

Refuting the Alleged Transmission of Concepts of Greek Thinking to Arabic Grammar

Menyangkal Konsep Tatabahasa Arab dipengaruhi Pemikiran Greek

Solehah Haji Yaacob *

Abstract

The study aims to provide a critical examination of the influence of concepts from Ancient Greek thinking on Arabic grammar. In order to determine whether and to what degree Arabic Grammar was influenced by ancient Greek, the researcher adopts a theoretical and analytical approach based on linguistic studies conducted by authors like J. Weiss, H. Fleisch, M.G. Carter and G. Troupeau. The study seeks to debunk or refute previous studies on the issue of alleged transmission of Greek grammatical concepts into Arabic grammar. In order to reach a balanced and objective judgment on this issue, the linguistic corpus and the historical background of transmission shall be analyzed.

Key words: Arabic Grammar, Refutation, Greek Thinking, Transmission, Judgement

Abstrak

Tajuk ini membincangkan secara kritikal tentang pengaruh pemikiran Greek terhadap Tatabahasa Arab. Di dalam membicarakan isu tersebut, penulis cuba membincangkan beberapa teori yang telah di kemukakan oleh beberapa orang penulis Orientalist seperti J. Weiss, H. Fleisch, M.G. Carter dan G. Troupeau. Sehubungan dengan itu kajian ini akan memastikan samada terdapat pengaruh Greek di dalam Tatabahasa Arab atau tidak memerlukan kepada analisis yang teliti. Oleh itu untuk menghasilkan suatu keputusan yang tidak dipengaruhi oleh unsur emosi maka kajian terhadap data-data bahasa dan tatabahasanya serta latarbelakang sejarah dan tamaddun bahasa tersebut perlu diteliti dan diambil kira.

Kata kunci: Penolakan, Perubahan, Konsep, Undang-undang Islam

Introduction

Arabic was a comprehensively developed language during the time of the revelation of the Qur'an. But its grammatical rules were not yet fully defined. Arabic grammar, undoubtedly, got well-defined later by going through various historical stages. It is claimed by certain quarters that Arabic received impacts from Greek thoughts and philosophy. The present paper is an attempt to look objectively into whether Greek thinking really influenced Arabic grammar and language, to one or the other extent.

* Assistant. Prof. Department of Arabic Language and Literature. Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences- International Islamic University Malaysia

The First Encounter with Ancient Greek Thinking

The first contact of Greek with Arabic grammar was probably made in Alexandria (Egypt) and Antioch (Syria) for both cities were renowned Hellenistic centers of education and learning.¹ Not all history scholars however, agree on this observation, which makes the question of influence of ancient Greek over Arabic language and thought debatable. In his book² *Ḍuḥā al-Islām*, the modern historian Ahmad Amīn argues that the well-known linguist and translator Ḥunayn Ibn Ishāq (873 C.E.)³ travelled to Rome to learn Greek to return later to Basrah to learn from Khalīl.⁴ Muṣṭafā Nazīf strongly supports this note in his statement that Ḥunayn visited Khalīl to study Arabic.⁵ Modern historians however, assert that during the ninth century C.E., Arabic scholarship was influenced by Greek science and thought. Bustānī, for example, was known for his competence in Greek while Khalīl was influenced by Aristotelian ideas, especially the concept of cause and effect.⁶ Muṣṭafā Ṣādiq Rāfi‘ī suggests that Arabic phonetic signs such as the *ḥarakāt* did not originate from Arabia but from Syria governed then by the Byzantines who introduced signs of small *ḥarakāt* as reading aids for the text of the Bible.⁷

When we examine the historical stages through which Greek became a *lingua franca*, we find that the Aramaic dialect of Syria was developing into an independent language in its own right.⁸ Reports suggest that the Persians built the school of Jundishapur near Kūfa which soon became a ‘refugee school’ for those leaving (though not necessarily expelled) other institutions like Alexandria and Antioch because of their “heretical opinions”.⁹ Jundishapur disseminated the

¹C.H.M. Versteegh, *Greek Elements in Arabic Linguistic Thinking* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1977), p.1-2.

²Amīn Ahmād, *Ḍuḥā al-Islām*, (Cairo: Lajnat al-Ta’līf wa al-Tarjamah, 1978), vol.1: p.313.

³J. Ruska, ‘*Ḥunayn Ibn Ishāq*’, (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr, Dā’irat al-Ma’ārif al-Islāmiyyah, 1980), vol. 8: p. 134.

⁴Amīn Ahmad, vol. I: p.313.

⁵Ibid, vol.1: p.313.

⁶Mahdī al-Makḥzūmī, *al-Khalīl Aḥmad al-Farāhidī, ‘A‘māluḥū wa manḥajūhu*, (Beirut: Dār al-Rā’id al-‘Arabī. 1986), p. 68.

⁷K. Brockelmann, *Tārīkh al-‘Adāb al-‘Arabī*, Trans. Abdul Ḥalīm al-Najjār, (Cairo: Dar al-Ma’ārif, 1968). vol.I: p.105.

⁸C.H.M. Versteegh, *Greek Elements in Arabic Linguistic Thinking*, p.1-2.

⁹Ibid, p.2.

ideas of Greek philosophy in Mesopotamia, and major Greek texts were directly translated into Syrian and Persian. This intellectual migration soon made Jundishapur a major centre in the dissemination of Greek culture and learning in the East.

