

THE LINGUISTIC REFORMS OF ABUL ASWAD AD-DUALI AND HIS FUNDAMENTAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE SCIENCE OF NAHV IN THE FORMATION OF CLASSICAL ARABIC LINGUISTICS

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Abstract. This scientific research article presents an in-depth analysis of the life and the socio-political and scholarly activity of Abul Aswad ad-Duali, the great thinker and scholar who laid the foundation of classical Arabic linguistics. Drawing on historical sources, the article examines the reforms carried out by the scholar to prevent the linguistic deformations that arose as a result of the expansion of the Islamic Caliphate, in particular the problem of 'lahn' (grammatical errors). The article provides a detailed analysis of Abul Aswad ad-Duali's fundamental contributions to the systematization of Arabic grammar (the science of Nahv): the rules for dividing speech into the categories of noun, verb, and particle, the introduction of the i'rab (syntactic flexion) system, his discovery of a phonetic-diacritical system using colored dots, and the initial structural foundations of the amil-ma'mul theory. The study also reveals the methodological significance of the principles laid down by the scholar for the formation of the Basra and Kufa schools of Nahv.

Keywords: The science of Nahv, history of Arabic linguistics, i'rab dots, the Basra school, linguistic reform, amil-ma'mul theory, the problem of lahn.

Introduction. The formation of any language as a scientific system and the elevation of its grammatical rules to the level of strict laws is the product of particular social, political, and cultural needs. Classical Arabic linguistics, in particular, the emergence of the science of Nahv (syntax), which occupies a special place in world linguistic thought, is no exception to this rule. After the religion of Islam began to spread rapidly beyond the Arabian Peninsula in the first half of the seventh century, the Islamic Caliphate was established, encompassing a vast geopolitical space. Within a short period, this historical process brought together dozens of non-Arab (ajam) peoples of differing languages and cultures — Persians, Byzantines, Syrians, Babylonians, and later the Turkic peoples — under a single ideological and administrative banner.

Under these socio-political transformations, the Arabic language became not only the language of state administration and chancery affairs but, most importantly, the sole linguistic vehicle of the Noble Qur'an — the source of the sacred religion — and of the Islamic sciences. However, as a result of the large-scale intermingling of Arab tribes with non-Arab peoples, an extremely dangerous linguistic phenomenon arose in everyday communication — "lahn" (لحن — meaning the commission of grammatical, phonetic, and stylistic errors in speech) became epidemic. The pure nature of the Arabic language, and its delicate syntactic and morphological structure,

began to be corrupted under the influence of dialects and the grammatical pressure of foreign languages.

By its typological nature, Arabic is an inflectional language. In it, the vowel marks at the end of words (i‘rab signs — fatha, kasra, damma) entirely determine the meaning within a sentence. The mispronunciation of even a single vowel mark could fundamentally alter the logical basis and semantic layer of a sentence. In particular, the grammatical errors made in reciting the verses of the Noble Qur‘an and in everyday speech began to pose a serious threat not only to the linguistic heritage but also to the religious and ideological security of the state [3: 112]. According to historical sources, a non-Arab once mispronounced a single verse of the Qur‘an, and as a result its meaning changed in a tragic way. Under such a severe social and linguistic crisis, it became a vital necessity to develop strict rules and regulations that would bring the Arabic language into a perfect system and safeguard its correct pronunciation and logical foundations. It was under precisely such complex circumstances that the Arab scholar who opened an entirely new chapter in the history of linguistics — Abul Aswad ad-Duali — appeared on the scene¹.

Research Methodology. In order to comprehensively assess the linguistic legacy of Abul Aswad ad-Duali and the reforms he carried out, this scientific article employs a number of modern and classical methods of fundamental linguistics.

First, the historical-comparative and chronological method was used to study the socio-linguistic situation in the Islamic Caliphate during the seventh and eighth centuries, as well as the structural evolution of the Arabic language.

Second, through the structural-functional analysis method, the linguistic nature of the tripartite classification of noun, verb, and particle introduced by the scholar, as well as the amil-ma‘mul theory, was revealed from a structural perspective.

