

On the Emergence of Arabic Syntax Investigating different theories

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ABSTRACT: As far as the emergence of syntax of Arabic language is concerned, the scientists have discussed the issue from two different angles: first, the motivations and the reasons beyond the emergence of syntax, on which there is consensus among the scientists and second, the quality and the manner of the emergence of syntax and its pioneers on which there is no consensus and there are questions regarding the nature of syntax; for example: does syntax belong to Arabic language itself, has it been created within its Islamic context or whether it has been adopted from other cultures and languages which have had close interactions with Arabic? Finding the answer to this problem is highly significant, because this issue is not just a part of the past literature or the theoretical background, but it has big repercussions and implications for Arabic language, which is the language of Quran. It is also important for Islamic thinking within the context of Islamic rationality.

Keywords: Syntax, Abol Al-aswad, Theory of Originality, Arabic science.

INTRODUCTION

It is obvious that syntax as a science has not been created overnight like any other science. A lot of factors need to be collected to respond to the needs and the concerns in the field which ultimately pave the way for creation or emergence of a science which must undergo a lot of processes and modifications to become mature. As we know, Arabic syntax has its roots in Islamic science, so it is evident that all that is related to Arabic language including syntax has been created and developed to preserve Quranic text both in terms of form and in terms of meaning (Noor al-din, 1995:17). In the beginning of the emergence of Islam, Muslims and Arabs need to know the science of reading (Gharaat) which they learned directly from prophet Mohammad and his close and trustworthy followers. They also need to know the science of interpretation to understand the proper meaning of Quran. Rhetoric and syntax were later developed after the science of interpretation, because the proper understanding of Quran depends on understanding both 'mabni' and meaning simultaneously.

Regarding the reasons and the motives beyond emerging and developing syntax, there is consensus among historians and scientists. Because of some conditions such as developing and expanding Islamic territories, borrowing non-Arabic elements and lexical items from other nations, inter-communication between Arab and non-Arab dialects and the attendance of Iranians in Iraq, Arabia and in cities such as Basra and Kufeh, inter-cultural marriages between Arabs and Persians threatened the purity of Arabic language which resulted in a situation which is technically called 'Lahn'. Although 'Lahn' was also common in the time of Prophet Mohammad, however, this phenomenon became increasingly a more prominent feature of Arabic language little by little (Hanif, 1988:11). Furthermore, there has been a strong motive among the Arabs that they take pride in their language which they regard it as a very unique and beautiful language which is under threat, because it may be affected by the language of non-Arabs. On the other hand, non-Arab nations needed to learn and understand Arabic in order to play a role in Islamic community (Hanif, 1988). Therefore, from a historical point of view, Muslims entered a new era of science in which they felt new needs and demands. So, they needed more advanced tools to develop and spread Islamic and religious teachings and practices. This meant a revival of different branches of the science or language in general and the science of syntax in particular (Talal, 1992:141).

As far as the emergence of syntax is concerned, it is worth mentioning that syntax as a science was started by Abol Al-aswad Doweli who was a poet and was known as one of Imam Ali's disciples. He is dominantly known to be one of the key characters in developing Arabic syntax. There are numerous 'Ravayat' (stories) concerning the role of Abol Al-aswad in the history of syntax. Thousands of pages in contemporary history books prove the role of this person as a pioneer in the field. Of course, all the 'Ravayat' agree that Abol Al-aswad has taken two different steps under the supervision of Imam Ali to deal with syntax. The first stage was the punctuation of the holy Quran. In the second stage which was after the death of Imam Ali, Abol Al-aswad invented the syntactic rules of Arabic language. However, there are many opponents who reject the possibility of inventing the syntactic rules of Arabic language by Abol Al-aswad in the early days of Islam. They strongly hold the idea that syntactic rules of Arabic and its philosophical rules are basically adopted and borrowed from other languages such as Syriac and Greek, etc. Both the early and contemporary opponents have presented a lot of arguments and reasons for their ideas. On the other hand, by investigating different angles of the problem, the proponents of Abol Al-aswad have been trying to present frequently quoted 'Ravayat' to defend their own ideas. However, this issue has many vast dimensions and repercussions which can threaten the position and the role of this Islamic character (Abol Al-aswad) and the Muslim world in general as opposed to western rationality and non-Islamic culture. In this paper, an attempt has been made to discuss and compare different theories of the opponents as opposed to the theory of originality of syntax. Finally, the results are presented.

