

IYYĀKA WA-L-MAS'ALA Z-ZUNBŪRIYYA ON A WIDELY DEBATED MEDIAEVAL GRAMMATICAL ISSUE

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0. Introduction

The *mas'ala zunbūriyya* (“the question of the wasp”) is one of the most famous disputes (*munāẓara*) between the grammarians of Baṣra and Kūfa. It is already present in Ibn al-Anbārī's (513-577/1119-1181) *Inṣāf* (II, 702-706, *mas'ala* 99), a collection of grammatical issues of controversy. It is mentioned in Ibn Ḥallikān's (608-681/1211-1282), *Wafayāt* (III, 463-465), in the biography of the renowned grammarian, Sībawayhi (ca. 140-180/760-796), and also briefly in Ibn Hišām's (708-61/1310-60) *Muġnī* (II, 54-75)¹.

Ibn Ḥallikān, on the one hand, describes it as an entertaining anecdote, emphasizing motives such as al-Kisā'ī (111-189/737-805, one of the most famous representatives of the grammatical school of Kūfa) being the teacher of the sons of Caliph Hārūn ar-Rašīd (*Wafayāt* III, 464). Ibn al-Anbārī and Ibn Hišām, on the other hand, discuss the issue also from a grammatical point of view. Thus their observations are of great importance for scholars, since their analytical approach, in which the arguments of the two grammarians, Sībawayhi and al-Kisā'ī are presented one by one, sheds light both on the difference between the two grammarians' methodology and – in a broader sense – on the major distinguishing factors between the grammatical schools of Baṣra and Kūfa.

1. The story of the dispute (*munāẓara*)

According to Ibn al-Anbārī, the two grammarians, Sībawayhi and al-Kisā'ī appeared in front of Yaḥyā al-Barmakī², in order to entertain the grand vizier with their dispute concerning a specific grammatical question:

¹ See also az-Zaġġāġī, *Maġālis* 8, Yāqūt, *Udabā'* I, 85 and XVI, 119, as-Suyūṭī, *Ašbāh* III, 15.

² According to al-Muṭarrizī, it was Caliph Hārūn ar-Rašīd's *maġlis* (al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt* 388).

fa-aqbala °alayhi l-Kisā'ī fa-qāla kayfa taqūlu kuntu azunnu anna l-°aqra-ba ašaddu las°atan min az-zunbūri fa-idā huwa hiya aw fa-idā huwa iyyāhā fa-qāla Sībawayhi fa-idā huwa hiya wa-lā yağūzu n-našbu fa-qāla lahu l-Kisā'ī laḥanta tumma sa'alahu °an masā'il min hādā n-naḥwi naḥwa ḥarağtu fa-idā °Abdullāhi l-qā'imu wa-l-qā'ima fa-qāla Sībawayhi fī dālika bi-r-rağ°i dūna n-našbi fa-qāla l-Kisā'ī laysa hādā min kalāmi l-°arabi...

“al-Kisā'ī turned to him asking: How would you say: ‘I thought that the bite of the scorpion is more severe than that of the wasp, but, lo, this one is like the other (*hiya*).’ Or: ‘...but, lo, this one is like the other (*iyyāhā*).’ Sībawayhi answered: ‘this one is like the other (*hiya*).’ al-Kisā'ī told him: ‘you do not speak proper Arabic’. Then he asked another question concerning the same topic: ‘I went out, and lo, °Abdullāh was just coming (*al-qā'im*). Is it with *al-qā'imu* or with *al-qā'ima*?’ Sībawayhi said: ‘One ought to use here the nominative case instead of the accusative’. To this al-Kisā'ī answered: ‘This is not the way Arabs³ speak’.

The debate was finally settled by Bedouins:

fa-dahālū wa-fīhim Abū Faq°as wa-Abū Ziyād wa-Abū l-Ğarāḥ wa-Abū Ƣarwān fa-su'ilū °an al-masā'il l-latī ġarat bayna l-Kisā'ī wa-Sībawayhi fa-wāfāqū l-Kisā'ī

“They entered the room with Abū Faq°as, Abū Ziyād, Abū l-Ğarāḥ and Abū Ƣarwān among them. They were asked the same questions that were discussed by al-Kisā'ī and Sībawayhi, and they agreed with al-Kisā'ī.”

