

## THE ELUCIDATION OF SYNTACTIC CHANGES AND THEIR CAUSES IN "MIFTOHU-L-ULUM"

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### **Annotation**

Theoretical and Practical Elucidation of Syntactic Changes and Their Causes in the Treatise Miftahu-l-Ulum by Sakkaki. The treatise is significant as it perfectly systematized the sciences of not only balagha (rhetoric/eloquence) but also şarf (morphology) and naḥw (syntax) in classical Arabic linguistics. The study analyzes specific grammatical rules within the syntax (naḥw) section of the work, particularly the process of case inflectional variation in nouns, words with unique declension patterns, and the subtle differences occurring in the structure of phrasal constructions.

### **Keywords**

Miftahu-l-ulum, Sakkaki, syntax, naḥw, syntactic changes, balagha, arabic grammar.

The history of Arabic grammar contains numerous rare works that have maintained their significance to this day. However, among them, the number of fundamental sources deemed worthy of the high praise—"a work unparalleled among both the earlier and the later generations" (or "a work that has no equal in the past or the future")—given by Muhammad 'Abd al-Hayy al-Lacknawi, is very small [6: 231].

One such unique and incomparable work is *Miftāḥ al-'Ulūm* (The Key to the Sciences), authored by Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf ibn Abī Bakr al-Sakkākī (d. 626 AH / 1229 CE). This book is considered the magnificent culmination of the author's entire scholarly career.

*Miftāḥ al-'Ulūm* is not merely a grammatical manual, but rather a comprehensive work on three fundamental sciences related to the Arabic language:

1. Şarf (Morphology)
2. Naḥw (Syntax)

3. Ma‘ānī, Bayān, and Badī‘ (Rhetoric) [2: 25].

*Miftāḥ al-‘Ulūm* is a comprehensive compendium that integrates these fields. The primary reason the work has retained its value over the centuries is precisely this complex and systematic approach. Al-Sakkākī articulated the deep theoretical foundations of these sciences with such precision and order that it guaranteed its status as the main reference source for subsequent generations of scholars.

In short, *Miftāḥ al-‘Ulūm* is a truly peerless fundamental legacy that marked a turning point in the development of Arabic linguistic sciences, opening many scholarly doors, just as its title suggests.

The renowned German orientalist Carl Brockelmann (1868–1956) made an immense contribution to the study of Arabic language and literature. In particular, his monumental work, "History of Arabic Literature" (*Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur, GAL*), is considered a fundamental source in Oriental studies.

Brockelmann enumerated scholars who significantly contributed to the development of Arabic linguistics, highly appreciating their academic importance. From his academic perspective, he singled out scholars who held a unique place in systematizing linguistic eloquence and grammatical rules. Specifically, Brockelmann held al-Zamakhshari’s work in high esteem, considering him a major figure in this field.

He emphasized that the great linguist Mahmud al-Zamakhshari (1075–1144) is followed in importance—in terms of analysis and theoretical contribution—by the great thinker Abu Ya‘qub Yusuf ibn Abi Bakr al-Sakkaki, who was a follower of the Khwarazmians [5:171].

In the introduction to his work, Sakkaki clearly explains the reason for its composition. He writes:

“Because the learned scholars of my time, the noble individuals who have perfected virtue, firmly requested me to write [a concise] treatise, I compiled it in a method that every sagacious (intelligent) person can understand, so that they might fully enjoy the benefits.” [1: 1b]

This information indicates that the work was created in response to the high demand and request of the academic community, and that it was written at an elevated scholarly level while still being accessible for comprehension. The author's goal was to convey the complex aspects of rhetoric and grammar in an easy and clear manner, even for profound students of knowledge.

Sakkaki explains his purpose in naming the work as follows:

“I compiled the essential sciences that must be thoroughly learned in this work and named it *Miftāḥ al-‘Ulūm* (Key to the Sciences) (مفتاح العلوم)” [3: 27].

The significance of the work lies in the fact that it encompasses comprehensive knowledge related to the Arabic language. Its primary value stems from the following points:

1. Inclusion of Twelve Disciplines

"Miftāḥ al-‘Ulūm" (The Key to the Sciences) compiles twelve fundamental disciplines, covering Arabic grammar (morphology, *ṣarf*; and syntax, *naḥw*) and various aspects of rhetoric (*balāgha*).

2. An Encyclopedia of Grammar and Rhetoric

The work distinctly sets itself apart from other sources of its time due to its profound exposition of all parts of Arabic grammar (*naḥw* and *ṣarf*), as well as the sciences of rhetoric (*ma‘ānī* - semantics/meaning, *bayān* - elucidation/figurative speech, and *badī‘* - stylistic refinement). This grants the text a unique and complete advantage.

3. Foundation for Subsequent Eras

"Miftāḥ al-‘Ulūm" served as a foundational textbook and methodological source for rhetoric and Arabic linguistics, not only in its own era but also in subsequent centuries. For example, its section on rhetoric was later commented upon and explained by renowned scholars, which further solidified the work's position in the scientific heritage.