Due to this influence however, theological speculation was introduced into Muslim scholarship with the *Mu'tazilite* debate on the Qur'an, the problem of free will and the doctrine of the attributes of Allah.¹⁰ It was also believed that Hellenistic universities not only taught Greek philosophy but Greek language as well, the most important medium of instruction and a compulsory subject for all students of philosophy.¹¹ Greek language and grammar exercised a profound influence upon the Syriac dialect in the form of many loan words, the system vowel-signs and even the literary style.¹² Obviously, this process became important after the Arab invasion of Greater Syria (*bilād al-shām*) after which Syriac translations of Greek works were rendered into Arabic¹³. New ideas and concepts passed through these translations into the language of administration including tax registers in Damascus.¹⁴ Moreover, in the late 10th century, Hamzah al-Iṣfahānī (d.961 C.E.) had access to Greek historical material and was able to incorporate it directly to the court of Iṣfahān.¹⁵ The medieval linguist and historian A. Merx,¹⁶ author of *Historia Artis Grammaticae Apud Syros* sought to relate the dependence of Arabic grammar to the logic of the appearance of declension, the division of words into three parts of speech, the distinction of three tenses and the notions of local or temporal adverb (*ẓarf*) and condition (*ḥāl*).¹⁷ Merx also argued that the influence of Greek linguistics on Arabic occurred after the introduction of Greek logic which was discussed later by the *Mu'tazilites*.¹⁸

The above examples suggest that Greek thinking influenced Arabic language used in the development of the judicial process during the *Mu'tazilites*, especially in the field of logic. However, early

¹⁰ Ibid, p.2

¹¹ Ibid, p.3

¹² Ibid, p.3

¹³ Ibid, p.15

¹⁴ Ibid, p.17

¹⁵ Ibid, p.18

¹⁶ G. Troupeau, V.7: p.913.

¹⁷ C.H.M. Versteegh, p.8.

¹⁸ Ibid, p.16

historians argue that the influence of Greek on Arabic had begun much earlier, namely with the establishment of Hellenistic institutions which translated Greek philosophy and literature into vernaculars such as Syriac. Thus, Syriac acted as the intermediary between Greek and Arabic. The earliest leading translators at that time like Ḥunayn Ibn Ishāq and Yaḥya Ibn Bīṭrīq were native speakers of Syriac. Damascus had become a center of Greek language under the Byzantines during the third, fourth and fifth century¹⁹ in which the language was officially used at court and in administration.

The Formal Development of Greek Grammar

Present knowledge of pre-Socratic thought and early rhetoricians is very fragmentary and solely derived from secondary sources. Since the end of the sixth century B.C.E. philosophers in Ionia and elsewhere studied astronomy, physics, mathematics, ethics, metaphysics and linguistics.²⁰ The major contributions of Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) – probably the most remarkable intellectual in antiquity – covered almost all fields of human knowledge.²¹ The Stoic school founded by Zeno (c. 300 B.C.E.) gave rise to linguistic studies, and the function of language in the Stoic system can be summarized in the sequence of the impression, the mind making use of speech and the experience produced by the impression in words.²² The Stoics formalized the dichotomy between form and meaning, distinguishing in language ‘the signifier’ and the ‘signified’. They promulgated a theory of syntax or sentence structure based on the analysis of different types of predicates available in the Greek verbal system e.g. transitive and intransitive.²³

Zeno was a bilingual speaker whose native language was a Semitic language. Up to this period, linguistics developed according to philosophical concepts with a focus on logic. We are aware that Aristotle summed up his concept of language at the beginning of his *De Interpretatione* in which he interpreted speech as a representation of the experiences of the mind and writing the representation of speech.²⁴ Both the Aristotelian and Stoic concepts of language however, differed. The

¹⁹ William Wright, ‘*Syriac Literature*’ in *The New Encyclopaedia of Britannica*, (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., V. II, 1998), p. 470.

²⁰ R. H. Robin, *A Short History of Linguistics*, (New York: Longman, 1990), p.16.

²¹ *Ibid*, p.16

²² *Ibid*, p.18

²³ *Ibid*, p.18

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.22

Stoic concept was based on anomaly becoming the dominant theme in language while Aristotle favored analogy concentrating on linguistic questions for the purposes of literary criticism and objective standards of correctness. Both divisions were exaggerated by the rivalry of Alexandria and Pergamum under Macedonian rule, whereby Alexandria was dominated by the analogists and Pergamum by the anomalists.²⁵

Greek grammatical tradition was formulated by authors beginning with Dionysios Thrax (ca. 170 – ca. 90 B.C.E.) whose *Tekhne Grammatike* (Art of Grammar) was translated at an early date into Syriac²⁶. This version has been challenged recently, and the prevailing opinion is that the first systematic grammars were written after the death of Dionysios in 90 B.C.E. and that the *Tekhne Grammatike* actually belonged to a later epoch²⁷. However, there is evidence of Greek grammars from the first century C.E. onwards in the form of fragments of grammars preserved on papyrus rolls excavated in Egypt²⁸, and a few

²⁵Ibid, p.23

²⁶According to the Nestorian tradition by Joseph of Ahwaz (d. before 580 C.E). See Baumstark, 1968, p.116-7.

²⁷Even during the middle Ages, many Byzantine scholars doubted the authenticity of the *Tekhne Grammatike*. The question was then re-opened in modern times by the Italian scholar Vincenzo Di Benedetto who published an extensive study on the subject in 1957-8. Today, five chapters are considered genuine where Dionysios outlines the discipline of grammatical study, then discusses reading aloud, accents, punctuation and the genre of rhapsody. The rest of the work is disputed. The remaining chapters are like a self-contained grammar type common in both Greece and Rome in late Antiquity, starting with chapters on the smaller linguistics units – the *gramma* (letter/speech – sound), syllable and word – and then on each word class: noun, verb (and conjugation), participle, article, pronoun, preposition, adverb, conjunction. The arguments are of two kinds, internal (based on evidence from the text of the grammar itself) and external: 1) The program sets out in the opening paragraph is not followed after chapter 5; 2) The first five chapters have almost no connection with the rest of the work suggesting that they were added later as a kind of introduction to an existing self-contained grammar; 3) There are significant discrepancies between the doctrine ascribed to Dionysios Thrax by early sources and that of the *Tekhne Grammatike*; 4) The only passages quoted from the *Tekhne Grammatike* by writers earlier than the fourth century come from the five chapters; 5) The earliest copies of the *Tekhne Grammatike* date from the fifth century; 6) The extant Greek grammars dating from the first to fourth centuries are not based upon the *Tekhne Grammatike*, but show the kind of fluctuation and experimentation that was characteristic of grammar in the better-documented Roman world before it was given definitive form in the mid-fourth century by Donatus. See Vivien Law, *The History of Linguistics in Europe From Plato to 1600*, (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.56.