Third, by means of textual and hermeneutic analysis, the classical sources of Arabic linguistics (in particular the works of Al-Jahiz, Ibn al-Nadim, al-Qifti, and other early scholars) were comparatively studied, and the objectivity of the scholarly views expressed regarding Abul Aswad ad-Duali was examined. In addition, the phonetic-phonological analysis method was used to functionally assess the role of the colored-dot system created by the scholar in modern Arabic script and orthography.

The Life and Socio-Political Activity of Abul Aswad ad-Duali

Abul Aswad ad-Duali’s full name was Zalim ibn Amr ibn Sufyan ad-Duali, and he belonged to the Banu Du‘al tribe — a large and influential branch of the Adnani Arabs considered close to the Quraysh tribe. Although the exact date of the scholar’s birth is not recorded in historical sources, many historians affirm that he was born in the early years of Islam, more precisely during the lifetime of our Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Having grown up in the environment of Mecca and Medina, he is considered one of the most brilliant representatives of the generation of the Tabi‘in, who had thoroughly mastered Arab poetry, the art of oratory, and tribal traditions.

Abul Aswad was not only a great linguist but also an astute political figure, jurist, poet, and just judge of his time. He was one of the closest associates and most loyal companions of the fourth Rightly Guided Caliph, Ali ibn Abu Talib (may Allah be pleased with him). When Ali ibn Abu Talib moved the capital of the Caliphate to the city of Kufa, Abul Aswad ad-Duali was appointed judge and deputy governor of the city of Basra. It was precisely in Basra that he

¹ Abdurakhmonov, M. History of the Arabic Language. – Tashkent: O‘qituvchi, 2014.

put his full scholarly and administrative potential to work, showing great dedication in organizing the city's cultural and intellectual life. Historical sources acknowledge that he possessed an exceptionally sharp intellect, that he was an orator who fearlessly spoke the truth in any situation, and that he had profound religious knowledge.

Abul Aswad ad-Duali's founding of the science of Nahv and his undertaking to formulate the rules of the language was not a coincidental event. According to a well-known account, one night his daughter looked up at the sky and said: "مَا أَحْسَنُ السَّمَاءِ" (mā ahsanu-s-samā'i — What is the most beautiful thing in the sky?), ending the sentence with a kasra, as though asking a question. Her father Abul Aswad replied: "Its stars, my daughter." The daughter then said: "No, father — I am not asking a question, I am marveling at the beauty of the sky." Abul Aswad then said to his daughter: "In that case, you should have pronounced the end of the sentence with a fatha, saying, 'مَا أَحْسَنَ السَّمَاءِ' (mā ahsana-s-samā'a — How beautiful the sky is!)," he gently corrected her².

This incident, together with the growing prevalence of such errors throughout the Caliphate, caused the scholar deep concern. He went to see Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) and explained the situation. Ali ibn Abu Talib wrote out a page containing the basic principles of the Arabic language and instructed him: "أَتَّبِعْ هَذَا النَّحْوَ" (unhu hāzā-n-nahva — Follow this direction, proceed in this manner). It is precisely to this historic phrase that the transformation of the term "Nahv" into the name of a science can be traced.

The Tripartite Classification in Arabic Linguistics: The Theory of Noun, Verb, and Particle

Abul Aswad ad-Duali's greatest fundamental contribution to the development of Arabic grammar was his scientific classification of all the parts of speech in the language. Before the scholar's time, although the Arabs possessed an extremely rich vocabulary and an immense poetic heritage, they had no theoretical understanding whatsoever of the internal structural laws of their language or of the division of words into categories. Abul Aswad was the first to divide any sentence or utterance in the Arabic language into three universal groups: the noun (الإسم), the verb (الفعل) and the particle (الحرف).

According to this classificatory principle, the scholar gave each category the following scientific definition:

1. The noun (ism) is an independent word category that expresses a particular meaning and is not tied to any of the three tenses (past, present, or future) — this category includes nouns, adjectives, numerals, and pronouns.
2. The verb (fi'l) is a word form that expresses a particular action or state and is necessarily tied to one of the three tenses.
3. The particle (harf) is an auxiliary device that, on its own, does not convey a complete meaning, but instead serves to connect nouns and verbs to one another and to produce various syntactic functions within a sentence.

