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# Grammatical Aspects and Their Impact on Meaning and Interpretation

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**Abstract:**

This study aims to highlight the correlation between grammatical inflection "Iʿrāb" and semantic understanding, as it represents a deeply rooted and inseparable connection in the Arabic language. The perspective that emphasizes the interdependence between grammatical inflection and meaning has been upheld by the majority of classical and modern linguists, from the time of *Sibawayh* in his seminal work to contemporary scholars. Grammatical inflection has thus become one of the defining features of Arabic, distinguishing it from other languages. It is the key to meaning, the path to comprehension, and a method used by Arabs to clearly convey meanings through syntax, elevating speech to a refined level of clarity and eloquence.

**Keywords:** grammatical inflection, grammatical aspects, semantics, interpretation.

**Introduction:**

Grammatical inflection is a phenomenon inherent in the Arabic language, known intuitively by early Arabs who employed it naturally and spontaneously. It was their means of expression and clarification, articulating their thoughts without engaging in detailed grammatical analysis or formal knowledge of its rules. Over time, grammatical inflection became the backbone of Arabic and its most distinctive trait among world languages so much so that Arabic came to be identified by it.

Given that the Qur'an is the most sacred and noble of texts, it logically deserves the utmost grammatical precision. Grammatical inflection is a vital tool for understanding the Qur'anic text, functioning as an interpreter of its meanings and a guide to its objectives and subtleties. Therefore, anyone working in the field of Qur'anic exegesis must possess a strong command of grammar and syntax to arrive at an accurate understanding and precise interpretation. Inflection is a derivative of meaning, directly tied to it; the validity of meaning depends on the correctness and precision of

inflection, and vice versa. These two correct grammatical form and sound meaning are foundational conditions for establishing the correct interpretation of any text.

**Research Problem:**

How did Arab linguists benefit from the various grammatical aspects and syntactical relationships between words in guiding Qur'anic meanings and extracting semantic insights from such differences?

What is the role of grammatical inflection and its markers in shaping understanding?

Does the variation in syntactic interpretation in works such as "Meanings of the Qur'an" imply a variation in meaning?

**First: Grammatical Inflection and Its Aspects**

**1.Definition of Grammatical Inflection**

**A.** Linguistically:

In Maqāyīs al-Lughah by *Ibn Fāris*, it is stated that:

"Iʿrāb is the verbal noun of 'aʿraba', which is derived from 'ʿaraba', meaning to clarify and express. Hence, they say: 'A man aʿraba (expressed) himself', meaning he explained and clarified." [1]

"As for the word itself, it is a verbal noun from 'uʿribtu ʿan al-shayʾ', meaning 'I clarified it.' A person is said to be 'muʿrib' of what is within him, i.e., he expresses and reveals it. The root of all this is in the word 'al-ʿArab', attributed to their eloquence, iʿrāb, and clarity." [2]

In Lisān al-ʿArab, we find:

"Iʿrāb and taʿrīb have the same meaning: expression and clarification. It is said: 'Aʿraba his tongue' or 'ʿaraba' both meaning he spoke clearly and eloquently." [3]

From these linguistic definitions, we deduce that the word iʿrāb revolves around the notions of clarity and expression, a consistent theme across Arabic dictionaries.

**B.** Terminologically:

Grammatical inflection is defined as:

"A change that affects the endings of Arabic words, manifesting as nominative, accusative, or jussive, based on the rules of grammar." [4]

*Ibn Jinnī* states:

"It is the clarification of meanings through words." [5]

*Ibn Hishām* defines it as:

"A visible or implied effect caused by a governing word on the end of a fully declinable noun or the present-tense verb." [6]

*Abbas Hassan* writes:

"It is the alteration of the sign at the end of a word due to the influence of syntactic agents and the requirements of each agent." [7]

From these terminological definitions, we conclude that the grammatical inflection pertains to the final vowel or sign at the end of declinable Arabic words, and any change in this sign points to new semantic functions or meanings.

**2.The Concept of Multiple Grammatical Aspects:**

**A. The Concept of Aspect:**

Linguistically:

The word face/aspect is pluralized as aspects , and it carries several meanings: the front of something, dignitaries of a place, the beginning of the day, and the intention or approach in speech. It can mean direction, intention, or meaning. [8]

Terminologically:

"Mentioning a specific grammatical meaning for a given inflectional state such as a word being in the nominative case because it is a subject or a predicate, or other syntactic roles associated with that case." [9]

**Second: The Nature of Semantics:**

A. Linguistically

In Al-Ṣiḥāḥ, dalālah is defined as:

"A dalīl is something through which another thing is inferred. Dalīl and dāll are synonyms. One says: 'He showed him the way', and the action is termed dalālah, dilālah, or dulūlah the form with an open vowel being the most accurate." [10]

*Ibn Fāris* notes in Maqāyīs al-Lughah:

"The root D-L-L has two main meanings: one indicating clarification or indication through signs, and the other denoting instability or fluctuation. The first meaning includes expressions like 'I guided someone to the road.'" [11]Al-Zamakhsharī similarly states:

"He showed him the road; he is a guide in the desert. If you say,' it means you have found it." [12]

Thus, dalālah conveys the meaning of guidance, clarification, and pointing toward the right place.