²⁸ Part of the Hellenistic cultural sphere.

complete treatises. One of those earliest grammatical fragments so far discovered dates from the first century. The full text goes as follows:

A meaning utterance (logos) is a prose collocation of word forms (lexis) revealing a complete thought. Its parts are nine: proper noun, common noun, participle, pronoun, article, verb, preposition, adverb, conjunction. The proper noun is a word form which signifies the individual nature of an object or concept, without tense but with cases, such as 'Homer', 'Paris'. The common noun is a word form which applies to many objects, without person or tense, such as 'poet', 'person'. The participle is a word form which takes articles and cases, and shows distinctions of tense, such as 'saying', 'known'. Hence it is called 'participle', in that its participle, in that it participates in aspects of both noun and verb. The pronoun is a word form used demonstratively instead of the noun, assigning order to the person, such as 'I', 'he'. The article is a word form with case which is placed before or after another word inflected for case and shows distinctions of gender, as in²⁹ ho, he, to 'the'³⁰. The verb is a word form showing activity or receiving action with tense and person, such as 'I write', 'it is being written'³¹. The preposition is an uninflected word form which stands before the word classes in composition. These are the prepositions: ana 'up to', kata 'down to', dia 'through', meta 'after', para 'beside', anti 'against', amphi 'around', huper 'over', apo 'from', peri 'about', en 'in', eis 'into', pro 'before', pros 'toward'. The adverb is an uninflected word form which is placed before or after the verb and not compounded with it, signifying quantity, quality, time, place, negation, agreement, prohibition, exhortation, interrogation, exclamation, comparison or doubt. Indicating quantity: 'frequently', 'rarely'. Quality: 'well', 'nicely'. Time: 'now'. Prohibition: me³². Exhortation: 'what!', 'encore!'. Interrogation: 'where?'. Exclamation: 'if only'³³. Comparison: 'like'. Doubt: 'pretty much', 'perhaps'. The conjunction is a word form linking the parts of discourse. It is used with copulative, disjunctive, causal, rational, interrogative, hypothetical, or expletive force. The following conjunctions are copulative: 'but', 'on the one hand', 'both... and', 'and', '...as also', 'and also'...Disjunctive³⁴.

The work is concise and centers on a series of definitions of the parts of speech. The word classes are discussed one by one and are similar to the Aristotelian idea of category in which "uncombined utterances which denote uncombined ideas necessarily denote one of ten things either substance or quantity or quality or relation or where or

²⁹ In nominative case

³⁰ cf. German der, die, das.

³¹ These are single-word forms in Greek: lego, graphetai.

³² The negative particle used in negative commands.

³³ cf. Spanish ojala.

³⁴ Vivien Law, *The History of Linguistics in Europe From Plato to 1600*, p.56, the statement taken from P.Yale, (1979), p. 49-52.

when or position or to have or doing or being acted upon”³⁵. There is also the Stoic³⁶ concern made for the distinction between *logos* and *lexis* in the opening of the definition when each word classes is described as a *lexis* focusing on its formal properties which was the major concern of earlier poets and orators. The definitions included both the semantic and formal elements which constituted the starting point in the progress of understanding Aristotle’s categories in the part of speech.

Opponents of Greek Influence on Arabic Grammar

Firstly, we must direct our attention to the origin of Arabic linguistics in order to show which elements in this phase resulted from a direct contact between Arab grammarians and Hellenistic culture in many of the conquered territories. From the ninth to the eleventh century C.E., a Greek-Arabic translation movement took place in the Muslim world. According to Dimitri Gutas³⁷ almost all scientific and philosophical secular Greek works were available by the end of the tenth century C.E. Those translations covered diverse topics such as astrology, alchemy, physics, mathematics, medicine and philosophy. Gutas explored the social, political and ideological factors operative in the early Abbasid society which occasioned and sustained the translation movement. He also retraced the legacy of the translation movement in Muslim lands and abroad suggesting a direct link with the ninth-century classical revival in Byzantium. Gutas provided a stimulating, erudite and well-documented analysis of this key movement in the transmission of ancient Greek culture to the Arab World.

In order to analyze the influence of Greek language on Arabic grammar, we need to focus however, on the influence of the concept and system of the grammar itself instead of simply acknowledging its

³⁵Butterworth, Charles E., *Averroes’ Middle Commentaries on Aristotle’s Categories and De Interpretatione*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), p.30.

³⁶Following Aristotle, numerous thinkers took up the task of working through the wealth of ideas inherited from Athens. Works of two kinds lay before them: systematizations and elaborations of the originally often concisely expressed and sketchily developed ideas. Amongst the people who participated in this activity were the members of the most famous philosophical school in the ancient world, founded by Zeno of Citium in the third century BC, and based as much in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) as in Greece. The Stoics grew in numbers and reputation, even counting a Roman emperor, Marcus Aurelius (121-180 C.E.), amongst their later adherents. See Vivien Law, (2003), p.38.

³⁷Dimitri, Gutas, *Greek Thought Arabic Culture –The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad an Early `Abbasid Society*, (London: Routledge, 1998), p. i.

existence on a general level. Even though Merx (*Historia artis grammaticae apud syros*) attempted to prove the dependence of Arabic grammar on Greek logic, he mainly used terminology resemblance. His most important arguments are: the notion of declension (*'ir'āb*); the division of words into three parts of speech; the distinction of two genders; the distinction of three tenses; local and temporal adverbs (*zarf*); and condition (*ḥāl*). It is questionable whether his arguments prove the influence of Greek grammar and not that of Greek logic. Greek grammar was rather based on logic and a semantic approach, as recorded in Aristotle's 'Category'. To relate the above idea to the text of the *Tekhne Grammatike* (Art of grammar) of Dionysios Thrax remains debateable since the authenticity of the manuscript itself is doubtful.³⁸

In order to understand how Arabic grammar had evolved completely independent of Greek rather than being subject to its influence, we should address the research done by those opposing the notion of Greek influence. The linguist and philosopher J. Weiss stressed the high level of consistency and regularity of Arabic grammar while vigorously opposed any idea of Greek or Latin influence. Weiss argues as follows:³⁹

If the case is, that just like grammar and philosophy is a scientific system, the attempt to prove any influence on the basis of occasional similarities seems to be little successful in as far as the many differences paralyze the conclusiveness of congruence substantially. We should not overlook that a system represents an entity, and that it is psychologically totally unlikely that a single term out of it should have wandered like an erratic block without taking traces of its next proximity with it.⁴⁰

Weiss argues that it is methodologically wrong to judge the influence of Greek and Latin on Arabic grammar based on one isolated term for every term is a part of complicated system, without which it is meaningless (C.H. Versteegh, 1977:12). Weiss followed comprehensive ideas and gave a balanced judgment. We can assume however that the signs of Arabic phonetic comprising u-vowel (*ḍammah*), a-vowel (*fathah*) and i-vowel (*kasrah*) have its origins in older languages such as Syrian, Hebrew, Persian and Sanskrit. The micro system of Arabic grammar must have been developed by the Arabs themselves, especially

³⁸Discussed earlier in this paper.

