
THE ARABIC MOOD SYSTEM: SEMANTICO-SYNTACTIC OBSERVATIONS

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Introduction

Most of the linguistic works on the Arabic verb system have confined attention to the morphology of verbs and their clausal structure, leaving the semantics of verbal paradigms untouched or not sufficiently treated.

Ancient Arab grammarians, particularly those who belonged to the Basra School of Grammar, were intrigued almost exclusively with "form", or rather as in the western tradition

forms" This school which was founded in what is now known as "Iraq" is represented by several grammarian authorities. To cite a few, we find Sibawaih, a Persian muslim whose book "al-kita:b" is still a valuable source in modern linguistic studies; and Al-Khalil Ibn Ahmad Al-farahidi, Sibawaih's teacher, whose lexicon "al-ain" affords pragmatic insights to the study of Arabic syntax. As Bakalla (1983) in the introduction observes, "in terms of methodology, Sibawaih represents the Basran school of grammar" (30).

Traditional Arab grammarians paid little or no attention to the scope of meaning signified by the Arabic verbal moods, nor did they take into account the speaker's attitude or his psychological behaviour toward the content of the utterance as to questions of 'certainty', 'uncertainty', 'possibility', etc.

Works by Arabists, notably: Bateson (1967); Bishaj (1971); Tritton (1977); Wickens (1980) and Thatcher (1982), tend to establish their conclusions about the Arabic verb and its moods on the *denotata* of individual variants in isolation, thus stopping short of determining with exactitude the meanings projected by verb forms, especially when such forms are collocated with certain functionals or used in different situational contexts. In a rather informative article, Omar (1994) writes: "It is the context of the situation ... that will determine the meaning" (39-58). Omar is right in his claim because word meaning can never be explored objectively in isolated environments, but rather, relative to situational contexts.

Modern studies by native speakers of Arabic (cf. Swed (1982); Al-aswad (1983); Khanna (1983)) have not probed into the semantic ranges of Arabic verb moods, though their works are devoted to the treatment of tense and the historical evolution of the Arabic verb. They survey, in a few pages, the verb-tense and verb moods with almost no syntactic detail or semantic signification; in addition, they have not explored the intricate nature of relations that connect words together. Wilkins (1980) attests that, "these are the relationships in Arabic language" (124).

In his Ph.D dissertation at Indiana University, Fradkin (1985) offers a closer view of Arabic moods and writes:

No one thus far considered them systematically for the apparent syntagmatic reason that they are predictable and required by various particles (204).

In short, it is evident that Arabs and non-Arabs have been fairly cautious in the treatment of moods. They have not bridged the classical approach of "verb" inflection to adequately examine the verb's semantic invariants. Not only this, but some of them have even gone as far as to deny the existence of a system of moods in Arabic. Cantarino in *The Syntax of Modern Arabic Prose* Vol. I (1974) alleges that, "Arabic has never developed a full system of moods" (77). Yet in another context, he recognizes the fact that, "the different moods of the imperfect indicate the speaker's psychological approach to the description of the verbal action" (77).

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the morphological structure of Arabic moods and the semantic fields denoted by them, taking into account what is often referred to as "verb status" or the "character of the verb". We intend to find out how much of the overall meaning of an utterance has to be ascribed to the verbal mood. Thus, the present paper intends to throw some light on the morpho-syntactic identity of moods and elucidate the affinity between the lexical meaning of the verb form and the general implication designated by the whole utterance, particularly with respect to the speaker's attitude. In view of the significance of this topic, it would be useful to begin by giving an explanation of "moods" before going into the actual discussion.

Background

Mood as a governing element in the syntactic structure of language is a frequent topic in modern linguistic studies. Several questions have been raised regarding 'concept', 'behaviour', 'resemblance with noun case-makers', 'semantic shadings', etc.

To begin with, we must acknowledge the concept that mood is the verbal property which indicates whether a certain item in the sentence structure is governed or otherwise. A verb form is governed if its application is generally dependent upon the use of particular lexical forms like particles, prepositions, adnominal complementizers, verbo-nominals and so on. In a language like Latin, for example, prepositions are said to govern nouns, making a certain case-ending obligatory.

Fradkin (1985) seems to be in accord with Lyons (1979) who attests that the verbal feature 'mood' is linked to the "speaker's commitment with respect to the factual states of what he is saying" (307). Lyons' statement implicates that mood is associated with the utterer's psychological approach to the perception of the verbal event. With this sense, mood differs from both the deictic category 'tense' and the semantico-syntactic notion 'aspect'. While 'tense' shows the various possible locations of a situation in time, 'aspects' as seen by Comrie (1976) are, "different ways of considering the internal temporal constituency of an action" (6).

