
4.6 Critics of the theory of government

Some Arab linguists, instead of assuming either an expressed or an abstract governing element in a sentence, believe that the governor is God, the creator of the language. Some Arab linguists argue that the governor is the speaker who uses the language. This argument can be found in the work of linguists such as Ibn Maḍā' (1988: 77), who called for the abolition of the theory of government:

> ammā madkhabu ahl al-ḥaq fa' inna ḥādhihi al-ażwāt innamā hiya min fi'l Allâh ta'ālā wa innamā tunsabu ilā al-insi̇n kāmâ yunsab-u ilayh sâ'ir af'āli̇h al-ikhtiyâri̇yyah, wa ammâ al-qawl bi-anna al-alfâz yuhdith-u ba'duhâ ba'd-an fa-bâṭil-un 'aql-an wa shar'-an là yaqīl-u bihi aḥad-un min al-'uqalâ'

As far as the opinion of bearers of truth is concerned, these vowels [parsing signs] are created by Almighty God and they are apportioned to man like any other of his freely chosen acts. But to say that words influence each other is false both logically and religiously. No able minded person would accept this.
The argument that the governing agent is the speaker of the words himself, on the other hand, can also be found in Ibn Jinnî (1957 vol. 1, pp. 109–110):

fa-ammâ fi al-haqīqah wa māhsūl al-hadīth fa al-'amal min al-rafi'
wa al-nāṣb wa al-jarr wa al-jāzm innāmâ huwa li al-mutakallim
nafsih lâ li-shay'în ghayrih

In fact, the speaker makes the effect, with its nominative, accusative, genitive or jussive representations himself and no one else.

It is clear from the passages quoted above that neither Ibn Madâ' nor Ibn Jinnî were trying to put forward an interpretation of the theory of government. Instead, they were both trying to destroy its pillars. The argument that the sentences the speaker uses are God-given and that grammarians have no right to explain the reasons for their being in this form is a call for the destruction of the theory. It is also an attempt to prohibit any effort to study sentence structure. Moreover, the argument that the influencing agent is the speaker himself means that the speaker composes sentences in complete freedom, which contradicts the observation of grammarians. This view also does not take into account the efforts that have been made to discover rules and general theories based on accurate observation of the language rather than grammarians’ own imaginings.

Ibn Madâ' al-Qurtubî (592/1195) set out his views on this subject in his book al-Radd 'alâ al-Nuḥāh (Refutation of the Grammarians), in which he claims that the abolition of this theory would make grammar much easier to learn. He argues (1988: 85) that the parsing signs on the last radicals of words bear no
relation to the function of the word in the sentence. In his introduction he writes (1988: 76):

| qasdi fi hadnha al-kitab an ahdifa min al-nahw ma yastaghni al-nahwi 'anh-u wa unabbih 'alaa ma ajma'u 'alaa al-khatja fih fa min dhalika iddi'a'uhum anna al-naasba wa al-khafda wa al-jazm la yakun-u illa bi-'amil-in lafzi aw bi-'amil-in ma'navi |

My aim in this book is to remove from grammar what a grammarian does not need and to draw attention to erroneous views, such as the [grammarians'] claim that the nasb [the accusative or subjunctive ending], the khafd [genitive ending] and the jazm [the jussive ending] cannot occur without an expressed or an abstract element.

Ibn Madâ' wished to remove from Arabic grammar everything that is too complex and too philosophical. Thus, he concentrated his attack on the theory of government and called for its abolition, just as he also called for the abolition of what grammarians call second and third type causation (cf. Chapter Two).

One contemporary Arab linguist who strongly opposes the theory of government is Ibrâhim Anis, who expressed his views this issue in his book min asrar al-'Arabiyyah. He devotes a whole chapter, entitled qissat al-i'rab, to his criticisms. He claims in this chapter that parsing signs are an artifact of grammarians (1978: 198). In another chapter, entitled laysa li al-harakah al-i'arabiyyah madlûl, (ibid.: 237), he also claims:

| lam takun al-harakat al-i'arabiyyah tuhaddid al-ma'ani fi adhhan al-'arab al-qudamâ' kamâ yaz'um al-nuhâh bal lâ ta'dû an takâna |
The parsing signs did not determine the meanings in the minds of the old Bedouin Arabs as grammarians believe, and they are no more than signs which are needed in most cases to connect words with each other.

