

**ANALYSIS OF IBRAHIM YAZIJI'S INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO ARABIC GRAMMAR IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NAHDA***Muxlisabonu Turgunovna Ishanxanova**International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan**ishankhanovamuxlisabona@gmail.com*

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**Abstract:** This article investigates the innovative dimensions of Ibrahim Yaziji's methodology for teaching Arabic grammar during the Nahda period (the Arab Renaissance). It scrutinizes the underlying reasons for reforming traditional linguistics, which was often characterized by its complexity and disengagement from the living language. A central focus of the analysis is Yaziji's commitment to maximizing the simplicity of presentation, evidenced by his clear language and his reform of cumbersome terminology. The study examines the integration of morphology and syntax in his works, as well as his selective approach to the scope of grammatical material. Particular attention is given to his re-evaluation of the classification of parts of speech and the category of *manṣūbāt*, which demonstrates a more semantically oriented analysis. The systematic unification of related topics and the reliance on practical examples are highlighted as significant pedagogical innovations introduced by Yaziji. The article concludes that his contributions culminated in the creation of a more accessible, logical, and contemporary system for learning the Arabic language, which profoundly influenced the subsequent development of Arabic linguistics.

**Keywords:** Arabic grammar, Arab Renaissance, grammatical simplification, morphology, syntax

**Introduction**

The Nahda (Arab Renaissance), spanning the 19th and early 20th centuries, was a period of profound intellectual, cultural, and social transformation across the Arab world. A crucial aspect of this renaissance was the re-evaluation and modernization of traditional sciences, including Arabic linguistics. Within this domain, many distinguished scholars sought to update established grammatical theories, aiming to make them more accessible and relevant to the demands of the new era. Among these pioneers, Ibrahim bin Nasif bin Abdullah al-Yaziji (hereafter Ibrahim Yaziji) holds a prominent position, as his works significantly contributed to the evolution of Arabic grammatical thought. To fully comprehend his innovative approach, we must examine various facets of his work in the context of the Nahda's linguistic trends [Dolinina].

**Linguistic Landscape of the Nahda Era and the Impetus for Reforms**

In the period preceding and accompanying the Nahda, the study of Arabic grammar was often characterized by excessive detail, convoluted terminology, and at times, a disconnection from the living language. Traditional grammatical texts, though possessing a deep theoretical foundation, could present considerable challenges for students due to their complexity and lack of clear pedagogical direction [Daniel L. Newman, p. 473]. Ibn Farhat, for instance, criticized earlier grammatical works for their opacity, stating:

"I omitted tiresome interpretations and flawed counter-arguments. When I saw that Ibn al-Hajib concealed understanding with his detailed narratives, and Ibn Hisham shattered [any] illusions [of language mastery] with his intentions, and Ibn Malik subjugated minds with his excesses, [I realized] that this was only an exaggerated study and an elaborate investigation. Or [perhaps], they pursue a goal that does not concern us, and we do not need it. Therefore, they are in one valley, and we are in another." [Ibn Farhāt, L. 2a].

Against the backdrop of growing interest in education, the spread of printing, and the development of national consciousness, there emerged a need for more accessible and practical Arabic language manuals. Nahda intellectuals recognized the importance of language as a tool for cultural revival and national unity, which spurred their efforts to reform its teaching and learning methodologies [Daniel L. Newman, p. 475]. Among such works, *Maṭāli' al-sa'd li-muṭāli' al-jawhar al-fard fī uṣūl al-naḥw wa al-ṣarf* ("A Guide to the Fundamentals of Morphology and Syntax (based on 'The Unique Pearl')") by Ibrahim bin Nasif al-Yaziji holds a special place. This book systematically presents the fundamentals of Arabic grammar and morphology. It serves as a *sharḥ* (commentary) on the renowned *qaṣīda "al-Jawhar al-fard"* ("The Unique Pearl"), penned by his father, the linguist and poet Nasif al-Yaziji<sup>2</sup>, whom Krymsky described as a "highly knowledgeable expert in Arabic philology" and "the most renowned for establishing language norms for new Arabic literature" [Krymsky, pp. 336, 350].

Thus, Ibrahim Yaziji continued his father's philological work, but with an awareness of new scientific trends. His knowledge of European languages and familiarity with comparative linguistics allowed him to approach his research more scientifically, even leading him to revise his father's works [Krymsky, p. 529]. This exemplifies how science evolves and how new generations of researchers can build upon the work of their predecessors while introducing novel knowledge and methodologies.