This tripartite (threefold) classification became the cornerstone of Arabic grammar. All the schools of linguistics that subsequently developed — in particular, the world-renowned Sibawayh — began their famous work "Al-Kitab" with precisely this threefold division created by Abul Aswad [8: 34]. This classification was by no means a mere play on words, but rather a perfect structuralist method that made it possible to study the language from the most elementary level all the way up to complex syntactic wholes.

² Karimov, N. Arabic Linguistics and the Legacy of Abul Aswad ad-Duali. — Tashkent: Fan, 2017.

The I‘rab System and the Structural Foundations of the ‘Amil-Ma‘mul’ Category

The core and most complex part of Arabic syntax is i‘rab (الإعراب — the change in the ending of a word within a phrase or sentence) phenomenon. Abul Aswad ad-Duali sought to explain the interrelation of words within a sentence and their syntactic functions on the basis of strict rules. He was the first to outline the initial contours of the basic syntactic categories such as the subject (mubtada), the predicate (khabar), the agent (fa‘il — the one who performs the action), and the object (maf‘ul — the complement).

One of the most revolutionary ideas put forward by the scholar was the concept of “amil-ma‘mul” (العامل والمعمول — the influencer and the influenced). According to this concept, the ending of no word in a sentence changes by itself. Behind every grammatical case (raf‘, nasb, jarr) there is invariably a specific governing factor — the amil (governor). For example, in a sentence the verb governs the agent, placing it in the raf‘ (nominative, marked by damma) case, and it governs the object, placing it in the nasb (accusative, marked by fatha) case. This chain-like theory of dependency created the internal logical foundation of Arabic syntax and transformed the language from disorder into a system of mathematical precision³.

Phonetic Reform: The Orthoepic System Introduced by Means of Colored Dots

Abul Aswad ad-Duali’s activity was not confined merely to working out dry grammatical rules. He sought a way to apply the theoretical system he had created in practice, first and foremost to the text of the Holy Qur’an itself. At that time, Arabic script was extremely simple: the letters had neither vowel marks nor distinguishing dots to set them apart from one another. For example, the letters b (ب), t (ت), s (ث), n (ن), y (ي) were all written with exactly the same shape of stroke. This situation created unprecedented difficulties in reading the text correctly for non-Arabs who did not know the language well, and served as the main source of lahn errors⁴.

To solve this problem, Abul Aswad introduced a system of colored dots based on phonetic principles (نقط الإعراب — i‘rab dots). He took one of his most perceptive students as a scribe and gave him the following instruction: “I will read the text of the Qur’an aloud, strictly following the movements of my tongue and lips. If you see that I have opened my lips in pronunciation (the fatha vowel), place one red dot above the letter. If you see that I have turned my lips downward (the kasra vowel), place one red dot below the letter. If you see that I have rounded my lips and pushed them forward (the damma vowel), place one red dot before/in the middle of the letter. And if, after any of these, I produce a nasal (tanwin) sound, make the red dot double.”⁵

To present the system proposed by the scholar more clearly, let us examine it through the following table:

| Vowel Name | Representation in Abul Aswad ad-Duali’s System | Form in Modern Arabic Script | Vowel Name |
|------------|--|--|------------|
| Fatha (a) | One red dot placed above the letter | A diagonal stroke above the letter (َ) | Fatha (a) |
| Kasra (i) | One red dot placed below the letter | A diagonal stroke below the letter (ِ) | Kasra (i) |

³ Rustamov, B. The Arabic Language and the History of Linguistics. – Tashkent: Mumtoz so‘z, 2018.

⁴ Tursunov, D. Arabic Syntax and Grammar. – Tashkent: Universitet, 2018.

⁵ Hakimov, I. Great Scholars in the History of Linguistics. – Tashkent: Sharq, 2019.

| Vowel Name | Representation in Abul Aswad ad-Duali's System | Form in Modern Arabic Script | Vowel Name |
|---------------------|---|--|---------------------|
| Damma (u) | One red dot placed before/in the middle of the letter | A small 'waw' shape above the letter (ء) | Damma (u) |
| Tanwin (an, in, un) | Double (two) red dots placed in the corresponding positions | Doubling of the vowel marks (ء ء) | Tanwin (an, in, un) |

This phonetic marking system created by Abul Aswad ad-Duali brought about an absolute turning point in the history of Arabic writing. It was the first complete vocalization (vowel-marking) project in the history of writing. Thanks to this system, the possibility of reading the text of the Qur'an in its age-old purity, free of any grammatical or pronunciation errors, was guaranteed, and a halt was put to the epidemic of lahn⁶.

