

## **The Flexibility of Placing the Subject in Arabic Sentences: A Study of Syntactic Word Order Restrictions and their Application to Arabic Grammar**

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**Abstract:** This research addresses the possibility of placing the subject in a pre-verb position in verbal sentences in Arabic, without necessarily stipulating that if the subject is preposed before the verb, it becomes a topic. In this way, the subject is a non-overt pronoun positioned within or after the verb, because the subject is conventionally acknowledged by grammarians to move freely to various post-verbal positions, but never pre-verbally. The research considers the views and opinions of linguists and grammarians who have dealt with this issue in detail, presenting a discussion of these views to reveal the strict restrictions imposed on the movement of the subject. It is hoped that this will contribute to the facilitation of teaching and learning Arabic grammar. It will also revitalize the discussion of views in Arabic grammatical traditions to try to establish new grammatical principles that contemporary linguists may adopt when reformulating the rules of Arabic grammar. This endeavor may simplify the task of learning rules and contribute to presenting them more flexibly and plausibly.

**Keywords:** nominal sentence, order, subject, topic, verbal sentence

### **1. Introduction**

Descriptive grammar focuses on how people naturally use language without trying to dictate how they should use it. It considers different aspects of language, such as how it is used in different social settings, and how it has changed over time. By looking at language from different angles, descriptive grammar aims to capture its ever-changing nature. Linguists can use descriptive grammar to investigate its historical shifts, how various communities use language, and how it works in different situations. Essentially, descriptive grammar offers a complete understanding of language, embracing its diversity and ability to change (Rossiter 2020). This current study investigates the order of the subject in relation to other elements in Arabic sentences, as well as the implications of such constraints for the two primary categories of Arabic sentences in grammatical research: nominal and verbal sentences. The present study begins by examining the viewpoints and hypotheses presented by Arabic grammarians and linguists. It is important to note that the scientific study of Arabic grammar has evolved to facilitate the learning and teaching of the language. For these grammarians, such study serves as a tool to

aid the learning of Arabic, rather than being the ultimate objective itself. However, we believe that it is essential to simplify grammar for Arabic learners and students, to help them overcome obstacles hindering their comprehension and interpretation of Arabic texts. This is especially key in cases of syntactic parsing, in which students often struggle to find intellectual or logical justifications for their understanding or agreement with traditional rules; often, they feel compelled to accept these rules out of necessity rather than comprehension and conviction. In Arabic sentences, agreement between the verb and the subject is determined by a number of factors, such as the order of the words and the type of subject (Jarrah, Rayyan, Al-Shawashreh and Zuraikat 2020).

It is worth mentioning that Arab grammarians laid the foundations of the science of grammar in their remarkable efforts, which hold a significant place among the various disciplines of Arabic studies. This field has made substantial contributions to the preservation of the Arabic language, the facilitation of its teaching, and the reduction of solecisms. The result of the diligent work put in by ancient linguists and grammarians was the identification and establishment of the rules of the Arabic grammatical system, using standardization methods in later stages to safeguard the language and prevent the infiltration of errors in both spoken and written Arabic.

However, Arab grammarians went to great lengths to apply logical concepts to their grammatical analyses. They often engaged themselves, as well as subsequent scholars and learners, in numerous arguments, justifications, and explanations that were not closely aligned with the spirit of the language. This, in turn, has led to significant criticisms of their work, as reflected in Ibn MaDa's comments (1979) on the grammatical research conducted by these grammarians. He noted that 'they adhered to what they did not need to, and they went beyond the scope of their research, making it difficult to tackle, weakly constructed, and based on scarcely persuasive arguments' (Al-QurTubi 1979: 64).

In this regard, it is important to distinguish between *musnad* and *musnad ?ilajh*. The subject *musnad ?ilajh* in a sentence is the person or thing we talk about, often referred to as 'the topic'. For instance, in sentences such as *Zaidun jadrusu fildza:mi?a* ('Zaid is studying at the university') and *jadrusu Zaidun fildza:mi?a* ('is studying Zaid at the university'), *Zaidun* ('Zaid') is the subject, regardless of whether the sentence is categorized as nominal or verbal. This categorization is due to the different positions of the noun and verb. The predicate *musnad* provides information about the subject, *musnad ?ilajh*. In the above sentences, 'jadrusu' ('is studying') serves as the predicate, conveying the action being performed by the subject. The concepts of subject and predicate are thus fundamental to understanding the structure and meaning of sentences in Arabic grammar.

### 1.1 Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this study posits that the subject of the verbal sentence in Arabic can occupy positions both before and after the verb, and that it can precede the verb while retaining its status as a 'subject' *fa?il*, rather than becoming a 'topic' *mubtada?*. As such, the sentence is still a verbal sentence and not a nominal one in

instances where the subject occupies a preverbal position. Determining the category and classification of sentences in Arabic depends on the nature of the ‘predicate’ *musnad* in the sentence. Understanding such concepts will facilitate the teaching of Arabic grammar and its understanding more than depending on the position of the ‘theme/topic *musnad-ʔilajh*.

