

Unlocking the Ajrūmiyya

Being a Commentary in the English Language on Ibn Ajrūm's Primer, and Drawing
Extensively from the Supplement of Ḥaṭṭāb

By

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The Definition of Speech

الكَلَامُ هُوَ اللَّفْظُ الْمُرَكَّبُ الْمَفِيدُ بِالْوَضْعِ

This is the classical definition of what constitutes speech in Arabic. In its linguistic meaning, ‘speech’ is wider, including as it does other means of communication such as gestures or writing.

As for its technical usage, the grammarians have defined ‘speech’ as anything that satisfies the following four conditions:

- 1 That it be enunciated vocally (اللفظ)
- 2 That it be composed of at least two words (المركب)
- 3 That it give an intelligible meaning (المفيد)
- 4 That it be Arabic; or, that it be intentional (there is a difference of opinion, as we shall see, Allah willing.) (الوضع)

اللفظ

Something’s being ‘enunciated’ means that it is a sound composed of alphabetic letters, such as *حَامِدٌ* or *يَمْشِي* or *مُنْدٌ*. The grammarians do not consider anything that is not enunciated to be ‘speech’ for grammatical purposes.

المركب

As grammatically defined, ‘speech’ must be composed of two or more words. For example, *جَاءَ زَيْدٌ* is speech, because it is composed of two words, a verb and a noun. This includes phrases which include words that are elided, such as *دَهَبَ*, which is considered to be *مركب* even though it appears to be only one word, because the subject pronoun is concealed (*مستتر*), as is seen by its only possible English translation: ‘He went.’

المفيد

Speech must give an intelligible meaning, whereby if one were to cease speaking, the meaning would be plain to the hearer, without their needing to wait for more. For example, the phrase زَيْدٌ فِي الدَّارِ is 'speech', because it gives a complete, intelligible meaning. If one were to say simply زيد في and then stop, this would not be considered 'speech', even though it is composed of two words, because it gives no complete meaning; the listener will no doubt be left wondering exactly where, or in what, Zayd might be.

الوضع

Grammatically speaking, 'speech' must be Arabic; there is no sense attempting to analyse a work in the Persian language according to the conventions and rules of the Arabic tongue. Other scholars have stated that the meaning of the author's words بالوضع is that in order to be considered 'speech', it must be uttered by a sentient being with intention: the vocalizations of a sleeping person, and the imitation of human discourse performed by parrots, and so on, are not fit for grammatical analysis according to this view.

The Parts of Speech

وَأَقْسَامُهُ ثَلَاثَةٌ : إِسْمٌ وَفِعْلٌ وَحَرْفٌ جَاءَ لِمَعْنَى

This is the classical definition of the Arabic parts of speech, as is said to have been originally put forward by Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib عليه السلام. Modern Arabic studies has a tendency to advance many other parts of speech, such as صفات and آلات, but these classifications are generally derived from other languages, and while sometimes useful, can often result in confusion. It remains the case that all Arabic words can be placed in one of the following three categories:

- 1 The Noun (الاسم)
- 2 The Verb (الفعل)
- 3 The Particle (الحرف)

الاسم

A noun is a word that embodies a meaning in and of itself, and is not contextualised by time. The word أسد embodies a specific meaning, namely ‘a lion’, so that if it is heard, the mind will conjure up the appropriate image according to its understanding and experience. Time has no bearing on the word, that is, there is no indication as to whether the reference is to the present, the past, or the future.

Nouns (أسماء) are of three kinds:¹

- (i) مُظْهِرٌ: That which indicates its meaning without need for context, such as زيد.

¹ The English grammatical terms *substantive*, *demonstrative* etc have intentionally been avoided here, as they are not perfect equivalents for the Arabic terms, and there is some overlap. Bearing in mind the many difficulties that arose with the attempts by English grammarians to apply Latin rules and precepts to English, a language which is patently neither Latin nor a derivative of it, it would seem wise to avoid wherever possible the temptation to apply too much English grammatical terminology to the Arabic language. In the case of such clear-cut terms as *noun* for اسم, *verb* for فعل and so on, this danger may be hoped to be averted.

- (ii) مُضْمَرٌ: That which indicates its meaning only in the context of first, second or third person, such as أنا, هو, وأنتم, and so on.
- (iii) مُبْهَمٌ: That which is ambiguous in meaning, such as هذا, هذه, and so on.

