CLASSICAL NAHWU SCIENCE: THE THEORY OF I'RAB, 'AMIL, AND A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE BASRAH AND KUFA MODELS

ILMU NAHWU KLASIK: TEORI I'RAB, 'AMIL, DAN TINJAUAN KRITIS TERHADAP MODEL BASRAH DAN KUFAH

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Abstract

This research discusses the concepts of i'rab and 'amil in Arabic grammar and examines the methodological differences between the Basrah and Kufah schools of thought, which are the two main currents in the construction of nahwu science. I'rab is understood as the change in the vowel marks at the end of a word, influenced by the presence of 'amil and the word's position in the sentence structure, thus playing an important role in maintaining the meaning and syntactic order of the Arabic language. This research uses a qualitative approach with the library research method, exploring primary sources from classical scholars' works and secondary sources from modern studies. Data analysis was conducted using content and comparative analysis methods to identify the epistemological characteristics of both schools of thought. The study results indicate that the Basra school is prescriptive, rational, and selective regarding language sources, while the Kufa school is more descriptive, flexible, and open to diverse forms of speech, including those considered irregular. This difference in approach impacts how they both understand and formulate the rules of declension and grammatical factors. This study concludes that both schools made distinct yet complementary contributions to the development of Arabic grammar, with Basra playing a role in standardizing theory and Kufa playing a role in preserving linguistic reality. This finding confirms that understanding i'rab is not only related to grammatical aspects, but is also supported by historical and epistemological perspectives within the Arabic language scientific tradition.

Keywords : I'rab, 'amil, Basrah school, Kufah school, Arabic grammar.

Abstrak

Kegiatan studi lapangan merupakan bagian penting dari pembelajaran pengalaman dalam pendidikan guru. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menguji dampak kegiatan studi lapangan terhadap pengembangan modul ajar dan kompetensi guru. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif yang melibatkan mahasiswa pascasarjana dan guru yang berpartisipasi dalam program studi lapangan. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan analisis dokumen modul pembelajaran. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kegiatan studi lapangan berpengaruh positif terhadap pengembangan modul pembelajaran kontekstual dan meningkatkan kompetensi pedagogis, profesional, dan sosial guru. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa kegiatan studi lapangan mendukung pengembangan profesional berkelanjutan

dan meningkatkan praktik pengajaran. Temuan ini memberikan implikasi praktis bagi program pendidikan guru.

Kata Kunci : i'rab, 'amil, mazhab Basrah, mazhab Kufah, nahwu Arab.

1. INTRODUCTION

Arabic is one of the languages with the richest and most complex grammatical systems in the world. This uniqueness lies in the existence of *i'rab*, which refers to the changes in the ending of words that indicate their syntactic functions within a sentence. *I'rab* serves not only as a marker of grammatical roles but also as a means of preserving meaning; thus, errors in *i'rab* can have direct implications for semantic distortion. These changes do not occur without cause; rather, they are influenced by the presence of the *'amil* (governor), the triggering element that determines the status of a word within the sentence structure. Therefore, understanding *i'rab* and *'amil* constitutes the primary foundation for mastering the Arabic syntactic system and serves as a distinguishing feature between Arabic and other languages.

The urgency of discussing *i'rab* becomes even more apparent when linked to the preservation of the original Arabic language, particularly in the context of reciting the Qur'an. The widespread expansion of Islam into various regions with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds led to a tendency toward linguistic mixing (*ikhtilath al-lughah*), which potentially altered pronunciation and meaning. This condition ultimately gave birth to the movement for codifying *nahwu* (grammar) rules, which subsequently developed through two major schools of thought: Basra and Kufa. These two schools not only established the rules of *nahwu* but also formed the methodological basis for understanding the concepts of *i'rab* and *'amil* more systematically.

