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SYNTACTIC AND SEMANTIC FUNCTIONS OF THE GRAMMATICAL GOVERNOR IN “MUGHNI AL-LABIB”

Abstract. *The article analyses the syntactic and semantic functions of the notion of the grammatical governor (al-‘amil) in Ibn Hisham al-Anṣari’s (708–761/1309–1360) “Mughni al-labib ‘an kutub al-a‘arib”. The study is based on the critical edition prepared by Mazin al-Mubarak and Muḥammad ‘Alī Ḥamd Allāh and published by Dar al-Fikr in Damascus. Using descriptive-analytical, structural-functional and comparative methods, and taking the triad governor–governed–effect as the unit of analysis, the study identifies three functional layers of the governor in the “Mughni”: a formal-syntactic layer that assigns case and mood markers; a structural layer that shapes sentence architecture through attachment (ta‘alluq), ellipsis and reconstruction; and a semantic layer that differentiates and specifies meaning. Ibn Hisham’s methodological principle is that syntactic parsing must proceed from meaning, while meaning must not contradict the attested usage of Arabic. Phenomena such as ta‘liq, ilgha’, the meaning-driven vocalisation of the hamza in inna/anna, and the divergence between formal and positional case caused by redundant particles show that the governor is not a purely mechanical device. The article concludes that in Ibn Hisham’s treatment the theory of the governor operates as an explanatory model mediating between syntax and semantics.*

Keywords: *Ibn Hisham al-Anṣari, “Mughni al-labib”, grammatical governor, i‘rab, syntactic function, semantic function, ta‘liq, ilgha’, ta‘alluq, ellipsis and reconstruction, Arabic grammatical tradition.*

INTRODUCTION

The theoretical core of the Arabic grammatical tradition is formed by the theory of the governor (al-‘amil). According to this theory, the i‘rab state of every word in a sentence – raf‘, naṣb, jarr or jazm – is not accidental, but is the result of the influence of a particular unit. The first consistent exposition of the theory is found in Sibawayhi’s

“al-Kitab”, and for the following ten centuries it served as the descriptive language of Arabic grammar (Sibawayhi, 1988:12).

Over time the theory developed in several directions. ‘Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani arranged the governors in terms of enumeration and classification in his treatise “al-‘Awamil al-mi’a”, while in “Dala’il al-i’jaz” he elaborated the theory of naẓm and linked syntactic relations organically to meaning (al-Jurjani, 1988:15; al-Jurjani, 1984:81). Ibn Maḍa’ al-Qurṭubī, by contrast, rejected the theory of the governor entirely in “al-Radd ‘ala al-nuḥat”, asserting that the causes of i’rab lie in the will of the speaker (Ibn Maḍa’ al-Qurṭubī, 1947:76). The question of the governor thus became one of the most debated theoretical problems in Arabic linguistics.

In this debate, Ibn Hisham al-Anṣari’s “Mughni al-labib ‘an kutub al-a‘arib” occupies a distinct place. The author – Jamal al-Din Abu Muḥammad ‘Abd Allah ibn Yusuf ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn Hisham al-Anṣari (708–761/1309–1360) – was an Egyptian grammarian whose competence in naḥw was rated by Ibn Khaldun so highly that he compared him with Sibawayhi (Ibn Khaldun, 2001:546). The “Mughni al-labib” is a unique work that combines the explanation of particles and other elements (adawat) in alphabetical order, the exposition of the rules of the sentence and of units resembling it, and the analysis of the errors to which the parser is prone (Shu‘ayb, 1986:27). It was written in the final period of the author’s life and emerged as an expanded continuation of his earlier treatise “al-I’rab ‘an qawa’id al-i’rab”. In the introduction Ibn Hisham himself records that the unexpected attention received by the short treatise prompted him to compose a detailed work (Ibn Hisham, 1985:3). This circumstance also determines the intended audience of the work: it is addressed not to beginners, but to the researcher who has mastered the foundations of naḥw and works independently with the text. The research problem may be formulated as follows: is the grammatical governor interpreted in the “Mughni al-labib” merely as a formal-syntactic mechanism producing the i’rab marker, or does it at the same time perform a semantic, meaning-differentiating function? The relevance of this question lies in the fact that views assessing the Arabic grammatical tradition as “purely formal” are still encountered in modern literature, whereas Ibn Hisham’s text opposes such an assessment with serious evidence.