The Theory of Originality of Arabic Syntax

Regarding this theory it can be said that in numerous frequent 'Ravayat' and historical documents, it has been emphasized that Arabic syntax has evolved in the context of Islamic culture. The main figure in the field was undoubtedly Abol Al-aswad Doweli under the supervision of Imam Ali. In this paper, an attempt is made to refer to some arguments in favor of the above claim. The first piece of evidence comes back to Abol Al-aswad himself indicating that he has received a book from Imam Ali in which the primary rules and principles of language have been explained (Ghofti, 2004:39). Ebne Salam (Al-jamhi, Vol: 12) in 'Tabaghat' has stated that Abol Al-aswad was the first person to be given the credit of founding syntax as a separate field; Ebne Ghatibeh in 'Sher and Shoara' emphasized that it was Abol Al-aswad who composed a book on syntax (Ebne Ghatibeh, 2005: 434). In a book entitled 'Al-Fazel' , Mobared (Mobared, 1956) has narrated a story about syntax in which Abol Al-aswad's daughter was shocked by high amount of warmth of whether and said "ما اشد الحر" which was uttered in such a way that was not understandable for his father as being a statement or a question. Then Abol Al-aswad understood that 'Lahn' was common among people. So he referred to Imam Ali and explained the danger of 'Lahn' for Imam Ali. He received some instructions from Imam Ali which he tried to develop and explicate later.

A narration has been quoted from Sirafi (Sirafi, 1936: 13) in Syntax 'Tabaghat' of Basreh in which most people agree that Abol Al-aswad was the first to begin and found the syntax rules. When he heard a miss-pronunciation of the Quranic verse "ان الله يري من المشركين و رسوله." he said that I didn't know that people's language has been so much deteriorating. Therefore, he set out to work on syntax of Arabic language to help people to have a more unified and correct pronunciation of holy Quran. Abol Al-tayyeb Loghavi in 'Maratebe Al-nahveen' (Abol Al-tayyeb, 1995:41) has another piece of evidence based on two arguments, one is related to Abu Hatim Sejestani and another is related to Germi and Khalil. The first evidence states that Abol Al-aswad was considered as founder of syntax. He is believed to acquire this knowledge from Imam Ali, because Imam Ali was aware of 'Lahn', he ordered Abol Al-aswad to devise some letters and diacritics for a more unified and exact pronunciation of holy Quran. The second evidence is based on a story that Abol Al-aswad and Ziad ebne Abieh found 'Lahn' in the pronunciation of a man, then Ziad suggested that Abol Al-aswad to work on the syntax of language. Ebne Al-nadim has another interesting piece of evidence (Ebne Al-Nadim, 1987: 40). He narrated a story in which he was friend with a Shiite man whose name was Mohammed ebne Hossein. This man, he said, had many old books, notes and manuscripts. Ebne Al-Nadim says that in some pages written by Yahya Ebne Yalmar, I found some terms such as subject and object which were explained by Abol Al-aswad. Up to now, we have presented different pieces of evidence which prove that Abol Al-aswad has been the founder of Arabic syntax. However, there are many more documents in which there are some paradoxes regarding the topic of syntax and its founder. For example, Sirafi (Sirafi: 13) states that people do not share the same opinions concerning whether Abol Al-aswad has been the founder and inventor of Arabic syntax. However, most of the people do believe the undeniable role of Abol Al-aswad as the founder and inventor of Arabic syntax. By careful examination of all 'Ravayat' (quotations) between the time span of first to seventh century, it is believed that Abol Al-aswad is regarded as the founder and initiator of Arabic syntax under the direct supervision of Imam Ali, although there are some minor objections.