الفعل

A verb is a word that embodies a meaning in and of itself, and is contextualised by time, whether past, present, or future. The word قَرَأَ embodies a specific meaning in itself, namely that of reading, and it is contextualised by time, in this case the past.

Verbs are also of three kinds:²

- (i) الماضي: That which indicates an event or action that took place in the past, and was completed before the time of speaking, such as قَعَدَ, سَمِعَ, فَعَلَ
- (ii) المضارع: That which indicates an event or action that takes place at the time of speaking, or which will take place after it, such as يَقْعُدُ, يَسْمَعُ, يَفْعَلُ
- (iii) الأمر: That which will take place after the time of speaking, such as اسْمَعْ, افْعَلْ, and اقْعُدْ

الحرف

Particles are words whose meaning does not become apparent until they are coupled with another part of speech. The particle مِنْ may be described vaguely as having the meaning 'from', suggesting the concept of origin or beginning, yet its shades of meaning defy plain definition or translation; its meaning is known only through context. Consideration of the following sentences, and the role of مِنْ in them, suffices to illustrate this:

أنا من دمشق

أنا أطول منه

² It may be noted that this does not correspond with the English convention of grouping verbs into past, present, future and imperative. The future tense is absent in Arabic, being as it is included with the present. It may therefore be appropriate to group Arabic verbs according to the same classification often afforded by English speakers to Japanese verbs: Past (الماضي), non-past (المضارع), and imperative (الأمر).

خرجت من المنزل
ما من إله غير الله

Particles are also of three kinds:

- (i) Those which can be applied to nouns only, such as **بِ**, **مِنْ**, **عَلَى**, etc.
- (ii) Those which can be applied only to verbs, such as **لَمَّا**, **لَمَّا**, **لَمَّا**, etc.
- (iii) Those which can be applied to both nouns and verbs, such as **هَلْ**, **وَ**, **فَ**, etc.

The Hallmarks of the Noun

الاسْمُ يُعْرَفُ بِالْحَفْظِ وَالتَّنْوِينِ وَدُخُولِ الْأَلْفِ وَاللَّامِ وَحُرُوفِ الْحَفْظِ وَهِيَ : مِنْ وَإِلَى وَعَنْ وَعَلَى وَفِي وَرُبَّ
وَالْبَاءِ وَالْكَافِ وَاللَّامِ ؛ وَحُرُوفِ الْقَسَمِ وَهِيَ الْوَاوُ وَالْبَاءُ وَالتَّاءُ

Nouns are distinguished from verbs and particles by several hallmarks. The author mentions four of these:³

- 1 The genitive case (الحفظ)
- 2 Tanwin (التنوين)
- 3 The definite article (دخول الألف واللام)
- 4 Genitive particles (حروف الحفظ)

الحفظ

The genitive case is particular to nouns.⁴ Nouns are said to be in the genitive case when their case ending is *kasra* or any of its substitutes. For example, in the sentence مَرَرْتُ بِزَيْدٍ, the word زيد is in the genitive case.

Nouns are made genitive either by other nouns or by particles, not by verbs (according to the mainstream position). The different ways this occurs will be seen in due course, Allah willing.

التنوين

³ These are not the only hallmarks of a noun. Another important one is الإسناد إليه , that is, the ability to be the subject of a sentence, whether verbal or nominal.

⁴ The term الحفظ was the term used by the Kufa school of grammarians. In Basra, the term الجر was preferred; the latter term is now the more frequently used.

Tanwin⁵ is also particular to nouns.⁶ It means the addition of the letter *nūn* at the end of a word, represented orthographically by a doubling of the final vowel. There are four kinds of tanwin:⁷

- (i) تنوين التمكن: This is added to the end of declinable nouns, reflecting their nature as true nouns, resembling neither verbs in their being partially declinable, or particles in their being indeclinable. This includes most indefinite singular nouns, such as رَجُلٌ and سَعِيدٌ, as well as many indefinite plurals, such as كُتُبٌ and نِسَاءٌ.
- (ii) تنوين التنكير: This is added to the end of indeclinable proper names in order to distinguish between a well-known individual and someone else who shares the same name. For example, the name of the famous grammarian Sībawayhi is indeclinable, and considered definite. If we want to make this name indefinite in order to mention someone else with this name (i.e. *a* Sībawayhi, not *the* Sībawayhi), we add tanwin, so it becomes سيبويه with tanwin.
- (iii) تنوين العوض: This is added to the particle إذ in such phrases as حِينَئِذٍ and يَوْمَئِذٍ in order to replace a sentence defining the period of time meant. It is equivalent to the ‘that’ in the phrase ‘On that day’, where the ‘that’ refers to some description of the day in question that distinguishes it from all other days. When Allah says: ﴿وَأَنْتُمْ حِينَئِذٍ وَتَنْظُرُونَ﴾,⁸ the tanwin in حِينَئِذٍ refers to everything that has come before, describing the moment when the soul leaves the body. The tanwin serves to avoid repeating a whole phrase that has just been mentioned, or that is understood by context.
- (iv) تنوين المقابلة: this is added to feminine sound plurals as the equivalent of the *nūn* that is added to the end of masculine sound plurals. That is,