As an Arabic language instructor, he actively combated illiteracy and fully comprehended the significance of linguistic knowledge. His words on the importance of language in society resonate:

"Undoubtedly, language is a reflection of the state of a nation, a picture of its life, a measure of its morals and customs, a record of its knowledge, arts, and literature. And if it does not keep pace with the needs of its speakers, and does not convey to their minds what arises in their thoughts, with sufficient clarity and precision, it becomes weak, and its speakers will be forced to seek another language that would better express their thoughts and satisfy their needs. [...] We see how in modern life language is used carelessly and inaccurately, its rules are violated, its richness is ignored, its expressive capabilities are not fully utilized, and foreign elements penetrate it, which distort its purity and clarity. [...] It is for this reason that it is so important to care for language, to study it, to perfect it, and to protect it from everything that can weaken and distort it. For language is one of the most important elements of national identity and cultural heritage." [Sābā' Īsā Mīkhā'īl, pp. 83-85].

This awareness of the dynamics and problems associated with the contemporary state of the Arabic language undoubtedly became one of the key reasons that prompted Ibrahim Yaziji to actively engage with issues of the Arabic language and its reformation during the Nahda. As a distinguished linguist, man of letters, and public figure, he profoundly understood the importance of language as the foundation of national identity and progress. He saw the necessity of modernizing Arabic, purifying it of excessive archaisms, and adapting it to the needs of modern life, science, and culture. His efforts were directed towards ensuring that the

Arabic language would once again become a powerful and effective instrument for expressing thought, advancing education, and strengthening national identity in an era of significant change.

### **Integration of Morphology and Syntax as a Key Trend**

One notable development in Nahda linguistics was the drive towards integrating the study of morphology—the science of word inflection and formation—and syntax—the science of sentence and phrase construction, the foundations of which were laid by Ibn Farhat. In classical Arabic grammatical tradition, these two disciplines were often treated separately, which could hinder a holistic understanding of the linguistic system. Ibn Farhat explained his motivation for this integration:

"I hastened to lift the veil that hung over the Arabic language, for some reason and for some time. I composed a text consisting of an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion. I gathered the principles of Arabic morphology and syntax that were scattered across different books. I highlighted what we needed and removed what was strange to us [...]" [Ibn Farhāt, l. 2a].

Furthermore, Ibn Farhat also noted that one of the goals of compiling his book was to include all necessary rules of Arabic grammar, which one needs to know, in one book in a concise form [Ibn Farhāt, l. 2].

Nahda scholars, following Ibn Farhat, including Ibrahim Yaziji, Butrus al-Bustani, Faris al-Shidyaq, and others, recognized the interconnectedness between word structure and its function in a sentence. They sought to present grammar as a unified system where morphological changes directly influence syntactic relationships.

### **Attempts at Simplifying Arabic Grammar**

The most prominent and significant feature of Ibrahim Yaziji's innovative approach was his unprecedented commitment to clarity and simplicity of exposition. Many classical grammatical texts were characterized by complex and abstract language, replete with specialized terminology that could be unintelligible even to adequately educated readers. Moreover, an analysis of excerpts from Ibrahim Yaziji's works in comparison with those of his contemporaries, such as Faris al-Shidyaq<sup>4</sup>, reveals a noticeable difference in style. Yaziji eschewed excessive theorization and complex philosophical argumentation, preferring clear and concise formulations supported by lucid examples. This orientation towards accessibility had immense pedagogical significance, making the study of Arabic grammar more appealing and effective for a broad range of students. His works contributed to the democratization of linguistic knowledge, making it accessible beyond a narrow circle of specialists. One of his methods was to consolidate topics and reduce explanations. For instance, instead of elaborately discussing each type of *manṣūbāt* (accusative case) in a separate section, he unified them into a single chapter. For each type, he provided the most fundamental definition and a brief example, literally "a couple of sentences."

This is evident in his treatment of the direct object (*al-maf'ūl bihi*):

- Yaziji immediately presents the essence: the direct object is that towards which an action is directed.
- And he immediately provides a simple and understandable example: "I hit Zayd" (ضَرَبْتُ زَيْدًا - *ḍarabtu Zaydan*) [Ibrāhīm Yāziji, p. 54].

That is, he doesn't delve into various types of direct objects, their nuances of usage, or any complex rules. His goal is to provide a basic understanding of what a direct object is so that the student can quickly grasp it and move on.