## 1.2 Problem

In this study, we emphasize that the subject can precede the verb while maintaining its role as a subject. Therefore, the noun *alṭa:libu* in sentences such as *nadzaha alṭa:libu* (lit. ‘succeeded’ the student) and *alṭa:libu nadzaha* (lit. ‘the student succeeded’) should be analyzed as a subject in the nominative case. This perspective contradicts the traditional analysis taught in grammar courses whereby this noun is classified as a subject in the first sentence; however, in the second, the learner is expected to recognize it as a topic in the nominative case. In this case, the subject is considered a non-overt pronoun positioned after the verb and which resumes the topic.

## 1.3 Significance of the study

The suggestion made in this study may help to rescue Arabic grammar from such notions as non-overt ‘silent’ elements and ‘induced’ interpretations. It will also help simplify parsing for learners while retaining the constants of Arabic grammar.

## 2. Previous studies

Studies on subject position regarding other elements in Arabic sentence word order are generally assumed to belong to the study of Arabic sentences and their elements and constituents. However, it is evident that the old grammarians’ treatment of subject position, as well as preposing and postposing, falls within the independent subfield of the *al faṣil* ‘subject’ section. Here, one finds all the rules and provisions related to the subject in the old grammar treatises. In their studies, the old Arab grammarians did not devote independent sections to the concept of the Arabic sentence, or its origin and the identification of its elements and constituents. Rather, these aspects were discussed while dealing with other grammatical issues and sections (Fulful 2009). Ibn Hisham al-AnSāri was the first to devote an independent chapter in his book on the study of the sentence (Al-Mehairi 1966: 3–46).

In Arabic grammar, both rules and practical application are integral to the modern scientific method. Sentence structure in Arabic is divided into thrī categories: the verbal sentence (*al- dzumla al-fiṣiljja*), where the subject indicates renewal or action; the nominal sentence (*al- dzumla al-ʔismijja*), where the subject indicates continuity and stability; and, the adverbial sentence (*al-jumla al-zarfīyya*), where the subject functions as an adverb or is connected by a preposition. Through this approach, Al-Makhzumi (1985) advocates that the freedom of the agent and their actions within a sentence are vital considerations. He asserts that the classification of Arabic sentences should depend on the nature of the subject, thus aligning with the principles of modern scientific methodology in the field of Arabic grammar. Al-Samarai (1966) discusses how Arabic grammarians historically

divided sentences and argues that their division, based on whether a sentence is initiated by a verb or a noun, is merely a formal categorization. He contends that consideration should be given to the subject in such a division, thus emphasizing the importance of the subject's role in understanding sentence structure.

Modern Arab grammarians have dealt with the Arabic sentence in much more detail than their predecessors and have suggested various propositions from different viewpoints. We may, now, witness many useful and valuable studies by contemporary linguists, such as: Al-Samarai (1966), El Mehairi (1966), Al-Juwāri (1974), Al-Makhzoomi (1985), Al-Fihri (1986), Abdo (2008), Safa (2010), and others. Each of these researchers has their own views and theoretical orientations within which they studied the sentence in Arabic. Some attempted to provide an explicit account of the views that the old grammarians held about the Arabic sentence, while others researched the boundaries of nominal and verbal sentences, their elements, and which elements are positioned outside these boundaries. Yet a third group attempted to look into the sentence in Arabic and reveal its deeper structure.

## **2. Methodology**

The study employs a descriptive-analytical approach, utilizing the viewpoints of both ancient and modern linguists, sourced directly from their original works and research. These perspectives are then organized and examined through a comparative analysis, which serves to test the hypothesis of the study.

This method encompasses a thorough examination of the arrangement of subjects in Arabic sentences and their flexibility in terms of positioning. To establish a foundation for this investigation, it is crucial to grasp the fundamentals of descriptive grammar and the diverse historical approaches linguists have taken towards subject order in Arabic. The data for this examination is drawn from insights and perspectives provided by a variety of linguistic sources, spanning historical and contemporary periods. These sources encompass the writings and studies of renowned Arabic grammarians, linguists, and researchers.

The analysis entails the classification and comparison of these viewpoints, particularly those pertaining to the placement of the subject within Arabic sentences. This scrutiny is essential for shedding light on disparities in interpretation, categorization, and the consequences of subject placement in Arabic sentences. Furthermore, it facilitates a deeper comprehension of the ongoing debates surrounding the freedom of subject movement within verbal sentences in Arabic.

## **4. The subject position and its impact on determining sentence boundaries**

It is well-known that the subject in an Arabic sentence is placed after the verb, i.e., to its left in the linear organization of the sentence, and, in the Arabic grammatical tradition, the subject may not precede its verb. In this study, by talking about the subject preceding or following its verb, we mean both the verb and quasi-verb, which governs the subject. However, for the sake of clarity and brevity, we limit our discussion to the verb in the examples we bring and explanations we offer.



