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Systematizing the Description of Arabic: The Case of Ibn al-Sarrāj

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Abstract: This paper will focus on the Arabic grammatical tradition and, in particular, on the new arrangement, in the 4th/10th c., of grammatical matters already elaborated in the first centuries of Islam. With this aim in mind we will take into consideration two representative grammatical treatises of the 8th c. and the 10th c.: Sībawayh's *Kitāb* and Ibn al-Sarrāj's *al-Uṣūl fī l-naḥw*, which both represent watershed moments in the history of the Arabic grammatical tradition. Abū Bakr ibn al-Sarrāj's philosophical training is obvious in the way he approaches the subject through the precise description of single items and in the laboured logic of the subdivision of his treatises. He follows the principle of "comprehensive subdivisions" (*taqāsīm*) borrowed from the logic he had studied under the direction of al-Fārābī. Ibn al-Sarrāj's method of organizing and introducing linguistic matters will be contrasted with the approach of the father of Arabic grammar, Sībawayh, who wrote – two centuries earlier – the most comprehensive description of Arabic.

Keywords: Ibn al-Sarrāj, al-Uṣūl fī l-naḥw, Kitāb Sībawayh, Arabic grammar, linguistic ideology (Arabic)

The fourth/tenth century was marked by a conspicuous focus on the activities of organization and arrangement across the various fields of cultural and scientific endeavour within the Arab-Islamic empire. This holds true for the discipline of linguistics, and, in particular, grammar. A pivotal moment in this process was the publication of *al-Uṣūl fī l-naḥw* by Ibn al-Sarrāj (d. 316/929), a treatise that was held in high esteem by his contemporaries as well as the following generations. It also provided the standard model according to which many subsequent grammatical treatises were arranged. Following a brief presentation of the significance and impact of the *Kitāb Sībawayh*, the most comprehensive description of Arabic and the most authoritative text of Arabic grammar, we will introduce *al-Uṣūl fī l-naḥw* and its innovative approach. We will then compare the introductory sections of the *Kitāb Sībawayh* and *al-Uṣūl fī l-naḥw* of Ibn al-Sarrāj that

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deal with the parts of speech. The procedure adopted by Ibn al-Sarrāj's when organizing and introducing linguistic matters will thereby be contrasted with the approach of the *Kitāb Sībawayh*.

1 Sībawayh, the *Kitāb* and its impact on subsequent grammatical tradition

The work of Sībawayh, the father of Arabic grammar as much as its "iconic figure",[1] was a milestone in the history of grammatical studies in the Arab world. Notwithstanding his celebrity, biographical details on him are scarce.[2] Sībawayh authored the first complete description of Arabic, the *Kitāb*. He built, no doubt, on the work of a previous generation of scholars who engaged in reflection on the Arabic language.[3] Nevertheless, his thinking, along with that of his master, al-Khalīl, is considered a turning point in linguistic and grammatical studies.[4] The hypothesis, put forward by Brustad, that they shared a common project aimed at defining and describing that register of Arabic called '*al-ʿarabiyya*'[5] would be consistent with what Gutas calls the "imperial ideology of the early ʿAbbāsid administration" aiming at "keeping unified the newly formed state", an operation that involved promoting the Arabic language as a cohesive element.[6] However partial it may be, the wider drive to foster a loyalty to the centre amongst all the disparate components of the Islamic empire and to define its identity through common institutions and a single language of administration[7] is probably the best explanation of the "invention" of grammar we have. As a matter of fact, both Sībawayh and al-Khalīl's works contributed to the standardization of Arabic and to the formation of a scholarly tradition over the following centuries. With this background in mind, this paper focusses on the next

1 Brustad 2016.

2 Biographical details in Carter 2004: 7–32; also see Marogy 2010: 1–45 for the historical background of the *Kitāb*.

3 On this see Talmon 2003.

4 "... a new, revolutionary trend, which in the long term dominated the Arab linguistic tradition" (Talmon 2003: 162).

5 Brustad 2016: 148.

6 Gutas 1998: 28. On the link between standardization and ideology see Milroy 2001.

7 On the role of Arabic as an 'ethnic marker' see Bashear 1997: ch. 3 esp. 50–51, 54–56 (but cmp. with Brustad 2016: 153 for chronology); on language and *shuʿūbiyya* dynamics see Suleiman 2011: 20.

generations and aims to identify the steps in the systematization of Arabic grammar built on the *Kitāb*.

A question mark hangs over the originality of the *Kitāb*, as was perceived already by Sībawayh's biographers. Every linguistic category (lexical data, morphological, phonological and syntactic data and theory) is pervaded by the presence of al-Khalīl, Sībawayh's master. Many other grammarians are mentioned, too. It is Sībawayh, nevertheless, who integrates all these data and theories into a unified and coherent theory of language. The *Kitāb* was composed as a consciously complete literary product, not as lecture notes; a complete copy was made by one of Sībawayh's pupils, al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ (d. 215/830 or 221/835), and this is at the basis of the transmission of the *Kitāb*.[8] The recognized purpose of the *Kitāb* was to describe that kind of speech later called *ʿarabiyya* in such a way that others could replicate it[9] and this means that, even if it was not designed for an immediate pedagogical purpose, it could easily serve one, if only the material were rearranged in an appropriate way. Sībawayh's *Kitāb* is the first fully-fledged description of Arabic and the first Arabic treatise ever written with a purely linguistic aim in mind: earlier works were ancillary to the reading and interpretation of the Koran. It is arranged as follows: a *risāla* (seven introductory chapters, setting up hierarchies and assumptions applicable to the rest of the work) and sections on syntax, morphology and, finally, phonology. This arrangement hints at the concept of language in Sībawayh's eyes: speech is "by nature linear"[10] and therefore he begins with the analysis of the complete spoken string before dealing with its single parts.

As Carter puts it, "the history of Arabic grammar is the history of what happened to the *Kitāb*".[11] However, the *Kitāb* did not receive due attention immediately: it was initially criticized, and only acquired its reputation from al-Mubarrad's time onwards. Al-Mubarrad (d. 285/898), after having written a refutation of Sībawayh's *Kitāb*, transformed his earlier criticism into explanatory commentaries and thus greatly contributed to making it *the* grammar around which grammatical studies revolved.[12] Al-Mubarrad's *al-Muqtaḍab* is in fact a revision and paraphrase of *Kitāb Sībawayh* with a marked didactic slant. Thus,

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8 Carter 2004.

9 "The purpose of the *Kitāb* was to describe the speech of the Bedouin in such a way that others can replicate this form of Arabic" (Carter 2004: 56); on the meaning of "speech of the Bedouin" cmp. Brustad 2016: 153 "in grammatical contexts these *ʿarab* are not just any ethnic Arabs, or Bedouins, but rather those who are authoritative transmitters of this language culture".

10 Carter 2004: 59: "speech can only occur in real time, and is therefore by nature linear".

11 Carter 2004: 138.

12 On this see Bernards 1997.

some time had to pass before Sībawayh gained his status as *imām al-naḥwiyyīn*. Furthermore, his treatise has always been perceived to be extremely difficult to read, impenetrable and obscure; yet it was deemed so valuable that it earned the title of *Qurʾān al-naḥw*. Anecdotes on its opaqueness and on the high esteem in which it was held are numerous, and involve figures of scholars of the standing of al-Jāḥiẓ. It is also related that al-Kisāʾī, his worst enemy, used to keep a copy of the *Kitāb* under his pillow, a fact that was discovered after his death.[13] These stories need not be taken at face value of course, but rather as an indication of the importance attached to this monument of Arabic grammar. Its value as a repository of linguistic data was also undisputable: Sībawayh had access to a living tradition and was expert enough to recognize linguistic data which could be trusted, while subsequent generations –cut off from the living tradition- were not able to add new data to the study of grammar.[14] Thus, Sībawayh's examples were copied by grammarians of the following centuries, perpetuating the importance of the *Kitāb*.

If, for Sībawayh's time, it is permissible to speak of the 'creation' of grammar,[15] in the sense that before him grammatical speculation existed but was unsystematic, the following centuries saw a rapid growth of grammatical enquiries but, and above all, a shift in grammatical approach.[16] There was a complete revision of the concept of communication, which was no longer seen as pragmatic and ethical but more as a rational activity. Terminological gaps in Sībawayh were filled and changes were made to his terminology. Thus, e. g., *musnad* (in Sībawayh roughly "topic") and *musnad ilayhi* (in Sībawayh roughly "predicate") were inverted and took the meaning of "predicate" (*musnad*) and "topic" (*musnad ilayhi*). This is probably the result of the impact of Greek logical categories, where predication is the main concern, contrasting with Sībawayh's emphasis on the concept of "starting a statement". In logic, word order is irrelevant, while in Greek, predication is associated with verbs. This could have brought about, in verbal sentences, the association of the first word of the sentence, called *musnad ilayhi* (or *fiʿl*) with the predicate, and this association was subsequently extended to nominal sentences.[17] *ʿIlla*, originally meaning "defect, weakness" in Sībawayh, later became "reason, cause", a notion crucial

13 Revealing anecdotes have been collected in Hārūn's preface: see Sībawayh *Kitāb* 1: 20–23; the anecdote involving al-Kisāʾī is at 22.