⁵ ‘Nunation’ seems a wholly unnecessary Anglicisation.

⁶ On the occasions in the Qur’an when verbs end in tanwin (for example 96:15), this is not tanwin but rather the *nūn* of emphasis, which historically was occasionally written with a doubled vowel, although its lexical purpose differs entirely from that of tanwin.

⁷ These are not the only kinds of tanwin: al-Ahdal mentions a total of ten in his commentary on Ḥaṭṭāb’s *Mutammima al-Ajurūmiyya*; but most scholars suffice themselves with mention of these four, as the others are subject to scholarly difference as to their applicability.

⁸ 56:84

the tanwin on the word **مسلمات** is equivalent to the *nūn* on the word **مسلمون**.

دخول الألف واللام

The addition of the definite article **ال** is also particular to nouns, e.g. **الرجل**, **الباب**, **القارئ**, and so on.

حروف الخفض

Only nouns are preceded by genitive particles, such as **زيد في الدار**, where the word **الدار** is preceded by the genitive particle **في**.

The genitive particles are **من**, **إلى**, **عَنْ**, **عَلَى**, **فِي**, **رُبَّ**, **كَيْ**, **بِ**, **لِ**, and **لِ**. Their meanings are well-known, and vary according to their context.

A further three particles are used as means of declaring oaths. These are **وَ**, **بِ** and **تَ**.

وَ is only used before substantive nouns, e.g. **وَالَّذِي نَفْسِي بِيَدِهِ**, **وَاللَّهِ**. It cannot be used with pronouns. It is not preceded by a verb, so we cannot say **أُقْسِمُ وَاللَّهِ**.

بِ can be used with both substantives and pronouns, e.g. **بِاللَّهِ** or **بِهِ**. It can be preceded by a verb, e.g. **أُقْسِمُ بِاللَّهِ الْعَظِيمِ**, or **أُقْسِمُ بِهِ**.

تَ is only used with the name **الله**, e.g. **تَاللَّهِ لَكُمْ ظُهُورٌ**. It is not preceded by a verb.

The Hallmarks of the Verb

وَالْفِعْلُ يُعْرَفُ بِقَدْ وَالسَّيِّنِ وَسَوْفَ وَبِتَاءِ التَّأْنِيثِ السَّاكِنَةِ

Verbs are distinguished from nouns and particles by several hallmarks. The author mentions four of these:

- 1 قَدْ
- 2 السَّيِّنِ
- 3 سَوْفَ
- 4 تاء التأنيث الساكنة

قَدْ

This particle comes before both ماضي and مضارع verbs. When it precedes the ماضي, it serves either to signify the close proximity of an event, as in قد قامت الصلاة, or else to give emphasis to an event that has already occurred, as in نعلم إنك قد صدقتنا. When it precedes the مضارع, it signifies either emphasis, as in قد يعلم الله, or rarity, as in قد يصدق الكذوب.⁹

السَّيِّنِ وَسَوْفَ

These two particles give a future sense to a مضارع verb when they precede it. It is said that the use of سوف implies that the event will happen later than is implied by the use of السَّيِّنِ; other scholars say that there is no difference between the two particles.

تاء التأنيث الساكنة

⁹ It is said that when Allah or His Messenger ﷺ use قَدْ, it always signifies emphasis.

An vowelless letter *ta*' is added to the end of a ماضي verb to show that the subject is feminine, and is unique to verbs. For example: ضَرَبَتْ, ذَهَبَتْ, سَمِعَتْ, etc.