(See Amaireh 1987: 67-83; Nakamura 1974).

To deny the presence of the parsing signs is obviously a denial of the theory of government itself, which is an explanation for the presence of parsing signs. Anis cites some examples to explain the unimportance of the parsing signs in determining the required meaning. Among these are the following:

**Example 1**

\[ \text{jā'ani man bā'a al-samak-a} \]
\[ \text{jā'ani bāi'-u al-samak-i} \]

The person who sells fish has come to me

In the first sentence the word *al-samak-a* (the fish) is in the accusative while in the second it is in the genitive. Anis claims that there is no difference in meaning between the two sentences.
EXAMPLE 2

\[sahirt-u \ al-laylat-a \ al-mádiyah\]

\[sahirt-u \ fi \ al-laylat-i \ al-mádiyah\]

I did not sleep last night

Here, in the first sentence the word \(al-laylat-a\) (the night) is in the accusative, while in the second sentence it is in the genitive. Anís claims that here also there is no difference in meaning between the two sentences. He argues (1978: 240) that the dropping of the parsing signs does not change the required meaning.

While Anís and Ibn Madâ’ agree on the rejection of the theory of government, and demand that it be dropped altogether from Arabic grammar, disagreement between the two scholars exists, in that Anís believes that the parsing signs on the last consonant of words are there because there is a tendency among speakers to join words together. If a speaker joins words together he needs these signs, whereas when he stops there is no need for them. Ibn Madâ’, on the other hand, believes that the parsing signs form part of the words to which they are attached.

Anís’s total rejection of the role of the parsing signs in the required meaning is evident from the following (1978: 242):

\[falaysat \ harakât-u \ al-i’ráb \ fi \ ra’yi \ ‘unšur-an \ min \ ‘anášir \ al-bínyah \ fi \ al-kalimát \ wa \ laysat \ dálá’ \ il \ ‘alá \ al-ma’ání \ kamá \ yaďumn \ al-nuháh \ bal \ inna \ al-asl \ fi \ kull \ kalimah \ huwa \ sukûn \ ákhirihá \ sawá’-un \ fi \ hâdhdâ \ má \ yusammá \ bi \ al-mabnî \ aw \ al-mu’ráb \ idh \ yúqaf-u \ ‘alá \ kilayhimá \ bi \ al-

155
sukün wa tabqā ma‘a hādhā wādiḥat al-sīghah lam tafqid min ma‘alimihā shay'-an

In my view the parsing signs do not form a part of words, and they are not indicative of the meaning, as grammarians believe. The principle is that the last radicals of the words are quiescent whether these are declinable or not. In both cases one should make the last radical quiescent because words are very clear and do not lose any part of their original function.

What determines subject and object in Anīs’s view is word order. He emphasises that the circumstances in which the speech was uttered assists linguists in determining the elements of the sentence (ibid.: 243). He illustrates his view by arguing that the subject of the sentence is not distinguished as a subject because it is in the nominative, nor is the object distinguished as an object because it is in the accusative. Rather, both forms are distinguished by their place in the sentence, which is determined by the style of the language. Hence, if one of the forms deviates from its normal position, it should be easy for linguists to trace it in its new position. Anīs’s view can be illustrated by the following:

1. The subject in the Arabic language comes after the verb and before the direct object, as in:

   akala Zayd-un tuffāḥat-an
   ate Zayd-nom. apple-acc.

   Zayd ate an apple
2. There are particular circumstances in which the direct object may come before the subject. One of these is the case of restriction (*hasr*), as in the following:

\[ \text{la ya'rif-u al-hubb-a illā man yukábiduhu} \]

no know-ind. the love-acc. except who suffer it

Only the person who endures love can understand what it feels like.

The views of Anis are rejected by most Arab linguists because the association of parsing sings with meaning has been deeply rooted in Arabic linguistic thought since its inception. The following examples serve to confirm this:

**Example 1**

\[ daraba 'Amr-an Zayd-un \]

‘Amr was hit by Zayd

Here, *Zayd-un* remains the subject despite the fact that it comes after the direct object, and *‘Amr-an* remains the direct object even though it comes before the subject.