14 Brustad 2016: 155.

15 Carter 1990: 122.

16 On the reception of the *Kitāb* and on the shift in the grammatical tradition after it, see Baalbaki 2008.

17 Carter 2004: 139; also see Viain 2014: 64–69.

for later grammarians in search of a much more abstract notion of grammatical causality[18] (while in the *Kitāb*, the concept of grammatical causality was covered by *ʿamal*). New terms were also created that do not figure in the *Kitāb Sībawayh*, where many concepts and elements lack a technical name at all (e. g. tenses, described in the *Kitāb* with periphrasis like "what has passed" acquired names such as *al-māḍī*).[19] Labels were created for specific categories that previously lacked proper definitions such as *mā al-nāsikha, afʿāl al-qulūb, lā nāfiya li-l-jins, nāʾib ʿan al-fāʿil.*

If the *Kitāb Sībawayh* is indisputably at the core of what Talmon defines as a "reformation"[20] and marks the beginning of a long and coherent linguistic tradition, its arrangement and the style of exposition did not make principles and concepts easy to grasp. The intricate and fragmentary arrangement of the book called for a more systematic exposition and for a rearrangement of content, especially in view of the requirements of linguistic education. The pedagogical goal had become ever more important—a tendency enhanced by Abbasid patronage—and grammarians started to become a professional category striving hard for recognition from the political authorities. Grammar became part of the standard curriculum of scholars of various fields and a professional class of Arabic teachers emerged. In a sense, as Carter observes, grammar started to be identified "with the institution of Islam",[21] thus further reinforcing the role of *ʿarabiyya* as the language of the empire.

By the third/ninth century, in common with practitioners of other disciplines, grammarians were seeking to provide their subject with a sound theoretical basis. In the fourth/tenth century, as the impact of the translated Greek works—and in particular those on logic—was felt in ever wider circles, efforts were made to give Arabic grammar a place of honour among the independent sciences. Grammar was recognized as a science necessary to read and interpret the huge textual tradition of Islam. Grammarians quickly absorbed methods and ideas introduced into scholarly circles by the logicians, and used them to refine linguistic speculation, whilst, at the same time, rejecting any intrusion of logicians themselves into what they considered their field of specialization.[22] As

18 On this term, see the seminal work of Guillaume 1986; on its historical sources and on *taʿlīl* in the Arabic Grammatical Tradition see Suleiman 1999; a recent survey of the concept of *ʿilla* and its development over time can be found in Versteegh 2007.

19 On this see Carter 2004: 140–143.

20 Talmon 2003: 282.

21 Carter 1990: 124.

22 A telling example of the tense relations between grammarians and logicians is the debate of Mattā b. Yūnus and al-Sīrāfī reported in al-Tawḥīdī's *al-Imtāʿ wa-l-muʾānasa*; on this see Mahdi 1970 and Endress 1986: 163–270.

Versteegh observes, the impact of Greek philosophy, and notably logic, on grammar has to be seen more in the formal presentation of grammatical theories than in the concepts themselves, which had remained essentially unchanged since the time of Sībawayh.[23] Nevertheless, the influence of logical concepts on grammar was clear and a process of creating a systematic descriptive theory ("the codification of grammar") occurred.[24] This took two different forms, together embodying the grammarians' response to the theoretical challenge of the philosophical-logical system: the first (descriptive) was called *uṣūl* (foundations) and the second (speculative) *ʿilal* (causes or explanations).[25] Ibn al-Sarrāj was the first grammarian to codify the form *uṣūl* and thus provides an instructive example of the interaction between linguistic and philosophical studies; his *al-Uṣūl fī l-naḥw* is the earliest treatise dealing with grammatical matters to exhibit a systematic arrangement. This was to have a lasting impact on subsequent works.[26]

We shall now focus our attention on Ibn al-Sarrāj's intellectual formation and on how this turn towards systematization in grammatical studies was effected in his *magnum opus*. This will allow us to identify some of the major innovations introduced by a book widely described in the sources in terms of excellence and originality, and to see how it drew on the Greek intellectual tradition, and to contextualise it in the process of systematization of the discipline.

2 Ibn al-Sarrāj: a profile

In contrast to Sībawayh, biographical profiles of Ibn al-Sarrāj are rather detailed.[27] Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Sarī al-Sarrāj ("the saddle-maker"), al-Naḥwī al-Baghdādī, al-Mubarrad's youngest and favourite pupil, is a key figure in the history of the Arabic grammatical tradition. Famous grammarians, like al-Zajjājī, al-Sīrāfī, and al-Fārisī, are counted among his pupils. In biographical sources, Ibn al-Sarrāj is portrayed as a man of letters, a poet, a grammarian and a music lover (*adīb, shāʿir, imāmun fī l-naḥw, muqbilun ʿalā l-ṭarabi wa-l-mūsiqā*). These are the characteristics listed by late biographers like al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363) and Ibn Qāḍī

23 Versteegh 1995: 45.
24 Bohas, Guillaume, Kouloughli 2006 [1990]: 8.
25 Bohas, Guillaume, Kouloughli 2006 [1990]: 8–14; on Ibn al-Sarrāj in particular 8–11.
26 On the place of Ibn al-Sarrāj's *al-Uṣūl fī l-naḥw* in the cultural context and its impact on the subsequent treatises of grammar see Viain 2014 esp. 26–33.
27 See Fleisch 1986.

Shuhba (d. 851/1448), but they represent a fair synthesis of judgments expressed on him in previous sources.[28] Interestingly, there is mention of the fact that Ibn al-Sarrāj had difficulty in pronouncing *rāʾ*.[29] His intellectual curiosity and versatility are eloquently depicted in the following anecdote that (in a certain sense and with a different conclusion) echoes those on the linguistic ineptitude and the grammatical shortcomings of Sībawayh. In the course of a *majlis* with al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923) and his pupils, Ibn al-Sarrāj gives a wrong reply to a grammatical question; harshly rebuked by al-Zajjāj, he confesses that he had forgotten the *Kitāb Sībawayh* because he had been diverted from this by the study of logic and music, and promises to revert to grammar. We find the first occurrence of the story in *al-Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm, whose closing comment is telling: "he reverted and *he composed what he composed*" (*fa-ʿāda wa-ṣannafa mā ṣannafa*).[30] Ibn al-Sarrāj's open-mindedness and his spirit of enquiry are also apparent from the frequent remarks on his 'grammatical syncretism': biographies mention that he relied also on Kufan theories (*ʿawwala ʿalā [...] madhāhibi l-Kūfiyyīn*) in contrast with Basran theories (*khālafa uṣūla l-Baṣriyyīn*).[31] Appraisals of his standing as a grammarian are unanimous and his primacy (*riʾyāsa*) in grammatical studies (after al-Zajjāj, or al-Mubarrad, according to the sources) was widely recognized[32]; later biographers state that nobody equalled him in grammar.[33]

From Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa (d. 668/1270), we know that al-Fārābī (m. 339/950) taught Ibn al-Sarrāj logic (*ṣināʿat al-manṭiq*) and in exchange Ibn al-Sarrāj taught him grammar (*ṣināʿat al-naḥw*)[34]; both were also versed in poetry.[35]

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28 Al-Ṣafadī *Wāfī* 3: 73; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba *Ṭabaqāt* 115. A long anecdote on his gifts as a poet is reported by al-Zubaydī *Ṭabaqāt* 112–114; Ibn al-Qifṭī *Inbāh* 3: 146–148; Yāqūt *Muʿjam* 1: 2535–2536; Ibn Khallikān *Wafayāt* 4: 340; al-Ṣafadī *Wāfī* 3: 74; al-Suyūṭī *Bughya* 1: 110.

29 This is related in a gently mocking tone by Ibn Khallikān *Wafayāt* 4: 339 and al-Ṣafadī *Wāfī* 3: 73.

30 Ibn al-Nadīm *Fihrist* 67–68; see also Yāqūt *Muʿjam* 1: 2535; al-Ṣafadī *Wāfī* 3: 73; al-Suyūṭī *Bughya* 1: 159; Ṭāshköprüzāde *Miftāḥ* 1: 156.

31 Ibn al-Qifṭī *Inbāh* 3: 149; Yāqūt *Muʿjam* 1: 2535; al-Suyūṭī *Bughya* 1: 159; Ṭāshköprüzāde *Miftāḥ* 1: 156.

32 Ibn al-Nadīm *Fihrist* 68 and Ibn al-Qifṭī *Inbāh* 3: 149 (*wa-ntahat ilayhi l-riʾyāsatu baʿda mawti l-Zajjāj*); Ibn al-Anbārī *Nuzha* 220 and Yāqūt *Muʿjam* 1: 2535 (*wa-ilayhi ntahati l-riʾyāsa fī l-naḥwi baʿda mawti l-Mubarrad*).