Returning to the mood's governing effect, the verb in the Arabic sentence is the governing component par excellence. It assigns the 'nominative' to the doer of the action and the 'accusative' to the receiver of it, provided that the receiver is not governed by other elements already. The verb form itself may be governed by certain particles ('lam', 'hatta', '?an', 'lan', 'fal-') in which case it assumes either the 'subjunctive' or 'jussive' mood, accordingly, for instance:

- (1) /yaktubu (Ipfv.) at-filmi: du al-jumlata/
he-write the pupil-the-sentence
"The pupil writes the sentence"

If we add the particles "lan" and "lam", respectively, to the above structure, we will obtain accordingly these two sentences:

- (2) /lan yaktuba at-filmi: du al-jumlata/
will not he-write the-pupil
"The pupil will not write the sentence"
- (3) /lam yaktub at-filmi: du al-jumlata/
did not he-write the pupil-the-sentence
"The pupil did not write the sentence"

A closer look at sentence (2) reveals that the functional "lan" with its inherent future signification has affected the imperfective indicative form 'yaktubu' putting it in the 'subjunctive'. In the meantime, the operating particle "lam" in sentence (3) with its negative preterital reference has

converted the indicative form to the 'jussive' mood. Being the governing catalyst in sentences (1-3) above, the verb form has put the substantive 'al-jumlata' in the 'accusative' case for it is the receiver of the action.

Referring to the Arabic tenses of "al-ma:di" and "A'al-ha:dir", (respectively "Perfective" and "Imperfective"), modern Arabist authorities uphold the viewpoint that though the two tenses - Wright calls them: "states" - share the same characteristic, (i.e. both are indicative), the "perfective" is defective in the sense that it has no other grammatical forms corresponding to the diversity of the "imperfective".

One aspect which is believed to characterise the Arabic imperfective is that it has, apart from the indicative form, other verbal forms termed moods: (a) the subjunctive (b) the jussive (c) the imperative - energetic. Wright in his encyclopedic work *A Grammar of the Arabic Language* (1981), speaks of five moods by saying:

The first is common to the perfect and imperfect states; the second and third are restricted to the imperfect; the fourth, or imperative, is expressed by a special form; and the fifth can be derived not only from the imperfect, but also from the imperative (52).

The fact that there are no good justifications, at least, from the perspective of modern Arabic to reject the imperative and energetic from the entire system of moods, yet several Arab and non-Arab authorities advocate the idea of setting both moods apart from the whole system, perhaps owing to diachronic reasons in the ancient variety.

Indeed, the energetic mood has virtually no special particles to govern it automatically as is the case with the jussive and the subjunctive. It is never obligatory, yet it carries a future implication. The semantico-syntactic ranges of this form intersect not only with the imperative, but also with the subjunctive and the jussive. Nevertheless, the energetic opposes the jussive in that it appears without prefixes.

Apparently, the tripartite system of Arabic moods (indicative, subjunctive, jussive) resembles to a great extent the declension system of Arabic nouns with its case markers: nominative, accusative, genitive. For instance, the imperfective verb 'yaftahu' literally "he opens" has the ensuing modal variations:

| | | |
|-------------|-----------|----|
| Indicative | 'yaftahu' | -u |
| Subjunctive | 'yaftaha' | -a |
| Jussive | 'yaftah' | -o |

Likewise in the nominal system, the noun *'mifta:h'* meaning "key" yields the following declension forms, with the prefixed definite article "al-"

| | | |
|------------|---------------|------|
| Nominative | 'al-mifta:hu' | -- u |
| Accusative | 'al-mifta:ha' | -- a |
| Genitive | 'al-mifta:hi' | -- i |

Clearly as the above paradigms show, the indicative corresponds to the nominative and the subjunctive is congruous with the accusative in nouns.

The similarity between mood markers and noun case-endings in Arabic stems from the morphological fact that very minor changes take place in the vowel of the ultimate character of the verb form. In the subjunctive, the vowel '-u' of the indicative form converts to '-a' while the jussive replaces the '-u' by a zero vowel or "suku:n", to use the Arabic notion, and hence, causing the final radical of the imperfective form to become unvowelled. We would like to emphasize that the Arabic tradition employs the same phonological notions when referring to mood markers and noun case-endings, alike. This grammatical operation is necessary for a proper understanding of the original meaning and other related meanings. It is conventionally called "*iʔrab*", literally "parsing" and is defined by Bohas, Guillaume, and Kouloughli (1990) as, "the variation of the final vowel in words after their insertion in the utterance and determined by the different governing operators" (54).