**Example 2**

\[ nahn-u al-‘Arab-u \]

We are the Arabs
The word *al-'Arab-u* in the first sentence is governed in the nominative, while in the second sentence it is governed in the accusative because it has a different function in each of the two sentences. In the first sentence it is a predicate and in the second sentence it is a direct object for an ellipted verb which can be estimated as *akhuss-u* (I mean), to make the assumed structure of the sentence read:

\[ nahn-u \text{ akhuss-u} \text{ al-'Arab-u} \text{ nukrim-u} \text{ al-dayf-u} \]

**Example 3**

\[ kam \text{ kitāb-an} \text{ qara'ta} \]
\[ kam \text{ kitāb-in} \text{ qara'ta} \]

The word *kitāb* in the first sentence is governed in the accusative because it is functioning as *tamyīz* (specifier), and the purpose of the question is to ascertain the number of books the addressee has read, while in the second sentence it is governed in the genitive because it is a *mudāf*, and what the sentence describes is the large number of books read by the addressee (cf. Ibn al-Sarrāj 1987 vol. 1, p. 222; ‘Amaireh: 1987: 81).

Anīs thinks that classical Arabic was used without vocalisation just like modern Arabic dialects. This idea can be rejected on the basis that the absence of parsing signs in modern Arabic dialects does not necessarily mean that Arabic did
Advocates of the theory of government do not dispute the fact that God creates language. They believe that God has induced humans to use language in various ways. They also believe that the speaker has freedom to use the language in whichever way he chooses and freedom to form sentences in various ways. They simply argue that all this should not stand in the way of systematic research which aims at observing the language in order to deduce rules that may help anyone who wishes to use language correctly as did its native speakers. They also aim to determine the function performed by each individual element in the sentence.

4.7 Contemporary attempts to amend the theory of government

Among contemporary Arab linguists, there are some who try to develop the Arabic theory of sentence analysis by introducing new ideas from modern linguistics, so that the two methodologies exist side by side. Among these is Khalil ‘Amaireh.
‘Amaireh agrees with Arab grammarians in defining the sentence as the bare minimum of words that carry the informative meaning (1987: 87). Nevertheless, he attempts to develop sentence analysis by attaching more importance to semantic elements. He draws upon the claims of transformational grammar that both the nominal and the verbal sentence may consist of a surface structure and a deep structure. He sees the principal aim of the deep structure of the sentence as being to relate information only.

‘Amaireh enumerates five elements which he calls ‘anāsir al-tahwil (the transformational elements), which if introduced into the deep structure of sentence transform it into a surface structure. These five elements are as follows.

4.7.1 Word order

On this issue ‘Amaireh adopts the view of al-Jurjânî and the Arab grammarians before him, who argue that a particular element of a sentence can be preposed for semantic purposes such as emphasis. The sentence

\[ \text{Zayd-un jā’a} \]

Zayd came.

for example has its assumed form

\[ \text{jā’a Zayd-un} \]

but the subject is placed in a preposed position for a semantic purpose (in this case, to draw attention to Zayd).
7.1.2 Augmenting

This refers to the addition of an element to the deep structure of the sentence to make it a surface structure for a semantic purpose. For example, the sentence

\[
\text{inna } \text{Zayd-an } \text{karim-un}
\]

is a surface structure derived from the deep structure:

\[
\text{Zayd-un karim-un}
\]

Zayd is generous.

The purpose of \textit{inna} (indeed) is to provide emphasis.

4.7.3 Ellipsis

The ellipsis of an element from a sentence transforms it from a deep structure into a surface structure. For example, the sentence

\[
\text{Zayd-un}
\]

as an answer to the question \textit{man ja'a?}. (Who came?) is a surface structure of a sentence which has the deep structure:

\[
\text{j'a Zayd-un}
\]

Zayd came.

However, the ellipsis has added to the sentence a semantic aspect, the purpose of which is brevity.
4.7.4 Parsing signs

'Amaireh believes that the parsing signs have a semantic value, and can transform the sentence from a deep structure into a surface structure with a different meaning from that of the basic sentence. For example, the sentence

\[ \textit{kam kitāb-an qara'īt?} \]

*How many books have you read?*

is a surface structure of the sentence

\[ \textit{kam kitāb-in qara'īt} \]

*You have read many books*

The first sentence is interrogative while the second is informative.