33 Al-Ṣafadī *Wāfī* 3: 73 "*lam yakhlaf fī l-naḥwi mithluhu*"; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba *Ṭabaqāt* 115 has instead "*lam yukhlaq*".

34 According to the chronology proposed by Mahdī in his *Introduction* to al-Fārābī *Ḥurūf* 45, they could have met after the death of al-Mubarrad (285/898), before Ibn al-Sarrāj's acquaintance with al-Zajjāj.

35 Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa *ʿUyūn* 2: 136. Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa is the only source that mentions the close relationship between the two; a thorough analysis of this passage was made by Zimmermann in

Al-Fārābī's interest in linguistics and language in general escaped the notice of his biographers, so his name does not feature in any of the biographical works devoted to grammarians. Nevertheless, he did speculate upon linguistic matters and expressed his own opinions on grammar and its relation with logic.[36] He closely examined the way "logical forms were expressed in Arabic". Furthermore, in the conflict between logic and grammar he strived to demonstrate that they were mutually interdependent rather than mutually exclusive.[37] Examples of this, and in particular of his interest in the interaction between the Greek terminology of logic and the linguistic features proper to Arabic are found in his detailed remarks on the different ways of translating the copula (the verb ἐστίν) into Arabic.[38] According to Mahdī, in spite of al-Fārābī's silence on this point, Ibn al-Sarrāj would have been the direct source of some of his statements in *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*.[39] Meanwhile, Ibn al-Sarrāj's philosophical training is obvious in his precise definitions of single items and in the logical subdivision of his treatises, based on the principle of "comprehensive subdivisions" (*taqāsīm*), which he borrowed from the logic he had studied under the direction of al-Fārābī. It is tempting to imagine that the bidirectional exchange between al-Fārābī and Ibn al-Sarrāj, where both were alternately disciple and master, played an important role in shaping their intellectual profiles.

Ibn al-Sarrāj's prestige is mostly associated with *al-Uṣūl fī l-naḥw*, which was long to be considered a reliable reference on grammatical matters.[40] Sadly, the only available edition is unreliable,[41] which seriously undermines our chances

his *Introduction* to al-Fārābī's *Commentary* (Zimmermann 1981: cxviii-cxxii). Its factuality seems to be uncertain. Nevertheless, Zimmermann concludes that the connection between the grammarian and the philosopher could have been a real one, or at least, could not be rejected ("it was so eminently plausible to think that they must have met", ibid. cxx).

36 On the linguistic interests of al-Fārābī and on his familiarity with the *Kitāb Sībawayh* see Zimmermann 1981: cxviii and cxx; also Langhade 1983: esp. 134–135 for grammar.

37 Abed 1991: 168.

38 al-Fārābī *Ḥurūf* 112–115; on this point also see Abed 1991: 126–128 and 136–141.

39 *Introduction* to al-Farābī *Ḥurūf* 46.

40 Late and early sources agree on this: in Ḥājjī Khalīfa, *Kashf* 1: col. 111 the most noticeable feature (and the unique mentioned) is its function as a reference work in case of disagreement: "*wa-huwa kitābun marjūʿun ilayhi ʿinda ḍṭirābi l-naqli wa-khtilāfi l-aqwāl*", which echoes "*wa-ilayhi l-marjaʿu ʿinda ḍṭirābi l-naqli wa-l-ikhtilāf*" in Yāqūt *Muʿjam* 1: 2536 and Ibn Khallikān *Wafayāt* 4: 339.

41 Ed. by ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn al-Fatlī in 1973. On this see Bohas 1991; a long list of corrections in Barakat and Bohas 1991; Bohas 1993.

of fully understanding the text. A critical edition, much needed considering the significance of this treatise, is highly desirable.[42]

3 *Al-Uṣūl fī l-naḥw*: an overview

3.1 Title and intent

The word *uṣūl* as a plural is attested in *al-Taʿrīfāt*, a scientific dictionary by al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413), in two entries. The first is devoted to the common acceptation of the word ("something that is required but does not itself require anything else") and the technical, legal (*fī l-sharʿ*) usage ("something on which something else is built, and which does not itself build on something else"). A second, separate entry is dedicated to *uṣūl al-fiqh*, which probably means that this was the only discipline formally recognized in a dictionary of this kind.[43]

As far as we know, the combination of *uṣūl* and *naḥw* in books' titles is not a frequent one.[44] The expression *uṣūl al-naḥw* occurs for the first time in Ibn al-Sarrāj's treatise and is paralleled some decades later in a treatise attributed to the Kufan Abū l-Ḥasan b. Dāwūd b. Ḥasan al-Qurashī al-Muqrī, known as al-Naqqār (d. 352/963), who authored a book entitled *Kitāb al-lugha wa-makhārij al-ḥurūf wa-uṣūl al-naḥw*, or simply *Uṣūl al-naḥw*.[45] The same terms surface later in a title of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), *al-Iqtirāḥ fī ʿilm uṣūl al-naḥw*, composed when he was young.[46] This Egyptian polymath claimed to be the first to lay the foundations of a new discipline called *uṣūl al-naḥw*, which he

42 An edition based on four out of the five extant manuscripts was in preparation at the university of Oslo but it seems not to have been published so far: see Amund Bjørsnøs (PhD student in classical Arabic philology at Oslo University), Arabic Grammar in the Early tenth Century. A critical edition and study of the *Uṣūl fī l-Naḥw* by Ibn al-Sarrāj; http://srii.org/content/upload/documents/30df9371-bfb9-4866-8479-0d7d874a8847.pdf (last accessed 27th October 2017).

43 al-Jurjānī *Taʿrīfāt* 49–50: *fī l-lughati ʿibāratun ʿammā yuftaqaru ilayhi wa-lā yaftaqiru huwa ilā ghayrihi, wa-fī l-sharʿi ʿibāratun ʿammā yubnā ʿalayhi ghayruhu wa-lā yabnī huwa ʿalā ghayrihi.*

44 Interesting remarks on the word *uṣūl* in books titles, even if in a different context, are also given by Martinez Gros, who interprets it in terms of a tendency to hierarchization ("tendence à éclairer le réel en le hiérarchisant depuis le origins qui le fondent") and of the logic of lineage ("logique de l'ascendance") (Martínez-Gros 1984: 85).

45 On al-Naqqār see Sezgin 1984: 9: 149. The shortened form of the title is found in Ismāʿīl Bāshā, *Īḍāḥ* 1: col. 93.

46 On this see Ghersetti (forthcoming).

describes as the homologue of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. *Al-Iqtirāḥ*, which he considered among his best works, aims at perfecting the discipline of *uṣūl al-naḥw* created – he says- by Ibn Jinnī (d. 392/1002), a representative of the speculative approach (*ʿilal*) to grammar.[47] The name of Ibn al-Sarrāj is cursorily cited only four times, and brief excerpts from his treatise *al-Uṣūl fī l-naḥw* are also present, but in extremely scanty proportion.[48]

It should be emphasized that "foundations of grammar" does not have the same meaning for al-Suyūṭī and Ibn al-Sarrāj. To Ibn al-Sarrāj, who represents a consciously descriptive approach to grammar, *uṣūl* rather refers to the norms to which speakers must adhere, the "fundamentals" of linguistic use.[49] His adoption of the word *uṣūl* can also be seen in the light of the distinction between *uṣūl* and *furūʿ* (or *masāʾil*) established in grammatical literature by al-Māzinī and taken over by al-Mubarrad whose pupil, Ibn al-Sarrāj, "took a step further" with this distinction, probably because it responded to a principle of logic.[50] This division was so clear in Ibn al-Sarrāj's eyes that he also planned to write a separate treatise on *furūʿ*.[51] With his *Uṣūl*, Ibn al-Sarrāj intended to give people a concise reference work and provide rules to follow in order to master the "speech of the Arabs" (*kalām al-ʿarab*). As a consequence, he aimed at the description and orderly arrangement of the "foundations" that are at the basis of language use.[52] This descriptive approach he calls *ʿilla* ("explanation"), in contrast with the speculative approach, which he calls *ʿillat al-ʿilla* ("second degree explanation"), thus being

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47 Bohas, Guillaume, Kouloughli 2006 [1990]: 11.

48 Al-Suyūṭī *Iqtirāḥ* 24, 155, 267–268.

49 Versteegh 1995: 2 emphasizes the distinction made "between the 'principles of grammar' (*ʾuṣūl al-naḥw*), i. e. the description of linguistic data within the corpus of Classical Arabic in a correct and systematic way, and the 'causes of grammar' (*ʿilal al-naḥw*), i. e. the explication of these descriptions or rules in terms of both language-internal and language-external laws".