³⁹Weiss, *Die arabische Nationalgrammatik und die Lateiner*, ZDMG, (1910, p.389-90).

⁴⁰ Trans. by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Anke Bouzenita, Dept of Fiqh , Kuliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences, International Islamic university Malaysia.

in confirmation of the invisible governor (*al-‘āmil al-ma‘nawī*) in subject, predicate and present tense. The Basrah School of linguists believes that the nominative of the topic as an abstract principle (*‘ibtidā’*) is the *‘āmil ma‘nawī* which makes the subject of the sentence *rafa’*. We believe such a feature is not part of many other languages because this *rafa’* indicates that it is free from any intruder such as accusative (*nāṣib*) or genitive (*jārr*). Otherwise, accusative (*nāṣib*) and genitive (*jārr*) are called visible governor (*al-‘āmil al-laḥẓī*) which could change the case form or declension. It is to be kept in mind that in Arabic the invisible governor or element zero in ideas of governor (*al-‘āmil*) implemented in the topic of *al-ishtighāl* very clearly but we cannot find exactly where the governor of the sentence is. In contrast, the governee appears very clearly. For example in *Zaydān ḍarabtuhū* (Zayd, I beat), *Zaydān* becomes the governee whereas the governor of the sentence is *ḍarabtuhū* which is the precedent of the sentence, and disappears according to the Basran School. Otherwise, according to the Kufan School, another group of Arab grammarians, the governor of the sentence is *ḍarabtu* after *Zaydān* because *ḍaraba* comes from *fi’l muta‘addī* (transitive verb). This shows that in Arabic grammar of the Basran School there exists an invisible governor in front⁴¹.

It seems there exist differences between the national varieties of Arabic and the one that is based on the Qur’anic linguistic model while there is the standard Arabic written grammar. It is possible that historians of Arabic have not been well aware of those differences between Arabic language and Arabic grammar, and have treated both in similar fashion. According to our analysis, the situation is totally different. We cannot deny the fact that Arabic language was affected by other languages which were in turn strongly influenced by Greek, like Assyrian, Syrian, Persian or Sanskrit. Those influences can clearly be seen in the many loan words from other languages such as Greek⁴² (*Falsafah, Geografiah, Zaburūd, Zamrūd, Yāqūt*); Sanskrit⁴³ (*Zanābil, Kapūr, Babghāk, Khaizurān, Filfīl, Ahlīlāj*); Assyrian⁴⁴ (*Akhū, Ummatun, Tiṣhū, Zabū, ilā, Qarbutun, Malākū*); and Syrian (Aramaic dialects) (*Ābā, Shama’, Ḥablā*). There were even pronouns similar to

⁴¹Called *al-‘Āmil al-Muqaddam* in invisible approach.

⁴²Amīn, Ahmad, *Ḍuhā al-Islam*, (Kuala Lumpur: DBP, 1978), V.III: p. 267.

⁴³Ibid, vol. 3, p.267.

⁴⁴Magīd Khair Bīk, *al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah: Judhūruhā, Intishāruhā, Ta’thīruhā fī al-Sharq wa al-Gharb*, (Damascus: Dār Sa’d al-ddīn, 1992), p.25-26.

Aramaic such as *anā īnu* which means *anā* in Arabic and '*Ant 'Anta* which means *anta antuma*. Nevertheless, a system which contrasts with the original Arabic grammar system exists in the topic '*Lughah Akalūnī al-Barāghīthū*' whereby one governor governs two governees. This phenomenon had been found in use by the tribe of *al-Ṭhai* and *Azd al-Shanū'ah*⁴⁵. In the case of the topic '*Tanāzu*', two governors govern one governee as in 'Amr ibn al-Qays' verse: *Walau 'anna mā as'ā lī adnā ma'īṣatin * kafānī walam aṭlub ḡalīlun minal al-mālī*

One of the strictest rules in Arabic syntactic theory is that one governor can never govern more than one element at the same time as in the verse quoted above where the words *kafānī* and *walam aṭlub* are *al-'āmils*. The poet did not say *ḡalīlan* accusative style (*fathāh*) but *ḡalīlun* with nominative (*ḡammah*) which means it belongs to *kafānī* nor *walam aṭlub*. This verse indicates that Arabic was not influenced by Greek thinking at the time when 'Amr ibn al-Qays accidentally introduced the system of governor (*al-'āmil*). This point finds support in Versteegh's statement: "We do not assert that Arabic linguistic thinking was a copy of Greek grammar, but we do believe that the instruction of Greek grammar was the model and the starting point for Arabic grammar."⁴⁶

A differing opinion on the independence of Arabic from Greek grammar is expressed by H. Fleisch:⁴⁷

Some Greek influences are to be mentioned: The speculation of Arabic grammar has borrowed some initial concepts from Greek science, not only important to Greek grammar but to the Aristotelian logic as well; this has highly reduced the Greek influence equipped with Aristotelian concepts, that the simple atmosphere it provided them. Arab grammarians have worked with their Arab mentality; the description of grammatical taxonomy is Arabic, the arrangement is Arabic, and all the Islamic sciences, grammar might have been the least subjected to external influences and has the most purely Arab.⁴⁸

Fleisch refuted the influence of Greek grammar on Arabic grammatical theory while agreeing to the notion of influence by Aristotelian logic since most Arab Grammarians emphasized on conceptual issues. Abdul Qāhir al-Jurjānī for example engaged extensively in semantics and conceptual meanings. Yet, to claim all his

⁴⁵ Al-Sayūfī, *Hama' al-Hawāmi' Sharḥ Jāmi' al-Jawāmi' fī 'Ilm al-'Arabiyyah*, (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), p. 514.