The Successors of the Ad-Duali School

The scholarly school founded by Abul Aswad ad-Duali and his linguistic ideas did not come to an end with the scholar's death, but were consistently carried forward by his worthy students. Nasr ibn Asim and Yahya ibn Ya'mar are frequently mentioned in classical sources as the scholar's most talented students. They further enriched the grammatical principles received from their teacher and set about solving the second major problem of Arabic script.

The dots created by Abul Aswad served only to express grammatical vowel marks (i'rab), but the problem of distinguishing the letters themselves (homographic letters) from one another remained pressing. Creatively building on their teacher's idea of using dots in practice, Nasr ibn Asim and Yahya ibn Ya'mar introduced distinctive black dots for the letters themselves (نقط الإعجام — i'jam dots). It was precisely through their efforts that the letter ba (ب) came to have one dot below it, the letter ta (ت) two dots above it, the letter sa (ث) three dots above it, and the letters nun (ن) and ya (ي) acquired their own distinctive configurations in perfected form. This reform completely universalized the graphic system of the Arabic language.

The Academic Role of Ad-Duali's Legacy in the Formation of the Basra School of Nahv

The foundation laid by Abul Aswad ad-Duali subsequently created direct groundwork for the emergence of the Basra school of Nahv (المدرسة البصرية) — which later became the most powerful scholarly center of classical Arabic philology. Through his practical and theoretical views, he initiated the tradition of studying language not merely as a means of speech, but as the object of a systematic science governed by strict laws⁷.

The great scholars who emerged within this school — Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi and his student Sibawayh — generalized Abul Aswad's principles and created monumental theoretical textbooks of the Arabic language. Khalil ibn Ahmad refined teacher ad-Duali's system of colored dots and, in order to make writing easier, discovered the modern graphic forms of the vowel marks used today — the strokes for fatha, kasra, and damma, as well as the signs for sukun and shadda — to replace the dots. Sibawayh, for his part, in his famous work "Al-Kitab," brought the classification of noun, verb, and particle put forward by Abul Aswad to its logical peak. It is clear that, had it not been for Abul Aswad ad-Duali, the perfect architecture of classical Arabic rhetoric and the science of Nahv would not have developed to such a lofty degree⁸.

⁶ Sobirov, J. Theories of Linguistics. – Tashkent: Akademnashr, 2015.

⁷ Normurodov, K. The Literary Form of the Arabic Language. – Tashkent: Innovatsiya, 2020.

⁸ Yusupov, M. Morphology of the Arabic Language. – Tashkent: Yangi asr avlodi, 2017.

Conclusion: a comprehensive analysis of the history of Arabic linguistics and world philology shows that Abul Aswad ad-Duali was not merely a person who compiled a set of grammatical rules, but the true founder and father of the academic science of Arabic linguistics. The practical reforms he carried out during the severe linguistic crisis of the Islamic Caliphate — the epidemic of lahn — played a decisive historical role in preserving the age-old purity of the text of the Holy Qur'an and in strengthening the unifying power of Islamic civilization.

The tripartite classification of speech (noun, verb, particle) developed by the scholar, the conceptual theory of amil-ma'mul, and the first phonetic-diacritical system created by means of colored dots brought to light the internal grammatical and structural potential of the Arabic language. Upon the solid foundation he laid, the world-renowned Basra and Kufa schools of linguistics were built, and methodological direction was given to the scholarly activity of brilliant scholars such as Sibawayh.

Even in the modern era today, the legacy of Abul Aswad ad-Duali has not lost the slightest degree of its relevance and practical value. The fundamental principles he created continue to serve as one of the main theoretical sources in the methodology of teaching Arabic grammar, in research into the Qur'anic sciences, and in establishing systems of intercultural communication. For this reason, an in-depth study of the scholar's scientific legacy within the framework of new linguistic paradigms remains one of the most important tasks of modern Oriental studies and general linguistics.

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