The Subjunctive Mood

The syntactic rules for the occurrence of Arabic moods can be fairly intricate. This is borne out by the fact that the clausal structure of each utterance and the different ways of linking together the main and subordinate clauses are complex.

The subjunctive is formed essentially from the indicative verbal form. The personal pronouns which lack adjunct characters following the last radical convert the nominative superscript "-u" (or *damma*) into "-a" (or *fetha*). If the indicative form has "-na" or "-ni" in final position preceded by a long vowel ('alif' or 'waw' or 'ya'), the "-na" or "-ni" after the third radical is omitted in the case of the subjunctive. For both second and third person feminine forms immediately terminating in the pronominal "-na", the plural forms are the same for all the moods. The morphological rule for forming the subjunctive can be written as:

| | after C ₁ | after C ₂ | after C ₃ |
|-------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Indicative | --u | --u: | --na, --ni |
| Subjunctive | --a | --a: | --O |

With respect to meaning, the subjunctive signifies an eventuality yet to take place in the future. The overall semantics of this mood is to add prenotional implication on the part of the utterer—or in Fradkin's term, "to insert conjecture" In fact, it is the perception which the utterer intends to attract a special attention to and with which the addressee may accord or otherwise.

While the subjunctive almost always carries this conjectural meaning, the indicative is uncommitted or rather neutral in this respect. The perceptual element denoted by the indicative form may or may not be conjectural and the hearer is likely or unlikely to concur. In essence, the mood under examination implies a kind of linguistic "insistence" in reference to the speaker's understanding of the verbal development. The indicative by contrast refrains from showing such denotatum though it may express it covertly.

Another important facet of the semantic fields of the Arabic subjunctive is its use in situational contexts with the negativizer "lan". As far as we can see, this is the single area, par excellence, in which the subjunctive presents itself as an independent clause. For Ziadah and Winder (1964), the lexical word "lan" is a functional word, "which negates the future absolutely. It is followed by a verb in the subjunctive" (122). The particle is a "very strong negation of the future" (Wright, 1981. 300), though some analysts, notably Cantarino, advocate the view that "lan" translated as "will/shall not" is

"sawfa" or the contracted form "sa-". In either case, the ultimate result is that there is no process of apprehension except by the will and intent of the speaker.

In reality, the subjunctive can be used with a set of particles which if employed can enforce, implicitly or explicitly, some conjectures, for example:

| | |
|---------|--|
| 'hatta' | "until, to the extent that" |
| 'kay' | "in order to" |
| 'likay' | "in order to, for the purpose of" |
| 'lan' | "will not/shall not" |
| 'li-' | "to, so as to" |
| '?an' | "that" |
| '?alla' | "that not" (contraction of "?an" plus "la:") |
| 'fa-' | "and then" |

Although these particles together with other paratactic prefixes can imply meanings like necessity, obligation, prohibition, inclination, permission, directive, etc., the most traditional particle, according to general consensus, that frequently accompanies the subjunctive is “ʔan”, as in:

- (4) /ʔaradtu (pfv) ʔan tadhaba (Ipfv.)/
 wanted-I that you-go
 “I wanted you to go”

Both Arab and non-Arab grammarians assert that an embedded clause introduced by “ʔan” can circumstantially be replaced by a verbal noun or “masdar”, for example:

- (5) /ʔaradtu dāha:baka/
 wanted-I going-your
 “I wanted your going”

The subordinate clause led by “ʔan” in example (4) refers to an event yet to take place in posteriority. The truth of this semantic reading stems from the functional role played by such a clause; it serves as the doer of the action, not the receiver of it.

To sum up, the verbal situation of the subjunctive is often associated with the direct speculation about the situation. The subjunctive with this conjecture consolidates the idea that it can refer to any verbal process, whether or not the process is concretely linked to the real world.

In particular situational contexts, the potential meaning of the subjunctive form may also be a consequence of the overall meaning induced by the verb of the superordinate clause of which the subjunctive with “ʔan” serves as object.

The Jussive Mood

The jussive, active and passive, is formulated from the indicative. It has the same forms as the subjunctive with one single exception: the pronominal persons that have no letters following the ultimate radical deletion of their final vowels and assume a zero vowel or “suku:n” as a result.

This apocopated modification - Fradkin terms it “truncated modification” - of the imperfective indicative has in fact two major areas of operation: (a) the imperative and (b) the conditional. In Wright’s words, “The jussive is denoted by the absence of any vowel with the third radical, as ‘yaktub’, whence it is sometimes called the apocopated imperfect” (60).

