Approaches to the Arabic Sentence: A Diachronic Study
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This study explores the approaches to the Arabic sentence. It discusses (1) the logical definitions of sentence, (2) the linguistic definitions of sentence, (3) Attitudes of Arab grammarians towards “utterance” and “sentence”, and (4) Sentence classes. Various views, opinions and definitions put forward by both early and modern Arab grammarians have been investigated. It is hoped that this study will be of some theoretical value to those concerned with the linguistic studies.

1. Logical definitions of the Arabic Sentence

Early Arab grammarians inclined to define “Sentence” on a logical basis in terms of "Predication" and "meaningfulness". Even modern Arab grammarians have exhibited a tendency to define sentence in a similar way.

Predication

Early Arab grammarians define the sentence as to consist of three logical elements:
1. "the Subject"
2. "the Predicate"
3. "Predication"

It is worth mentioning that Siibawayhi (1316 A.H, vol 1:7) defines the notion of predication as:
وصفت الفاعلية جزئية تعمل على ربط المسمى بالمسمى الاليه" "The predication consists of the subject and the predicate. One of which cannot dispense with the other. The speaker must use both.”

In this respect, AL-Radhi (1985, vol. 1:8) presents the following definition of the “Predication”:
"أحد أجزاء الكلام هو الحكم أي الاستداد الذي هو رابطة ولا بد له من طريقين المسمى والمسمى الاليه" "The predication is one part of speech which is considered to be a connector between two ends: the subject and the predicate.”

It is necessary to shed light on some definitions of the predication put forward by some modern Arab grammarians. AL-Makhzumi (1964:31), for instance, states that:
"الإسناد عملية ذهنية تعمل على ربط المسمى بالمسمى الاليه" "The predication is a mental process by which the subject and the predicate are linked up."

Tahhaan, also, deals with the notion of predication by describing it as:
"العلاقة الضمنية التي تربط المسمى بالمسمى الاليه" "The implicit relation that connects the subject with the predicate.”

It is obvious that the significance of the predication stems from the fact that it has the function of linking up the subject with the predicate in order to form a meaningful sentence. AL-Zamakhshari touches upon this point by saying:
An utterance consists of two words. One of them is predicated on the other. This can only be realized by two nouns or by a verb and a noun. This is called a sentence.

It may be appropriate to mention that, for the purpose of this study, the term "جملة" is equivalent to "Sentence", whereas the terms "كلام" and "لفظ" are equivalent to "Utterance".

"Meaningfulness"

Meaningfulness "الإفادة" is considered to be another important factor that has to be taken into account when the Arabic sentence is studied. The Arabic sentence is widely defined by both early and modern Arab grammarians according to the concept of meaningfulness.

Meaningfulness, in fact, means that a sentence can stand alone to express a full meaning. Ibn Jinni, thus, reasons that:

(Ibn Jinni,1988,vol.1:26)

“As for the sentence, it is every meaningful utterance independent by itself.”

Touching on the same subject, Ibn Hishaam states that:

(Ibn Hishaam,1981:35)

“The meaningful utterance is called an utterance and a sentence. By meaningful we mean that at the end of which the meaning is complete.”

Furthermore, Ibn Ya’iish (vol.I:21) argues that:

“Speech is the meaningful sentences”

many similar definitions are put forward by modern Arab grammarians. A typical definition is given by Hasan:

(Hasan,1971,vol.1:15)

“The utterance or the sentence is what consists of two or more words and has a comprehensible and an independent meaning.”

It is, however, relevant at this point to mention here that many modern Arab grammarians have been influenced by the logical definitions put forward by foreign linguists who regard the sentence as a minimum unit of speech. In this respect, Siemon Potter (1957:104) points out that “The sentence is the chief unit of speech. It may be defined quite simply as a minimum complete utterance.”

It is to be noted that Potter’s definition quoted above is almost echoed by Al-Makhzumi who says:

1 "كلام" may be rendered into English by (Speech) especially when it denotes a general sense of speech.
Aniis, also, defines the sentence in a similar way by saying that

(Aniis, 1966:260-261)

"The sentence .. is the least possible utterance. It provides the listener with a meaning independent by itself."