50 Baalbaki 2006: 193: "Māzinī was the first author to have used *ʾuṣūl*, in the plural, as a technical term which refers to the 'fundamental' or main themes related to a certain grammatical topic ... Obviously, this distinction between *ʾuṣūl* and *furūʿ* or *masāʾil* ... is an early step toward the classification of grammatical questions according to some logical foundation which proceeds from the general to the particular".

51 Ibn al-Sarrāj *Uṣūl* 1: 328: *wa-naḥnu nufridu kitāban li-tafrīʿi l-uṣūli wa-mazji baʿḍihā bi-baʿḍ, wa-nusammīhi Kitāba l-furūʿi li-yakūna furūʿa hādhihi l-uṣūl* and passim (on this see Baalbaki 2006 193).

52 Ibn al-Sarrāj *Uṣūl* 1: 36: *wa-gharaḍī fī hādhā l-kitābi [dhikru] l-ʿillati llatī idhā ṭṭuridat wuṣila bi-hā ilā kalāmihim faqaṭ wa-dhikru l-uṣūli wa-l-shāʾiʿi li-annahu kitābun ījāz*. A late encyclopedic dictionary cursorily mentions the plural *uṣūl* (under the lexical entry *aṣl*, not separately) and contrasts it with *furūʿ*: in this sense *uṣūl* is meaningfully equated with *qawāʿid* (rules) (*wa-l-uṣūlu min haythu innahā mabnā wa-asāsun li-farʿihā summiyat qawāʿid*; al-Kaffawī, *al-Kulliyyāt* 122).

the first to formalize a clear-cut difference between the two.[53] The lines of *al-Uṣūl* where he makes this crucial distinction can be compared with the corresponding passage of *al-Īḍāḥ fī ʿilal al-naḥw* by al-Zajjājī (d. 337/948 or 339–40/949–50), in order to elucidate the difference between these two approaches. Contrary to Ibn al-Sarrāj, al-Zajjājī's intent is to pen a book on the hidden causes (*ʿilal*) and not on the nature of linguistic data, and thus give his work an explanatory character.[54] The speculative, explanatory approach alluded to by Ibn al-Sarrāj with the terms *ʿillat al-ʿilla* and represented by al-Zajjājī's *Īḍāḥ* has a different subject and a different aim. In Ibn al-Sarrāj's own words it is intended rather to demonstrate the "wisdom" (*ḥikma*) and superiority (*faḍl*) of the Arabic language over other languages, thus becoming part and parcel of an ideological approach to linguistic data.[55] It is worth noticing that the notion of *ʿillat al-ʿilla*, which is not further elucidated nor put into operation by Ibn al-Sarrāj, was criticized by one of his fellow grammarians, Ibn Jinnī (d. 392/1002), who deemed it faulty for two reasons: it was nothing more than an explanation of the first *ʿilla* and it implied the prospect of endless regression.[56]

3.2 Significance and status

The importance of Ibn al-Sarrāj's *al-Uṣūl fī l-naḥw* has been emphasized many times by modern scholarship: it has been described as a "watershed" in Arabic

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53 Ibn al-Sarrāj *Uṣūl* 1: 35–36. In this sense *ʿilla* "acquired a new, crucial meaning when it began to be used in discussions about the epistemological status of linguistic arguments" (Versteegh 2007 309).

54 Al-Zajjājī *Īḍāḥ* 38: "*wa-hādhā kitābun anshāʾnāhu fī ʿilali l-naḥwi khāṣṣatan wa-l-iḥtijāji lahu wa-dhikri asrārihi wa-kashfi l-mustaghliqi min laṭāʾifihi wa-ghawāmiḍihi dūna l-uṣūli li-anna l-kutuba al-muṣannafata fī l-uṣūli kathīratun jiddan wa-lam ara kitāban ilā hādhihi l-ghāyati mufradan fī ʿilali l-naḥw*". Versteegh interprets *uṣūl* here as a reference to "the more conventional treatises of grammar" (Versteegh 1995 20 n. 4).

55 Ibn al-Sarrāj *Uṣūl* 1: 35. It is interesting to notice that this ideological slant does not appear in al-Fārābī's approach to different languages (*al-fārsiyya, al-yūnaniyya, al-sughdiyya*) which, in his *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf*, are given equal dignity: see e. g. al-Fārābī *Ḥurūf* 111–112. Suleiman 1999: 7 sees this passage of *al-Uṣūl* as a cue to the socio-political context of that time: in his eyes *taʿlīl* played "a role in post fourth/tenth century studies in the inter-ethnic strife in Muslim society by supporting the Arab's position against those who wished to denigrate them" (also ibid. 203).

56 Ibn Jinnī, *Khaṣāʾiṣ* 1: 173: "*... sharḥun wa-tafsīrun wa-tatmīmun li-l-ʿilla*" and "*wa-kāna yajibu ... an yakūna hunā ʿillatun wa-ʿillatu al-ʿillati wa-ʿillatu ʿillati al-ʿilla ... wa-in takallafa mutakallifun jawāban ʿan hādhā taṣāʿadat ʿiddatu l-ʿilali wa-addā dhāka ilā hujnati l-qawli wa-ḍaʿfati l-qāʾili bihi*". However, Ibn Jinnī concludes that Ibn al-Sarrāj must be regarded with kindness, or otherwise his opinion must not be regarded attentively. On this also see Versteegh 1995; 90; Suleiman 1999: 71–72.

grammatical theory[57] or "une étape décisive dans le développement de la tradition grammaticale arabe",[58] and scholars agree that it marks a permanent rupture with the preceding tradition of Arabic grammar ("[...] rupture, dont le texte fondateur est le Kitaab al-Uṣuul d'Ibn al-Sarraaj").[59] It also established a descriptive pattern for grammatical treatises in the following centuries.[60]

Al-Uṣūl fī l-naḥw was held in high esteem also in the pre-modern period. Some of Ibn al-Sarrāj's contemporaries considered it superior to his master's *al-Muqtaḍab*, a comparison that Ibn al-Sarrāj rejected out of modesty.[61] Al-Zubaydī (d. 379/989) and Ibn al-Qifṭī (d. 646/1248) describe it as "extremely noble and useful" (*wa-huwa ghāyatun mina l-sharafi wa-l-fā'ida*)[62] and al-Ṣafadī as "precious" (*nafīs*).[63] Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 577/1181) considered it the best and the greatest of Ibn al-Sarrāj's "good" works,[64] and Ibn Khallikān (d. 681/1282) includes it among the best treatises on grammar.[65] If there was common consent on its excellence, the interesting point is not the general statement of its value, but rather the nature of its superiority. Yāqūt expounds on this, and, in so doing, is also the first to mention arrangement as a major trait of the *Uṣūl*.[66] He lists three arguments for his positive judgement: comprehensiveness, reception of Sībawayh's teaching and "the best order". He says: "in it [*al-Uṣūl*] he brought together the foundations of Arabic, he received the questions treated by Sībawayh and put them in order in the best way".[67] This "best order", which finally emerges as the salient feature of *al-Uṣūl*, is further specified by Ibn al-Qifṭī in a way that

57 Owens 1990: 9.

58 Barakat and Bohas 1991: 183.

59 Carter 2000; Guillaume 1988: 31.

60 Owens 1997: 51: "... *al-'Uṣuwl fiy al-naḥw* effectively established the form of grammatical treatises which is in use in the Arabic world up to today"; for this reason it was included in the corpus of the fundamental linguistics works of diverse cultural traditions established by a team of scholars: see Guillaume 2000a http://ctlf.ens-lyon.fr/n_form.asp (last accessed on 11th October 2016) and Guillaume 2000b.

61 Ibn al-Nadīm *Fihrist* 68; Ibn al-Qifṭī *Inbāh* 3: 145; Yāqūt *Mu'jam* 1: 2536; al-Ṣafadī *Wāfī* 3: 73; Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba *Ṭabaqāt* 115; al-Suyūṭī, *Bughya* 1: 110.

62 Al-Zubaydī *Ṭabaqāt* 112; Ibn al-Qifṭī *Inbāh* 3: 146.

63 Al-Ṣafadī *Wāfī* 3: 73.

64 Ibn al-Anbārī *Nuzha* 220: "*lahu muṣannafātun ḥasanatun wa-aḥsanuhā wa-akbaruhā* Kitābu l-Uṣūl".

65 Ibn Khallikān *Wafayāt* 4: 340: "*wa-huwa min ajwadi l-kutubi l-muṣannafati fī hādhā l-sha'n*".

66 Cfr.; Owens 1990: 9: "it is his organizational systematization in his *al-'Usuwl fi l-Nahw*, 'the Foundations of Grammar', which effectively serves as a model for all subsequent pedagogical grammars".