2. The linguistic issue of the *mas'ala*

2.1 Two versions

The sources display the “question of the wasp” in two different versions⁴. These differ in the choice of nouns, the position of the masculine and feminine nouns, and in the gender of the infinitive (*mašdar*).

– The sentence as given by Ibn al-Anbārī (*Inšāf* II, 702) and Ibn Hišām (*Muğnī* I, 71):

³ al-Kisā'ī uses the term “Arabs” referring to his Bedouin informants.

⁴ In only two versions, since the quotations in the *Inšāf* and the *Muğnī* are identical. This story, however, has a lot of different versions. A good example for this is given by al-Muṭarrizī in his commentary to al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*: “kuntu azunnu anna l-°aqra-ba ġayr az-zunbūri fa-idā huwa am fa-idā hiya iyyāhu” (al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt* 388).

kuntu azunnu anna l-caqraba (fem.) ašaddu lascatan (fem.) min az-zunbūri (masc.) fa-idā huwa hiya/fa-idā huwa iyyāhā

“I thought that the bite of the scorpion is more severe than that of the wasp, but, lo, this one is like the other.”

– The sentence in the wording of Ibn Hallikān (*Wafayāt* III, 464):

kuntu azunnu z-zunbūra (masc.) ašadda las'an (masc.) min an-naḥlati (fem.) fa-idā huwa hiya/fa-idā huwa iyyāhā

“I thought that the bite of the wasp is more severe than that of the bee, but, lo, this one is like the other”

One can easily see that while in the version of Ibn al-Anbārī the two feminine words (*caqrab*, *las'a*) are followed by a masculine one (*zunbūr*), the two masculine words (*zunbūr*; *las'*) are followed by a feminine one (*naḥla*) in the account of Ibn Hallikān. Since in the sentence quoted by Ibn al-Anbārī there is only one masculine word, it is easier to see in this instance which word is referred to by the pronoun *huwa*. Meanwhile, in the quotation from Ibn Hallikān there are more than one masculine word, thus the object of the pronoun is not clear.

2.2 The pronouns after *idā*

Indeed, the debate of the two grammarians focuses on the pronouns. The major question they ask is whether one should put the 3rd person feminine pronoun in *raf'* (nominative, *hiya*) or *našb* (accusative, *iyyāhā*) after the particle *idā*.

2.2.1 The Kūfan view

The opinion of the school of Kūfa as represented by al-Kisā'ī is that the second noun after *idā* should be in *našb*. He, therefore, finishes the sentence with “*fa-idā huwa iyyāhā*”. The basis of al-Kisā'ī's argumentation is that he considered every linguistic data provided by the Bedouins (*samā'*) as a possible source for analogical usage (*qiyās*) in sentences.

al-Kisā'ī followed the methodology of descriptive grammar not distinguishing between rare (*šādd*) and generally accepted (*muṭṭarid*) usage. He compiled data from Bedouin informants without distinction between well-known, interesting, trivial or odd information. His informants reported everything they heard from a trustworthy source. Consequently, even one example from a pre-Islamic

or Islamic poet's work was enough ground for him for a grammatical argument⁵. According to this principle al-Kisā'ī gave an example that is analogous to the case in question according to the Kūfan standards:

ḥaraġtu fa-idā 'Abdullāhi l-qā'ima (Ibn al-Anbārī, *Inṣāf* II, 703)

"I went out, and lo, 'Abdullāh was just coming".

al-Kisā'ī and the Kūfan grammarians claim that the last expression of the *mas'ala zunbūriyya* (*īyyāhā*) can be substituted by the term *al-qā'ima* on the basis of analogy, since both words are in the accusative (*naṣb*)⁶. They argue that the second pronoun is in *naṣb* because of the particle *idā*. They say that whenever this particle expresses surprise, it takes the meaning "*waġada*" (to find), which ultimately attracts an object in the accusative (*naṣb*)⁷. According to the interpretation of the Kūfans, the particle *idā* is a regent (*'āmil*) which exerts its influence (*'amal*) on the predicate of the nominal sentence (*ḥabar*)⁸.