The Hallmarks of the Particle

وَالْحَرْفُ مَا لَا يَصْلُحُ مَعَهُ دَلِيلُ الْأِسْمِ وَلَا دَلِيلُ الْفِعْلِ

Particles are distinguished from nouns and verbs by the fact that they do not accept any of their respective hallmarks. They cannot be prefixed by ال; they cannot be suffixed by tanwin; they cannot be preceded by genitive particles; they cannot be preceded by سَ or سَوْفَ or قَدْ; they do not accept the suffix تْ; they have no case, whether genitive or otherwise.

I'rāb

الإعرابُ هو تَغْيِيرُ أَوْاخِرِ الْكَلِمِ لِاخْتِلَافِ الْعَوَامِلِ الدَّاحِلَةِ عَلَيْهَا لَفْظًا أَوْ تَقْدِيرًا

I'rāb¹⁰ means the process by which the ends of words are changed because of their grammatical function; this change may either be explicit (لفظاً), or implicit (تقديرًا)—which is to say, the change may be apparent on the end of the word, or it may be something we cannot see because of the particular form of the word, but must understand to be there nonetheless.

(NB By هو تَغْيِيرُ أَوْاخِرِ الْكَلِمِ, we must not understand that the word itself actually changes; what changes is the vowel or letter at the end of the word, which does not affect the radicals themselves but is added to them, as we shall see. The word itself never changes.)

Why do these changes occur? Because of the grammatical function of the word (العوامل الدَّاحِلَة) (عَلَيْهَا)—literally, this means ‘the agents that influence them’. The grammatical case of most words can be seen clearly by how they are pronounced (or written); these cases are assigned to the words based on what their **purpose** in the sentence is.

For example, consider the sentence:

جاءَ سَعِيدٌ

In this sentence, سَعِيدٌ is مرفوع (that is, in the case of رفع) because its grammatical function is that of subject or فاعل. What is the ‘agent’ or عامل that makes it a subject? The verb جاء.

Now if we say:

رَأَيْتُ سَعِيدًا

¹⁰ In ordinary speech, the verb يُعَرِّبُ/أَعْرَبُ means ‘to make plain, to announce clearly, to express openly’; in its technical sense, it may be translated as ‘inflection’.

The word سعيد now has a different ending: a *fatḥa* instead of a *ḍamma*. This is because it is now in the case of نصب, because it is the object of the verb رأيت, which is the عامل here.

And again, if we say:

مَرَرْتُ بِسَعِيدٍ

The word سعيد now has a different ending: a *kasra*. This is because it is prefixed by a حرف جر, which is the عامل here.

Notice that in all three cases, the word سعيد remains the same: its final letter is still د. What has changed is the vowel affixed to its end. This is what our author means by تَغْيِيرُ أَوْ أَحْرِ الْكَلِمِ. And this change at the end of the word is what our author calls الإعراب.

As we have seen, our author divides إعراب into two kinds when he says لفظاً أو تقديراً. This means there are two forms of إعراب: لفظي, and تقديري.

1 – الإعراب اللفظي means ‘explicit inflection’ or ‘pronounced inflection’; it describes those situations wherein the grammatical case of the word is clearly pronounced at its end, such as with the letter د in the word سعيد, as we saw above. This is the normal situation for most Arabic words.

2 – الإعراب التقديري means ‘implicit inflection’ or ‘imagined inflection’; it describes those situations where there is something to prevent the grammatical case of the word from been clearly shown at its end. There are three things which can cause this: التَّعَذُّرُ, الاستتقال, and المناسبة.

(a) التعذر¹¹ means that the last letter of the word is an *alif maqṣūra* preceded by a *fatḥa*, (this kind of word is called مقصور), such as الهُدَى and الفَتَى. There is no way to put a vowel onto the end of this word, since the letter *alif* cannot take a vowel. Thus we have no choice but to say:

جاءَ الفَتَى
رَأَيْتُ الفَتَى

¹¹ Literally the word mean ‘impossibility’.

مَرَرْتُ بِالْفَتَى

In each case, the ending of the word الفتى does not change; we must simply understand (or ‘imagine’) that the vowel showing the grammatical case is there.¹² The same is the case for مضارع verbs which end in *alif*, such as يَرَى and يَنْهَى:

إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ

(b) الاستثقال means¹³ that the last letter of the word is a *yā* preceded by a *kasra* (this kind of word is called منقوص), such as القاضي or الوالي. To put a *kasra* or a *ḍamma* on to the end of such a word would be possible, but the Arabs do not do it because it would be difficult and unnatural to pronounce. Thus we must say:

جاءَ القاضي
مَرَرْتُ بِالْقَاضِي

The Arabs, however, do put a *fatḥa* on the end of such words, because this is more natural to pronounce; thus we may say:

رَأَيْتُ الْقَاضِيَّ

مضارع verbs which end in *wāw* or *yā* also belong in this category.