67 *Jama'a fīhi uṣūla 'ilmi l-'arabiyyati wa-akhadha masā'ila Sībawayhi wa-rattabahā aḥsana l-tartīb*: Yāqūt *Mu'jam* 1: 2536; the same in Ibn al-Anbārī *Nuzha* 220. This statement is paralleled by similar statements in modern scholarship: e. g. "the data, and for the most part, theoretical

explicitly underlines the philosophical background of Ibn al-Sarrāj's approach. Reporting the words of al-Marzubānī (d. 382/993), Ibn al-Qifṭī explains that in *al-Uṣūl fī l-naḥw*, Ibn al-Sarrāj "borrowed the chapters of *Kitāb Sībawayh* and arranged it in categories according to the system of 'comprehensive subdivisions' (*taqāsīm*), in a manner corresponding to the form (*lafẓ*) of the logicians [...] as for the content (*maʿnā*), it is all taken from the *Kitāb Sībawayh*".[68] The "best order" mentioned in these sources thus turns out to be strict adherence to logical categories that make it much easier to access the work's contents, in other words, well organized information. That this new arrangement corresponded to rational criteria resulting in clarity and immediate accessibility features also, and separately, in a curious statement that corroborates the conclusion that *al-Uṣūl fī l-naḥw* was a turning point in the history of grammar: "they say: grammar remained crazy until Ibn al-Sarrāj made it reasonable with his *Uṣūl*".[69] The contrast between a state of insanity, where disorder reigns, and rationality, where everything is in the right place, is an interesting clue to the perception of Ibn al-Sarrāj's contribution to the history of grammar. It looks like Ibn al-Sarrāj's fellow grammarians felt relieved to have at their disposal a reference-work that was easily perusable and where the desired information could be located quickly.[70] The most conspicuous novelty of *al-Uṣūl fī l-naḥw* was thus associated with the systematic arrangement of the contents of grammar already treated by Sībawayh.[71] Yāqūt's statement about Ibn al-Sarrāj's agency in rationalizing grammar could also reveal the perception of a more structural aspect of the novelty of

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descriptive apparatus pertaining to this grammar are to be found in Sībawayhi, and were organized in a coherent way by Ibn al-Sarrāj" (Owens 1997: 54).

68 Ibn al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh* 3: 149: *ṣannafa kitāban fī l-naḥwi sammāhu al-Uṣūla ntazaʿahu min abwābi Kitābi Sībawayhi wa-jaʿalahu aṣnāfahu bi-l-taqāsīmi ʿalā lafẓi l-manṭiqiyyīn [...] wa-innamā adkhala fīhi lafẓa l-taqāsīmi fa-ammā l-maʿnā fa-huwa kulluhu min Kitābi Sībawayh.* On this kind of arrangement see Bohas, Guillaume, Kouloughli 2006 [1990]: 10.

69 *Mā zāla l-naḥwu majnūnan ḥattā ʿaqqalahu bnu al-Sarrāji bi-Uṣūlihi*: Yāqūt *Muʿjam* 1: 2535; al-Suyūṭī, *Bughya* 1: 109; Ṭāshköprüzāde, *Miftāḥ* 1: 156. This statement seems to parallel, or better, to mirror an odd affirmation of the Kufan Abū Mūsā al-Ḥāmiḍ (d. 305/918) on Sībawayh, whom he -out of anger- defines as a charlatan (*dajjāl*), a devil (*shayṭān*) to whom the *jinn* are favourably disposed (Abū l-Ṭayyib al-Lughawī *Marātib* 86–87).

70 This does not mean that Ibn al-Sarrāj's views were not criticized by his fellow grammarians: e. g. al-Zajjājī is rather negative about Ibn al-Sarrāj's definition of the noun, which he deems uncorrect (*wa-qāla Abū Bakrin b. al-Sarrāji l-ismu ... wa-hādhā ghayru ṣaḥīḥin ...* due to its ambiguity (al-Zajjājī *Īḍāḥ* 50; Versteegh 1995: 5). See above for Ibn Jinnī's appraisal of his definition of *ʿillat al-ʿilla*.

71 Cmp. with Baalbaki 2008: 249: "The systematic organization of Ibn al-Sarrāj's book is probably the main reason for the famous saying that he, by his *ʾuṣūl* (or perhaps *ʾUṣūl*, i. e. the work itself), rationalized grammar".

his treatise, not exclusively limited to formal arrangement: the presence of a unifying organizational principle. This feature has been dealt with in some detail in modern scholarship. Owens seems inclined to recognize it in the notion of markedness since, as he notices, Ibn al-Sarrāj's exposition always moves from unmarked to marked categories.[72] A different perspective is suggested by Baalbaki, who explains Yāqūt's statement on the basis of a greater consistence in analytical tools (the unifying concept of predication) adopted by Ibn al-Sarrāj: Ibn al-Sarrāj had the merit of being the first to choose the concept of predication (*ikhbār*) as the one and only criterion to differentiate the parts of speech.[73]

Be that as it may, due to its clear arrangement or to its internal conceptual consistency, the treatise of Ibn al-Sarrāj, whose dependence upon the *Kitāb Sībawayh* is repeatedly emphasized by biographers, was appreciated as a reliable means for accessing the foundations of grammar in a user-friendly arrangement. As Viain emphasizes, while sanctioning the status of the *Kitāb Sībawayh* as the founding treatise of Arabic grammar, Ibn al-Sarrāj moulded its contents into a systematic shape, suitable to be used as a template for later grammatical literature, as well as for educational purposes.[74] It was thus also a response to the pedagogical impulse which - along with the religious one - had driven the development of Arabic grammar from the beginning.[75]

3.3 Innovations

As the pupil of al-Mubarrad, the authority in grammatical studies, and a friend of the philosopher al-Fārābī, Ibn al-Sarrāj formed a link between the traditional

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72 Owens 1997: 54–55.

73 Which Baalbaki compares with the multiple criteria adopted by Sībawayh, who did not adhere to a unifying criterion (be it morphological, semantic or syntactic) to differentiate them (Baalbaki 2017: 188–193); also see 192: *wa-ka-ʾanna Ibna al-Sarrāji qad istashʿara l-ḥājata ilā miʿyārin wāḥidin tuʿraḍu ʿalayhi aqsāmu l-kalāmi wa-wajada fī l-ikhbāri miʿyāran naḥwiyyan tarkībiyyan yaṣiḥḥu l-istināḍu ilayhi fī tafriqati aqsāmi l-kalām*". As Baalbaki emphasizes, predication (*ikhbār, isnād*) is the core unit of both types of sentences and the pillar of linguistic structures (*huwa ʿimādu l-jumlati bi-nawʿayhā wa-annahu asāsu tarkībi l-kalāmi wa-naẓmihi*, Baalbaki 2017: 192).

74 Viain 2014: 33: "Ibn al-Sarrāǧ, disciple préféré de Mubarrad, réassume sa conception du *Kitāb* comme fondement de la discipline grammaticale: L'enjeu consiste toutefois pour lui à donner à la doctrine sībawayhienne une forme canonique, normalisée, et donc susceptible de faire l'objet d'un enseignement systématique".

75 Owens 1997: 46–47; 50 "Sībawayhi's grammar [...] has the nature of a reference grammar, and to fulfill more practical pedagogical needs [...] the reference grammars themselves were made more transparent in their organization".

study of grammar and the foreign philosophical tradition, a link made clear in al-Khwārizmī's (*Mafātīḥ al-ʿulūm*) description of "Arab sciences", which include grammar, and "foreign sciences", which include philosophy. Logic of Greek origin is visible in Ibn al-Sarrāj's systematic recourse to the dichotomous classification he adopted in the *Uṣūl*. He was the first to present linguistic data following a rigorous organization aimed at reflecting theory, notably case marking and the hierarchy of concepts: first nouns, then verbs and then particles. He was also the first to divide syntax according to parts of speech: the chapter on the noun was arranged by case markings (first nominative, then accusative and then genitive), and the chapter on the verb by modal markings (first indicative, then subjunctive and then the apocopate form). Nominative comes first and is considered more important because it is an essential component of the predicative core of the sentence; accusative and genitive come later, since they do not belong to this core. In this way, he succeeded in imposing the formal model of government, according to which case markings and modal markings result from the action of some elements in the statement upon others. Yet the most important innovation was bringing to the fore the significance of the predicative relation in structuring grammatical explanations and remarks, something that had never been done before Ibn al-Sarrāj.[76] Most likely the relevance of the notion of predication in Ibn al-Sarrāj's exposition is a consequence of his philosophical studies, and in particular of the Aristotelian logic he studied with al-Fārābī. Aristotelian logic is, in fact, as Abed states, "a predicative logic" where the logical form is always composed of a subject and a predicate, be it a verb or the combination of a copula and a predicate.[77] The relevance of the predicative model in al-Fārābī's logic is clearly visible, for instance in the stress on the notion of copula and "timeless connector", the pillar of predication,[78] and in the description of the categories of sentences (*qaḍāyā*), where these are defined on the basis of a binary model as "the combination of two things which are combined one with the other".[79]

Apart from arrangement and the emphasis given to the notion of predication, the *Uṣūl* shows other meaningful innovations. One of them is the fact of giving a clear-cut definition of grammar, singling out its essence and its aims; this is a pattern followed

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76 Guillaume 1988 32.