It might be argued that the same idea could be observed in Tahhaan’s definition which states

(Tahhaan, 1972:44)

"The sentence is the minimal image of utterance or the smallest unit of writing. It demonstrates that a mental process has been formed in the mind of the speaker who attempts to transfer it, according to certain rules and common manners, to the listener’s mind."

In view of the definitions stated above, it is not difficult to stress the fact that modern Arab grammarians strive to define the “Sentence” on a logical basis.

2. Linguistic Definitions of the Arabic Sentence

In the light of the previous survey, it could be concluded that Arab grammarians, in general, have not dealt with “Sentence” from a linguistic point of view. Apparently, their efforts have focused on the Arabic sentence in terms of “Predication” and “meaningfulness.”

Nevertheless, one could find that some linguistic aspects have been reflected in the definitions made by some Arab grammarians:

(Ibn Hishaam, 1985, vol.2:490)

“...The sentence is made up of a verb and a subject, and the topic (or the inchoative, according to wright) and the comment (or the enunciative or announcement, according to wright.)”

(Al-Zamakhshari, 1323 A.H.:6)

“The utterance consists of two words. One of them is predicated on the other. This can only be realized by two nouns or by a verb or a noun. This is called a sentence.”
The viewpoints just discussed reveal the fact that the structural properties of the Arabic sentence have not been neglected but it could be said that the logical aspects of the sentence have been given more attention.

It is worth mentioning that contemporary linguistic studies have contributed widely to defining the concept of the Arabic sentence by relying on two trends: the first trend is influenced by European linguistic studies, whereas the second is a continuation of the approaches followed by traditional Arab grammarians in the linguistic field with an attempt to develop them (Al-Muttalibi, 1981:29).

3. Attitudes of Arab Grammarians Towards “Utterance” and “Sentence”

It is interesting to review the opinions put forward by many Arab grammarians related to these two concepts. Their views, in this connection, are commonly classified into two trends: the first holds the view that the “utterance” and the “sentence” are equivalents, i.e. both of them are used to refer to the same thing. This attitude, in fact, is adopted by a group of early Arab grammarians such as Ibn Jinni who points out that:

"الكلام كل فت فت مفتد من 하나 و هو الذي يسبح التحويرون الدمل"  

"Speech is every independent and meaningful utterance. It is called sentences by the grammarians."

He, also, presents the following definition:

"أما الجملة فهي كل كلام مفيد مستقل بنفسه"  
(Ibn Jinni, 1988: 26)

"As for the sentence, it is every meaningful utterance independent by itself"

There are also other supporters of the same view. Ibn Ya’iish, one of these supporters, argues that:

"الكلام عباره عن الجمل المفيدة"  
(Ibn Ya’iish, vol.1:21)

"Speech is the meaningful sentences"

Hasan, a modern Arab grammarians, reflects a similar point of view. His definition echoes the previous ones:

"الكلام أو الجملة هو ما يتزكر من كلمتين أو أكثر و له معنى مفيد مستقل"  
(Hasan, 1971, vol.1:15)

"The utterance or the sentence is what consists of two or more words and has a comprehensible and an independent meaning"

The second group includes those who believe that the utterance and the sentence are not equivalents. Ibn Hishaam throws light on the difference between these two concepts by stating that:

"إن الفظ المفيد يسمي كلاما و جملة و يتزكر بالكلمتين ما يحسن السكوت عليه. و إن الجملة أعم من الكلام، فكل كلام جملة و لا يتعكس الال ترى أن نحو "قام زيد" من قولك "إن قام زيد قام عمر" يسمي جملة و لا يسمي كلاما لأنه لا يحسن السكوت عليه و كذا الفظ في جملة الجواب."  
(Ibn Hishaam, 1981:35)

"The meaningful utterance is called “utterance” and “sentence”. By “meaningful” we mean that at the end of which the meaning is complete. The sentence is more general than the speech where every
speech is a sentence whereas the contrary is not true, e.g. “Zaid stands up” in “If Zaid stands up, Omer will stand up” is called a sentence but not a speech because its meaning is incomplete. The same is true in regard to the result of the conditional sentence.”

Ibn Hishaam further says:

"الكلام هو القول المفيد بالقصد، والمراد بالعفاف ما ذُل على معنى يحسن السكرت عليه و"جملة عبارة عن الفعل وفاعله والمبتدأ وخبره، وما كان بمثلة أحدثه، وثناه يظهر أنهما ليسا مترادفين كما يتوهم كثير من الناس."