Despite both being primary references in classical Arabic linguistic studies, the Basra and Kufa schools possess different epistemological approaches. Basra tends to be prescriptive (*mi'yāri*), utilizing a rational and selective approach toward linguistic sources, thereby producing a standardized and rigorous system of rules. Meanwhile, Kufa is more descriptive (*wasfi*), remaining open to real linguistic phenomena as they existed among Arabic-speaking communities, including linguistic variations considered *syādzdz* (irregular) or uncommon by the Basra school. These differences have a broad impact on the formation of the theory of *i'rab*, the methods of *qiyas* (analogy), the selection of authoritative sources, and the formulation of *nahwu* rules that developed within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

This article is structured to outline the basic concepts of *i'rab* and *'amil* while critically examining the differences in thought between the Basra and Kufa schools. A comparative approach is used to highlight their points of convergence and divergence, as well as how these epistemological constructions influenced the development of *nahwu* until the contemporary era. Through an in-depth study of these two schools, it is expected that readers will gain a more complete understanding of the principles of *i'rab*, not only theoretically but also within the historical context of Arabic linguistic intellectual development.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach utilizing library research (Nugraha, 2025). This approach was selected because the object of study is conceptual and historical in nature—specifically the concepts of i'rab and 'amil from the perspectives of the Basra and Kufa schools—derived from both classical and contemporary literature. The research data were obtained from classical nahwu texts, such as the works of Sibawayh, Al-Khalil bin Ahmad, and scholars of the Basra and Kufa schools, as well as modern literature examining the epistemological development of Arabic linguistics.

The data collection technique was conducted through a documentation process of relevant primary and secondary texts. Primary sources include classical nahwu books and works by scholars of the Basra and Kufa schools, while secondary sources consist of academic books, scientific journals, and previous research discussing the methodologies of both schools in understanding i'rab and 'amil. This data collection involved reading, reviewing, note-taking, and classifying information based on the research themes.

The data analysis techniques utilize content analysis and comparative analysis. Content analysis is used to understand the concepts of i'rab and 'amil along with the methodological foundations employed by both schools. Meanwhile, comparative analysis is applied to identify the similarities and differences in the nahwu paradigms between the Basra and Kufa schools, covering epistemology, authoritative sources, and the application of rules. The results of the analysis are presented in a descriptive-analytical manner to reach objective and argumentative conclusions.

This methodology was chosen to ensure the study is not merely descriptive but also capable of presenting the scientific framework that illustrates the epistemological positions of both schools in the construction of nahwu. Thus, this research is not only historical-informative but also evaluative in mapping its relevance to contemporary Arabic linguistic studies..

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION
a. I'rab
 1) Definition of I'rab

I'rab is the change influenced by an 'amil (governor), or the change at the end of a word caused by a governor, which categorizes the word into rafa' (nominative), nashab (accusative), jar (genitive), or jazm (jussive) depending on the form of the 'amil affecting it (Al Ghalayaini, 1983: 18). I'rab refers to the change in the sound or final vowel (harakat) of a word resulting from its position within a sentence or phrase structure, or due to the preceding functional words (al-'awamil) (Munip, 2008: 42).

A declinable ism (noun) is a noun that undergoes changes in its final vowel according to its position in the sentence. Meanwhile, the declinable fi'il (verb) is the fi'il mudhari' (present/future tense verb) that is not directly attached to the nun niswah (feminine plural marker) or nun taukid (emphasis marker) (Ni'mah, n.d.: 24 & 137). For example, the word محمّد

(Muhammadun) can change to محمدًا (Muhammadan) or محمدٍ (Muhammadin), depending on its position in the sentence structure.

2) Types of I'rab

Words in Arabic (kalimat) are divided into three types: ism (noun), fi'il (verb), and harf (particle). Not all words are subject to i'rab. In Arabic, only two types of words relate to i'rab: ism and fi'il. The harf is completely unrelated to i'rab because it is not affected by an 'amil and holds no independent syntactic position.

Verbs have three types of i'rab: rafa', nashab, and jazm. Nouns also have three types: rafa', nashab, and jar (Al Ghalayaini, 1983: 19-20). This indicates that a verb can never be in the jar state, and a noun can never be in the jazm state. Overall, there are four categories of i'rab in Arabic: rafa', nashab, jar, and jazm.