The aim of the study is to determine, on the basis of the text of the “Mughni al-labib”, the syntactic and semantic functions of the grammatical governor, to model the relationship between them, and to reveal Ibn Hisham’s methodological principles on this question.

In order to achieve this aim, the following tasks were set: first, to establish the historical formation of the theory of the governor and its place in the “Mughni”; second, to systematise the classification of governors presented in the work; third, to analyse the syntactic functions of the governor (the assignment of i‘rab, ta‘alluq, ellipsis and reconstruction); fourth, to demonstrate its semantic functions on the example of Qur’anic evidence (shawahid); fifth, to propose a theoretical model of the relationship between the two functions.

The working hypothesis is the following: in the “Mughni al-labib” the governor appears as a two-sided unit – on the one hand it is the formal cause of i‘rab, on the other hand it is the syntactic exponent of meaning; and for Ibn Hisham the criterion of the correctness of a parsing is the correct apprehension of the meaning.

The study of the subject has not only theoretical but also practical significance. For centuries the “Mughni al-labib” was taught in the advanced curricula of the madrasas of Transoxiana, and today it remains one of the principal sources in higher education institutions specialising in Arabic philology. For this reason, a precise elucidation of the theoretical principles of the work directly serves the improvement of the methodology of teaching Arabic grammar.

The structure of the article is as follows: the second section analyses the classical and modern literature on the subject; the third section sets out the source basis and the research methods; the fourth section presents the results of the analysis in five directions; the fifth section discusses the results in their theoretical context; the sixth section formulates the conclusions.

MAIN PART

Review of the literature

Among the classical sources, although Sibawayhi’s “al-Kitab” does not define the notion of the governor in strictly terminological form, it employs it consistently in practice as an instrument of description. Analysing Sibawayhi’s method, R. Baalbaki shows that the notion of the governor in his work is not formalised as rigidly as with the grammarians of the later period, but is organically bound up with the observation of usage (isti‘mal) (Baalbaki, 2008:45).

In “al-Khaṣa’iṣ”, Ibn Jinni provides a theoretical grounding for the notion of ‘illa (cause) and stresses that grammatical causes are closer to juridical than to logical causes

(Ibn Jinni, n.d.:48). Y. Suleiman, for his part, studies the principle of ta‘lil (causation) as the methodological core of the Arabic grammatical tradition and regards the theory of the governor as a direct product of that principle (Suleiman, 1999:63).

‘Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani’s theory of nazm is of particular importance for the present subject. In his view, the merit of words lies in the arrangement of the meanings they express in mutual correspondence, and the rules of nahw are in fact the expression of relations of meaning (al-Jurjani, 1984:81). This view constitutes the first major theoretical argument against interpreting the governor as a purely formal phenomenon.

In modern Arabic linguistics, Tammam Ḥassan critically re-examined the theory of the governor and proposed in its place the theory of indicators (qara’in): meaning is apprehended not through a single governor, but through the convergence of formal and semantic indicators (taḍafur al-qara’in) (Ḥassan, 1994:191). Mahdi al-Makhzumi likewise assessed the theory of the governor as a factor complicating the teaching process (al-Makhzumi, 1986:44). Shawqi Ḍayf, in preparing Ibn Maḍa’s refutation for publication, demonstrated the historical significance of that criticism (Ḍayf, 1968:216).

Among the studies devoted directly to the “Mughni al-labib”, ‘Imran Shu‘ayb’s monograph on Ibn Hisham’s method is the most substantial (Shu‘ayb, 1986:27). N. al-Ḥubayṭi and M. Yunus, having studied the system of evidence (shawahid) in the work, established that Ibn Hisham consistently applies the method of adducing, after the principal shahid, a corroborating “nazir” (parallel) shahid (al-Ḥubayṭi & Yunus, 2023:163). Ḥ. al-Sharif and Ḥ. al-Sharif analysed Ibn Hisham’s objections to other parsers and commentators and showed that the majority of them rest on the criterion of meaning (al-Sharif & al-Sharif, 2021:132).

In Western Arabic studies, J. Owens describes the theory of the governor as the pivotal notion of medieval Arabic grammatical theory and compares its descriptive power with that of modern dependency grammar (Owens, 1988:38). K. Versteegh provides the general historical picture of the tradition (Versteegh, 1997:74), while M. Carter substantiates the connection of Sibawayhi’s theory with juridical and ethical notions (Carter, 2004:57). In Russian and Uzbek Arabic studies, the works of B. M. Grande and of N. Ibrohimov and M. Yusupov treat the question of the governor mainly within the framework of practical grammar (Grande, 2001:302; Ibrohimov & Yusupov, 1997:128).