The word dalālah has three accepted vocalizations:

Dá-lā-lah (with fatha) – considered the most accurate[13].

Di-lā-lah (with kasra).

Du-lū-lah (with ḍamma.)

"The permissibility of using the word with a fatḥah, kasrah, or ḍamma on the letter dāl was affirmed by *al-Jawharī* (d. 393 AH), who said: 'dalālah, dilālah, and dulūlah'." [14]

There is scholarly debate regarding the distinctions among these vocalizations. Ibn Duraid (d. 321 AH) distinguishes them as follows:

Dalālah (fatha): denotes the profession of guiding.

Dalīlah (kasra): refers to the guide itself or the sign. [15]

In summary, the linguistic definition of dalālah encompasses:

Guidance, indication, and clarification of something hidden.

It is a trilateral term in form.

All three vocalizations are permissible, with the most accurate being the fatha form.

*Dr. ʿAlī Ḥasan Zayyān* emphasizes:

"The form with fatha is the correct one, as the kasra form (dalīlah) is on the pattern of fiʿālah, which often denotes professions (e.g., nijārah – carpentry, filāḥah farming). Therefore, we should say: dalālah and science of semantics with a fatha." [16]

Furthermore, indication (dalālah) can be by sign, symbol, or gesture.

B. Terminologically

Semantics is considered:

"A branch of linguistics that studies the relationship between linguistic symbols and their meanings. It examines the historical development of word meanings, their diversity, figurative use, and relationships among words." [17]

More succinctly, some define it as:

"The study of meaning; or the science concerned with meaning." [18]

Therefore, Semantics is concerned with meaning, focusing on the evolution of vocabulary, semantic variation, and inter-word relationships, making it a broad and inclusive field.

According to *al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī* (d. 816 AH):

"Dalālah is the condition whereby knowing one thing leads to knowledge of another. The first is the sign (dāll), and the second is the signified (madlūl)." [19]

This indicates that dalālah relies on a dyadic relationship:

-The signifier (a conceptual or linguistic representation).

-The signified (the meaning or concept understood in the mind).

There is no semantics without both components.

From the above, we conclude that semantics in language refers to guidance, clarity, and making the hidden apparent. Terminologically, it signifies the intrinsic relationship between the sign (word) and its meaning, without which comprehension is impossible. The signifier points to a mental image, and the signified is the concept itself both are essential to meaning.

**Third: The Relationship Between Grammatical Inflection, Semantics, and Interpretation:**

Starting from the comprehensive definition by *Ibn Jinnī*, who characterized grammar as:

"Grammar is the pursuit of the manner of Arab speech in its usage, including grammatical inflection and other aspects... so that non-Arabs may attain the eloquence of Arabs, speak as they do even if they are not one of them, and if some deviate, grammar returns them to the correct form." [20]

Here, he emphasizes the imitation and pursuit of the Arab way of speech its logic, usage, and word manipulation. His use of the term "way" refers to the path or manner, giving grammar a broad and inclusive role, not restricted merely to inflectional endings.

Limiting grammar to tracking the final vowel changes in words strips it of its essential function: distinguishing between meanings. It reduces grammar to a lifeless mold, focusing on correctness over purpose, and ignores its role in differentiating valid and invalid expressions. Therefore, grammar serves as a bridge between thoughts and expressions.

Grammar and Meaning in *Sibawayh*'s Work

The intricate relationship between word form and meaning was long examined by classical grammarians. In al-Kitāb of *Sibawayh*, this concept is deeply embedded. His work is a linguistic encyclopedia, integrating phonology, morphology, syntax, and rhetoric, offering a holistic view of the Arabic linguistic system. It showcases the intimate bond between syntax and rhetoric. [21]

Sibawayh classifies statements into five categories:

-Correct and meaningful.

-Grammatically correct but semantically impossible.

-Grammatically correct but factually false.

-Grammatically correct but stylistically poor.

-Both grammatically and semantically incorrect. [22]

Each category reflects how form and meaning intertwine. For example:

 "I came to you yesterday; I will come tomorrow" is sound and meaningful.

 "I came to you tomorrow; I will come yesterday" is grammatically valid but semantically incoherent.

"I carried the mountain" is formally correct but factually false.

 "Indeed Zayd I saw" is syntactically permissible, but stylistically awkward.