2.2.2 An evidence?

The case ending "-a" of the structure (*al-qā'im*) on which al-Kisā'ī bases his argument is just as problematic as that of *īyyāhā* in his dispute with Sībawayhi. This can be inferred from aš-Šarīṣī's commentary on al-Ḥarīrī's *al-Maqāma š-Širāziyya* (No. 35)⁹. In his work al-Ḥarīrī says:

fa-lammā ra'aytu šawba Abī Zaydin wa-rawbahu wa-uslūbahu l-ma'lūfa wa-šawbahu ta'ammaltu š-šayḥa 'alā suhūmati muḥayāhu wa-suhūkatī rayyāhu fa-idā huwa īyyāhu (al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt* 387, aš-Šarīṣī, *Šarḥ* IV, 169)

"Now when I saw the mixture and tinge of Abū Zayd, and his wonted ways and manners of proceeding, I looked hard at the old man, with all his defacement of countenance and fulsomeness and lo! it was he himself" (Steingass 1898:72-73).

The text of the 35th *maqāma* ("*fa-idā huwa īyyāhu*") seems to support the opinion of al-Kisā'ī. The commentators, among them aš-Šarīṣī and al-Muṭarrizī, however, rectify al-Ḥarīrī's words saying that the correct form would be "*fa-*

⁵ Cf. Goldziher 1994:35: "According to [the Kūfan school], if we can find at least one example among the old poets or a form which differs from the usual rule, this single example is sufficient for somebody to follow it in writing or in speech in similar cases".

⁶ The accusative is called *fath* by the Kūfan grammarians, cf. Ibn al-Anbārī, *Inṣāf* I, 19.

⁷ *li-annahā bi-ma'nā waġadtu*, Ibn al-Anbārī, *Inṣāf* I, 84, II, 705.

⁸ Cf. Ibn al-Anbārī, *Inṣāf* II, 704.

⁹ A. Fischer (1922:153) refers mistakenly to the chapter "*al-Maqāma l-Bašriyya*" in his "unsere Satzfügung ja sogar in den Makamen des Bašrensers...".

idā huwa huwa”. aš-Šarīṣī also deals with the supporting example given by al-Kisā’ī (*ḥaraġtu fa-idā ‘Abdullāhi l-qā’ima*¹⁰), saying that the accusative ending of *al-qā’im* is not acceptable for the Baṣran grammarians. He argues that the accusative case of the word *qā’im* (suggested by al-Kisā’ī) is only in accordance with the radical opinion of the grammarians of Kūfa, who claim that the *ḥāl* (adverb of state or condition) can be definite. Sībawayhi, nonetheless, advocates an opinion, which was subsequently accepted by the school of Baṣra that refuses the possibility of a definite adverb of state or condition. It should be noted here that these later commentators in their explanation refuse the accusative on the basis of considering it *ḥāl* and refusing to accept that it can be definite following the Baṣrans whose views by their time became generally accepted. The Kūfans, however, did not explain this structure as a *ḥāl*, but as a consequence of the special usage of *idā* in the meaning of *waġada*.

2.2.3 The Baṣran view

According to the analysis of the grammarians of Baṣra, however, the particle *idā* is not an *‘āmil* attracting *raf‘* and *naṣb*, but is simply followed by a nominal sentence with both of its parts (*mubtada’* and *habar*) being in the nominative. Sībawayhi argues along the same lines, when he finishes the sentence with the words: *fa-idā huwa hiya*.