The commentaries written on the work also constitute an important source layer. The commentaries of al-Damamini (d. 827/1424) and al-Shumunni are the principal

auxiliary sources for elucidating the difficult passages of the text, while al-Suyuṭī's "Sharḥ shawahid al-Mughni" is the principal aid in identifying its poetic evidence (al-Suyuṭī, n.d.:68). The very tradition of these commentaries testifies to the theoretical weight of the work: the attention of the commentators is directed above all to substantiating Ibn Hisham's parsing choices.

Sources and methods

The study was carried out on the basis of the critical edition of the "Mughni al-labīb" prepared by Mazin al-Mubarak and Muḥammad 'Alī Ḥamd Allah and published by Dar al-Fikr in Damascus (Ibn Hisham, 1985). Descriptive-analytical, structural-functional and comparative methods were applied, and the triad governor–governed–effect was adopted as the unit of analysis. The classical sources of the theory of the governor, the commentary tradition on the work, and modern studies of the Arabic grammatical tradition were used as supplementary material; the Qur'anic evidence adduced by Ibn Hisham served as the empirical basis of the analysis.

The structure of the work and the classification of governors

In the introduction to the work Ibn Hisham states explicitly that he divides it into eight chapters (Ibn Hisham, 1985:4). This structure is presented in Figure 1.

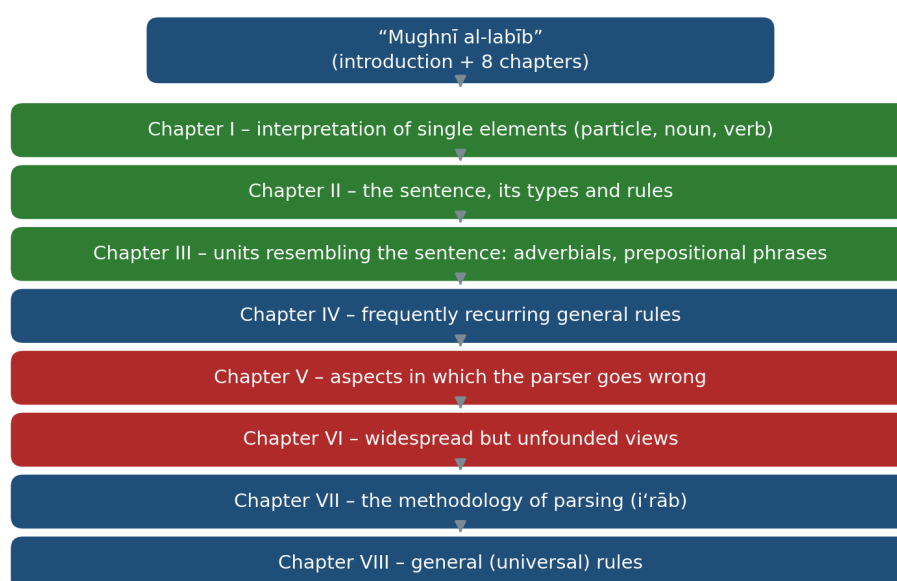


Figure 1. The structure of the "Mughni al-labīb"

The structure shows that the work differs fundamentally from traditional textbooks of naḥw: its material is arranged not in the order noun–verb–particle, but according to the practical needs of the parser. The first chapter is organised alphabetically, and in it the

meanings of each element are examined first, after which its governing or non-governing capacity is considered in relation to those meanings. For instance, “inna” with kasra and “anna” with fatha are analysed in separate entries (Ibn Hisham, 1985:22; 1985:30), and “illa” occupies an independent place as a particle of exception (Ibn Hisham, 1985:87).

This arrangement itself carries an important theoretical implication: for Ibn Hisham the point of departure is not the governor, but the meaning of the element. The question of government is settled only after that meaning has been established.

In the work, governors are first divided into formal (lafẓi) and semantic (ma‘nawī) types. The formal governor is present in the sentence in the shape of a word and is in turn divided into sama‘ī (used only in attested instances) and qiyāsi (governing by rule). The semantic governor is one that has no formal exponent and follows from position and meaning. Its two principal manifestations are ibtidā’, which puts the mubtada’ in the nominative, and tajarrud, which puts the imperfect verb in the indicative. The general picture of the classification is given in Figure 2.