77 Abed 1991: 120: "Regardless of the grammatical structure of any given sentence, the logical *form* of that sentence should always fit the schema S is P [and] every finite verb or active verb form may be rewritten as a combination of the copula "is" and a participle"; also see ibid. 121.

78 al-Fārābī *Ḥurūf* 112–114.

79 al-Fārābī *Ḥurūf* 127: *wa-l-muʾtalafu min shayʾayni alladhayni yaʾtalifu aḥaduhumā ilā l-ākhari hādhā l-iʾtilāfu huwa al-qaḍiya*. It is worth noticing that the same terms are also used by Ibn al-Sarrāj when he defines speech (see below): *al-kalāmu yaʾtalifu min thalāthati ashyāʾ*.

by logicians.[80] It must be noted that in the *Kitāb Sībawayh* there is no preliminary statement on grammar and its aims, something that we would consider natural in the formative stage of a discipline; nor is there one in al-Mubarrad's *al-Muqtaḍab*, which represents a significant step towards the adaptation of grammatical treatises to pedagogical requirements. As stated above, Ibn al-Sarrāj is also the first to formalize a clear-cut difference between the descriptive approach and explanatory approach, giving the term *ʿillat al-ʿilla* its "technical" or "metalinguistic" status.[81]

A further meaningful change is the subdivision, given immediately after the introductory section on *partes orationis*, between inflected and non-inflected parts of speech (*bāb al-iʿrāb wa-l-muʿrab wa-l-binā' wa-l-mabnī*)[82]: this corresponds roughly to the division of grammar into syntax and morpho-phonology already visible (but not systematically described, formalized or categorized) in the arrangement of the *Kitāb Sībawayh*. This division also marks the synthesis between the data described by Sībawayh and the logicians' methods and concepts.

The difference of approach in organizing the contents is glaring in the first section of the treatise, which examines the parts of speech.[83] Translating and commenting upon this part, Troupeau emphasized the strong influence of philosophy on the presentation of grammar.[84] The chapter also contains a certain number of innovations that would be taken up in the following periods, including logic and semantic considerations of philosophical matrix.[85] It is useful to compare the parts of speech as they are presented respectively in *Kitāb Sībawayh* and in *al-Uṣūl fī l-naḥw* in order to appreciate the novelty of Ibn al-Sarrāj's treatise and to properly evaluate Yāqūt's statement about the "craziness" of grammar before Ibn al-Sarrāj's intervention.

4 The *Kitāb* and the *Uṣūl*: a comparative glance

Parts of speech (in Sībawayh's words *kalim*) were first set out by Sībawayh in the introduction to his work, and his classification has not been altered since

80 On the relevance of accurate definitions in logic see e. g. the treatise of Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī (d. 363/974) on the difference between logic and grammar: in the first lines, the author explains that the best way to differentiate things is a meticulous analysis of their definitions (*taḥlīl ḥaddihi*) (Yahyā b. ʿAdī in Endress 1978: 39 = 192).

81 Suleiman 1999: 71.

82 Ibn al-Sarrāj *Uṣūl* 1: 43.

83 On this see Viain 2014: 36–41.

84 Troupeau 1983: 144: "l'influence de la logique sur la présentation grammaticale du *Kitāb al-ʿUṣūl* est particulièrement perceptible dans le premier chapitre".

85 On this see Guillaume 1988: 31–33.

(it stays the same even in today's grammars). They are three: noun (*ism*), verb (*fiʿl*) and "meaningful particle that is neither a noun nor a verb" (*ḥarfun jāʾa li-maʿnan wa-laysa bi-smin wa-lā fiʿl*).[86] The basis of this is not made explicit, but it "relies on the fact that nouns and verbs have a well-defined morphology and range of meanings ... [while] particles [...] have no specific form, but are clearly meaningful words [...] and the only thing they have in common is that both their form and their meanings are different from those of nouns and verbs".[87]

The same classification is also found in Ibn al-Sarrāj's *Uṣūl*, with a small but meaningful difference: while Sībawayh simply talks about *kalim* (*fa-l-kalimu smun wa-fiʿlun wa-ḥarf*), Ibn al-Sarrāj's formulation is more complex in conceptual terms, in that it hints at a syntactic approach: "speech is *composed of* three parts ..." (*al-kalāmu yaʾtalifu min thalāthati ashyāʾa ismin wa-fiʿlin wa-ḥarf*).[88] This sentence, slightly changed, is reiterated at the end of the chapter. Nevertheless, it is complemented with a list of all the possible combinations of the three parts of speech that produce a well-formed sentence. Hence, Ibn al-Sarrāj explains that sentences can be formed by two nouns or by a noun and a verb,[89] but cannot be formed by two verbs, nor by two particles.[90] It is easy to understand that this catalogue of well-formed structures is based on the binary, predicative model crucial in defining the parts of speech, even though technical terms referring to predication do not feature in this passage. This reiteration of the categories of the parts of speech and the meaningful addition of categories of well-structured sentences, which can be considered as a compendium of earlier definitions, enhances the overall consistency of the exposition and serves as an abstract and a methodological frame for the subsequent parts.

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86 Sībawayh *Kitāb* 1: 12.

87 Carter 2004 74.

88 Ibn al-Sarrāj *Uṣūl*, 1: 36.

89 Independently of their mutual order, which we take as a clue about the underlying model of predication where the position (what comes first and what comes second) does not affect the functions of predicate (verb) and the subject (noun).

90 Ibn al-Sarrāj *Uṣūl*, 1: 41: *wa-llādhī yaʾtalifu minhu l-kalāmu l-thalāthatu l-ismu wa-l-fiʿlu wa-l-ḥarfu fa-l-ismu qad yaʾtalifu maʿa l-ismi ... wa-yaʾtalifu l-ismu wa-l-fiʿla ... wa-lā yaʾtalifu l-fiʿlu maʿa l-fiʿli wa-l-ḥarfu lā yaʾtalifu maʿa l-ḥarf.* Cmp. Sībawayh *Kitāb* 1: 14 *a lā tarā annaka law qulta inna yaḍrib yaʾtīnā wa-ashbāha dhālika lam yakun kalām?* Although suggesting that a well-formed sentence cannot be composed by two verbs, this statement has a much narrower scope, since it is aimed at describing the similarity between imperfect verbs and nouns.

If we compare each of the definitions of the parts of speech as they are presented in the *Kitāb* and the *Uṣūl*, the following differences, which touch both form and content, are immediately perceptible.[91]

Length: Ibn al-Sarrāj's definitions are much longer than Sībawayh's. The *Kitāb* counts twelve lines for listing the parts of speech and describing them, while over six pages of the *Uṣūl* are devoted to the same matter.

Arrangement: in the *Uṣūl* definitions are also ordered according to a rigorous arrangement and the three *shurūḥ*, one for each part of speech, are each divided into three parts on the basis of inflectional categories.

Conceptualization: the *Kitāb* gives no definitions at all; it only supplies examples in the case of nouns, and gives a very brief description in the case of verbs and particles. By contrast, for each part of speech, the *Uṣūl* gives rigorous definitions hinging on three criteria[92]: first, a word is defined in relation to itself (semantics); second, a word is defined in relation to its role in the sentence (syntax); third, a word is defined in relation to other words, by singling out the distinctive features that differentiate it from the rest of the words. This last criterion looks very Saussurian, since it relies on the conception of language as a system "où tout se tient".

Let us have a closer look at the example of the noun (*ism*) and the verb (*fiʿl*) in the *Kitāb* (henceforth *KS*) and the *Uṣūl* (henceforth *UN*).

KS – Noun (*Kitāb* 1: 12): *fa-l-ism: rajul, faras [wa-ḥāʾiṭ]*. For 'noun', Sībawayh uses the non-technical term meaning 'name' and simply provides examples representing three categories: animate/human, animate/non-human and inanimate. This is a comprehensive representation of the possibilities based on semantic features differently combined: +animate/-animate and +human/-human. Classification here is purely formal, and the different subcategories are not dealt with: they are treated syntactically only later.

