bound in producing a coherent sentence by combining individual words in the correct sequence followed by establishing their meaning as part of the whole. In reference to the notion of the inimitability of the Qur'an, al-Jurjani stressed the importance of both meaning and expression. According to the logicians, meaning was derived from the logical idea and signified by the expression. Although the grammarians concentrated on the functions of the words, al-Jurjani argued that it was meaning which determined the quality of style and observed that it would be absurd to attribute eloquence to expressions as such. He reasoned as follows²:

Know that whenever you look into this (corruption of taste and language) you find that there is one cause for incorrectness, namely their assumption of the expression which brought them to its attributes, these all being attributes of the expression and they were left (as such) without distinguishing between that which was self-descriptive and those attributes which are gained by the meaning (of the entire expression).

Al-Jurjani maintained that there is a large semantic difference between sentences verbal sentences wherein the verb always expresses movement, and the nominal form of the participle, which expresses a state³:

The next division (in the nuances of the predicate) is that between an assertion in the form of a noun and that in the form of a verb. This is a subtle distinction which is indispensable in the science of rhetoric. The explanation is that the semantic role of the noun is to assert a meaning about something without implying its constant renewal, whereas it is the verb's semantic role to imply the constant renewal of the meaning that is asserted of something.

⁺ Corresponding author. Tel.: +603-6196 5114; fax: +603-61964870.
E-mail address: solehah71@gmail.com.

When you say ‘Zayd is leaving’ (*zaydunmunṭaliqun*), you assert his actual departure without making this departing something he constantly renews and produces. Its meaning is just like in the expression ‘Zayd is tall’ (*zaydun tawilun*) and ‘Amr is short’ (*Amrun qasirun*). You do not make length and shortness of stature something that is renewed and produced, but just assert these properties and imply their existence in general. In the same way you do not intend in the expression ‘Zayd is leaving’ anything more than that this is asserted of Zayd.

The importance of semantics as presented by al-Jurjani was taken up by al-Sakkaki (d.1229C.E.) the author of *The Key of the Sciences (Miftah al-Ulum)* in which he introduced the term of literary science (*ilm al-adab*) consisting of syntax (*sarf*), grammar (*nahw*) and rhetoric (*bayan*). He explained the importance of these three areas of linguistic study as follows⁴:

Know that the science of meanings follows the properties of the constructions of the language in conveying information, and the connected problem of approving and disapproving these, in order to avoid mistakes in the application of speech to what the situation dictates by paying close attention to this.

Sakkaki defined rhetoric as “the knowledge of the expression of one meaning in different ways by referring to it more or less clearly which serves to avoid mistakes in the application of speech to the full expression of what one wishes to say”⁵. In other words, the discussion of semantic elements needs to be related to the technical grammatical aspects of language.

The opinions of al-Jurjani reflect his general dissatisfaction with the way linguistics were developing at the time. He appears to have been considerably critical of the traditional Arabic grammarians and their preoccupation with sentence structure (word order) and meaning. His opinion was shared by Ibn Mada, who lamented over the grammarians useless morphological exercises and theoretical discussions that had nothing to do with the living language⁶.

The importance of meaning can be easily demonstrated by way of relating it to the grammatical rules of declension and agency. The following number of examples taken from the most authoritative text of the Arabic language, the Qur’an, may suffice at this point. The first example is ‘If only You would give me respite for a little while, then I would give alms and be among the righteous’ (*law la akhkhartanī ila ajalīn qarīb fa-usaddiq waakun min al-sālihīn*)⁷. The word ‘be’ (*akun*) signifies an expressed wish of a future state and not a state which has resulted by fulfilling a condition. As such, the determining agent is not related to speech (*lafẓi*) but to meaning (*ma`anawi*). This view was supported by al-Zamakhsharī⁸.