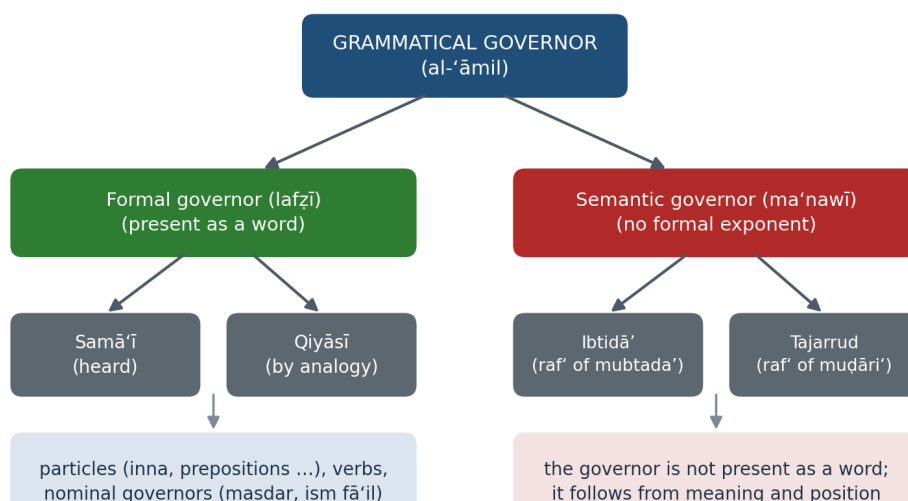


Figure 2. *The classification of the grammatical governor in the “Mughni al-labib”*

The existence of the semantic governor is of considerable theoretical importance for the theory as a whole: if i‘rab necessarily had to have a material, visible cause, the nominative of the mubtada’ could not be explained. Consequently, in the tradition the governor was from the outset understood not as a purely material entity, but as an explanatory construct. It was precisely this aspect that later became the principal target of Ibn Maḍa’s criticism (Ibn Maḍa’ al-Qurṭubī, 1947:76).

The syntactic functions of the governor

The primary syntactic function of the governor is to produce the i‘rab marker in the governed element. This relation is expressed in the form of the triad governor–governed–effect (Figure 3).

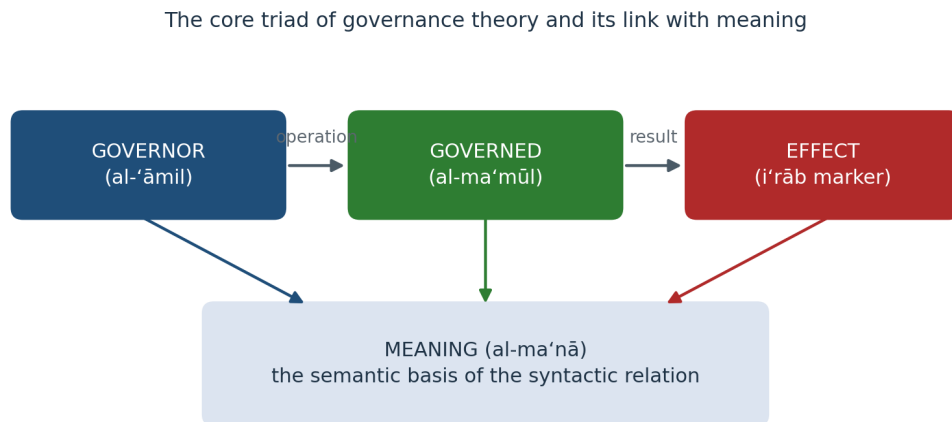


Figure 3. *The triad governor–governed–effect and its relation to meaning*

The second syntactic function is ta‘alluq, that is, the identification of the governor to which an adverbial or a prepositional phrase is semantically attached. Ibn Hisham devotes the third chapter of the work precisely to this question and treats the adverbial and the prepositional phrase as an intermediate unit between the single word and the sentence (Ibn Hisham, 1985:4). The importance of the question of ta‘alluq lies in the fact that it discloses the hidden structure of the sentence: in the basmala, for example, the prepositional phrase is attached to a reconstructed verb, and the way in which that reconstruction is chosen determines the meaning of the whole expression.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The point of attachment of the prepositional phrase is reconstructed as “ibtida‘i” or “abda‘u”.