'theme/subject'. The fronting of the 'theme/subject' does not change the nature of the sentence, since it has been fronted because of its importance.

Al-Samarai (1966) agrees with this proposal. According to Al-Samarai (1966: 204), *muḥammad-un sa:fara* 'Mohammad travelled' and *sa:fara Muḥammad-un* 'lit. travelled Mohammad' are verbal sentences as long as the predicate is a verb'. Al-Juwāri (1974) concurs and states that, 'in reality, there is no difference between *qa:ma Zajd-un* 'lit. stood Zaid', and *Zajd-un qa:ma* 'Zaid stood', as far as their construction is concerned; the predicate is a verb in both sentences, and so the predication is of the same nature, meant to stipulate the temporal reference. The difference is limited to the precedence of the 'theme/subject' in the second sentence to give it some importance, and to emphasize that something is predicated of it (Al-Juwāri 1974: 20–21).

These linguists base this proposal on the opinion of the Kufi grammarians, who defend both freedom of subject movement and allowing it to assume a position prior to its governor, as there is nothing to prevent it (Al-Makhzoomi 1985: 44; Al-SuyūTi 1992; Al-Ansari 1994). This has motivated modern linguists to reconsider a *frīr* subject placement in the sentence, as well as what this entails concerning certain issues usually treated within the nominal sentence, and moving them to the domain of the verbal sentence.

Thus, we find two opinions on the subject's order and its *frīdom* of movement inside verbal sentences. The first is a well-known opinion commonly adhered to in the study of the Arabic sentence and its teaching. It is based on fixed subject order after the verb and the inadmissibility of its fronting. Proponents of this opinion are both old and contemporary grammarians, in general (Al-Makhzoomi 1985). The second opinion, however, is less common, not employed in the studying or teaching of Arabic grammar, and held by various contemporary linguists who propose that the subject can be fronted over its verb without changing the sentence type from verbal to nominal.

## 5. Blocking fronting: Problems and justifications

Arabic grammar has always recognized as a nearly indisputable premise that the subject is placed after the verb. To the old grammarians, it cannot be imagined that the subject precedes the verb. That the subject is placed after the verb is an unquestioned truth for Sibawayh, who lived in the 8<sup>th</sup> century and authored the renowned work, '*Kitab Sibawayh*' or '*Al-Kitab*'. Although he did not focus on this issue when talking about the subject, his opinion can be clearly inferred from the section in his book on the subject. In this section, he dealt with notions of transitivity and intransitivity, i.e., the verb extending beyond the subject that follows it, or limiting its influence to the subject. The posterior position of the subject is implied from what Sibawayh (2004: 33–34) says:

The section of the subject whose verb does not extend to an object... . As for the subject whose verb does not extend beyond it ...' and 'this is the section of the subject whose verb extends beyond it to an object...'. In this last section – i.e., the section on the subject whose verb extends beyond it to reach an object.

Sibawayh (2004) points out that *ḍaraba ṣabd-ulla:h-i Zajd-an* ‘lit. beat Abdullah Zayd’ (the noun *ṣabd-ulla:h-i* ‘Abdullah’ takes nominative case inflection, as it does in *ḍahaba* (went), because it engages the verb in *ḍaraba*; likewise, the verb *ḍahaba*, and *Zajd-an* ‘Zaid’ take accusative case inflection because it is an object to which the action of the subject has extended. On the contrary, Al-Haj Salih (2007: 128) believes that, although these Sibawayh’s statements may prohibit moving the governed element over its governor, they also indicate that, if it precedes it, the sentence structure changes but not its positive meaning, as in *ṣabdulla:hi qa:ma* ‘Abdullah stood’ = *qa:ma ṣabdulla:hi* ‘lit. stood Abdullah’.

Grammar books have continued to place the subject after the verb, and to consider this order one of the most important rules concerning the subject, equal in status to the rule that decrees its inflection of the nominative case. In their treatise, most grammarians have stipulated that this was the position of the subject in the word order. For example, we may quote what Al-Ansari (1946) said on the rules on the subject: ‘that it is placed after the predicate, and if there appears what appears like a fronted subject, we must posit a subject that is a non-overt pronoun’. This is the approach that grammarians have adopted in dealing with the subject when it precedes its verb. They usually assume the subject to be a non-overt pronoun after the verb, as in *Zajd-un nadzaha* ‘Zaid succeeded’, and do not consider the noun *Zajd*, which precedes the verb here, as the subject. This is so as not to disrupt the rule stipulating that the subject be positioned after the verb (Al-Mubarrid 1994: 128). Al-Mubarrid (1994) suggests that the verb inflects the non-overt pronoun, inside it, with the nominative case, as in *ṣabdulla:hi qa:ma* ‘Abdulla stood’. If we say that the verb inflects *ṣabdulla:hi* for the nominative case, this means it is inflecting two nouns for the nominative case as subjects. This is not allowed in terms of the grammarians’ approach except for conjunctions such as *dzaʔa ṣabdulla:hi wa Zajd-un* ‘lit. came Abdulla and Zaid’.