Objections against the theory of originality of syntax

Some scholars have been skeptical regarding the idea that Abol Al-aswad has been the founder and inventor of Arabic syntax under the supervision and guidance of Imam Ali. They have presented their objections and arguments to reject Abol Al-aswad as the founder of Syntax. The opponents' ideas are mainly affected by intellectual and scientific conditions dominating the first centuries of Islam. However, it can be briefly said that all the opponents' ideas uniformly follow the same lines of arguments which are supposed to have the same motivations. Most of these opposing ideas have been answered by Islamic scientists. Of course, all the objections do not have the same nature. Some have been very radical, denying all the historical evidences in favor of Abol Al-aswad, while others have been more conservative and moderate. It is worth mentioning that many contemporary scholars and scientists have no doubt in accepting the originality of historical arguments and quotations (Ravayat). Among others we can refer to George Zeidan, Mostafa Rafeei, Hassan Ziarat, and orientalist Falujel (Talal Alameh: 165). Among the conservative and moderate opponents, we can refer to Mazen Mobarak, Hassan Dun, and orientalist Lashnesher (Talal Alameh). From the radical opponents, we can refer to Karel Brekman, Ahmad Amin, Ebrahim Mostafa, Saeid Afghani, Hanif, Foad Bostani, Aliakbar Dekhoda, Abol al-karim Dajeili (the same). In this part, we are not presenting the proponents' ideas, but we present the main tenets of moderate opponents' ideas, those who do not entirely reject the theory of the originality of Arabic syntax, but are skeptical and accept the theory under some conditions.

Mazen Mobarak (Mobarak, 1934: 30) as a moderate opponent states that Abol Al-aswad created some rules and obligations to prevent 'Lahn' for pronunciation of Quran. He believes that it is very unlikely that Imam Ali has set some rules and standards for Abol Al-aswad to follow and it is very surprising that if we believe that Imam Ali has had any effect on Abol Al-aswad, because he has been preoccupied with the issue of Caliphate (the same). Hassan Oun states that there is no doubt in the 'Ravayat', but they must be dealt with care and attention (Talal Alameh: 170).

The Arguments presented by radical opponents

To investigate the radical opponent's ideas concerning Abol Al-aswad and his role as the founder of syntax, we begin with Ahmad Amin as the most radical opponent. Ahmad Amin (Ahmad Amin, 2006: 280:2) states transparently that history of syntax is very vague and ambiguous and what different historians have presented as evidence do not satisfy our desire for truth and they are almost superstitions, because in the era of Imam Ali these definitions and attributing these philosophical divisions to Imam Ali are very far from reality and these logical classifications cannot be traced back to Imam Ali or Abol Al-aswad. It is, however, undeniable that Ahmad Amin's radical ideas are influenced by western orientalist and nobody has doubt about his acrimonious assumptions regarding Shiite doctrine and Imam Ali's followers. Ahmad Amin has been the first scholar who spread the seed of skepticism among people. Almost all the later opponents rephrased his objections to deny the role of Abol Al-aswad in syntax.

Ebrahim Mostafa:

Ebrahim Mostafa under the influence of western orientalist and Ahmad Amin (Talal Alameh, 1992: 162) states that it would be simplistic to believe that Imam Ali in the early days of Islam has had any knowledge of syntax, because in that time Arabs could not have had such knowledge. To prove his claim, Ebrahim Mostafa argues that he has studied Sibuyeh's book entirely and there is no reference to Abol Al-aswad, while a person is called Abdolah has been mentioned several times (Ebne Abi al-hadid, 1959: 170):

Saeid Afghani:

He is a Syrian contemporary scholar with a lot of publications. By approving Ahmad Amin's radical ideas (Al-afghani, 1964: 136), he argues that it is not understandable for me that with so many wars, how Imam Ali could have had any time to spend on such issues as science and innovation in syntax and language science.