UN – Noun (*Uṣūl* 1: 36): *al-ismu mā dalla ʿalā maʿnan mufradin wa-dhālika l-maʿnā yakūnu shakhṣan wa-ghayra shakhṣ*: "the noun refers to a simple meaning, which can be concrete (*shakhṣ*) or abstract (*ghayr shakhṣ*)".[93] This first definition is semantic; nouns are defined in relation to themselves. Contrary to al-Zajjājī, who attributes it to al-Mubarrad, Troupeau states that this definition is much more like the one given by Aristotle in the *Hermeneutics*. Next, nouns are defined in relation with the sentence on the basis of the predicative model: *al-*

91 The passages of *al-Uṣūl fī l-naḥw* of Ibn al-Sarrāj concerning the parts of speech, as well as the introductory section (*Risāla*) of the *Kitāb Sībawayh* have been translated and commented, among others, by Troupeau (respectively in Troupeau 1983; Troupeau 1973-74).

92 On this see Troupeau 1983.

93 The concepts of "concrete" and "abstract" are discussed in Versteegh 1995: 61 n. 16.

ismu mā jāza an yukhbara ʿanhu "the noun is that of which there can be a predicate". The third criterion comes to the fore at the end, where Ibn al-Sarrāj[94] enumerates six distinctive features typical of the noun: it can be preceded by an article or a preposition, but not by *sawfa* or *qad* (which are peculiar to verbs), it can have an epithet or be replaced by a pronoun. Criteria two and three seem to address the learner (*mutaʿallim*), and in fact, closing the section on nouns, Ibn al-Sarrāj offers a kind of concise test, based on distributional criteria, that a novice might employ: elements that can be combined with verbs are nouns, elements that cannot be combined with verbs are not (*kullu mā ṣaluḥa an yakūna maʿahu "yaḍurru" wa-"yanfaʿu" fa-huwa sm*).[95]

KS – Verb (*Kitāb* 1: 12): *ammā l-fiʿlu fa-amthilatun ukhidhat min lafẓi aḥdāthi l-asmāʾi wa-buniyat li-mā maḍā wa-li-mā yakūnu wa-lam yaqaʿ wa-mā huwa kāʾinun lam yanqaṭiʿ* (examples of morphological patterns follow). The same as above: the non-technical term referring to 'action, act' is used here as a technical term. Verbs are described as deriving from nouns denoting actions, which is irrelevant for syntax, but is highly relevant for the following discussion of the priority of nouns over verbs.[96] They have three different forms, described rather intuitively with "something that has elapsed" (*mā maḍā*) i. e. perfect, like *dhahaba* etc.; "something that has not yet happened" (*mā yakūnu wa-lam yaqaʿ*) better specified further as "the way you give orders" (*qawluka āmiran*) i. e. imperative, like *idhab* etc.; and "something that is still going on" (*kāʾinun lam yanqaṭiʿ*) i. e. imperfect, like *yadhhabu*. The three forms are clearly distinguished and distinct morphologically, but, in the description given by Sībawayh, the second and the third partially overlap, in that they are both related to imperfect and opposed to perfect.[97] It can be noticed that this is a description more than a definition and that priority is given to the exhaustive list of all the possible instances occurring in speech. To give a full-scale description of *kalām al-ʿarab* is in fact the aim of Sībawayh, who is apparently rather indifferent to structured and systematic definitions.

UN – Verb (*Uṣūl* 1: 38): *al-fiʿlu mā dalla ʿalā maʿnan wa-zamānin wa-dhālika l-zamānu immā māḍin wa-immā ḥāḍirun wa-immā mustaqbal*: verbs "refer to a meaning and a time, and this can be past, present or future". This is the

94 *Uṣūl* 1: 37–38.

95 Ibn al-Sarrāj *Uṣūl* 1: 38; the marked pedagogical aim of *Uṣūl* is also emphasized elsewhere e. g. 1: 37 "*wa-lammā kuntu lam aʿmal hādhā l-kitāba li-l-ʿālimi dūna l-mutaʿallimi ḥtajtu an adhkura mā yaqrubu ilā l-mutaʿallim*".

96 Carter 2004: 74.

97 For a new interpretation of the verbal system description in *Kitāb Sībawayh* see Giolfo 2014: 137–140.

semantic definition of verbs and, in the same way as nouns, verbs are defined in relation to themselves. In this too, Troupeau sees a great similarity to Aristotle's *Hermeneutics* and *Poetics*.[98] Verbs are also defined in relation to the sentence always in terms of predication "*al-fiʿlu mā kāna khabaran wa-lā yajūzu an yukhbara ʿanhu*" ("the verb can be a predicate but not take a predicate"); but this passage occurs in the section on nouns, thus implicitly recognizing the prototypical character of nouns affirmed by the Basrans. The verb is then defined in relation to other words, and a long paragraph is devoted to morphology in order to describe formal features of the imperfect (*muḍāriʿ*) *vs* perfect (*māḍī*), and features differentiating verbs from nouns. *Muḍāriʿ*, meaning 'similar' (i. e. similar to noun, since it behaves as a noun in declension), is also explained on the basis that only present actions exist, thus instituting a conceptual link between nouns and verbs.

The definition of *ḥarf* is quite peculiar since it has no correspondent in the 'semantic definition' adopted by Ibn al-Sarrāj for nouns and verbs; this could well reflect the syntactic/instrumental character of particles, which are devoid of proper meaning but charged with grammatical meaning, something already hinted at in Sībawayh's description.

KS – Particle (*Kitāb*, 1: 12): *mā jāʾa li-maʿnan wa-laysa sman wa-lā fiʿl* "something that brings a meaning and is not a noun or a verb". In this Sībawayh is quite vague, and commentaries and tentative interpretations of his words are numerous. The description revolves about two poles, one positive (hinting at a syntactic, i. e. instrumental, meaning) and one negative (the fact of not being included in the categories of nouns and verbs). In the *Kitāb*, *ḥarf* can refer to different entities, but in any case, they are different segments of speech whose meaning depends on the context. Further on, Sībawayh lists the 'places' a particle can occur, i. e. the syntactic meaning it can have: e. g. *hal* is used for questions (*istifhām*) and *yā* for addressing (*nidāʾ*).

UN – Particle (*Uṣūl* 1: 40) *al-ḥarfu mā lā yajūzu an yukhbara ʿanhu kamā yukhbaru ʿani l-ism* "the particle cannot take a predicate as the noun can". This sentence, occurring first in the section on nouns and then repeated in the section on particles, is not a semantic definition like those of nouns and verbs, but a purely syntactic one. Contrary to the first and the second, which have an affirmative form, this takes a negative form, stating what a particle is not, instead of defining what it is, and establishes a mutually exclusive relationship with the two categories, nouns and verbs. It seems to reproduce the description of the *Kitāb*, but with the meaningful innovation of putting it in the mould of

98 Troupeau 1983: 145; also see Guillaume 1988: 31–32.

the predication model. This seems to be a flaw in the systematic exposition of the *Uṣūl*, in that there is no clear-cut definition like those given for the noun and the verb: the text skips to the syntactically-based description of *ḥarf*, explaining that is has no role in the predicative relation since it can be neither subject nor predicate. This emphasizes once more the importance of the predication model.

It is of interest to make a comparison, even if cursorily, with the equivalent passages of *al-Muqtaḍab* by al-Mubarrad, the master of Ibn al-Sarrāj, whose treatise –an intermediate stage between the *Kitāb* and the *Uṣūl*- greatly contributed to the process of pedagogical adaptation of Sībawayh's *Kitāb*. After the list of the three parts of speech, which- it is said- are common to every language (*lā yakhlū l-kalām, ʿarabiyyan kāna aw aʿjamiyyan, min hādhihi l-thalātha*), al-Mubarrad immediately starts his explanation by using the concept of *iʿrāb* as the pivotal conceptual tool. The second sentence of *al-Muqtaḍab* is thus devoted to the inflected parts of speech,[99] hence bringing to the fore the binary division inflected (*muʿrab*)/non-inflected (*mabnī*).[100] The exposition of this partition precedes, in fact, the definition of the noun, which is based first on semantic and then on syntactical/combinatory criteria, thus representing an intermediate stage between Sībawayh's and Ibn al-Sarrāj's formulations. The pivotal role of *iʿrāb* appears again immediately after this point, when the three cases of nouns are mentioned and the related concept of *bināʾ*, in relation with final vowels, is introduced.[101] The entire section al-Mubarrad devotes to the definition of *ism*, with its insistence on morphological details, reveals almost no interest in syntax as an operative concept. Moreover, the notion of predication, so relevant in *Uṣūl*, never appears.

The same marked interest in morphology is to be found in the chapter devoted to the verb, which lacks any definition at all. The discussion pivots on morphology and al-Mubarrad enumerates all the different possibilities: paradigms of perfect (*māḍī*) and imperfect (*mustaqbal*) verbs, and verbal nouns (*maṣdar*).[102]

A telling example of the different approach in *al-Muqtaḍab* and *Uṣūl* lies in their explications of the word *muḍāriʿ* for imperfect verbs. While al-Mubarrad

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99 al-Mubarrad, *Muqtaḍab* 1: 141: *wa-l-muʿrabu l-ismu l-mutamakkinu wa-l-fiʿlu l-muḍāriʿ*.