The old grammarians went to extremes in their adherence to the posterior position of the subject in relation to the verb, going so far as to claim that *aHad-un* (someone)—in the Quranic verse *wa ʔin ʔahad-un min al-mufriki:na ʔistadza:raka* ‘And if one of the polytheists seeks your protection’ (al-Tawba, 6)—is the subject of a deleted verb, whose interpretation is supplied by what follows it. That is, it is projected as the verb *ʔistadza:raka* (seek protection), because the grammarians could not parse *ʔahad-un* as a topic, since conditional particles only precede verbal sentences. The question that arises here concerns whether the sentence that follows the conditional particle in this verse is a verbal sentence in which the subject has been moved to a position that precedes its verb. This verbal sentence could have appeared in several forms of preposing and postposing of elements:

- *wa ʔin ʔistadza:raka ʔahadun min al-mufriki:na* (lit. ‘and if one of the polytheists seeks your protection)
- *wa ʔin ʔistadza:raka min al-mufriki:na ʔahadun* (lit. and if seeks your protection of the polytheists one)
- *wa ʔin ʔahadun min al-mufriki:na ʔistadza:raka* (lit. and if one of the polytheists seeks your protection)

- *wa ʔin ʔahādun ʔistadʒa:raka min al-mufriki:na* (lit. and if one seeks your protection of the polytheists)

Many problems arisen from the stipulation of an obligatory order where the subject occupies a post-verb position. The first and most important lies in the necessity of assuming a subject in the form of a non-overt pronoun after the verb in sentences like *Zajd-un nadʒaha* 'Zaid succeeded', and the learning difficulties that it creates. The student learns that the subject performs the action, or of what the verb is predicated. When we say *nadʒaha Zaj-un* 'lit. succeeded Zaid', *Zajd-un* is the performer of the action of 'succeeding', and this is what success predicates. When the learner starts parsing a verbal sentence, they are often met with ambiguity, and may ask why *Zajd-un* is not parsed as a subject when it is fronted, since it is still the performer of the action, and since we will be saying that the subject is a non-overt pronoun that resumes the overt noun. The teacher cannot find a convincing answer and may provide unsatisfactory responses, professing statements such as the grammarians do not agree or that it is unacceptable for the subject to precede its verb, or others like them; none of these explanations are likely to be found satisfactory.

The difficulty that learners face with this kind of parsing is clear to the observer. It stems from the different terms used in naming the subject; sometimes it is called the 'subject' because it is what performs the action, while at others it is the 'topic', under the excuse that the sentence begins with it, even though it is still the performer of the action. It is as if the Arabic grammar learner has to accept easily and effortlessly, or so the grammarians assume, the changes in grammatical terms, which actually are misleading rather than generating the precision required in parsing.

Among the most prominent justifications that the grammarians put forward for the obligatoriness of the postverbal order of the subject and the rejection of the possibility of its precedence over its verb is the claim that the verb and its subject are like a single word made of two components. In such a case, it is inadmissible to place the second component of the word before the first. Analogously, the subject cannot be positioned before its verb (Al-Anbārī 1977: 79; Ibn Yaʿīš 2001).

## 6. Permissibility of precedence: Problems and justifications

Some Kufi grammarians think that the subject may precede its verb and see nothing wrong in it. Ibn MaDā (1997: 81-84) adopted this view and found no nīd to assume the existence of a pronoun in the verb in sentences like *Zajd-un qa:ma* ('Zaid stood'). The subject of the verb is *Zajd-un*, which precedes it (see Ibn MaDā' 1979). This has enabled Kufi grammarians to overcome many of the problems in parsing and in assuming non-overt elements, for which there is no need. One good example of this can be seen in assuming a deleted verb after the element 'in in the Quranic verse *wa ʔin ʔahādun min al-mufriki:na ʔistadʒa:raka* ('And if one of the polytheists sīks your protection'), and after *ʔiða:* in the Quranic verse *ʔiða: al.sama:ʔu ʔinfaqqat* ('When the heaven is split asunder') [al.ʔinʔiqqa:q : 1](Multilingual Quran). One of the benefits of admitting the precedence of the subject over the verb lies in doing away with the grammarians' view that it is

necessary to assume a verb after the conditional *ʔin* and *ʔiḏa*: ('if'). The grammar books and approaches still propose that, in parsing *ʔahadun* in the verse *wa ʔin ʔahadun min al-mufriki:na ʔistadza:raka*, we have to say that it is the subject of a deleted verb recovered or interpreted by what comes after the noun, i.e., *ʔistadza:raka* ('seek protection'); those who are engaged in parsing are still parsing *al.sama:ʔu* ('the heaven') in the Quranic verse *ʔiḏa: al.sama:ʔu ʔinfaqqat* as the subject of a deleted verb recovered by the verb that follows it, assumed to be *ʔinfaqqat* ('is split').