This work demonstrates that Sakkaki was not only a linguist but also a mature thinker who deeply understood the scientific needs of his time and was capable of systematizing knowledge.

*Miftāḥ al-‘Ulūm* (The Key to the Sciences) became a truly great discovery in the Muslim world by encompassing twelve sciences. The superiority of this work over other sources in the field stems from its comprehensive coverage of all branches of Arabic grammar.

Further proof of *Miftāḥ al-‘Ulūm*'s uniqueness – both in comparison to earlier and later works – is its inclusion of topics not found in other sources, which are presented using a method of logical coherence and sequence.

While the concluding section (or *khātima*) of other works typically presents the specific reasons for their composition, Sakkaki's *khātima* brings forth the causes of syntactic processes (*sabab al-‘amal al-naḥwī*). The most significant aspect is that he addresses each cause under a separate chapter (*faṣl*), naming it according to its relevance. Since there are ten chapters, it is understood that ten causes are elucidated.

The causes of syntactic processes elucidated by Sakkaki are as follows:

Chapter One: On the Reason for the Indeclinability (*Binā‘*) of Indeclinable Nouns

الفصل الأول في علة بناء ما بني من الأسماء

In this chapter, Al-Sakkākī explains that there are four states that necessitate indeclinability. He clarifies in which categories and under what conditions these states are observed, and why they lead to a word's indeclinability [cf. 1: 56b-57b].

Chapter Two: On the Reason for the Prohibition of Full Declension (*Mamnu' min al-Ṣarf*) and Related Matters

الفصل الثاني في علة امتناع ما يمتنع من الصرف وما يتصل بذلك

This chapter elaborates that the reason for the partial declension (i.e., non-assimilation of case endings) of diptotes (nouns declined in two cases) is the absence of *tanwīn* (nunation). Furthermore, the specific characteristics of these diptotes are detailed in this chapter [cf. 1: 58a-59a].

Chapter Three: On the Reason for the Declension of the Six Nouns by Letters when in the *Idāfah* Construction

الفصل الثالث في علة إعراب الأسماء الستة بالحروف مضافة

In this chapter, Al-Sakkākī discusses the six nouns famous in *Naḥw* (Arabic grammar) whose syntactic change (*i'rāb*) is marked not by short vowels (*ḥarakāt*) but by specific letters (*ḥurūf*) [cf. 1: 59b].

He argues that the reason for the syntactic variation of these six nouns using letters when they serve as the *mudāf* (first term) in an *idāfah* (genitive/possessive) construction is the prohibition of a single-letter word in the Arabic language.

Example: The word فَم (mouth), in this specific syntactic context, would otherwise be reduced to the single-letter form فā' (ف).

Since such a reduction to a single-letter word is disallowed in the language, the letters *wāw* (و), *yā'* (ي), or *alif* (ا) are attached to it for case marking. Thus, it appears in the forms فُو، فَي، فَا (fū, fī, fā), instead of the single-letter form ف.

Therefore, when the aforementioned words are attached to the first-person singular possessive pronoun (*yā' al-mutakallim*), their syntactic change is not marked by letters, because in those specific forms, the word consists of two letters (e.g., فَمِي), not one, thus making the substitution with و، ي، or ا unnecessary.

Sakkākī's Style and Interpretation of Chapter Three

In explaining the rules within the work, Al-Sakkākī employed a concise and succinct style of expression. This method further enhances the value of the treatise. The first sentence of the chapter in question can be cited as a prime example of this brevity.

In that chapter, Al-Sakkākī states:

«وهي إظهار الاجتناب بالألف وجه وأقربه عن أن يقوي خلاف قياس فيها»

(Literal translation: it [the reason] is the notion of manifesting shunning by the alif and bringing it closer to being strong against analogy) [1: 59b].

A reader would expend considerable effort to grasp the meaning from this literal translation alone. The work contains numerous such sentences that are brief yet profound in meaning.

The phrase "shunning by the *alif*" in this sentence conveys the specialized meaning of preventing a word from being reduced to a single letter.

The phrase "bringing it closer to being strong against analogy" indicates that a single letter alone must not remain as a word; rather, the word must consist of at least two letters. It is important to note that in this specific sentence, the word *alif* is used not as the specific letter *alif*, but in the sense of "one" (i.e., singularity).

Chapter Four: On the Reason for the Declension (*I'rāb*) of the Dual and the Plural and their Peculiarities

الفصل الرابع في علة إعراب المثني والمجموع على ما هو عليه

In this chapter, Sakkākī explains that the dual and the sound (regular) plural are formed through the addition of suffixes, and that this phenomenon is exclusive to nouns.

Regarding the reason for this structural change, Al-Sakkākī states:

«The added element consists of *madd* (long vowel) letters, and its placement within words is light and easy. Therefore, the tongues glide over it, listeners become attached to it. Natures grow accustomed to it, and souls incline toward it. The *madd* letters that indicate the *i'rāb* (inflection) are thus preserved because they are prevented from being vocalized [i.e., bearing short vowels]» [1: 60a].