The third function is ellipsis (ḥadhf) and reconstruction (taqdir). Even when the governor is elided, its influence is preserved, since its trace – the i‘rab marker – remains in the sentence. This mechanism is one of the subtlest aspects of Arabic naḥw, and Ibn Hisham applies it consistently. What matters is that the reconstruction must not be arbitrary: it must correspond to the meaning and be attested in Arabic usage. This condition is the central criterion of Ibn Hisham’s methodology.

The fourth function is the regulation of hierarchy and competition among governors. The phenomena of *tanazu'* (two governors laying claim to one governed element) and *ishtighal* (the governor being diverted from the overt governed element to a pronoun) are resolved precisely on the basis of this hierarchy. The ordering of governors by governing strength is shown in Figure 4.

In the phenomenon of *tanazu'*, two governors lay claim to a single governed element, and there is a debate among grammarians as to which governor should be given preference: the Basrans preferred the later governor, the Kufans the earlier one. On this question Ibn Hisham adduces the arguments of both positions and makes the choice dependent on the semantic requirement of the sentence. In *ishtighal*, the governor is diverted from the overt noun to the pronoun that follows it; as a result the overt noun may stand in the nominative or the accusative, and this choice too depends on the semantic emphasis. In both phenomena the theory of the governor operates not merely as a rule, but as a mechanism regulating alternative interpretations.

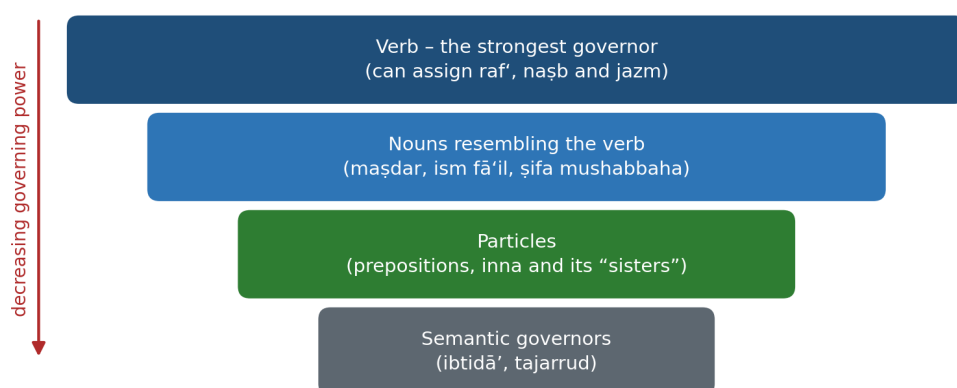


Figure 4. *The hierarchy of governors by governing strength*

The basis of the hierarchy is the principle of *aşl* and *far'*: the verb is regarded as the origin of government, while nouns and particles govern in proportion to their resemblance to the verb. In Ibn Hisham's eighth chapter this principle is raised to the level of a general rule: assigning to something the ruling of that which resembles it (*ḥaml 'ala al-shabah*) is formulated as an independent rule (Ibn Hisham, 1985:884).

The semantic functions of the governor

The analysis shows that in the “*Mughni al-labib*” the choice of the governor is in many cases determined by meaning and, conversely, that a change of governor leads to a change of meaning. The most characteristic types of such cases are examined below.

The first case is the vocalisation of the hamza with kasra or with fathā. In the form with kasra, “inna” preserves the sentence and conveys the meaning of emphasis, whereas in the form with fathā, “anna” turns the following part into the meaning of a maṣḍar. Although the form is the same, the syntactic status and the meaning are entirely different (Ibn Hisham, 1985:22; 1985:30).

The second case is the dependence of government on a semantic condition. In the Ḥijazi dialect the negative particle “ma” governs by analogy with “laysa”, but this government is cancelled when the semantic conditions are violated:

مَا هَذَا بَشَرًا

Surat Yusuf, verse 31: “ma” governs, and the predicate stands in the accusative.

The third case is the separation of formal and positional i‘rab by redundant particles. The redundant particle “min” puts the governed element in the genitive in form, while its actual function in the sentence is preserved:

مَا جَاءَنَا مِنْ بَشِيرٍ

Surat al-Ma’ida, verse 19: “bashir” is formally genitive but positionally nominative – it functions as the subject.