⁴⁶ C.H.M. Versteegh, *Greek Elements in Arabic Linguistic Thinking*, p.15.

⁴⁷ Fleisch, H., *Traité de Philologie Arabe*, (vol. 1, Beirut, 1961), p.23, 25.

⁴⁸ Trans. by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Anke Bouzenita.

ideas were derived from Aristotelian logic would be unjustified. For Jurjānī, the relationship between syntax and semantics has not been effectively clarified within the framework of traditional Arabic grammatical theory. In his commentary⁴⁹ he differentiated between meaning and form in a sentence. This concept is presented not to linguists but to theologians (*mu'tazilah*) in an effort to impress them with the need to study theology, grammar and literary theory so as to improve their understanding of the inimitability of the Qur'an. In this case, the theory of coherence (*nazm*) combines three aspects, namely 1) expression (*lafz hāmīl*), 2) meaning (*ma'nā bihi qā'im*), 3) the conjunction between expression and meaning (*ribāt lahuma nāzim*). This statement shows the intellectual capacity of Jurjānī. He further argues that one would not arrive at the proper meaning if not constructed with expression (*lafz*) and conjunction (*rabāt*) in order to produce a cohesion (*nazm*). In other words, those who achieve true eloquence (*faṣāhah*) will not be able to produce a coherent sentence unless they combine the group of words according to their concurrence followed by the meaning. Based on this view, we learn that Jurjānī focused more on the system of cohesion (*nazm*) and movement among the words after their combination. This means that the production of eloquence does not depend strictly on the use of separate words to produce meaning. In his major contribution to the discussion about the *I'jāz al-Qur'an* he concentrated on meaning (*ma'nā*) and expression (*lafz*). Both concepts have been subjected to debate between logicians and grammarians. For logicians, the meanings represent the logical ideas signified through expressions. Otherwise grammarians concentrated on the functions of the words. For Jurjānī, meaning (*ma'nā*) is what determines the quality of a style, and it would be absurd to attribute qualities of eloquence to an expression as such. He states:

واعلم أنك كلما نظرت وجدت سبب الفساد واحدا وهو ظنهم الذي ظنوه في اللفظ وجعلهم الأوصاف التي تجري عليه كلها أوصافا في نفسه ومن حيث هو لفظ وتركهم أن يميزوا بين ما كان وصفا له في نفسه وبين ما كانوا قد أكسبوه إياه من أجل أمر عرض في معناه.⁵⁰

“You should know that whenever you look [corruption of taste and language] you would find the cause of corruption being only one,

⁴⁹Jurjānī, *Dala'il 'ijāz*, Sayid Muhammad Rashid Rida (ed.), (Cairo: Maktabah Muhammad Ali Ṣubayḥ wa Awlād, 1960), p.66-67.

⁵⁰Ibid, p.256

namely their assumption about the expression and their attribution of attributes without proper distinction between those attributes that they assign to them because of something that belongs to its meaning”⁵¹.

According to Jurjānī, *‘Ilm al-Bayān* is “the knowledge of the expression of one meaning in different ways”, through reference to it more or less clearly, which serves to avoid errors in the application of speech to the full expression of what one wishes to say.”⁵² This means that the science of expression of the meaning (*bayān*) is the final touch in the process of conveying information and cannot be separated from the science of meaning. In other words, the discussion of the introduction of semantics needs to be related to the technicality of grammar. In this sense the ideas of Jurjānī were an expression of the feeling of dissatisfaction with the way linguistics evolved. Jurjānī’s *Dalā’il al-I’jāz* (Arguments of the inimitability of the Qur’ān) shows some remarks which could be interpreted as criticism of Arab traditional grammarians in regard to the relationship between word order and meaning. This view was shared by Ibn Mada` who complained of the useless morphological exercises and theoretical discussions having no connection whatsoever with the living language.⁵³ He did not say that the system of declension (*i’rāb*) lacks the necessary elements for developing the idea of linguistics in Arabic. Rather, the idea needs to be supported by further supportive elements including the meaning in a semantic concept as well as the synthesis of those concepts as formulated by logicians and grammarians.

We may deduce therefore that the special meaning associated with the cohesion (*naẓm*) exists when the meaning is quoted after the process of entering *siyāq* such as subject (*mubtada’*) existed because of predicate (*khabar*). For example, *al-munṭaliqu Zaydun* means ‘the one who leaves is Zayd’ while in *Zaydun al-munṭaliqu Zayd* is the one who leaves. i.e. *fā’il* (agent) existed cause of the *fi’l* (verb), and so on. This shows that the originality of Jurjānī as a rhetorician is evident in the way he links his view on meaning as determinant factor in the quality of a text to a linguistic dimension by way of considering it not through isolation but rather within a coherent text composition, cohesion or *naẓm*. This is a

⁵¹Ibid, p.256

⁵²Kees Versteegh, *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought*, 111, (London: Routledge, 1997), p.124.

⁵³Ibn Mada`, *Al-Raddu` ‘alā Nuḥāh*, Shawqi Da’if (ed.), (Cairo: Dār al-Ma’ārif, n.d.), p.78.

key notion in both the *Dalā'il al-I'jāz* (Arguments for Inimitability of the Qur'an) and *Asrār al-Balāgh* (Secrets of Eloquence)⁵⁴. In both the works he attempted to define the principle in linguistic terms.⁵⁵

To substantiate the idea discussed above, we find some further remarks on the system showing how the concept of meaning is powerful via the concept of declension (*i'rāb*) and governor (*'āmil*). In the first example is ﴿لَوْلَا أَخَّرْتَنِي إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ قَرِيبٍ فَأَصَّدَّقَ وَأَكُنُ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ﴾⁵⁶ the word 'وَأَكُنُ' *wa'kun* in zero-vowel style (*sukūn*) caused by the thinking of abstract rules (*tawahhum*⁵⁷ *sharṭī*⁵⁸) indicates for *تمني tamannī* and the rule of governor (*al-'āmil al-sharṭī*) is not in speech (*lafẓ*) but in the conceptual thinking (*ma'nawī*) which is conjuncted to the word *أَصَّدَّقَ*⁵⁹ where it is accusative and zero-vowel (*sukūn*). Al-Zamaksharī favors this idea and argues that it resembled in *akhartanī aṣṣadaq wa akun* *إِنْ أَخَّرْتَنِي أَنْ أَخَّرْتَنِي وَأَكُنُ أَصَّدَّقُ وَأَكُنُ*. The research assumes *wa akun* *وَأَكُنُ* a zero-vowel (*sukūn*) cause of different style of declension.⁶⁰