(c) المناسبة means¹⁴ that a noun is suffixed by first person possessive *yā* (which means ‘my’), as in كتابي ‘my book’. Because the possessive is affixed directly to the end of the noun, it is not possible to put the vowel of إعراب there, as well.¹⁵ Thus we say:

¹² We can still tell the grammatical case of each الفتى in our examples through the context, but sometimes it can be more difficult to do this. Consider:

جاء موسى الفتى.

Did the boy come to Mūsā, or did Mūsā come to the boy?

¹³ Literally it means ‘uncomfortable difficulty’.

¹⁴ Literally it means ‘coincidence’.

أُحِبُّ أُمَّيْ.

The mother is the object of the love, but we must deduce this from the context, since there is nowhere to put the *fatḥa* which would otherwise show the word أم to be منصوب.

¹⁵ Many beginning students make the mistake of putting the vowel on the end of the *yā*, as in:

جاءَ أَسْتَاذِيْ.

This must be avoided; whatever the merits of its logic, it is not Arabic.

The Parts of Inflection

وَأَقْسَامُهُ أَرْبَعَةٌ: رَفْعٌ وَنَصْبٌ وَخَفْضٌ وَجَزْمٌ. فَلِلْأَسْمَاءِ مِنْ ذَلِكَ الرَّفْعُ وَالنَّصْبُ وَالخَفْضُ، وَلَا جَزْمَ فِيهَا، وَلِلْأَفْعَالِ مِنْ ذَلِكَ الرَّفْعُ وَالنَّصْبُ وَالجَزْمُ، وَلَا خَفْضَ فِيهَا

There are a total of four parts of inflection in Arabic, concerning both nouns and vowels.

They are:

- 1 الرفع
- 2 النصب
- 3 الخفض or الجر
- 4 الجزم

الرفع

رفع means 'to raise' or 'to be raised'; technically speaking it means an inflection represented by a *ḍamma*, a *wāw*, an *alif* or a *nūn*.¹⁶ Both nouns and verbs can be مرفوع (that is, in a state of رفع).

النصب

نصب means 'to set up straight' or 'to be set up straight'; technically speaking it means an inflection represented by a *fatḥa*, an *alif*, a *kasra*, a *yā*, and the omission of a *nūn*.¹⁷ Both nouns and verbs can be منصوب.

الخفض

خفض means 'to be low'; technically speaking, it means an inflection represented by a *kasra*, a *yā* or a *fatḥā*.¹⁸ Only nouns can be مخفوض.

¹⁶ These are often termed '*ḍamma* and its deputies'.

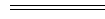
¹⁷ '*Fatḥa* and its deputies.'

الجزم

جزم means ‘to cut’; technically speaking, it means an inflection represented by a *sukūn*, or by omission of a letter.¹⁹ Only مضارع verbs can be مجزوم.

Thus there are three kinds of inflections:

- (1) One common to nouns and verbs (نصب and رفع)
- (2) One peculiar to nouns (خفض)
- (3) One peculiar to verbs (جزم)



البناء A note on

Although our author explains what الإعراب is, he does not touch on البناء. While الإعراب applies to those words whose endings change depending on their grammatical function, البناء describes those words whose endings never change, regardless of their grammatical function. بناء literally means ‘to build’, and these words are ‘built’ in one way only. البناء occurs in nouns, verbs and particles.

Nouns

Some nouns are ‘built on’²⁰ *sukūn* (that is, they always end with *sukūn*), such as مَنْ and كَمْ. Others are built on *fatha*, such as كَيْفَ and أَيْنَ. Others are built on *damma*, such as حَيْثُ and هُوَ لَأَ. Finally, others are built on *kasra*, such as أَمْسِ and مُنذُ.

Verbs

¹⁸ ‘*Kasra* and its deputies.’

¹⁹ ‘*Sukūn* and its deputy.’

²⁰ مبني على

All ماضي verbs are ‘built on’ *fathā*, unless they are suffixed by the plural *wāw*, such as ضربوا or any vowelled subject pronoun, such as ضَرَبْتُ or ضَرَبْنَا.

All particles are ‘built’; their ends never change for any reason pertaining to inflection.²¹

²¹ Though they may change for other reasons, pertaining mostly to pronunciation.