This example reveals the subtlest aspect of the theory of the governor: influence at the level of form is separated from status at the level of function. It was precisely this separation that required the introduction of the notion of maḥall (position) in the tradition, and typologically it stands close to the distinction between surface and deep structure in modern linguistics (Owens, 1988:38).

The fourth case is the possession by a single element of different functional statuses. In analysing the element “idha”, Ibn Hisham devotes three separate sections to it: its departure from adverbial status, its departure from the meaning of futurity, and its departure from conditional status (Ibn Hisham, 1985:117; 1985:118; 1985:124). In the “idha” expressing suddenness, the element does not govern at all:

فَإِذَا هِيَ حَيَّةٌ تَسْعَى

Surat Ta Ha, verse 20: “idha” of suddenness; what follows it is a subject and a predicate.

The fifth case, and theoretically the most important, is the phenomenon of ta‘liq. When a blocking element such as an interrogative, a negation or the lam al-ibtida’ intervenes between a verb of cognition (verbs of knowing and supposing) and the two

objects it should govern, the government of the verb stops at the level of form but is preserved at the level of meaning:

لِنَعْلَمَ أَيُّ الْحِزْبَيْنِ أَحْصَىٰ لِمَا لَبِثُوا أَمَدًا

Surat al-Kahf, verse 12: the interrogative pronoun “ayyu” is nominative, while the clause stands positionally in the accusative.

Ta‘liq differs fundamentally from ilgha’: in ilgha’ the government of the verb is cancelled altogether and the verb remains in a merely parenthetical function, whereas in ta‘liq the government is preserved positionally. A comparative scheme of the two phenomena is given in Figure 5.

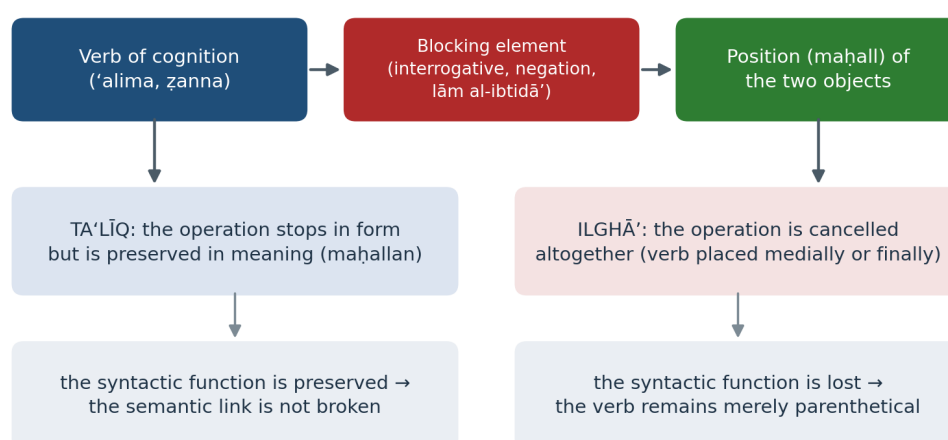


Figure 5. Comparative scheme of the phenomena of ta‘liq and ilgha’

Finally, the sixth case is the direct differentiation of meaning by i‘rab. The distinction of subject and object by means of i‘rab markers secures the freedom of word order in Arabic and at the same time prevents ambiguity of meaning:

إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ

Surat Faṭir, verse 28: the i‘rab marker clearly distinguishes the subject from the object.

As a seventh case one may point to the two kinds of government exercised by the negative particle “la”. When it expresses generic negation it puts its noun in the invariable form and the negation acquires an absolute meaning; when used by analogy with “laysa” it puts its noun in the nominative and its predicate in the accusative, and the negation becomes particular. Although in both cases the particle has one and the same form, its government, and with it the scope of the negation expressed, differ. This example once again confirms the conclusion concerning the semantic load of the governor.

On the basis of the above analysis, a three-layer functional model of the governor in the “Mughni al-labib” may be distinguished (Table 1). These layers are not separate from one another but are linked hierarchically: the semantic layer determines the structural layer, and the structural layer determines the formal layer.