100 This same binary division *muʿrab/mabnī* is, of course, present in *Uṣūl*, but with a different emphasis: it does not come at the beginning, but only nine pages into the treatise.

101 al-Mubarrad *Muqtaḍab* 1: 142, in line with the *Kitāb* where the concept of *iʿrāb* emerges in the section on the "courses" of the end of words (*majārī awākhiri l-kalim*), immediately after the first section listing the *partes orationis* (Sībawayh *Kitāb* 1: 13).

102 al-Mubarrad *Muqtaḍab* 1: 209–211.

explains it on the basis of a general resemblance of imperfect verbs to nouns,[103] Ibn al-Sarrāj offers a more complex analysis. His explanation revolves around the concept of definiteness: the analogy in behaviour between nouns and verbs consists in the possibility of making definite (i. e. identifiable) a noun or an imperfect verb by way of the article *al-* and the prefix *sa/sawfa* respectively. The starting point of the analysis is the affirmation that imperfect verbs are semantically ambiguous: one and the same form (e. g. *ta'kulu*) can correspond to two different meanings referring to present (*mā anta fīhi*) and future (*mā yustaqbalu*), since there is no formal marking of what time is intended by the speaker (*lā dalīla fī lafẓihi ʿalā ayyi l-zamānayni turīdu*). In this, imperfect verbs are analogous to nouns that, if lacking the definite article *al-*, do not reveal which entity is intended by the speaker. For instance, in the sentence "*rajulun faʿala kadhā wa-kadhā,*" there is no formal token of the identity of the person intended by the speaker. However, both nouns and verbs can be disambiguated by adding a further element (*shay' ākhar*): the definite article for nouns and the morpheme of the future *sa/sawfa* for verbs. Like nouns, which -unless specified- refer to general (i. e. indefinite, non-identifiable) meanings and embrace more entities (*yaʿummu qawluka "rajulun" Zaydan wa-ʿAmran*), the imperfect verb, if not disambiguated by means of *sa/sawfa*, embraces two times: future and present (*... anna hādhā l-fiʿla ... yaʿummu shay'ayni al-mustaqbala wa-l-ḥāḍir*). Imperfect verbs preceded by *sa/sawfa* (that defines which time is meant) are thus similar (*ashbaha*) to nouns preceded by *al-*, that serves to specify which entity, among many others, the speaker refers to. It is by virtue of this analogy that verbs are said to resemble (*ḍāraʿa*) nouns.[104]

5 The impact of Ibn al-Sarrāj's work

The *Uṣūl* was, as far as we know, the first grammatical treatise to explain grammar within a new framework derived from methods of Greek logic, using logical categories to explain the rules.

The arrangement of the *Uṣūl* is based on two focal points: the division of parts of speech and inflectional marking (*iʿrāb*). The first point (parts of speech) was in the forefront, and as such needed clear-cut and exhaustive

103 al-Mubarrad *Muqtaḍab* 2: 1: *iʿlam anna l-afʿāla innamā dakhalahā l-iʿrābu li-muḍāraʿatihā li-l-asmā'*; in the *Kitāb* this similarity is further restricted to participles: imperfect nouns are said to be similar to participles (*asmā' al-fāʿilīn*) since they convey the same meaning (Sībawayh *Kitāb* 1: 14).

104 Ibn al-Sarrāj *Uṣūl* 1: 38–39.

definitions.[105] The arrangement and definitions of the parts of speech given in the *Uṣūl* were taken up by Ibn al-Sarrāj's pupils (al-Zajjājī, al-Rummānī and others), who handed them on to their disciples, thus determining the form of standard treatises of grammar for the following centuries. Another feature of the *Uṣūl* taken up in later treatises was the division between scientific, theoretical discourse and pedagogical discourse. In the latter, approximation (*taqrīb*) was possible and desired: it consisted mostly of lists of properties peculiar to each category of grammatical element (e. g. the possibility for nouns to be preceded by the article *alif-lam*), which represented non-formal criteria useful to teach novices. A remarkable innovation was also the adoption of the Aristotelian definition of the verb.

As emphasized by modern scholarship, the most significant innovation of the *Uṣūl* seems to be the notion of predication, which serves as the unifying concept and the fulcrum of the definition of the parts of speech.[106] Predication is given a special prominence starting from the order of exposition: it comes at the beginning of the first chapter, where it operates as a watershed to distinguish nouns from verbs and from particles, whose definitions come after.[107] The prominence given to the predicative relation in structuring grammatical explanations was something new. Indeed, the *Kitāb* deals with the making of statements (which implies the predicative relationship), but in pragmatic terms: it describes the way sentences are constructed and thus singles out the word(s) by which a sentence is begun and the word(s) that follow, and gives information about the initial part of the sentence, but without analysing predication itself. That notwithstanding, Ibn al-Sarrāj's treatise represented a point of departure from the preceding tradition for its systematic presentation of the grammatical matters already dealt with in previous treatises, as emphasized in the statement that "grammar was crazy until Ibn al-Sarrāj made it reasonable with his *Kitāb al-uṣūl*".

6 In the guise of a conclusion

Ibn al-Sarrāj lived in a period when many disciplines were moving the simple accumulation of data towards classifications of knowledge grounded in

105 Guillaume 1988; see also Viain 2014: 99–105.
106 E. g. Guillaume 1988; Baalbaki 2017: 189–190 in connection with the "rationalization of grammar" ascribed to Ibn al-Sarrāj.
107 Ibn al-Sarrāj *Uṣūl* 1: 37.

consistent theory; as a consequence, clear-cut definitions and proper arrangement were necessary. Ibn al-Sarrāj provides a systematic representation of the conceptual organization of grammar, exploiting the logicians' methods and classifications. The arrangement of the *Uṣūl*, its classifications and definitions are signs of an approach to grammar influenced by logic: corpus and linguistic data taken from the *Kitāb* Sībawayh were thus organized in a well-structured and systematic mould, contributing to its evolution from a reference grammar into a didactic tool. We might see this aspiration to systematic exposition in connection with the "coming of age" of grammar and many disciplines of Arabic-Islamic scholarship, but also with the professionalization of their practitioners, who claimed to establish a disciplinary consciousness and scientific basis in fields that already had well-established identities, like grammar. Ibn al-Sarrāj represents, with al-Mubarrad and al-Zajjājī, a middle stage in the paradigm shift between Sībawayh and later grammarians, whose activity Ibn Khaldūn describes as detached from linguistic usage and imbued with the rules of logic and the art of argumentation (... *min jumlati qawānīni l-manṭiqi l-ʿaqliyyati awi l-jadal*).[108] A whole chapter of Ibn Khaldūn's Muqaddima (the 36th) testifies to the distance between linguistic proficiency and professional expertise, or in other terms, between practice and theory. Grammar, referred to as the "knowledge of rules of declension" (*ʿilmu qawānīni l-iʿrāb*), is here described as purely theoretical: many grammarians and experts of these rules, if requested, would not be able to write a single line without solecisms and would not be in a position to express themselves in "good Arabic" (*ʿalā asālībi l-lisāni l-ʿarabī*), while individuals unskilled in the rules of *iʿrāb* are proficient in both prose and poetry.[109] In the same vein, Ibn Khaldūn underlines that while Sībawayh filled his *Kitāb* with examples taken from linguistic usage, later grammarians did not. As a consequence, their treatises contain "bare grammatical rules, devoid of the poetry and speech of the Arabs" (... *al-qawānīni l-naḥwiyyati mujarradatin min ashʿāri l-ʿarabi wa-kalāmihim*),[110] a fact that, apart from its lamentable consequences for linguistic education, is a proof of that "freezing of the corpus material"[111] already begun in Sībawayh's time.

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108 As emphasized by Baalbaki 2008: 250, who quotes and discusses passages of the 36th chapter of Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima* (5: 318). The title of this chapter (*The Habit of this language [Arabic] is different from Arabic grammar [*ṣināʿat al-ʿarabiyya*] and can dispense with it in teaching*) is revealing.

109 Ibn Khaldūn *Muqaddima* 5: 316–317. *Al-lisān al-ʿarabī* in Ibn Khaldūn's view is the language of Muḍar. The chapter closes with a tirade against grammarians, who diverted grammar from its original aim i. e. linguistic education (*taʿlīm*).

110 Ibn Khaldūn *Muqaddima* 5: 317.

111 Brustad 2016: 150.

Ibn al-Sarrāj's *Uṣūl* can be seen as a turning point in the process of systematization of linguistic thinking enhanced by the impact of Greek logic, in the search for clarity in the organization of manuals, intimately tied to their pedagogical aims. It can also be seen as a decisive moment in the process of professionalization of the class of grammarians so harshly criticized, centuries later, in Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima*.

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