One of the most solid arguments put forward to justify the claim of the subject's precedence over its verb is the dire need to facilitate the teaching of Arabic grammar in the face of the repeated complaints about the difficulty that grammar represents for both learners and teachers. Assigning the name 'topic' to the subject while it exists in the sentence raises questions and confusion for the learner who can, for example, accept the parsing of topic as a *ʔism* ('noun') of the verb *kāna* ('was') when they see this verb initiating a nominal sentence. However, no justification can be found for parsing *Zajd-un* ('Zaid') as a topic in the sentence *Zajd-un nadzaha* ('Zaid succeeded') after parsing it as a subject in the sentence *nadzaha Zajd-un* ('lit. succeeded Zaid') just a little while before. The change in its position has not changed its status as a subject. It thus becomes even harder for the learner to say that the subject is a non-overt pronoun coming after the verb.

What harm will be done to Arabic grammar if we define a verbal sentence as one centred on the verb, whether it follows or precedes the subject, as in *Zajd-un nadzaha* ('Zaid succeeded') and *nadzaha Zajd-un* ('succeeded Zaid')? And what is wrong in treating *Zajd-un* ('Zaid') as a subject in both sentences, instead of treating it as a topic in one and subject in the other. Some linguists may think that the problem of admitting the precedence of the subject over its verb lies not in those sentences where the predicate is singular and masculine. The problem is with sentences whose predicate is dual (D) or plural (P) in number and masculine (M) or feminine (F). These are sentences such as: *nadzaha al-ta:liba:ni* ('lit. succeeded the students', D/M); *nadzaha al-ta:libata:ni* (lit. 'succeeded the students', D/F); *nadzaha al-tulla:bu* (lit. 'succeeded the students', P/M); and, *nadzaha al-ta:libua:tu* (lit. 'succeeded the students', P/F). In these sentences, if we move the 'theme/subject' so as to precede the predicate (the verb), the 'duality' pronoun *ʔalif al.ʔiθ.najn* and the two plurality pronouns *wa:w al-dzama:ʕa* and *nu:n al-nniswa* appear as clitics bound to the verb. This is shown in the following sentences:

- *al- ta:liba:ni nadzaha:* the students succeeded (D/M)
- *al- ta:libata:ni nadzaha:* the students succeeded (D/F)
- *al- tulla:bu nadzahu:* the students succeeded (P/M)
- *al-ta:liba:tu nadzaha:* the students succeeded (P/F)

## 7. The problem of bound nominative pronouns

It is well known that these pronouns, namely *hā*, *hatta*, *hū*, and *hna*, have been taken by grammarians to be markers of duality or plurality, according to one analysis of the variety known as *ʔakalu:ni al-bara:dzi*. In this, there is full subject verb agreement regardless of the order of the subject in relation to the verb. Taking this

into consideration, there is nothing to prevent creating an analogy with this case and treating it accordingly, if we allow the subject to precede its verb. Therefore, similar to the case of considering *-at* the end of the verb in *Hind-u nadzahaḥat* ('Hind succeeded') a marker of subject femininity, we may say that *-a:* at the end of the verb in *al-radzula:ni nadzaha:* ('the two men succeeded') is a marker of the duality of the subject. Likewise, *-u:* at the end of the verb in *al-ridza:lu nadzahu:* ('the men succeeded') is a marker of a plural masculine subject, whereas *-na* at the end of the verb in *al-ta:liba:tu nadzahna* ('the female students succeeded') is a marker of a plural feminine subject. We may thus say that a sentence such as *al-ridza:lu nadzahu:* ('the men succeeded') is a verbal sentence in which the subject *al-ridza:lu* precedes the verb *nadzahu:*.

A number of linguists have adopted the same view on these pronouns. Some grammarians believe that the example of the occurrence of the verb is sufficient to refute any claim about the precedence of the subject over the verb, if only to prevent the existence of two subjects for a single verb. Al-Sāmarra'i (1966: 218) suggests that these pronouns are nothing more than markers of duality or plurality, in the same way that *-at* marks the feminine gender.

Abdo (2008: 21) also adopts this view on these pronouns, concluding that they are 'simply agreement markers'. He does not differentiate between the markers of duality or plurality in the nouns, on the one hand, and those pronouns that are bound to the verbs, on the other. Perhaps the occurrence of these pronouns as elements bound to the verbs when their subjects precede them compelled the Basri grammarians to stipulate that the subject must follow the verb, so as to assign to these pronouns their special status in the sentence.