Layer	Function	Manifestation in the “Mughni al-labib”
Formal-syntactic	Assigns the i‘rab marker (raf‘, naṣb, jarr, jazm)	The triad governor–governed–effect; the hierarchy of governing strength; ḥaml ‘ala al-shabah
Structural	Shapes the hidden architecture of the sentence	Ta‘alluq of adverbials and prepositional phrases; ellipsis (ḥadhf) and reconstruction (taqdir); tanazu‘ and ishtighal
Semantic	Differentiates and specifies meaning	The vocalisation of the hamza in inna/anna; the semantic conditions of the government of “ma”; ta‘liq and ilgha’; the divergence of formal and positional i‘rab caused by redundant particles

Table 1. *The three-layer functional model of the governor in the “Mughni al-labib”*

An important aspect of the model is that the connection between the layers is not one-directional. Meaning determines the parsing, but the reverse direction also operates: the i‘rab marker restricts meaning and removes ambiguity. It is precisely this two-way relation that permits the relative freedom of word order in Arabic, since grammatical functions are indicated not by order but by i‘rab.

This model corresponds fully to the methodological principle set out by Ibn Hisham in the fifth chapter: the parser must first apprehend the meaning of the expression and then choose the parsing that accords with that meaning; whereas proceeding from form alone, without regard to meaning, is one of the principal sources of error.

The methodological principles of Ibn Hisham

The fifth chapter of the work is devoted to the aspects in which the parser goes wrong, and the sixth to the analysis of views that are widespread but unfounded. These two chapters are the principal parts that distinguish the “Mughni al-labib” from an ordinary grammatical reference work, since what is criticised in them is not description but the method of description.

Among the sources of error indicated by Ibn Hisham, the following are of particular importance for our subject. The first is parsing an expression according to its outward form alone, without taking its meaning into account. The second is advancing a reconstruction that is acceptable in terms of meaning but unattested in Arabic usage. The third is

applying a general rule without regard to its conditions and exceptions. The fourth is absolutising one meaning of a polysemous element and applying it in all positions. The fifth is disregarding the variant transmissions of a shahid.

This list is directly connected with the question of the governor. Indeed, the majority of the errors enumerated arise from the incorrect identification of the governor or from an inappropriate reconstruction of its government. In other words, for Ibn Hisham the correct identification of the governor is not a technical stage of parsing, but a condition of understanding the text.

In the seventh chapter the author expounds the procedure of parsing. According to his approach, analysis must begin not from the part but from the whole, and the i‘rab state of individual words must be determined only after the general meaning of the expression has been apprehended. Moreover, an interpretation requiring less reconstruction is to be preferred to one requiring more. Methodologically, this principle corresponds to the principle of economy in modern linguistics.

In the eighth chapter, generalised universal rules are formulated on the basis of individual cases. Two of them are fundamental for the theory of the governor: assigning to a unit the ruling of a unit resembling it, and assigning to a unit the ruling of a unit adjacent to it (Ibn Hisham, 1985:884). The first rule explains the fact that nouns govern in proportion to their resemblance to the verb; the second explains that in certain cases the i‘rab marker is selected not according to a semantic connection but according to proximity of position. This second rule in itself shows that the governor does not always have a purely semantic basis, and this calls for a balanced assessment of the conclusions of the study.

Thus, in Ibn Hisham’s system the governor has a two-sided nature: it relies mainly on meaning, yet in certain cases purely formal factors – adjacency, resemblance, phonetic harmony – also operate. It is precisely this balance that determines the theoretical value of the work.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained call for a serious correction of the view that the theory of the governor is of a “purely formal” character. In the text of the “Mughni al-labib” the governor operates not independently of meaning, but as the syntactic exponent of

meaning. The phenomenon of ta‘liq is the most reliable evidence of this: if the governor were a purely mechanical force, it would be incomprehensible that a semantic element such as an interrogative or a negation should halt its operation. The fact that government is halted precisely by a semantic obstacle shows that the notion of the governor has a semantic basis.

This conclusion accords with al-Jurjani’s theory of nazm: since syntactic relations are the expression of relations of meaning, it is natural that i‘rab too should be directly bound up with meaning (al-Jurjani, 1984:81). At the same time, the results partly confirm Tammam Ḥassan’s theory of indicators: in the “Mughni”, meaning frequently rests not on a single governor but on the convergence of several exponents – the i‘rab marker, word order, context and the lexical meaning of the element (Ḥassan, 1994:191). The difference is that Ibn Hisham describes these exponents within the framework of the notion of the governor, whereas Tammam Ḥassan presents them as a system independent of the governor.