Such an approach to simplifying grammar was likely aimed at making the study of Arabic less cumbersome and more accessible for beginners. Instead of detailed immersion into every aspect, Yaziji offered a more general and concentrated exposition of grammatical material.

Another aspect of Yaziji's simplification concerned the terminology of the Arabic language. Traditional grammatical terminology, developed over centuries, often featured complexity, unwieldiness, and difficulty in memorization, which created obstacles for language learners and did not align with modern pedagogical approaches focused on clarity and simplicity. During the Nahda era, there was a drive towards the unification and standardization of the Arabic language and its grammatical system, and the reform of terminology became part of this process.

The reform of terminology involved several directions: simplifying complex terms, using more descriptive terms, introducing new terms, and clarifying the meanings of existing terms. The goal was to make grammatical concepts more accessible, understandable, and effective for teaching and learning.

Ibrahim Yaziji was one of the prominent scholars actively involved in this reform. His work, *Maṭāli' al-sa'd*, contains examples of his commitment to simplification and clarity. In particular, he used the more compact and clear term "ضمائر الرفع البارزة" (explicit nominative pronouns) instead of the complex and cumbersome term "الضمائر المتصلة المرفوعة" (attached nominative pronouns). This demonstrates his endeavor for greater transparency and ease of understanding grammatical concepts.

Another such example can be found in the following two passages from different grammatical works, where the authors present grammatical topics from different perspectives:

And among the types of noun is the generic noun (اسم الجنس). This is what denotes a thing and everything similar to it, and it is divided into a specific noun (اسم عين) and an abstract noun (اسم معنى). And both of them are divided into a non-qualitative noun (اسم غير صفة) and a qualitative noun (اسم هو صفة). A non-qualitative noun, for example, "man," "horse," "knowledge," and "ignorance." And a qualitative noun, for example, "rider," "sitting," "understood," and "hidden" (pronoun). [Mufaṣṣal, 5]

And here is how Yaziji explains the same topic:

A noun is either explicit (ظاهر) or a pronoun (مضمر), as you have learned. An explicit noun is either definite (معرفة) – this is what refers to a specific named individual (بعينه), like Zayd. Or it is indefinite (نكرة) – this is what refers to a general designation (شائع في جنسه) within its genus, like "man," as it does not refer to any one man to the exclusion of others." [Ibrāhīm Yāzījī, p. 37].

An analysis of the two excerpts reveals the following:

The first striking difference is the starting point of classification. Yaziji begins with the fundamental division of nouns into explicit (*zāhir*) and implicit (*muḍmar*). This primary division is based on the method of referring to an object (direct mention or pronoun). In contrast, Zamakhshari begins with the category of the generic noun (*ism al-jins*), which he defines as a general name for a thing and everything similar to it. This division focuses on semantic generality.

The level of detail at the initial stage is also noteworthy. Yaziji immediately subdivides explicit nouns into definite (*ma'rifa*) and indefinite (*nakira*), providing clear definitions and

examples for each category. Zamakhshari, at the first stage, subdivides the generic noun into a specific noun (ism 'ayn) and an abstract noun (ism ma'nā). He then further subdivides these categories into a non-adjectival noun (ism ghayr ṣifa) and an adjectival noun (ism huwa ṣifa).

Moreover, there is a difference in the focus of classification. Yaziji's classification at the initial stage is more oriented towards the referential function of the noun (whether it refers to a specific object or a class of objects). In contrast, al-Zamakhshari's classification at the initial stage is more oriented towards the semantic nature of the noun (whether it denotes a concrete object or an abstract concept), and then on its grammatical function (whether it is an adjective or not).

Both scholars aim to systematize knowledge about nouns, but they choose different starting points and use different criteria for their primary classification. Yaziji begins with the most fundamental grammatical distinction (explicit vs. implicit) and then proceeds to definiteness. Zamakhshari begins with a semantic category (generic noun) and then delves into the distinctions between concrete and abstract, as well as between nouns and adjectives.

These differences may reflect different pedagogical approaches or different theoretical perspectives on which aspects of noun classification are most important or fundamental. Yaziji's approach may seem simpler and more direct for beginners, while al-Zamakhshari's approach offers a more branched and semantically rich classification from the outset.

One of the key features of the author's innovative approach in presenting grammatical material is the unification of interconnected grammatical topics within a single paragraph. This methodological decision allows the reader to perceive the material more holistically, to see direct connections between various aspects of grammar, and to avoid fragmented study of individual phenomena. Such an approach contributes to the formation of a more systemic understanding of the subject. Thus, in analyzing the nominal sentence, he integrated the consideration of factors determining the case forms of the subject and predicate, in synchronic unity with the syntactic structure. Unlike previous studies, which were characterized by discrete analysis of morphological and syntactic aspects, this author demonstrates their systemic interdependence [Ibrāhīm Yāziji, pp. 50-52].

