



VERB PATTERNS (AWZĀN) IN ARABIC MORPHOLOGY AND THEIR ROLE IN SEMANTIC DERIVATION

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Abstract. *This article analyses the system of Arabic verb patterns (awzān al-af'āl) one of the central topics of Arabic morphology (sarf) and their role in lexical-semantic derivation. Arabic derives a rich array of semantic-grammatical distinctions from trilateral (three-consonant) roots through patterns I–X: causativity (ta'diya), intensivity, reciprocity (mushāraka), reflexivity, and requestive meaning, among others. The morphological structure of each major pattern, the semantic meanings it produces, and the semantic relationships among forms derived from a single root are demonstrated with examples. It is argued that the Arabic morphological pattern system is not a mere formal change but a productive instrument that expands the semantic potential of the language.*

Keywords: *Arabic morphology; saraf; verb patterns; awzān al-af'āl; causativity; intensivity; semantics; root and pattern.*

INTRODUCTION

Arabic belongs to the Semitic language family, and its morphological system is based on the “root and pattern” (jadhr wa-wazn) principle. According to this principle, most Arabic words consist of a root of three (occasionally four) consonants (e.g. k-t-b, f-'-l, d-r-s) and a morphological template (pattern) applied to it. The verb pattern system is one of the most productive parts of Arabic morphology, since a single root can yield dozens of new words and meanings through different patterns (Wright, 1996).

The study of verb patterns is important not only from a purely morphological standpoint but also from a semantic one, because each pattern change produces a specific and often predictable semantic shift. The purpose of this article is to analyse the Arabic verb pattern system as a morphological-semantic unity, to demonstrate the lexical-grammatical derivational functions of each pattern with examples, and to argue for the pattern system's role in expanding the semantic potential of the language.



The study employs morphological-semantic analysis, comparative analysis of forms derived from a single root, and componential analysis of verb meanings. The source base includes classical sarf textbooks (Ibn Malik, 2000; al-Zanjani, 1999), modern Arabic grammar references (Ryding, 2005; Umarov, 2016; Sa'diyev, 2017), and lexicographic sources (Ibn Manzur, 1994; Majma' al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya, 2004).

MAIN PART

In the Arabic morphological system the root (jadhr) carries the core lexical meaning, while the pattern (wazn) determines the grammatical-semantic form. For example, the root k-t-b is associated with the general semantic field of "writing," but through different patterns it yields kataba ("he wrote"), kattaba ("he made someone write"), kātaba ("he corresponded") and iktataba ("it was written / he subscribed"), each with its own specific meaning. This system is one of the most important typological features distinguishing Arabic from many other languages (Wright, 1996).

Pattern I (fa'ala) is the basic, bare (mujarrad) verb form expressing the root's primary lexical meaning: kataba ("he wrote"), darasa ("he studied"), fariha ("he rejoiced"). It serves as the morphological-semantic starting point for all other patterns.

Pattern II (fa'ala) is formed by geminating the middle radical and typically performs two semantic functions: causativity causing someone to perform an action (e.g. 'allama, "he taught," from 'alima, "he knew") and intensivity performing an action forcefully or repeatedly (e.g. kassara, "he shattered," from kasara, "he broke").

Pattern III (fā'ala) is formed by inserting a long alif between the first and second radicals and usually expresses reciprocity (mushāraka) between two parties (e.g. kātaba, "he corresponded") or an attempt at an action directed at another (muhāwala).

Pattern IV (af'ala) is formed by prefixing a hamza and primarily expresses causativity, often making intransitive verbs transitive: jalasa ("he sat") → ajlasa ("he seated someone"). In some cases it also expresses entry into a state: asbaha ("he entered the morning") (Ryding, 2005).

Pattern V (tafa'ala) is the reflexive of Pattern II and often expresses self-directed action or gradual occurrence: ta'allama ("he learned") from 'allama ("he taught"). Pattern VI (tafā'ala) is the reflexive-reciprocal of Pattern III: takātaba ("they corresponded with one another"). Pattern VII (infā'ala) expresses a passive-reflexive meaning: inkasara ("it broke, by itself"). Pattern VIII (ifta'ala) is multifaceted, expressing reflexivity,



reciprocity or special meanings (e.g. iktasaba, “he earned”). Pattern X (istaf’ala) expresses request or seeking: istaghfara (“he sought forgiveness”) from ghafara (“he forgave”) (Umarov, 2016).

Beyond the ten principal patterns, Arabic possesses several rarer patterns (XI–XV) found mainly in verbs denoting colour, physical defect or special states: e.g. if’alla ihmarra (“he turned red”). Four-consonant (rubā’ī) roots such as tarjama (“he translated”) and zalzala (“he shook”) also follow the root-and-pattern principle, confirming the overall consistency of the Arabic morphological system (Wright, 1996).

From the perspective of cognitive semantics, the Arabic pattern system exemplifies the principle of iconic (natural) correlation between form and meaning: increasing morphological complexity (gemination, additional consonants) frequently parallels semantic “intensification” or “complication.” This phenomenon, known as morphological iconicity, is a universal cognitive-linguistic principle clearly manifested in Arabic.

A deep knowledge of the pattern system is of considerable practical importance for students of Arabic, since it enables them to predict the meaning of an unfamiliar verb from its pattern and to understand the semantic differences among forms derived from a single root. In modern Arabic, new verbs are regularly coined from existing roots through patterns a process called ishtiqāq (derivation) which is also actively used in modern scientific and technical terminology. The pattern system is equally central to natural language processing (NLP) systems for Arabic, which identify the root and pattern of a given verb form in order to determine its grammatical-semantic properties automatically (Ryding, 2005; Sa’diyev, 2017).

CONCLUSION

The Arabic verb pattern system is not a mere formal change but a productive and systematic instrument that considerably expands the semantic potential of the language. The specific semantic function of each pattern causativity, intensivity, reciprocity, reflexivity, requestive meaning and others enables the derivation of dozens of new meanings from a single root, which is one of the principal sources of the lexical richness and expressive capacity of Arabic. The study and teaching of this system as a morphological-semantic unity remains an important direction for improving the effectiveness of Arabic-language education.



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