Similarly to al-Kisā’ī the grounds for Sībawayhi’s arguments are *qiyās* and *samā’*.¹¹ The latter one is evidenced by the fact that Sībawayhi often introduces justifications for his arguments with the terms *sami‘tu* (I heard), *ra’aytu* (I saw) *balaġanī* (it reached me)¹². Contrary to al-Kisā’ī, however, Sībawayhi always considers complex syntactic structures, and so interprets the *īyyā* particle in the overall structure of language. Sībawayhi distinguishes three types of pronouns:

- the separate (*munfaṣil*)¹³,
- the suffixed (*muttaṣil*)¹⁴,
- and one connected to *īyyā*.

¹⁰ See also Fischer 1922:155.

¹¹ Cf. Baalbaki 2008:35.

¹² Cf. Levin 1994:204.

¹³ *wa-ammā ‘alāmātu l-iḍmāri l-latī takūnu munfaṣilatan min al-fī‘li wa-lā tuġayyiru mā ‘amila fīhā ‘an ḥālihi idā uḏhira fīhi l-ismu fa-innahu yaṣrakuḥā l-muḏharu li-annahu yuṣbiḥu l-muḏhara wa-ḡālika qawluka anta wa-‘Abdullāhi ḡāhibāni wa-l-karīmu anta wa-‘Abdullāhi* (I, 343.6-9)

¹⁴ *wa-‘lam anna ḥadfa n-nūni wa-tanwīni lāzimun ma‘a ‘alāmati l-muḍmari ḡayri l-munfaṣili li-annahu lā yutakallamu bihi mufradan ḥattā yakūnu muttaṣilan bi-fī‘lin qablahu wa-bi-ismīn fīhi ḍamīrun* (I, 795-797)

The three types differ not only in their form but also in their usage. The separate pronouns can only signify *rafʿ*, the suffixed pronouns can take both the *naṣb* and the *ğarr*, while the *ıyyā* particle can only take *naṣb*. Since the use of *ıyyā* and that of the suffixed forms overlap, Sībawayhi concludes that *ıyyā* can be a sign of *naṣb*, when the suffix of object cannot be displayed¹⁵. In this case *ıyyā* serves as a substitute (*badal*) for the suffixed pronoun (*muttaṣil*)¹⁶:

*ıyyāka ra'aytu wa-ıyyāka aʿnī*¹⁷

“It is you whom I saw and I [really] mean you.”

atawnī laysa ıyyāka wa-lā yakūnu ıyyāhu

“They came to me, not to you, nor to him.”

3. The theoretical background for Sībawayhi's interpretation

In order to understand Sībawayhi's position in his debate with al-Kisā'ī, one has to be familiar with two things. First, it is necessary to understand Sībawayhi's interpretation of what he calls *huwa huwa* structure, which in modern terms would be the identifying nominal sentence¹⁸, and secondly, that Sībawayhi considers that the particle *idā* is not a regent (*ğayr ʿāmil*).

3.1 The *huwa huwa* structure

Sībawayhi (*Kitāb* I, 333.20) begins the analysis of this type of sentences with the example:

qad ġarrabtuka wa-wağadtuka anta anta ... wa-l-maʿnā ... fa-wağadtuka anta llaḍi aʿrifu

“I tried [to recognise] you, and found that you were you. ... It means ... that I found that you were the one that I knew.”

Sībawayhi's analysis starts with the *anta anta* structure. He establishes that the first one is the *mubtadaʿ* (i.e. the subject of the nominal sentence), while the second is the *mabnī ʿalayhi* (i.e. the predicate of the nominal sentence). Consequently, the two clauses in the above example (a verbal /*wağadtuka*/ and

¹⁵ *ʿalāmatu l-muğmarīna l-manṣūbīna ıyyā mā lam taqdir ʿalā l-kāf* (I, 332.4)

¹⁶ *lā taqdiru ʿalā l-kāfi wa-lā al-hāʾi fa-ṣārat ıyyā badalan min al-kāfi wa-l-hāʾi fī hāḍā l-mawḍiʿ* (I, 333.13-14)

¹⁷ This is a linguistic example formed on the basis of the Qurʾānic āya (Q 34/24): *wa-innā aw ıyyākum la-ʿalā hudan aw fī ḍalālin mubīnin*, where the use of *ıyyā* is compulsory.