### **8. The order of the subject (precedence is the original position): A dīper look into the structure of the Arabic sentence**

We may support our hypothesis with the views of modern linguists, who have attempted to determine the deep structure of the verbal sentence in Arabic. Two views have emerged in this connection. The first and most popular view is that which sīs verb-subject-object order as the dīp structure of a verbal sentence in Arabic (Zakariyya 1983). The second view is that subject-verb-object order is the dīp structure of an Arabic sentence (Zakariyya 1983: 28; al-Ma<sup>c</sup>rifa 1984: 194; al-Fehri 1986: 105; Robert 2007: 91). Following those linguists proposing the latter structure, the subject is originally ordered before the verb and so it is in its original position when it appears before the verb in the surface structure. We may refer the reader to the arguments presented by Abdo (2008), one of the best linguists to have discussed the deep structure of the Arabic sentence. Abdo (2008: 120-124) argues against those who claim that the verb should precede the subject in the deep structure and provides several pieces of evidence to support his proposal.

Furthermore, parsing according to the Basri approach disallows the precedence of the subject over its verb, requiring that we consider a simple sentence such a *Mohammad-un nadzaha* ('Mohammad succided') or *Hind-u nadzahaḥat* ('Hind succeeded') as a complex one. Instead of characterizing these as straightforward verbal sentences with a subject before the verb, we need to describe

them as nominal sentences in which a hidden verbal sentence, comprising the verb and its subject (often an unexpressed pronoun), is nested. This verbal sentence functions as a commentary on the topic, which is actually the subject positioned at the beginning of the sentence.

Thus, within this framework, a learner who is asked to find nominal and verbal sentences in a certain text has to pick all the sentences that are similar to *Mohammad-un nadzaha* ('Mohammad succeeded') as nominal sentences, and retrieve *nadzaha [huwa]* ('succeeded [he]') as a verbal sentence from the preceding sentence. Instead, it is possible for them, if we allow the precedence of the subject over the verb, to consider the sentence *Mohammad-un nadzaha* ('Mohammad succeeded') a single verbal sentence.

Earlier, we pointed out the great benefit of allowing the subject to precede the verb, despite the assumptions (of non-overt elements) and interpretations we were compelled to maintain if we adhere to the obligatory posterior position of the subject. The noun that follows the particle *ʔida*: ('if') in *ʔida: al.sama:ʔu ʔinfaqqat* ('When the heaven is split asunder') will be parsed as a subject of the verb that follows it, and we will not need to assume a deleted verb before it, i.e., 'which is interpreted by what comes after it' in the grammarians' phraseology (Al-Ansari 1964: 123). There is no doubt that accepting the subject may precede its verb greatly simplifies both the learning and teaching of Arabic grammar. However, a question may be raised about the parsing of the subject if preceded by *al-nawāsikh* ('the annullers') verb *ka:na* and its sisters, the verb *ka:da* ('be about to') and its sisters, and the particle *inna* and its sisters, as in:

- *ka:na Zajd-un yusa:ʕidu al-muhta:dzi:na* (lit. 'was Zaid help the needy')
- *ka:da Zajd-un yusa:ʕidu al-muhta:dzi:na* (lit. 'was about to Zaid help the needy')
- *ʔinna Zajd-an yusa:ʕidu al-muhta:dzi:na* (lit. 'verily Zaid help the needy')

The same question arises where the subject is governed by a preceding governor, as in:

- *ʕa:hadtu Zajd-an yusa:ʕidu al-muhta:dzi:na* (lit. 'Saw-I Zaid help the needy')
- *dza:ʔa Zajd-un yusa:ʕidu al-muhta:dzi:na* (lit. 'came Zaid help the needy')
- *mararrtu bi-Zajd-in yusa:ʕidu al-muhta:dzi:na* (lit. 'passed-I by Zaid help the needy')

How would we parse the noun (*Zajd-an*) in the above sentences? Is it parsed as a subject? If so, then what about the annuler verbs that precede it? And how do we explain its accusative case when it is preceded by the particle (*ʔinna*) and its sisters? What about its status as an object of the verb *ʕa:hada* ('saw'), or a subject of the verb *dza:ʔa* ('came'), or inflected for the genitive case by the preposition *bi*?

Initially, we should divide the above examples into two groups:

1. Sentences initiated by the annullers *ka:da* and *ʔinna* :
  - *Ka:na Zajd-un yusa:ʕidu al-muhta:dzi:na*
  - *Ka:da Zajd-un yusa:ʕidu al-muhta:dzi:na*
  - *ʔinna Zajd-an yusa:ʕidu al-muhta:dzi:na*

## 2. Genuine sentences:

- *fa:hadtu Zajd-an yusa:ʕidu al-muhta:dzi:na*
- *dza:ʔa Zajd-un yusa:ʕidu al-muhta:dzi:na*
- *mararrtu bi-Zajd-in yusa:ʕidu al-muhta:dzi:na*

In the examples of the first group, the noun *Zayd* is in the position of the subject that precedes its verb, since these thrī sentences are originally similar to a sentence such as *yusa:ʕidu Zajd-un al-muhta:dzi:na* (lit. ‘helps Zaid the needy’). Also, the subject has moved forward to precede its verb, and so the sentence has become *Zayd-un yusa:ʕidu al-muhta:dzi:na*. Then, the annuler verbs are introduced at the beginning, while *Zayd* is the subject—according to what this study proposes, and not a topic—as the grammarians would say. We see no problem in continuing to parse it as a subject in these sentences. As such, *ka:na* and *ka:da* have no syntactic function when introduced at the beginning of a verbal sentence, whether the subject precedes or follows its verb.