### Selective Approach to Morphology and Syntax

In his treatment of morphology ('ilm al-ṣarf), Ibrahim Yaziji exhibited a distinct selectivity, focusing on the most crucial and fundamental aspects. In the early stages of Arabic grammar's development, particularly in the works of authorities such as Sibawayhi (8th century CE)<sup>5</sup>, the primary focus was on describing grammatical phenomena based on a meticulous analysis of the Quranic text and Bedouin poetry, considered to be the purest forms of Arabic. The classification of parts of speech was more general, and many forms originating from verbal roots could be discussed within the context of verbal paradigms due to their morphological connection to the verb and their ability to express action or state.

Ibn Farhat, being one of the earlier authors after the classical period, likely adhered to this established tradition. Ibn Farhat asserted that 9 linguistic units (tis'at ashya') are derived from the maṣdar [Ibn Farhāt, l. 14b]:

Derived forms from maṣdar:

1. Past Tense ضَرَبَ | (الماضي) |
2. Present-Future Tense يَضْرِبُ | (المضارع) |
3. Imperative Mood اِضْرِبْ | (الأمر) |
4. Negative Imperative Mood لَا تَضْرِبْ | (النهي) |

5. Active Participle (الفاعل) | ضَارِبٌ
6. Passive Participle (المفعول) | مَضْرُوبٌ
7. Noun of Time and Place (اسم الزمان والمكان) | مَضْرِبٌ
8. Noun of Instrument (اسم الآلة) | مِضْرَبٌ
9. Noun of Unity/Kind (اسم المرة والنوع) According to the author, it is not formed from the maṣḍar.

His consideration of nouns of place and time, as well as active and passive participles, within the chapter on the verb, was likely driven by the following factors:

- Morphological Connection: These forms are derived from verbal roots through derivational processes and retain certain morphological patterns characteristic of verbal derivatives.
- Semantic Connection: They carry meaning derived from the original verb (action, state, time, place of action).
- Functional Proximity: In some contexts, participles can perform functions close to verbs (e.g., in nominal sentences denoting a continuous action).

Ibrahim Yaziji, living considerably later, demonstrated a more differentiated view on the Arabic grammatical system. Ibrahim Yaziji was one of the first to discuss the noun of place and time, active and passive participles, and the noun of instrument in the chapter on nouns, while earlier authors, such as Ibn Farhat, considered them in the chapter on verbs [Ibrāhīm Yāziji, p. 29]. His relocation of nouns of place and time, as well as participles, to the chapter on nouns indicates that Ibrahim Yaziji adopted an innovative approach to the classification of parts of speech, identifying nouns of place, time, participles, and instruments as a distinct category specifically associated with nominal semantics. Traditionally, these forms were treated within the verbal system due to their derivation from verbal roots and their retention of some verbal characteristics, such as indicating tense or voice (in the case of participles).

The relocation of these categories to the chapter on nouns signifies a shift in emphasis in Yaziji's linguistic analysis. He likely focused on their nominative function—their ability to denote concepts of place, time, object or subject of action (through participles), and instrument of action (noun of instrument). This may indicate a more semantically oriented approach by Yaziji, where the classification of parts of speech is based less on morphological origin and more on their primary function in a sentence—their ability to act as nominal phrases and denote specific entities or characteristics. Thus, by singling out these categories in the chapter on nouns, Yaziji emphasized their status as lexical units denoting specific concepts, even despite their connection to the verb. This was a significant step in the development of Arabic grammatical tradition, offering a new perspective on the structure and functions of parts of speech.

Furthermore, Yaziji's innovation lay in his broader view of the maṣḍar category. He expanded this category to include nouns in the accusative case that originally functioned as subject (mubtada') or predicate (khabar) in a nominal sentence but changed their case under the influence of the following grammatical factors [Ibrāhīm Yāziji, p. 53]:

- Kāna (كَانَ) and its sisters (akhawātuhā), which render the predicate of a nominal sentence accusative. For example: كَانَ الطَّقْسُ جَمِيلًا - The weather was beautiful. (الطَّقْسُ - the name of kāna; جَمِيلًا - the khabar kāna in the accusative case).
- 'Inna (إِنَّ) and its sisters (akhawātuhā), which render the subject of a nominal sentence accusative. For example: إِنَّ الْعِلْمَ نُورٌ - Indeed, knowledge is light. (الْعِلْمُ - the name of 'inna in the accusative case; نُورٌ - the khabar 'inna in the nominative case).