(Ibn Hishaam, 1985, vol.2:490)

"Utterance is coupling the meaningful with the intention. The meaningful is what has a complete meaning and the sentence consists of the verb and the subject and the topic and its comment or what may occupy the position of one of them. Thus, it seems that the two are apparently not synonymous as many may think."

A similar view is exhibited by Al-Juraani. He argues that:

"الجملة عبارة عن مركب من كلمتين أسمحت إحداهما إلى الأخرى، سواء أفكار كوك وزيد قام أو لم يمد كوك (أن تكرمني) فإنه جملة لا تفيد إلا بعد مجيء جوابه فتكون الجملة أهم من الكلام مطلقاً."

(Al-Juranee, 1971:42)

"The sentence is a structure that consists of two words. One of them is predicated on the other, whether this structure is meaningful as in “Zaid is standing up” or not as in “If you reward me” which is an incomplete sentence until it has the result of the condition. Thus, the sentence is absolutely more general than the speech."

In this respect, a significant conclusion can be drawn from Al-Juraani’s definition: the “sentence” is used by him to cover the two English notions of “sentence” and “clause”. The latter is defined in English syntax as follows: “A clause is a group of words which include a finite verb, is grammatically complete and self-contained, but does not by itself make complete sense” (Eckersley, 1980:320).

4. Sentence Classes

It is an established fact that the Arabic sentence has divided into two major types: (1) the verbal sentence (الجملة الاسمية) and (2) the nominal sentence (الجملة الفعلية). The verbal sentence, in fact, is characterized by being introduced by a verb whereas the nominal is normally introduced by a noun. In this connection, it is convenient to bring into focus what has been mentioned by Ibn Hishaam:

"الاسمية هي التي صدرها اسم كـ "زيد قام" ... و الفعلية هي التي صدرها فعل "قام زيد"...

(Ibn Hishaam, 1985, vol.2:492)

"The nominal sentence is introduced by a noun such as “lit., Zaid is standing up”... and the verbal sentence is introduced by a verb such as “lit., Stood up Zaid”.


It is to be noted that for the purpose of determining the type of sentence, the early Arab grammarians have paid more attention to the subject المندAleٍى than to the predicate
Ibn Hishaam’s abovementioned definition can be regarded as typical of this.

On the other hand, a group of modern grammarians have taken the predicate as a criterion of determining the kind of sentence. The supporters of this view believe that in a verbal sentence, the predicate must be a verb apart from its position within a sentence. (see Al-Makhzumi, 1964:46-1986:90). Al-Makhzumi, for instance, sees that “the introduction of the subject does not change the nature of the sentence because it is introduced for the purpose of bringing it into focus” (Al-Makhzumi,1964:42, see Al-Bayaati,1983:65). Accordingly, قام زيد (lit., Stood up Zaid) or زيد قام (lit., Zaid stood up) are said to be two verbal sentences since the predicate, in both sentences, is a verb. Therefore, the subject is preposed before the predicate in زيد قام (Zaid stood up) without radically changing the meaning of the sentence.

It is worthmentioning that Tahhaan has dealt with this issue, arguing that “Since a sentence is a predicative process, it is useless to divide it into a verbal sentence and a nominal one… Whether a sentence begins with a verb or a noun, it is, in both cases, a predicative process. Thus, there is no difference between جلس الولد (lit., Sat down the boy) or جلس الولد (lit., the boy sat down)” (Tahhaan,1972:55). The difference lies, in fact, in focus.

It may be appropriate at this point to deal with the Arabic sentence from a transformational point of view. Before discussing the subject, it is relevant to review some definitions in regard to the term “Transformation”. Chomsky, for instance, defines it as “a rule that operates on a given string… with a given constituent structure and converts it into a new string with a new derived constituent structure” (Chomsky,1957:44). It is also defined as “a rule that states what type of constituent is moved, where it is moved from, and where it is moved to.” (Culicover,1976:28).