The second example is the accusative cause by the removal of genitive (*al-khafid*) which means the removal of the genitive is a result of accusative on the governee (*ma'mūl*). According to Ibn Mālik⁶¹, the accusative case on the governee (*ma'mūl*) caused by the removal of the genitive in speech (*lafẓ*) whereas in thinking (*ma'nawī*) it is based on the meaning (*al-tadāmu al-tjābī*)⁶² such as the Qur'anic verse ﴿وَاخْتَارَ مُوسَىٰ﴾⁶³ *واختار موسى*. The word *ikhtāra* is the governor of the governee *qawmahu*, the visible object (*al-maf'ūl bi lafẓih*). This is because the real governor is a preposition *min* which is genitive being removed from the verse (*āyah*). However, there is another opinion in its declension (*i'rāb*).

⁵⁴Both of the primary works of Jurjānī.

⁵⁵Kees Versteegh, *Landmarks in Linguistic Thought*, p. 111, 119

⁵⁶Al-Munāfiqūn: 10.

⁵⁷*Tawahhum* is a synonym for *iḍmār* or *taqdīr*, which is a central concept in Sībawayh's analysis.

⁵⁸Showing the meaning of sentence cannot be taken for granted. See Sībawayh, *al-Kitāb*, 3/117.

⁵⁹The reading of *فَأَصَّدَّقَ* by Jamhūr (majority) is accusative.

⁶⁰Tammam Hasan, *Al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah, Ma'nāhā wa Mabnāhā*, p 204–205.

⁶¹Ibn 'Aqil, (1998), *Sharh Ibn 'Aqil*, 1:19.

⁶²Ḥasan, Tammām, *al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah Ma'nāhā wa Mabnāhā*, (Morocco: Dar Al-Thaqāfah, n.d.), p. 222.

⁶³Al-A'rāf: 155.

Al-Akhfash al-Ṣaghīr⁶⁴ argues “to remove the genitive is not a must, but is permissible to avoid an ambiguous situation, as in “*baraytu al-qalama al-sikkīna*” (I sharpened my pencil knife) where the original form is “*baraytu al-qalama bi al-sikkīn*” (I sharpened my pencil with knife). ‘*Baraytu*’ is the governor (‘*āmil*), *al-qalama* the governee (*maf’ūl*) of ‘*baraytu*’ and *al-sikkīna* the governee (*ma’mūl*) of the removed original governor in the genitive. Sībawayh⁶⁵ did not agree with this since the cause of the removal of the genitive was the preceding verb becoming a governor. This opinion is nonetheless supported by Abū Ḥayyān⁶⁶. The word *ikhṭāra* is a transitive verb (*fi’l muta’addī*) hence governs the two governees (*maf’ūlān*).

The third example is the conjunction based on meaning (*al-‘aff ‘alā al-maḥal*) whereby the understanding of meaning (*al-athar al-ma’nawī*) is according to the implicit item⁶⁷ according to the Qur’anic example: ﴿وما يعزب عن ربك من مثقال ذرة في الأرض ولا في السماء ولا أصغر من ذلك ولا أكبر﴾⁶⁸ The accusatives of *asghar* and *akbar* are *manṣūbān* and not genuinely based on the principle of *mamnū’ ‘an al-ṣarf*. Originally, they should be used with a genitive term (*jār*). An accusative here is being conjuncted by place or situation (*al-maḥal*) and not by declension (*i’rāb*) as a speech. ‘*Mā’* is a negative type of speech otherwise it is nominative case in thinking in the original text or *raf’ ma’nawī* because it is subject of a verb. The subject of the verb is the doer of the action expressed by the verb and must follow the verb⁶⁹.

The fourth example is connection or disconnection because of meaning (*al-‘ittisāl wa-‘inqitā’ bi-sabab al-ma’nā*) as in the Qur’anic verse⁷⁰ ﴿ما لهم به من علم إلا اتباع الظن﴾. The disconnection of *al-‘amal* based on the seven permissible ways of recitation (*al-qirā’āt al-sab’*) which is *ittibā’a* in the accusative case, allowing speculation (*ẓann*) in contrast to

⁶⁴Alī ibn Sulaymān al-Baghdādī.

⁶⁵Sībawayh, *al-Kitāb*, Vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1999), p. 73.

⁶⁶Andalusī, Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, V. 4 (Beirut: Darl al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2001), p. 297.

⁶⁷Karīm, Abd Allah Ahmad Jaad, 2001, *Al-Tawahhum ‘inda al-Nuḥah*, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Adab, 2001), p.161.

⁶⁸Yūnus: 6.

⁶⁹Ibn Hishām, *al-Mughnī al-Labīb*, V. I, (Beirut: al-Maktabat al-‘Āriyah, 1999), p. 268

⁷⁰Al-Nisā’: 157.

definitive knowledge (*'ilm*)⁷¹. Otherwise, *ittibā'u* in the nominative case as recited by the tribe of the Banū Tamīm means knowledge or *'ilm* and does not imply *ẓann* as in the reading allowing the accusative case. This is because the exceptional (*illah*) is a disconnector between governor and the word *ittibā'a*. In the original text however, *ittibā'a* is disconnected with words *min 'ilmin* where it is subject in the nominative case. The word *'ilmin* is a subject being put into genitive after the preposition *min* as a (*mu'akkidah*) for *ittibā'al-ẓann*.