Chapter Five: On the Reason for the Declension (*I'rāb*) of *kilā* and *kiltā* when Annexed to a Pronoun

الفصل الخامس في علة إعراب (كلا وكتا) مضافين إلى ضمير على ما هو عليه

In this chapter, the scholar presents various views regarding these two words (*kilā* – masculine dual; *kiltā* – feminine dual), emphasizing that while their form is singular, their meaning is dual. He also cites verses from poets as evidence. Al-Sakkākī explains that the *alif* contained within them is not the *alif* that explicitly signifies the dual, citing this as the reason for their indeclinability in other contexts [cf. 1: 60b].

Chapter Six: On the Reason for the Declension of Words like *muslimāt* (Muslim Women) and its Peculiarity

الفصل السادس في علة إعراب نحو (مسلمات) على ما هو عليه

Al-Sakkākī states that the reason the sound feminine plural (*Jumu' Mu'annath Sālim*) is inflected is due to its conformance to the masculine [plural]. This is because the feminine [plural] is derived from the masculine. The derived element always follows the origin [cf. 1: 61a].

Chapter Seven: On the Reason for the Inflection (*I'rāb*) of Inflectable Verbs

الفصل السابع في علة إعراب ما أعرب من الأفعال

In this chapter, Al-Sakkākī focuses on the verb's jussive mood, contrasting it with the noun. He discusses the phenomena of jazm (jussive/apocopate), which is absent in nouns, and jarr (genitive case), which is absent in verbs [cf. 1: 61a].

Chapter Eight: On the Reason for the Operation ('*Amal*) of Operative Particles and the Nature of their Variation in this Regard

الفصل الثامن في علة عمل الحروف العاملة وكيفية اختلافها في ذلك

Having addressed the reasons for syntactic change in the noun and verb categories, Al-Sakkākī then explains the phenomena related to the third category: the particle (*ḥarf*).

In this chapter, Al-Sakkākī details the particles that precede nouns and verbs, discussing how they cause changes (syntactic operations) in these categories. He first elaborates on the particles that precede nouns, followed by a detailed examination of those that precede verbs.

He also contrasts these operative particles with non-operative particles that convey meaning but lack syntactic function, such as the noun-initial definite article ال (*al-*) and the verb-initial future markers س (*sīn*) and سوف (*sawfa*) [1: 62a].

Chapter Nine: On the Reason for the Syntactic Operation ('*Amal*) of Nouns that Do Not Cause the Genitive Case, and the Nature of their Variation

الفصل التاسع في علة عمل الأسماء غير الجر وكيفية اختلافها

This chapter explains the reasons why the verbal noun (*maṣḍar*) and the active participle (*ism al-fā'il*)—which are derived from verbs—occur in the nominative (*raf'*) and accusative (*naṣb*) cases. Al-Sakkākī discusses that the active participle takes the nominative (*raf'*) case when it functions as the subject/agent (*fā'il*) within the sentence, and the accusative (*naṣb*) case when it functions as the circumstantial qualifier (*ḥāl*) [cf. 4: 62].

Chapter Ten: On the Reason for the Syntactic Operation of Abstract Meaning (*Ma'nā*) Causing the Nominative Case for the Subject, the Predicate, and the Imperfect Verb

الفصل العاشر في علة عمل المعنى الرفع للمبتدأ والخبر والفعل المضارع

This chapter asserts that the initial term, or subject (*mubtada'*), in a nominal sentence takes the nominative (*raf'*) case because it is positioned at the beginning of the sentence. The predicate (*khobar*) takes the nominative because it follows and is dependent upon the subject. Furthermore, it is maintained that the imperfect verb form takes the nominative mood (*raf'*) due to its potential to substitute for or function in the place of a noun [cf. 1: 63a].

Based on his profound scholarly views, Al-Sakkākī compiled the causes (or reasons) for syntactic processes which were not observed in the works of previous

scholars—into ten chapters. The bipartite division of the noun category in Arabic (into declinable and indeclinable) in terms of syntactic change, which is covered in the First and Second Chapters, exists in every source of the field. However, it is difficult to find an explanation of why they change or do not change, articulated with the clarity and depth found in Al-Sakkākī's work. The Third, Fourth, and Fifth Chapters provide a detailed analysis of the most common syntactic relations and the reasons for changes observed in word combinations that follow the word (i.e., the most frequent relations in common lexical phrases). The Sixth Chapter explains the category of the plural—the most frequently used of the affixes forming lexical structure—including the resulting changes and their underlying causes. The scholar investigated this reason because this category proves highly productive in both single words and word combinations.

The remaining chapters focus on the syntactic changes in the verb, which is considered the largest of the word classes. In each chapter, he elucidated subject-specific scholarly critical observations and ideas. The fact that he supported each of these ten chapters with Quranic verses (*āyāt*) and poetic couplets (*abyāt*) stands as proof of his immense and profound knowledge.

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