As for Ibn Maḍa’s criticism, the results of the study do not support it fully. Ibn Maḍa’ understood the governor as a real acting force and rejected it on that basis (Ibn Maḍa’ al-Qurṭubi, 1947:76). The text of the “Mughni”, however, does not require such a “physical” interpretation of the governor: in it the governor works as an instrument of description, that is, as a means of expressing systematically the relations of dependency in the sentence. In this sense J. Owens’s comparison of the theory of the governor with dependency grammar appears well founded (Owens, 1988:38).

The results of the study also clarify a further important aspect of Ibn Hisham’s methodology. In many cases he adduces several parsings for a single expression and selects from among them the one that best corresponds to the meaning. This approach differs from the method observable in some of his predecessors, which was confined to enumerating the possibilities, and raises his work to the level of critical analysis. In the study of al-Sharif and al-Sharif it is likewise noted that Ibn Hisham’s objections rest mainly on the criterion of meaning (al-Sharif & al-Sharif, 2021:132).

Theoretically, the most interesting result is the distinction between formal and positional i‘rab. In constructions involving redundant particles, the form indicates one thing and the function another. In the tradition this contradiction was resolved through the notion of maḥall, which in fact makes it possible to determine grammatical function

independently of form. This shows that the Arabic grammatical tradition arrived at a functional approach long before modern linguistics (Suleiman, 1999:63).

It is also useful to compare the results with the notions of modern linguistics. The governor–governed relation stands typologically close to the notions of valency and dependency: the fact that a verb requires a certain number of governed elements, that nouns govern in proportion to their resemblance to the verb, and that in ta‘liq the dependency is preserved at the functional rather than the formal level – all of this may be compared with analogous phenomena in modern theories. Caution is required in such comparison, however: while the notion of the governor in the Arabic tradition is an instrument of description, it also carries an epistemological load as part of the tradition of ta‘lil (causation) (Suleiman, 1999:63).

From a pedagogical point of view, the results lead to the following conclusion: teaching the rules of government in isolation from meaning in the instruction of i‘rab contradicts the very logic of the traditional sources. Ibn Hisham’s method – first establishing the meaning of the expression, then choosing the parsing that corresponds to that meaning – stands considerably closer to the modern communicative approach. This makes it possible to regard the “Mughni al-labib” not only as a historical monument, but also as a working methodological source.

At the same time, the limits of the study must be acknowledged. Since the analysis is selective in character, a corpus analysis covering all the shawahid of the work would be required in order to generalise the conclusions quantitatively. Such research constitutes a promising direction for future work: digital corpus methods would make it possible to model the governor–governed relations in the “Mughni” statistically.

CONCLUSION

The study has led to the following conclusions.

First, in the “Mughni al-labib” the grammatical governor appears not as a one-sided formal mechanism, but as a three-layer functional unit: it produces the i‘rab marker, shapes the hidden structure of the sentence, and performs the task of differentiating meaning.

Second, the structure of the work – the analysis of elements in alphabetical order, first in terms of their meaning and then in terms of their government – shows that for Ibn Hisham meaning is primary, while government is a secondary question deriving from it.

Third, the phenomena of ta‘liq and ilgha’ prove that the theory of the governor has a semantic foundation: the halting or cancellation of government is explained by semantic rather than formal causes.

Fourth, the distinction between formal and positional i‘rab shows that form and function were separated in the Arabic grammatical tradition, that is, that the principle of functional analysis was applied in practice.

Fifth, Ibn Hisham’s methodological criterion – the correspondence of the parsing to the meaning and its attestation in Arabic usage – raises the work from the level of an ordinary grammatical reference book to that of a critical and analytical study.

Sixth, the rule of “the ruling of adjacency” in the eighth chapter also shows the limits of the theory of the governor: in certain cases the i‘rab marker follows not from a semantic connection but from purely formal proximity. This means that the governor should not be absolutised, but understood as a system operating together with other exponents.

The results of the study are of practical significance for the teaching of Arabic grammar, and particularly for the formation of parsing skills: explaining the rules of i‘rab in connection with meaning yields better results than making students memorise them mechanically. They are also of methodological significance for the practice of Qur’anic exegesis, since the sources of error identified by Ibn Hisham remain relevant today.

Two directions appear promising for future research: creating a statistical model of governor–governed relations on the basis of the digitisation of the corpus of shawahid in the “Mughni al-labib”, and a systematic comparison of Ibn Hisham’s approach with modern theories of dependency grammar and construction grammar.

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