The above analysis shows that grammar (*naḥw*) investigates the syntactic relation between the words of an utterance. These examples are essentially concerned with the function of case endings in the sentence. The kinship between grammar and eloquence (*balāghah*) is thus self-explanatory. In expressing the realm of meanings (*ma'ānī*), grammar is concerned with the means of making utterances expressing desired meanings with utmost exactitude through a number of syntactical devices such as conjunction and dis-conjunction as well as the relation between subject and predicate⁷². In other words, the concept of Arabic thinking in grammar is not isolated. Rather, the concept of grammar is included in the concept of semantics. Thus, without the expression of a desired meaning, the concept of understanding the meaning cannot be produced. In fact more studies are needed on the relationship between grammar and meaning, especially in terminology. At the practical level however, much of the confusion and inefficiency in teaching Arabic grammar could be avoided if some of the non-functional topics of grammar (*naḥw*) are substituted by those subjects of eloquence (*balāghah*), which focus on the relation between form and meaning.

M.G. Carter denies any Hellenistic influence on Arabic Grammar: "I hope that the evidence adduced by the Hellenists on the point reached by Arabic grammar in the crucial period of the eighth century should be rejected because it is applied hysteron proteron, and because it is based on a dubious interpretation of the Grammar of the later period, and because it is contradicted by *al-Kitāb* itself"⁷³. According to Carter, Greek influence has to be ruled out because of lack

⁷¹See the opinion of Zamakhsharī and Ibn 'Aṭīyah in *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, Vol. 3: 406.

⁷²Ramzi Ba'lbakī, *Grammarians and Grammatical Theory in the Medieval Arabic Tradition*, (USA: Ashgate, 2004), p. 9.

⁷³M.G.Carter. *The Origins of Arabic Grammar*, trans. of Les Origines de la Grammaire Arabe, *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* (No.40, Paris, 1972, p. 69-97), Philip Simpson (ed.) (USA: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2006).

of evidence. There is no reference to suggest foreign influences in the indigenous accounts of the earliest Arabic grammarians⁷⁴. He further added: “The most obvious weakness of the Greek hypothesis is that it has never been confronted with Arabic grammar itself or rather, that the Hellenists have never defined the kind of Arabic grammar itself or rather, that the Hellenists have never defined the kind of grammar which they claim was borrowed from Greek”⁷⁵. Carter then stresses that “it will be necessary to show that *al-Kitāb* is the first grammatical work in the Arabic language”⁷⁶. He believed that every form of linguistic study preceding Sībawayh i.e. the period of orthographical innovations and the period of the group of *naḥwiyyūn* had been the work of amateurs. Sībawayh was the first real grammarian who brilliantly assembles the linguistic facts forming part of social system into a *juridical* corpus. His purpose was the description of linguistic behavior, a normative grammar as a reference for later grammarians.

Carter argues that grammar in Sībawayh’s *Kitāb* is clearly unrelated to the Greek system based on logic especially when he states: “I have already alluded to the fact that there was no term for ‘grammar’ in Sībawayh’s time, and I outlined the stages whereby the word *naḥw* ultimately acquired this technical sense”⁷⁷. He also highlighted that Sībawayh and Aristotle have very different interest in preposition (*ḥarf*) which was identical with the Greek *fone asemos* but defined from a totally different point of view. Aristotle says that the particle has a definite function but no specific meaning while for Sībawayh the preposition (*ḥarf*) has a some kind of meaning (*jā’a li ma’nā*) but no specific function⁷⁸. During the time of Sībawayh there existed an abstract legal system set up by Muslim jurists in order to analyze laws and traditions. This proves that Sībawayh did not need any abstract Greco-Hellenistic theory for his grammatical system and that he has been rather influenced by the Islamic legal system in order to pattern the style of Arabic Grammar approach. That is why it is not possible to prove the dependence of Arabic grammar on Greek through simple reference to the division of the parts of speech where there are eight

⁷⁴Ibid, p.3

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.5

⁷⁶ Ibid, p.5

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.12

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.15

parts of speech in Greek while Arabic grammar has only two or three, including preposition (*ḥarf*).⁷⁹

In order to support that notion of the influence of Islamic law on Arabic grammar, Carter presented two critical points: (1) a series of existing terms for the categories and phenomena of the Arabic language and (2) a set of operational functional terms borrowed from the legal system. He adduces four important terminological arguments, namely the use of moral criteria in grammar ‘*ḥasan*’ (good), ‘*qabīḥ*’ (bad)⁸⁰, the *qiyās* as a juridical method⁸¹, the terminology of *mawḍi‘* derived from the study of the law⁸², and the numerous linguistic terms carrying juridical connotations (e.g. *shart* [condition], ‘*iwaḍ*’ [compensation], *badal* [replacement], *ḥadd* [limitation], *ḥujjah* [argument], and *niyyah* [intention]).⁸³

Carter points out that there were many contacts between Muslim jurists and grammarians. Sībawayh himself started as a student of law, and lawyers often needed the help of grammarians for the explanation of linguistic subtleties in legal texts. For him if it can be pruned that the science of law furnished the example for Sībawayh’s theory of speech, the Greek hypothesis has lost its *raison d’être*. In his view the Greek hypothesis is a priori improbable because of the complete silence in Arabic sources concerning any dependency on Greek examples, and for Greek grammar is of completely different character. We cannot however base a spontaneous linguistic corpus on Sībawayh alone because he himself acknowledged many authorities in his book including Abū al-Aswād al-Du’alī, Yūnus ibn Ḥabīb, Khalīl, Abū ‘Amr, Kisā’ī and al-Farrā’ who helped in collecting the linguistic corpus. This kind of information shows us how Sībawayh duly acknowledged the contribution of others. It is possible that as a supporter of the theory of Grammar (*naḥw*) in Arabic he molded his theory according to his own understanding of Arab life of the time. Carter’s observations on the relationship between grammar and law in the Muslim world are certainly very plausible. In addition, Versteegh agreed with Carter that grammar is a linguistic system in its own right.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.17

⁸⁰ M.G. Carter, *The Origins of Arabic Grammar*, trans. of *Les Origins de la Grammaire Arabe*, 1972, p.84.

⁸¹ Ibid, 1972, p.84

⁸² Ibid, 1972:84-85

⁸³ Ibid, 1972, p.86

⁸⁴ C.H.M. Versteegh, *Greek Elements in Arabic Linguistic Thinking*, p.15.