¹⁸ It should be noted here that Sībawayhi did not use the notion of sentence at all.

a nominal /*anta anta*/) are affixed to one another without any apparent structural relation between them. As a parallel to this sentence, Sībawayhi (*Kitāb* I, 333.21) quotes another example (*wağadtuka wağhuka ṭalīqun* /“I found that your face was relaxed”/). He asserts an analogy between the two examples since they consist of two structurally separate clauses and the two final phrases (*anta* and *ṭalīqun* respectively) have the same syntactic function.

Sībawayhi (*Kitāb* I, 334.1-2), however, also acknowledges the use of *īyyā* after a separate pronoun (*munfaṣil*): *wağadtuka anta īyyāka*.

In this case Sībawayhi says that *anta* is a *ṣifa* (attribute) to *-ka*, while *īyyāka* is an apposition to *anta*, like *zarīf* in the sentence *wağadtuka anta z-zarīfa* (“I found that you were the one whom I knew as the witty one”)¹⁹. This, however, is completely different from the usage of *īyyā* in the *mas'ala zunbūriyya* since there *īyyā* together with the pronoun (*īyyāhu* or *īyyāhā*) is the predicate of a nominal sentence (*mabnī 'alayhi* in Sībawayhi's terms).

3.2 *idā*

As we have seen, the *mas'ala zunbūriyya* contains two grammatical problems. One concerns the use of *huwa/hiya* or *īyyāhu/īyyāhā*, the second the role of *idā* uses to express surprise (*idā li-l-mufaṣṣa*). Interestingly enough, it is the second problem which drew much more attention in the grammatical literature after Sībawayhi's age²⁰. Two questions arise in this respect: (i) whether *idā* is a regent (*'āmil*) or not; (ii) if not, when and in which position can a noun in accusative (*manṣūb*) stand after it.

As we have seen above, the Kūfans considered *idā* as *'āmil*. According to Sībawayhi (*Kitāb* I, 45.3), however, *idā* is a particle introducing a nominal sentence (*ibtidā'*): *wa-li-idā mawḍi'un āḥaru yaḥsunu fīhi ibtidā'u l-asmā'i ba'dahā*. As an example, he puts: *naẓartu fa-idā Zaydun yadhhabu* “I looked, and lo! Zayd was just going away”.

Later Baṣran grammarians developed further the rules related to the use of *idā* expressing surprise. Let us analyse here briefly only al-Mubarrad's²¹ views concerning the particle *idā*. In his *Radd li-Kitāb Sībawayhi*, he discloses 134 grammatical questions concerning which he does not concede with his predecessor (Bernards 1990:40).

The twelfth question of the treatise deals with the particle *idā*:

¹⁹ Sībawayhi adds that his explanation here originates from al-Ḥalīl.

²⁰ It is, however, outside the scope of the present paper to present the treatment of *idā* in all its diversity.

²¹ al-Mubarrad died in 258/898, a mere one hundred years after Sībawayhi, which labels him as a member of the second generation of grammarians following Sībawayhi. His work is exceptionally enticing, since he was the first to openly criticize the *Kitāb* (cf. Bernards 1990:35).

fa-ammā idā l-latī takūnu li-l-mufāḡa'ati fa-tilka taqa'u ba'dahā l-asmā'u ... wa-dālika qawluka haraḡtu fa-idā 'Abdullāhi qā'imun wa-in šī'ta qulta fa-idā 'Abdullāhi wa-taskutu wa-lā taḡtāḡu ilā ḡawābin (Bernards 1997:21-22)

“In case *idā* expresses surprise, a noun may follow (e.g. *haraḡtu fa-idā 'Abdullāhi qā'imun*). If you wish, you can also say *fa-idā 'Abdullāhi* (“lo, ‘Abdullāh!”). Then you should not say anything else, because no further clause is needed.”