Shufi Hanif:

By following both the ancient and contemporary opponents' radical ideas, he adopted an even more radical stand on the issue and he regards all the 'Ravayat' which are the basis of the role Abol Al-aswad being regarded as the founder of syntax as being baseless (Hanif, 1968).

He states ironically that as if Imam Ali had no any other issue such as war in Kufeh, Lavant and Iraq, but just devoting himself to invent and find the grammar and syntactic rules of language. He emphasized that such definitions and logical classifications are impossible to be invented by Imam Ali or his followers. He goes on to say that such ideas are attributed to Imam Ali by very fanatic Shiite followers.

Orientalists' ideas:

At the turn of 19th century, orientalist regarded the 'Ravayat' concerning the role of Abol Al-aswad as founder of syntax as being superstitious and baseless. That is why that sometimes they regard the invention of syntax under the influence of Sanskrit language (Folorsi and Brokman) and sometimes they consider the creation of syntactic rules as being related to Greek language. In his book, Brokman (Brokman, 1965: 123) considers the role of Abol Al-aswad as the inventor of syntactic rules as a baseless and superstitious idea.

The idea of adopting syntax from Syriac language:

The proponents of this theory claim that syntactic rules of language are adopted from Syriac syntax, because these people resided in Modern Iraq around Mesopotamia, and they have had huge intercommunications with Arabs, so, the rules of syntax were taken from these people who possessed their own literature. However, after the Islam conquest, they lost their influence in the region (Amin, 128). Amin argues that since for Syriac language, the syntactic rules have been written already, therefore it is not difficult to write the Arabic rules based on the rules of Syriac language, this is even more probable if we consider this fact that Arabic and Syriac are descended from the same family root that is, they are both members of Semitic language family (the same). In the history of Islamic civilization (Zeidan: 688), it is stated that Syriac scientists were very influential to help Arabs to write the rules of their language. Quite opposed to the above ideas, it is must be said that intercommunication between Arabs with The Syriacs cannot be a convincing reason to believe that Arabic syntactic rules are adopted from this language, because Arabs were constantly in contact with other nations such as Persian, Greek, Indians, etc. Furthermore, no historian has made any reference that whether Abol Al-aswad has had any direct or indirect contact with the Syriacs (Hashem Mohammed, 1995: 250). Regarding the similarity between syntactic rules of Arabic and Syriac, two arguments can be presented: first, both languages share the same family root, that is both are Semitic and second, similarity between languages is a very natural phenomenon, because of the nature of language as a means of communication, we may come across similarities between languages due to the same function that languages serve. Another important argument to reject the opponents' ideas is the fact that Abol Al-aswad and Imam Ali lived in a time in which there was no whatever contact between Arabs and the Syriacs and the death of Abol Al-aswad was 20 years earlier than the death of the founder of Syriac syntax, that is Yaaqub Rahavi (Zeidan, 689: 3).

The idea of adopting syntactic rules of Arabic from Greek:

This approach is based on the idea that the rules of Arabic syntax are adopted from Greek language. Muslims took the rules from Greek, expanded it and derived many disciplines from this Greek knowledge. Of course, it is undeniable that Greek thought has been very influential in different aspects of Islamic and eastern life after the development of Islamic territories, this influence was even more accelerated after scientific revolutions and the people's need for translation.

It is believed that adopting syntactic rules of Greek language has followed two different forms: first, direct adoption from Greek and second, indirect adoption through intervening role of Syriac.