"I will drink the sea water yesterday" combines the future particle 'will' with the past marker 'yesterday', making it logically and grammatically impossible. [23]

Thus, *Sibawayh* rejected sentences even if they were grammatically sound when their meanings were incoherent, indicating early grammarians prioritized semantic validity alongside syntactic correctness. This confirms that grammar and meaning are interdependent, giving rise to what some scholars now call syntactic semantics.

The Concept of Syntactic Semantics

In his book "Grammar of Meaning", *Muḥammad Ḥamāsah* advocates a blended approach:

 "The idea that preoccupied me in this book was the intimate fusion between syntax and meaning, such that understanding syntax correctly is to understand the semantic basis upon which the text is built." [24]

This "intimate fusion" refers to a harmonious integration between linguistic levels, forming a coherent mechanism for meaning extraction. This integration can only be realized through the sentence, which unites grammar and meaning in composition. Hence, syntactic semantics involves:

-Words fulfilling syntactic roles.

-Semantic relationships influenced by grammatical structure.

-Context both linguistic and extralinguistic surrounding the sentence. [25]

**Conclusion:**

Grammatical inflection is the practical application of Arabic grammar, crucial for clarifying meanings and resolving ambiguity. As discussed, it involves changes in the final parts of words, and has become one of the defining strengths and unique features of Arabic. It preserves its elegance, guards against error, and ensures clarity.

*Ibn Qutaybah* stated:

"Grammatical inflection is a decoration God granted to Arabic speech a distinguishing feature that clarifies between otherwise similar expressions. It differentiates meanings, such as between subject and object. If someone says: 'This is a killer of my brother' with "nunation" "tanwīn", it implies someone else killed his brother. But if he says: 'This is the killer of my brother' with genitive construction, it implies that he himself killed him." [26]

Thus, attaching grammatical inflection to speech is essential to protect the intended meaning from distortion, error, or ambiguity. As grammarians have stated:

"The founder of language was wise and knew that speech, once constructed, would inevitably become ambiguous. Thus, wisdom required that grammatical inflection be embedded in speech." [27]

*Ibn Rushd (Averroes)* also noted that:

"The disagreements among jurists regarding the meanings of terms are often due to differences in grammatical inflection." [28]The grammarian *al-Farrāʾ*, referenced in this paper, believed that proper understanding of Arabic aids in mastering many sciences. It is even reported that *Abū ʿAmr al-Jarmī* spent thirty years issuing legal rulings based on *Sibawayh'*s book. [29]

This all demonstrates that much of the disagreement among scholars of jurisprudence and interpretation is grounded in grammatical analysis. As *al-Zamakhsharī* asserted:

"Most areas of legal theory and its discussions are built upon grammatical inflection." [30]

This indicates a deep connection between grammar and Islamic sciences especially jurisprudence, its principles, and Qur'anic studies. Without the grammatical inflection , people could interpret God's Book however they wished, as our scholars warned. Thus, abandoning the grammatical inflection , as some Orientalists propose, is impossible in Arabic, because it is tied to the divine speech and its comprehension.

*Dr. Māzin al-Mubārak* said:

"*Omitting iʿrāb causes many sentences and expressions to become ambiguous and vague. Much meaning is lost when the grammatical inflection is absent. Who can truly understand the verse:

﴿إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ﴾ (Fāṭir: 28)

Or the sentence: 'How good Zayd is!' without correct grammatical markers?" [31]

Hence, any call to abolish grammatical inflection is essentially a call to abandon reflection on the Qur'an and its interpretation, and a rejection of the Islamic Law. Inflection is the path to understanding and reflection.

Historically, as Arabic began to weaken due to non-Arab influence, errors and deviations emerged. The early Arabs spoke fluently by nature, but later generations required a codified system to maintain

purity of speech. This gave rise to grammar and grammatical inflection as mechanisms to preserve God's Book from error and maintain its intended meaning.

It is authentically reported that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), upon hearing a grammatical error, said:

"Guide your brother." [32]

And it is reported that *Ibn ʿUmar* used to strike his son for making grammatical errors. [33]

In Summary, the Function of the grammatical inflection Includes:

-Understanding the Book of God and uncovering its rulings and secrets.

-Comprehending the Prophet's (peace be upon him) sayings.

-Distinguishing between different meanings.

-Differentiating correct from incorrect speech.

-Detecting and correcting grammatical errors.

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[33] Ibn Abī Shayba, Abū Bakr ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muḥammad, *al-Muṣannaf fī al-Aḥādīth wa-al-Āthār*, chapter: "What has been reported on the iʿrāb of the Qurʾān," ḥadīth 07, ed. Kamāl Yūsuf al-Ḥūt, Dār al-Tāj, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st ed., 1409 AH / 1989, vol. 6, p. 116.