4.7.5 Intonation

'Amaireh argues that the deep structure of the sentence can also be transformed by changing its intonation to give it a totally different meaning. For example the sentence

\[ \textit{Zayd-un karīm-un} \]

can be transformed into an interrogative or an exclamatory sentence.

'Amaireh therefore disagrees with traditional grammarians over the claim that parsing signs are the result of the influence of the governing elements on the affected elements in the sentence. He put forward an alternative to this theory by adopting the five elements discussed above. However, in putting forward this alternative, he appears to maintain that Arab grammarians give the surface form
of the sentence more importance than the overall meaning it carries. For this reason he has adopted a methodology combining both the form of the sentence and the overall meaning of the sentence. This can be expressed diagrammatically as follows (Amaireh 1987: 91).

Amaireh has attempted to eliminate some ideas from the traditional Arabic linguistics and replace them with new ones. In other words, he argues that the dependence of Arab linguists, especially grammarians, on the theory of government has resulted in shortcomings in the analysis of the Arabic sentence. The same concerns as are discussed by Amaireh can be found in the work of another prominent contemporary Arab linguist, Tammâm Hassân, who has
adopted the concept of *ta'liq*. This concept was put forward by al-Jurjānī in his book *Dalā'il al-Ijāz* as an alternative to the theory of government. Hassān (1985: 189) suggests that the concept of *ta'liq*, which means establishing relations between syntactical meanings and the context or situation, is more accurate than the concept of ‘*amal* as a means of analysing Arabic sentential structure:


In my view, as, most probably, in the view of ‘Abdūl Qāhir [al-Jurjānī], *al-ta'liq* is the central idea in Arabic grammar and only an understanding all of its aspects will rid people of the superstition of grammatical government and its operators. This is because using the context (*al-ta'liq*) determines the meaning of [all the grammatical] issues in the text and explains the relationship between them in a way which is more comprehensive, better and more useful in the linguistic analysis of these meanings and their grammatical functions.

Accordingly, both Amaireh and Hassān have been strongly influenced by al-Jurjānī’s treatment of the relationship between the elements forming the sentence. However, they disagree with al-Jurjānī on the use of general statements to explain the concept of *ta'liq*, in particular the phrase *bi-hasab mawqi' ba'dihā min ba'd* (according to their position in relation to others).
Al-Jurjâni deals with this under a more general theory called nazm (construction; cf. Chapter Six). In this regard he writes (1984: 87):

> wa idh qad 'arafta anna madâr-a amr al-nazm 'alâ ma'âni al-nahw wa 'alâ al-wujîh wa al-furîq allati min sha'nihâ an takûn-a fih fâ-i'lam anna al-furîq-a wa al-wujûh kathîrah laysa lahâ ghâyah taqîf-u 'indahâ wa nihâyah lâ tajid-u lahâ izdiyâd-an ba'dahâ thumma i'lam an laysat al-mazîyyah bi-wâjibah lahâ fi anfusihâ wa min hayth-u hiya 'alâ al-i'tlâq wa lâkin ta'rid-u bi-sabab al- ma'âni wa al-aghrâd allati yûqâ'-u lahâ al-kalâm thumma bi-hasab mawqi' ba'dihâ min ba'd

If you comprehend the influences of nazm on grammatical meaning and on the different circumstances that it should include, you must understand that these circumstances are too numerous and have no limits, and you must know once again that distinctions are not an end in themselves or absolute. Rather, they are mentioned to serve the meaning and objectives of the speech according to their position in relation to others.

The suggestions of Amaireh and Hassan are extremely valuable, and these linguists are probably right in criticising Arabic sentential theory. However, although these scholars have attempted to incorporate traditional Arabic linguistic theory with insights from modern linguistic theory they have not devised any concrete replacement for the basic theory put forward by traditional Arab linguists.

One can suggest that the field of Arabic Linguistics is still in need of such efforts that make classical Arabic ideas readable for the contemporary reader. At the same time we need to compare the traditional Arabic linguistic theory with...
aspects of Western linguistics without losing the uniqueness of the Arabic linguistic heritage. This is because the Arabic linguistic thinking is strongly linked with Islamic theology. This gives this scholarship a distinctive feature that cannot be matched in any other linguistic tradition.