The second example demonstrates the established rule of the accusative cause causing the removal of genitive (*al-nazi` `ala al-khafid*) which means the removal of the genitive as a result of the accusative case dominating the governee (*ma`mul*). According to Ibn Malik⁹, the accusative case on the governee causes the removal the genitive in speech is based on the meaning as exemplified in ‘And Moses chose out of his people seventy men for our meeting’ (*wa ikhtāra mūsā qawmahu sab`īna rajulan li-miqātinā*)¹⁰. *Ikhtāra* here governs *qawmahu* in terms of meaning, the original governor *min* having been left out. However, al-Akhfash al-Saghir¹¹ argued that in such case ‘to remove the genitive is not a must but it permissible in order to avoid an ambiguity’¹². This argument was applied in the case of *baraytu al-qalama al-sikkina* which is correctly expressed *baraytu al-qalama bi-al-sikkini*. The transitive verb *baraytu* is a governor, *al-qalama* a governee of *baraytu* and *al-sikkina* a governee of the removed original governor in the genitive case. However, Sibawayh¹³ argued otherwise, namely that the cause of the removal of the genitive lay in the fact that the preceding verb acted as governor. This view was shared by Abu Hayyan¹⁴.

The third example is also taken from the Qur’an and is often used to demonstrate a case of understanding of meaning in reference to an implied element (*al-athar al-ma`anawi*)¹⁵. The verse in question is interpreted as follows: ‘And nothing is hidden from your Lord so much as the weight of an atom on the earth or in the heaven nor what is less than that or what is greater’ (*wamāya`zubu `an rabbika min mithqālidharratin fī al-ardwalāfī al-samā` walāasghara min dhālika walā akbara*)¹⁶. The attributes ‘smaller’ (*asghar*) and ‘bigger’

(*akbar*) are read in the accusative case although following strict grammatical rules should be read in the genitive case. The accusative case here is justified by the adjectives ‘being conjunct by place or state’¹⁷.

The fourth example constitutes a specific case of ‘connection or disconnection due to meaning’ (*al-itṭiṣālwa-inṣiṭā’ bi-sabab al-ma’anā*), as found in the Qur’anic phrase ‘They have no certain knowledge, they follow nothing but conjecture’ (*mālahumbihi min ‘ilminillaitibā’a al-zann*)¹⁸. The disconnection of the governor (*amil*) constitutes a legitimate and authoritative reading variant. *Iṭbā’a* in the accusative case would mean speculation (*zann*) in contrast to definitive knowledge (*‘ilm*)¹⁹. On the other hand, *iṭbā’u* read in the nominative case as recited by the Banu Tamim means definite knowledge as in the reading allowing the accusative case. This is so because the word ‘except’ (*illa*) acts as a disconnector between the governor of the sentence. Originally, *iṭbā’a* disconnectedness ‘of knowledge’ (*min’ilmin*) where it was the subject in the nominative case. In this regard, Sibawayh commented that ‘all is by intention (*wa kullun wa mā nawā*)’.

The examples presented above demonstrate that grammar (*nahw*) investigates the syntactic relation between the words of a given phrase, and specifically dealt with analyzing the function of case endings in a sentence. The immediate relationship of grammar and rhetoric (*balaghah*) is thus self-explanatory. In expressing specific meanings, the latter is concerned with the means of making the utterances reflect the desired meaning with utmost exactitude through a number of syntactical devices such as conjunction and disjunction, as well as, the relation between subject and predicate²⁰. In other words, reason and grammar are not considered isolated aspects of language, and grammatical concepts are included in semantic concepts. Thus, without the expression of a desired meaning, the understanding of the meaning cannot be realized. Undoubtedly, more studies are needed to further illuminate the relationship between grammar and its meaning, especially in terms of terminology. At a practical level, many an obstacle experienced in the teaching and learning of Arabic grammar could be removed if some of the non-functional topics were substituted by rhetorical topics which focus on the relation of form and meaning.

3. Conclusion

The transmission process of explaining the meaning or the endings of vowels was expertly summarized by Sibawayh. Eloquence was not considered to lie in the respective linguistic style and choice of words but in the correct reflection of meaning. According to al-Jurjani, this kind of transmission needed to be modified by using the system of *Naẓm*.

4. References

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