Ebne Manzur states that Greeks called the science of the sounds and other relevant issues as syntax (Ebne Manzur, 1990, 305: 15). Mohammad Satran (Al-Satran: 36) states clearly that Arabic rules of syntax in its embryonic stages were strongly influenced by Aristotelian logic. According to Ishaq Saka (Mohammad Al-Mansur, 1418: 131) dividing words to noun, verb and preposition was originally proposed by the Greeks. Arabs took this classification from the Greeks through Syriac language. Therefore, it can be concluded that Arabic rules were taken indirectly from the Greeks, after Syriac borrowing these rules from Greek and finally Arabs adopted the rules from Syriac. So, it can be concluded that Arabic has adopted the rules of syntax from Greek (Samerai, 1961: 14). In Islamic encyclopedia, it has been confessed that the main tenets and concepts of Arabic syntax are adopted from Aristotelian logic which were transferred to Arabic by intervention of Syriac language (Hashem: 131).

The same arguments which were presented to reject the ideas that Arabic syntax was borrowed from Syriac are also valid to reject the idea of adopting the rules of Arabic syntax from Greek, because it is mainly held that adoption from Greek has been through Syriac. This theory like the previous theory neither is not based on strong arguments both practically and historically. This theory is generally based on some tentative assumptions and estimates which are only created in the mind of its proponents and which have not been practically proved. What is the reality is the fact that the contact and intercommunication between Arabs and Greeks has been through Syriacs. What is important here is that this cultural contact has occurred after the death of Abol Al-aswad, while Arabic rules of syntax were written by Abol Al-aswad before the translation of Greek books. Another point worth mentioning is the fact that the syntax of Greek language is fundamentally different from syntax of Arabic language. So, it can be inferred that the person who invented the rules of Arabic language could not have had any knowledge of Greek syntax (Samerai:

13). Although Showfi Hanif does not consider Abol Al-aswad as the founder of Syntax, but states that Arabic syntax could have not been adopted from Greek syntax.

CONCLUSION

Based on what we investigated in this paper, it can be concluded that the main purpose behind inventing syntactic rules for Arabic language has been sacred and valuable intentions to protect and preserve the exact pronunciation of holy Quran and to prevent 'Lahn' or mispronunciation of Quran. Because of the important conditions of the early days of Islam and the development of different branches of science and the concerns among people regarding mispronunciation of Quran after expanding Islamic territories and converting non-Arab nations to Islam, inventing rules of correct pronunciation was highly important in that time. Accordingly, based on vast number of 'Ravayat' which we have inherited from second century onward, it was argued that Abol Al-aswad Doweli under the supervision and guidance of Imam Ali (peace be upon him) set out to invent basic rules of syntax and pronunciation for correct pronunciation of Quran in two different phases. Because of the sacred and valuable intentions and motives of Abol Al-aswad, what he did, that is, inventing the rules or language is also sacred and valuable. However, some scholars and orientalist tried to invalidate and reject the important role of Abol Al-aswad as the founder and initiator of Arabic syntax. Their arguments are mainly politically and religiously biased without any strong and convincing argument. The opponents have even claimed that not only has Abol Al-aswad invented the rules of syntax, but Arabic syntax does not have originality, and it has been taken from other languages such as Syriac and Greek. In this paper, it was proved that the contact and intercommunication between Arabs and these languages occurred after the death of Abol Al-aswad and Imam Ali. It was also argued that the scientific movements and the translation of Greek and Syriac books happened in the end of the Umavieh's Caliphate and the Abbasid's Caliphate. Furthermore, most of the translated books are in unrelated fields to language and syntax such as medicine, engineering, philosophy, mathematics and logic. So, it cannot be concluded that Arabic syntax was flourished and developed in Islamic context by Islamic scientists and scholars. It seems that opponents who are skeptical about the originality of Arabic syntax have been influenced by acrimonious ideas of some orientalist who have been either without knowledge or biased in their judgments. Spreading skepticism regarding the role of Abol Al-aswad as the founder of Arabic syntax has been for the purpose of encouraging people to follow the western culture ignoring the contributions of Islamic figures and characters to science in the world.

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