Always used to express prohibitions, deny statements, and issue directives, the jussive is rarely applied alone. In other words, it is generally accompanied by particles and pronominal prefixes such as: 'lam', '?in', 'la:', 'li-', as in:

- (6) /li-taxruj (Ipfv) lawran/
 let-she-go out at once
 "Let her go out at once"

Clearly, the jussive in the above example is employed to indicate a command, hence its reinforcement with the paratactic prefix "li-" translated as "let". If a prohibition is desired, the negativizer "la:" literally "not" then precedes the jussive (second persons only), for instance:

- (7) (i) /la: taxruj (Ipfv) / (masculine singular)
 not you-go out
 "Do not go out"
- (ii) /la: taxruja: (Ipfv.) / (dual)
 not you-go out
 "Do not go out"

In the typological linguistic picture, the jussive intersects with the perfective 'al-ma:di' in two semantic areas: (a) The conditional with '?in' translated as "if" and (b) the referential identity of the negativizer "ma:" followed by the perfective form and "lam" followed by the imperfective. As for the particle "?in", grammarians are faithful in pointing out this quadrilateral mix-and-match pattern of conditionals, rendered as: "If you go, I (will) go"

- (8) /?in ta d hab d ahabtu/ (jussive - perfective)
 /?in d ahabta d ahabtu/ (perfective - perfective)
 /?in d ahabta ?a d hab/ (perfective - jussive)
 /?in ta d hab ?a d hab/ (jussive - jussive)

It seems to us that the semantic feature reflected by the four synonymous utterances of the above pattern is that the verbal development described is not necessarily conceivable. This is indeed the very nature of Arabic conditionals and the Adenotatum of future temporality Fradkin (1985) asserts that. "there is, in essence, no control over the perception of these processes" (237).

Let us now examine the functional "lam". It has invariably a past time connotation in Arabic syntax which is dominated entirely by the jussive. In his influential nineteenth-century work, Wright claims that the imperfective after 'lam' has exclusively the denotation of the perfective. Brockleman (cf. R. Fradkin 1985) views this preterital meaning of the jussive after 'lam' as a reflection or effect of the old semitic variety. But he does not explain why this meaning of the jussive should only appear in negation.

To cite an example:

- (9) /lam yaktub (Ipfv.) darsa-hu/
 did not he-write lesson-his
 "He did not write his lesson"

With respect to the synonymous affinity and substitutability of 'lam' plus imperfective and 'ma:' plus perfective, we must admit that several non-native speakers have not acknowledged the semantic variation between them. Nonetheless, the Arabist scholar, Rammuny (1978) suggests, though with caution, that 'ma:' followed by the perfective is the negation of the verb form together with the whole utterance, and 'lam' negates only the verb form.

We wish to add that 'ma:' is not only followed by the perfective, but also by the imperfective. In such cases, it resembles the particles '?in' and 'man' in having two sentence parts: apodosis and protasis. The verbs in the protasis (If - clause) and the apodosis (main clause) are in the imperfective jussive. The particle 'ma:' with this "impersonal" utilization signals a future denotation, similar to that expressed by the conditional particle '?in'

Conclusion

What we are proposing here is that far more attention should be paid to the semantic variations of the Arabic moods. A partial investigation of the system will, unquestionably, yield partial and insignificant conclusions. Language meaning is never stable or invariable - if the situation changes so does the meaning.

The notion of 'mood' has to do with the perception of the verbal development. It determines the semantico-syntactic relations that exist between words on the grounds of contrast between factuality and non-factuality (i.e. actual fact and hypotheticalness).

The mood system in Arabic comprises the indicative, the subjunctive, and the jussive. The subjunctive represents a tenuous affinity with the

situation named. The jussive, meanwhile, expresses a denial of that situation; this is in Fradkin's expression, "the mood of arbitrariness, a sort of appeal to the perception of a verbal process" (236). The imperfective indicative being the unmarked member concurs with the verbal situation, it distinctly involves factuality if it is used in default of any precedent functionals. The major difference between the jussive and imperative lies in the grammatical prefixes accompanying them. On a semantic basis, the imperative cannot co-occur with a negation; nor can it be formed from morphological passives.

As for the energetic form, we believe that it harmonizes more with the 'Subjunctive + n' than with the 'jussive + an' as in "taktuban *na*" rendered as "you write" It is a morphologically hybridized entity This has given the form its semantic hybridity, hence designating the determination of the subjunctive as well as the appeal of the jussive.

We must admit objectively that Arabic has developed a system of moods. As Fradkin (1985) who affords pragmatic insights into the phenomenon observes, "there is a system and it is complete" (168), although it is merely confined to the imperfective.

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