Here, we may draw upon what Al-Ansari (1964) argued about the verbs *ʕasā* (‘perhaps’), *ʔawfaka* (‘is about to’), and *ʔihlawlaqa* (‘is about to’). Al-Ansari (1964: 323) stated that, if any of these is preceded by a noun that is the ‘theme/subject’ in meaning, and is followed by the particle *ʔan* (‘to’) and the verb, as in *Zajd-un ʕasa: ʔan jaqu:ma* (lit. ‘Zayd perhaps to stand’), it is possible to assume that it is devoid of the pronoun that resumes the noun, and so it will be parsed as a predicate to *ʔan* and the verb, which may replace the comment. Alternatively, it could be parsed as a predicate of the pronoun, and *ʔan* and the verb is then in an accusative position as a comment. However, if any of these three verbs is followed by *ʔan* and a verb that is followed by a noun which is the theme/subject in meaning, it is possible to assume that the verb is devoid of the pronoun. An example of this is *ʕasa: ʔan jaqu:ma Zajd-un* lit. (‘perhaps to stand Zayd’). In this case, the verb is a predicate to that noun, and *ʕasa:* will be a predicate of ‘*an* and the verb, which replaces the comment.

The sentence *Ka:na Zajd-un yusa:ʕidu al-muhta:dzi:na* is transformed from the sentence *Ka:na yusa:ʕidu Zajd-un al-muhta:dzi:na*, and both sentences are fully grammatical. This follows the rules of Arabic literary style, as found in the Quranic verse *turi:du:na ʔan taʕuddu:na: ʕamma: ka:na jaʕbudu ʔa:ba:ʔuna:* (lit. ‘want-you to turn-us away from what were worship our fathers’) (Ibrahim: 10) and in so many other texts. Thus, how should we parse *ʔa:ba:ʔ* (‘fathers’) in this verse? Are we going to say that it is *ʔism ka:na* (‘ka:na’s ʔism’)? It is undoubtedly the subject of the verb *jaʕbud* (‘worship’), as the grammarians say. However, we cannot, in any possible way, accept the assumption of the ʔism of *ka:na* as a non-overt pronoun that follows it, as the grammarians posit. It is hard to imagine the existence of a pronoun that refers to nothing, except in the minds of the most extreme of interpreters.

What applies to *ka:na* (‘was’) and its sisters equally applies to *ka:da* (‘almost’) and its sisters—the verbs of approach, hope, and initiation. Thus, a sentence like *ka:da al-mmaʕtar-u janzilu* (lit. ‘was about the rain to fall’) is exactly like *ka:da janzilu al-mmaʕtar-u* (lit. ‘was about to fall the rain’) in parsing. Parsing follows this line and will be easy to understand because it is in accordance with the

semantics of the sentence, allowing learners and teachers of Arabic grammar to avoid any confusion in parsing such sentences.

Even if we could find a plausible way to parse the *ʔism* of *ka:na* and its sisters and the subject of *ka:da* and its sisters (verbs of approach, hope, and initiation) in the manner we have illustrated (i.e., by considering it the subject of the verb that follows it, and ignoring the idea of its being parsed as the ‘ism ‘topic’ of the annuler verb), how should we parse the *ʔism* ‘subject’ of *ʔinna*? The noun in such sentences as *ʔinna Zajd-an yusa:ʕidu al-muḥta:dʒi:na* (lit. ‘verily Zaid helps the needy’) is inflected for the accusative case. In their discussion of the topic of *ʔinna* and its sisters, the old grammarians provided the solution to the problem by saying that this noun is in the context of a nominative case inflection, although it is in fact inflected for the accusative case, because of the influence of *ʔinna* and its sisters.

This is what they say in explaining the nominative case inflection on the noun *rasu:l* (‘messenger’) in the Quranic verse *ʔanna Alla:h-a bari:ʔ-un mina al-muʔfriki:na wa rasu:l-u-hu* (‘God is innocent of the polytheists and His Messenger’) (al-Tawba: 3.). Here, it is conjoined to the original function of the subject of *ʔanna*, i.e., *alla:h* (‘God’), who is the subject of the following verb, and hence it would be inflected for the nominative case (Al-Andalusi 2001: 8). This is despite it being verbally inflected for the accusative case on the surface because it is preceded by *ʔanna*.