Furthermore, syntactic rules are considered to be one of two types of rules by which the underlying structure and the surface structure are coupled. “Phrase structure rules, as Bornstein points out, generate the sentences that are found in the deep structure. Transformational rules change around these sentences, making them into surface structures” (Bornstein,1977:37). Transformational rules may be obligatory or optional. An obligatory T-rule derives a syntactic structure whose underlying structure is syntactically ill-formed (and perhaps semantically unacceptable)… An optional T-rule, on the other hand, derives a syntactic structure whose underlying structure is well-formed (Al-Najjar,1990:52-53). According to this approach, the sentence زيد قام will be an optionally transformed structure which is derived from its well-formed basis (underlying) counterpart قام زيد, assuming that the basic Arabic word order is VS(O). thus, it is clear that according to optional or obligatory rules, some syntactic constituents are added, deleted or substituted.

As far as the surface structure is concerned, Arabic has two types of sentences:

a. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>Vt</th>
<th>NP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S→</td>
<td>Vt</td>
<td>NP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NP</td>
<td>VP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

 جاء الرجل (the man came)

اشرى الرجل بيئا (the man bought a house)

b. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S</th>
<th>NP</th>
<th>AdjP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S→</td>
<td>NP</td>
<td>PP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NP</td>
<td>VP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

 الجو بارد (the weather is cold)

الولد ذكي (the boy is clever)

الرجل في الدار (the man is in the house)
An important conclusion to be drawn from the above mentioned types reveals
the fact that the types of Arabic sentences are determined with regard to the
transformational processes which operate on the underlying structures. In other
words, it can be said that most sentences, in Arabic, are transformed from the
basic word order VS(O). the following examples will illustrate:

a. 
فأححمد جاء
2 1
b. 
أحمد جاء
1 2

a. 
سافر الرجل
1 2
b. 
الرجل سافر
2 1

a. 
اشترى الرجل أبا
3 2 1
b. 
الرجل اشترى أبا
3 1 2

Thus, the sentences (b) are said to be transformed from (a) by applying optional T-
rules to their underlying structures.

Seen from the viewpoints of traditional Arab grammarians, Arabic has two types of
generative rules: the first is used for generating a sentence containing a finite verb
whereas the second generates a sentence without a finite verb (the so-called equational
sentence) like

"This is Zaid" and "Iron is metal" but this verb is gradually disappeared (see Al-Makhzuuni, 1964:31-32, 1986:133). It is interesting to
mention that this question has been handled by Zakariyya from a transformational
point of view. He points out that an attention is to be paid to a type of the Arabic
sentences which do not contain a verb or an adjective in the surface structure. These
sentences, as other types of sentences, are complete in meaning such as:

شوارع بقع سوداء

أنا جثة

هذا زمن آخر

الرجل في الدار

الناس في سهرة

(Zakariyya, 1983:107-108)

he goes on to say that the analysis of this kind of sentences requires applying a
transformational rule to delete the verb because this verb disappears in the surface
structure of these sentences. This verb contains a semantic marker (+ Present)[

(1bid:108). For more illustration, he puts forward the following example:
it is worth mentioning that in such a kind of sentences, the equivalent of verb “to be” in its present form is deleted as a result of applying an optional T-rule whereas the past and the future form of the verb “to be” appear in the surface structure, the following examples will illustrate:

a. (past)

the project was successful

b. (present)

the project is successful

c. (future)

the project will be successful

To conclude, Arabic sentences have one generative rule in their underlying structures. This rule can be written as follows:

S → V NP NP

AdjP

PP
CONCLUSIONS

In the light of this study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. It has been noticed that early Arab grammarians inclined to define "sentence" on a logical basis. Even modern Arab grammarians have exhibited a similar tendency.
2. It can be concluded that Arab grammarians, in general, have not dealt with "sentence" from a linguistic point of view. Nevertheless, one could find that some linguistic aspects have been reflected in the definitions made by some Arab grammarians.
3. From a transformational point of view, it can be said that most sentences, in Arabic, are transformed from the basic word order VS(O).
4. An attempt has been made in this study to prove by empirical evidence that the Arabic sentence has one generative rule in its underlying structure.
LIST OF SYMBOLS AND TRANSLITERATION

-邸 = ρ = t = ط
- ب = b
- ت = t
- ث = th = ظ
- ج = J
- ح = h
- خ = kh
- د = d
- ذ = th
- ر = r
- ز = z
- س = s
- ش = sh
- ص = s
- Short Vowels
  - a = فتحة
  - i = كسرة
  - u = ضمة
- Long Vowels
  - aa = أ
  - ii = ي
  - uu = و
- ض = dh
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