3) Signs of I'rab

I'rab employs a unique system of signs. Broadly, these signs are divided into two categories: letters (huruf) and vowels (harakat/syakal). The signs using letters consist of four: alif (ا), nun (ن), waw (و), and ya (ي). The signs using vowels consist of three primary markers: dhammah (ُ), fathah (َ), and kasrah (ِ) (Ibid: 20), along with sukun (ْ) (Ni'mah: 141).

b. The Basra School Basra

Currently located in Iraq, was the birthplace of Arabic linguistic development. In the mid-1st century AH, Muslim scholars realized that as Islam expanded, the Arabic language became vulnerable to losing its authenticity due to mixing with non-Arabs (ikhtilath). Basra became the center for transforming Arabic linguistics from abstract thought (adzhân) into written codification (shuwarî) (Ramadhan, 2020).

According to Al-Thanthowi (1997), the development of nahwu is divided into four phases: 1) The Establishment Phase (Basra); 2) The Growth Phase (Basra and Kufa); 3) The Perfection Phase (Basra and Kufa); and 4) The Simplification and Codification Phase (Baghdad, Andalusia, Egypt, and Levant).

The Basra School is characterized by its rational and rigorous approach. Factors contributing to its dominance include its geographic location as a trade hub and the presence of the "al-Mirbad" market, a gathering place for poets and linguists. In terms of methodology, Basra utilized Al-Qur'an as a reference but was very selective. They occasionally labeled certain Qur'anic recitations (qira'at) as "errors" if they did not align with their established rational rules of nahwu. For instance, they criticized the recitation of Abdullah bin Amir regarding Surah Al-An'am: 137 because it separated the mudhaf from its mudhaf ilaih (Yahya et al., 2021).

c. The Kufa

School According to Syauqi Dhaif, the Kufa School possesses distinct characteristics shaped largely by the ideas of Al-Farra'. Its traits can be summarized into three points: openness to irregular (syadz) linguistic narrations, flexibility in analogy (qiyas), and the introduction of new grammatical terminology (Dhaif, n.d.: 158).

First, Kufa was inclusive regarding linguistic sources. They did not limit themselves to pure (fushah) dialects but accepted rare and irregular linguistic phenomena (syadz). While Basra only accepted data from specific Bedouin tribes (Najd, Hijaz, Tihamah), Kufa accepted the speech of urbanized Arabs in Iraq, which Basra viewed as "contaminated" by Persian and Indian influences.

Second, Kufa was more flexible in applying qiyas (analogy). They could derive a general rule from a single rare poem or an irregular linguistic occurrence. In contrast, Basra required syawahid (textual evidence) to be widespread and standardized.

Third, the Kufa School adopted a descriptive approach, explaining linguistic phenomena as they existed in reality. This contrasts with Basra's prescriptive or mi'yari approach, which was more philosophical and logical—often attributed to the influence of Greek philosophy. In summary, the Kufa School was more open and pragmatic, whereas the Basra School was stricter and more standard-oriented in formulating Arabic grammar rules.

4. CONCLUSION

I'rab in the Arabic language refers to the changes in vowels or sounds at the end of a word caused by the presence of an 'amil (governor) and the word's position within a sentence structure. These changes only apply to nouns (ism) and the imperfect verb (fi'il mudhari'), while particles (harf) do not undergo i'rab. Broadly, the forms of i'rab are divided into rafa' (nominative), nashab (accusative), jar (genitive), and jazm (jussive), with markers consisting of both letters and vowels. This demonstrates that i'rab is an essential grammatical system that determines the syntactic function of a word in an Arabic sentence.

In the development of nahwu (grammar), the Basra School emerged as a pioneer in the standardization of rules. Its characteristics are marked by a rational approach, strict selection of linguistic sources, and an emphasis on qiyas (analogy) using pure linguistic data from Bedouin Arabic speakers. The rules established by this school are oriented toward a normative-prescriptive (mi'yari) approach, resulting in a systematic and logical grammatical standard.

In contrast, the Kufa School was more flexible and descriptive in responding to linguistic phenomena. They accepted irregular (syadz) speech, variations in Qur'anic recitations (qiraat), and a broader range of linguistic sources, including those from urban Arabic communities. This makes the Kufan approach more realistic and practical in interpreting linguistic developments.

Consequently, the fundamental difference between these two schools lies in their epistemological paradigms: Basra focuses on the purity of data and the rationalization of rules, while Kufa emphasizes openness to diverse linguistic usage. Together, they complement each other in forming a comprehensive framework of Arabic nahwu that remains relevant to this day.

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