Yet, in order to prove that Sībawayh's ideas were related to legal Islamic concepts, Ibn al-Anbārī⁸⁵ stated that the methodological approach used by jurists was followed by Arabic grammarians. He supported his argument by Imam Jamāl al-ddin al-Asnāwī⁸⁶ who realized that concepts such as *uṣūl al-fiqh* and Arabic grammar originated from the same root since the concept of *qiyās* was adopted in Arabic grammar as *'qiyās al-naḥwi'*. Maḥmūd Niḥlah⁸⁷ expresses that “the *uṣūl al-naḥw* and its branches are similar to the concept of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and its branches” to imply that both concepts are taken from the same system and root of knowledge. In order to refute Greek influence on Arabic grammar however, he believed it would be a grave error to attribute the beginnings of Arabic grammar to conservatism or simple intellectual curiosity. The proponents of the theory of a Hellenistic influence were equally mistaken when they assume that all abstract thought had to be developed in Greek style because the essential principles of Islamic law had already been established at the time of Sībawayh⁸⁸. G. Troupeau⁸⁹ refuted Merx' statement⁹⁰ in these words: “I have made the point that it is unlikely that Sībawayh who died circa 796 A.D. would have known the logic of Aristotle and been influenced by it, and this for two reasons: the first being that the Hermeneutics and the poetics were not translated into Arabic until approximately a century after the death of Sībawayh; the Hermeneutics by Ishāq Ibn Ḥunayn (d.

⁸⁵Ibn al-Anbārī, *al-'Inṣāf fī Masā'il al-Khilāf Bayn al-Baṣriyyīn wa al-Kufiyyīn*, (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilmiyyah, 1998), p.1-15.

⁸⁶Jamāl al-ddīn al-'Asnawī, *al-Kawkab al-Durrī*, Hassan 'Aud (ed.), (Jordan: Dār al-Ammar, 1984), p. 342.

⁸⁷Maḥmūd Niḥlah, *Uṣūl al-Naḥw al-'Arabī*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1987), p. 24.

⁸⁸Ibid, p.21

⁸⁹ “The work of Aristotle, having been translated first into Syriac and Arabic was familiar to Muslim intellectual circles as early as the ninth century. Furthermore some orientalist, in their study of the origins of Arabic Grammar, have concluded that the first grammarians were influenced by Aristotelian logic, from which they would have borrowed fundamental grammatical concepts, in particular the well-known division of the *'partes orationis'* The logic of Ibn al-Muqaffa' and The origins of Arabic Grammar.

⁹⁰Merx, *Historia Artis Grammaticae Apud Syros*, Lipsiae 1889, p.137-53. See The Logic of Ibn al-Muqaffa' and The Origins of Arabic Grammar, The translation of La logique d'Ibn al-Muqaffa' et les Origins de la Grammaire Arabe', Arabica xxviii (Leiden, 1981), trans. by Philip Simpson. Copyright (USA: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2006), p.1.

910 C.E.), the poetics by Matta Ibn Yunus (d. 940 C.E.). The second reason is that the grammatical terms used by these two translators, with a few exceptions, either do not exist in the work of Sībawayh or differ significantly from the terms which he employs, as may be observed from the following list⁹¹. The very different terminology of the grammatical terms employed by ‘Abd Allah ibn al-Muqaffa’ in his epitome of the *Hermeneutics* – when compared with the terms utilized by Sībawayh – differ almost entirely. For example, the verb identified as preposition (*harf*) by Ibn al-Muqaffa’ and by Sībawayh as verb (*fi’l*). Similarly, addition (A) called *lahq* while (S) called absent; adjective (A) called *lasiqa* while (S) called *na’t*; and finality (A) called *ghāya* while (S) called absent⁹². These observations lead us to accept that there exists no conformity between the terminology of Arabic grammar and that of Greek logic. In addition, the parts of speech in Greek grammar have eight categories while they are divided into three in Arabic grammar which shows that they have nothing to do with Aristotelian logic.

Conclusion

Beginning with the contact of Hellenistic thinking with Arabic culture we have acknowledged the influence of Greek institutions of learning in the East. However, the transmission of Greek grammatical concepts into Arabic grammar is very questionable and needs to be modified. Dionysios Thrax’ *Tekhne Grammatike* cannot be regarded as a valid starting point in this question and requires no further consideration. Weiss, Fleisch, Carter and Troupeau had their own reasons to oppose the influence of Greek grammar. Weiss used a methodological approach to the system of language itself and concluded that previous studies are in favor of a Greek influence had been too selective and therefore produced no valid results. Fleisch acknowledged the influence of Greek thought in the field of Aristotelian logic. However, Aristotelian logic was applied more in the fields of philosophy and sciences than in the study of grammar⁹³.

Carter argued that Arabic grammatical theory was free from any Greek influence because it was firmly based on Islamic source texts such as the Qur’an and as such shared the same roots with Islamic legal

⁹¹Words 1) Letter: Ibn Ishāq called *ustuquss*, Sībawayh called *harf*; 2) Syllable: Ibn Ishāq called *’iqtidāb*, Ibn Mattā called *maqta’*, Sībawayh called absent, 3) Conjunction: Ibn Ishāq called *ribāṭ*, Sib. called *harf ‘atf*, 4) Article: Ibn Ishāq called *wasīla*, Sib. called absent, 5) Verb: Ibn Ishāq and Matta called *kalīma*, Sib. called *fi’l*.

⁹²G. Troupeau, *The Logic of Ibn al-Muqaffa’ and The Origins of Arabic Grammar*, p.3.

⁹³As mentioned by Gutas Dimitri on page 7 of this paper.

theory. Several linguists support the understanding that the concept of *naḥw* in Arabic grammar originated from Islamic Law. Sībawayh introduced the ideas of Arabic grammar through the four accepted legal schools and their shared concepts of ‘*wājib*’, ‘*mubāḥ*’, ‘*sunnah*’ and ‘*ḥarām*’ which is complementary to the grammatical concepts of ‘*wājib*’, ‘*jawāz*’, ‘*shādh*’ and ‘*mamnu*’. Troupeau has shown that the differences of terminology used by Sībawayh and the translators of Aristotle’s *Hermeneutics* and *Poetics*.