In sentences like *lajsa Zajd-un bi-qa:ʔim-in* (lit. ‘not Zaid prep-standing’), *ma: raʔajtu min ʔaḥad-in* (lit. ‘not saw-I prep-one’), and *ma: dʒa:ʔa min ʔaḥad-in* (lit. ‘not came prep-one’), the grammarians suggest that *qa:ʔim* is inflected for the genitive case verbally but inflected for the accusative case in its function as a comment of the verb *laysa*. As for *ʔaḥad*, they suggest that it is inflected for the genitive case verbally, but for the accusative case in its function as an object of the verb *raʔajtu* in the second sentence, and for the nominative case in its function as a subject of the verb *dʒa:ʔa*, in the third sentence. Thus, there should be nothing to prevent parsing the noun *Zajd-an* in the sentence *ʔinna Zajd-an yusa:ʕidu al-muḥta:dʒi:na* (lit. ‘verily Zaid help the needy’) as inflected for the accusative case verbally, and for the nominative case because of its function as a subject of the following verb *yusa:ʕidu*. To simplify things, we could say that *ka:na* and *ka:da* and their sisters can precede a verbal sentence, whether the subject precedes its verb or follows it. Thus, we can have *ka:na jaqu:mu Zajd-un bi-wa:dʒiba:tihi* (lit. ‘was doing Zaid his homework’) and *ka:na Zajd-un jaqu:mu bi-wa:dʒiba:tihi* (lit. ‘was Zaid doing his homework’). Similarly, *ka:da jaqu:mu Zajd-un bi-wa:dʒiba:tihi* (lit. ‘about to doing Zaid his homework’) or *ka:da Zajd-un jaqu:mu bi-wa:dʒiba:tihi* (lit. ‘about to Zaid doing his homework’) is possible. On the other hand, ‘*inna* and its sisters cannot precede a verbal sentence unless the subject has been moved to the front of its verb, as in *ʔinna Zajd-an jaqu:mu bi-wa:dʒiba:tihi* (lit. ‘verily, Zaid doing his homework’).

We now look at the second group of examples, i.e., those in which the subject precedes its verb and presents a problem in parsing, and which we have called ‘genuine’ sentences: *fa:hadtu Zajd-an yusa:ʕidu al-muḥta:dʒi:na*; *dʒa:ʔa Zajd-un yusa:ʕidu al-muḥta:dʒi:na*; and *mararrtu bi-Zajd-in yusa:ʕidu al-*

*muhta:dzi:na*. These sentences differ fundamentally from the sentences of the first group with the annuler verbs. In the sentences of the first group, the noun *Zayd* is a subject present in the sentence, before it is initiated by the annuler verb. This is different from *Zayd* in the sentences of the second group, which are complex and formed of two sentences. The original sentences in these examples are *fa:hadtu Zajd-an*, *dza:ʔa Zajd-un*, and *mararrtu bi-Zajd-in*, which are full verbal sentences, each of which contains a complement sentence like *yusa:ʕidu al-muhta:dzi:na*. The subject in the complement sentence is the non-overt pronoun within the verb (*yusa:ʕidu*), referring to the antecedent *Zayd* in the original sentence. Therefore, there is no basis for using these sentences to argue against the subject preceding its verb in an Arabic sentence.

## 9. Conclusion

We conclude that the subject in an Arabic sentence is free to move both to the right (before the verb) and to the left (after the verb) within the sentence structure. This freedom of movement has only been constrained by the insistence of grammarians. More precisely, the objection to the subject preceding its verb has only been raised by grammarians, alongside the coercive rule that they have suggested. As for freedom of subject movement, we find no more obvious evidence for it than the abundance of sentences that we meet in Arabic texts in the Holy Qur'an, in both poetry and prose, where the subject precedes its verb. As is well known, grammarians cannot prevent the subject preceding its verb, but have succeeded in imposing their approach when dealing with the fronted subject, what it is to be called, and how it is to be parsed. They did not allow its parsing as a subject in this case. As a result, they have excluded all sentences in which the subject comes before its verb from the category of verbal sentences—moving them to the set of nominal sentences—because, according to their approach, the subject becomes a topic when it occupies a position before the verb.

This study has dealt with the benefits that Arabic grammar would gain from allowing the subject to precede its verb, and the facilitation this offers for learning and teaching. It is hoped that this will help make Arabic sentences compatible, in their nature and description, with sentences in many other languages in which the 'theme/subject' precedes the predicate.

Adopting our suggestion that a subject may precede its verb in a sentence may also limit instances when unconvincing assumptions are made about non-apparent elements and processes, for which there is no persuasive justification. In many such cases, we fail to see any reason for their justification other than grammarians' insistence on the inadmissibility of the subject preceding its verb. No matter how we try, we find no reason why a subject is assumed to occur after the verb *nadzaha* in the sentence *Zajd-un nadzaha* ('Zaid succeeded') Nor do we find any benefit in assuming the existence of a 'deleted' verb before the noun that follows the particle *ʔiða:* in the Qur'anic verse *ʔiða: al.sama:ʔu ʔinfaqqat*, so as to parse the noun *al.sama:ʔu* as a subject to this deleted verb, as interpreted by the spelled-out verb after the noun.

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