In contrast, Ibn Farhat did not include these in the maṣḍar. Moreover, Ibn Farhat, when discussing nouns in the accusative case (المنصوبات), divided them into true accusative nouns (aṣl)

and those appended to true accusative nouns (mulḥaq bi-l-aṣl). He listed the following as true accusative nouns:

1. Absolute object (al-maf'ūl al-muṭlaq);
2. Direct object (al-maf'ūl bihi);
3. Accusative noun denoting place or time of action (al-maf'ūl fihi);
4. Accusative noun denoting the reason for action (al-maf'ūl lahu);
5. Accusative noun of concomitance (al-maf'ūl ma'ahu) [Ibn Farḥāt, l. 87a-93b].

After meticulously examining the above categories, the author proceeded to elucidate the nouns appended to true accusative nouns, which included:

1. Noun after a vocative particle (al-munādā);
2. Exception (al-istithnā');
3. Circumstantial adverb (al-ḥāl);
4. Specification (al-tamyīz);
5. Comparative and superlative degrees (af'al al-tafḍīl);
6. Kam as an interrogative and predicative pronoun (kam al-istifhāmiyya wa al-khabariyya);
7. Metonymy kadha;
8. Cardinal numbers from 11 to 99;
9. Warnings (al-taḥdhīr), such as إِيَّاكَ وَالْكَذِبَ (Beware of lies);
10. Inducements (al-ighrā'), for example, عَلَيْكَ زَيْدًا (Stick to Zayd) [Ibn Farḥāt, l. 94a-108a].

Thus, Yaziji's innovation specifically lay in his expansion of the traditional understanding of maṣṣūbāt, incorporating into this category the predicate of kāna and the name of 'inna (and their sisters), which, though in the accusative case, result from the grammatical influence of these particles on an originally nominal sentence (subject and predicate).

Yaziji evidently adopted a broader perspective on the maṣṣūbāt category, basing it not solely on the original function of the word, but also on its actual case state in the sentence under the influence of specific grammatical factors. This distinguished his approach from Ibn Farḥāt's more conservative view.

Analyzing Ibrahim Yaziji's methodology in Maṭālib al-sa'd, it should be noted that, similar to Ibn Farḥāt in Bahth al-maṭālib, he includes a syntactic analysis of individual sentences in the concluding section of his study. However, a methodological distinction is that Ibrahim analyzes examples that directly illustrate the theoretical material from preceding paragraphs.

Ibrahim titles this section "Grammatical Analysis of Examples from Sentences" (i'rāb shawāhid al-naḥw). The subsequent structure of the section is characterized by thematic organization according to grammatical phenomena, where each paragraph corresponds to a specific aspect of grammar. The author explicitly indicates the relevant page, for instance: "Example of the subject of a verbal sentence" (shawāhid al-fā'il (ṣafḥa 47)).

## Conclusion

Ibrahim Yaziji's innovative approach to Arabic grammar emerged as a notable phenomenon within the context of the Nahda era. His commitment to simplifying the language of exposition, reforming terminology, integrating morphology and syntax, and adopting a selective approach to grammatical material contributed to greater accessibility and systematization of knowledge about the Arabic language. His re-evaluation of the classification of parts of speech and the category of maṣṣūbāt reflects his pursuit of a more semantically grounded analysis of grammatical phenomena. The methodical unification of interrelated topics

and the analysis of examples illustrating theoretical material are also vital elements of his pedagogical innovation. Overall, Ibrahim Yaziji's contribution to the development of Arabic grammatical thought lay in his endeavor to make language learning more logical, comprehensible, and responsive to the needs of the new era, profoundly influencing the subsequent development of Arabic linguistics. The primary distinguishing feature of Ibrahim Yaziji's innovative approach to Arabic grammar was his consistent and purposeful simplification of both the language of exposition and the very structure of the presented material. His departure from complex terminology and excessive detail, the unification of related grammatical topics, and his reliance on clear, concise explanations with concrete examples made the study of Arabic more accessible and effective for a broad range of students during the Nahda. This commitment to clarity and simplicity was Yaziji's key contribution, facilitating the democratization of linguistic knowledge and laying the groundwork for the further modernization of the Arabic grammatical tradition.

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