Thus, according to al-Mubarrad, in case *idā* expresses surprise, not only a separate nominal clause (*ibtidā'*) may follow it, as stated by Sībawayhi, but also an independent noun. That is the *idā* of surprise does not necessarily need a complete clause. Similarly to Sībawayhi, he does not consider *idā* as a regent (*ʿāmil*).

In another work, the *Muqtaḍab*, al-Mubarrad is more lenient. First he mentions the use of *idā*, stipulating that in standard use the noun following the particle ought to be in the nominative case (*rafʿ*), but he also allows the accusative (*naṣb*) in the second part which he calls *ḡawāb*:

wa-taqūlu haraḡtu min ad-dāri fa-idā Zaydun fa-ma'nā idā hāhunā l-mufāḡa'atu fa-law qulta 'alā hādā haraḡtu fa-idā Zaydun qā'iman kāna ḡayyidan li-anna ma'nā fa-idā Zaydun ay fa-idā Zaydun qad wāfaqanī (al-Mubarrad, *Muqtaḍab* III, 274)

“Or you could say: ‘I went out from the house, and lo, Zayd was there!’. The *idā* particle here expresses surprise. If you then said: ‘I went out and lo, Zayd was standing there’ it would be proper, since ‘lo, Zayd was there’ means ‘lo, Zayd was encountering me by chance.’”

Başran grammarians after al-Mubarrad’s generation treat this question in more detail calling al-Mubarrad’s *ḡawāb* by a new term, *ḡāl*, and refusing the Kūfan view that *ḡāl* may be expressed by a definite noun (as we have seen it in al-Kisā’ī’s view in the *mas'ala zunbūriyya*)²².

4. Conclusions

The above analysis may have demonstrated two important facts:

1. Despite the apparent differences, the argumentation of the representatives of these grammatical schools displayed similar features. The basis of argumentation were in both cases *qiyās* and *samāʿ*. A consequence ensuing from this was that both parties implemented some kind of descriptive grammar. Yet a differ-

²² See the discussion in detail, among others, in Ibn al-Anbārī, *Inṣāf* II, 702-706.

ence between the two schools is tangible in this respect. The representatives of the school of Baṣra were more stringent. They limited the circle of trustworthy *rāwīs*. The *Kitāb* of Sībawayhi contains 1050 *šawāhid*, out of which there are only 50 without a source²³. This may attest two facts. The first is that even an anonymous verse can be ground for argumentation, the second is, that members of the school of Baṣra were extraordinarily strict in their choice of sources. The latter conclusion, in turn, points to two further observations. Firstly, that the members of the school of Baṣra were intent to stipulate the use of language. Secondly, as they were the ones writing the grammar books, they had to be pragmatic in their explanations. Based on the assumption that all human languages function according to productivity rules, a grammarian may formulate such examples that would become paradigms for an infinite number of existing sentences. This is further evidenced by Sībawayhi's occasional prescriptive remarks. His aim was not to stipulate the language of Bedouins but to teach his readers how to speak proper Arabic²⁴.

2. The verdict in the dispute was delivered by Bedouins who had thought that al-Kisā'ī was right. This shows that Bedouins were not only informants, but were also considered as authorities in grammatical questions²⁵. Despite the fact that there existed no unanimous Bedouin language, only a couple of dialects, grammarians tended to consider the opinion of Bedouin speakers in grammatical questions worthy of attention. The reason for this inclination was that Bedouins were not only familiar with the dialect and language of ancient poets, but – contrary to the urbanized population of the cities – they conducted a similar way of living to their ancestors. They shared the environment of pre-Islamic poets. When travelling to the cities, the Bedouins naturally established relations with the urbanized population, but this had apparently little effect on their language, and they kept using their own dialect. To grammarians this dialect naturally recalled a higher standard of language, since Bedouins still implemented those short-vowel endings, which – as for the urbanized population – had not even survived into the 2/8th century²⁶.

²³ Cf. Goldziher 1994:36.

²⁴ Cf. Levin 1994:204.

²⁵ Cf. Blau 1963:43-46.

²⁶ Cf. Levin 1994:213.

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