How Have the Descriptions of taḥḏīr Changed?

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1 Speech Acts and taḥḏīr

Austin (1962) divides utterances into two categories: ‘constative’ utterances, which express facts or situations, and ‘performative’ utterances, which themselves come into effect as acts. Performative utterances are furthermore divided into two kinds: ‘explicit’ performatives and ‘primary’ performatives, in which the performative function is not explicit, such as ‘Fire!’, ‘Hello!’, and so on.

The speech acts themselves have three subdivisions (Austin 1962:91–93, 101–107): i. locutionary acts; ii. illocutionary acts; and iii. perlocutionary acts. The locutionary act is the act of uttering a certain language expression. The illocutionary act is an act in another dimension fulfilled based on the locutionary act in saying something. The perlocutionary act is the act of producing utterance effects through the illocutionary act by saying something. It is the illocutionary act that usually becomes the subject of research on speech acts, so illocutionary acts are commonly called ‘speech acts’. Being a mediated locutionary act, the illocutionary act brings ‘illocutionary force’, such as imperative, promise, request, question, reporting, and so on.

In the Arabic grammatical tradition there is no direct parallel with Austin’s theory, but several notions come close to the framework introduced by Austin. In this connection, the classification of speech into ḥabar and ʾinšā‘ should be mentioned. Ibn Hišām (d. 761/1360) says that “it [kalām ‘speech’] is ḥabar, ṭalab, and ʾinšā‘” (Šuḏūr 31). He explains that ḥabar encompasses sentences such as affirmative sentences and negative sentences, that is, sentences which can be determined to be true or false. Imperative, prohibitive, and interrogative sentences, whose meaning is not truth-conditional and is derived from the utterance with a delay, are ṭalab. In contrast, ʾinšā‘ encompasses sentences like ʾanta ḥurr ‘You are free’, said to a slave, or qabīltu hāḏā l-nikāḥ ‘I have accepted

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this marriage' to a person who proposed to you, whose meaning and utterance co-exist (Šuḏūr 32).

Ibn Hišām says that some grammarians agree with a tripartite division of speech in this way, but in fact speech is divided into only two, that is, ḥabar and 'inšā', as the content of qum 'stand up!' happens at the time of its utterance and is not affected by any delay. In this type of speech, which is called 'inšā', the utterance means that the meaning has been completed (Šuḏūr 32). Ḥabar may be regarded as a constative utterance, and 'inšā' as a performative utterance in terms of Austin's (1962) definition. Larcher (2007:358) points out that 'inšā' consists of two subdivisions, talabī (jussive utterance) and 'iqā'ī (performative utterance) according to al-Kafawi's al-Kullīyāt. He also offers as a hypothesis that 'inšā' had its roots in fiqh, then it broadened its scope toward the jussive utterances, which include orders ('amr) and prohibitions (nahy). Eventually, Ibn al-Ḥājib (d. 646/1249) expanded the category of 'inšā' from the legal to the linguistic sciences (2007:359).

The present paper aims to illustrate the changing descriptions of speech acts in Arabic grammar, taking tahrīr ‘warning’ as an example. Actually, tahrīr is not a term used frequently in Arabic grammar. Sibawayhi, for example, used this term only twice in his Kitāb (1, 253 and 273). Nonetheless, the term tahrīr has come down in the Arabic grammatical tradition, at least on a small scale. Ikeda (1970:41) points out that grammarians in the field of Arabic grammar began to focus their attention on editing instructional textbooks in the 5th/11th century; therefore, there must have been some changes in the descriptions of Arabic grammar at that time. This era must be investigated to see how the description of tahrīr changed in the Arabic grammatical tradition.

The notion of tahrīr fits into Austin’s primary performatives. Concerning accusatives of exclamation, Reckendorf (1921:108) says that an exclamation about or to somebody is called nidā‘ ‘calling’ like tahrīr ‘warning’ and 'iğrā‘ ‘rebellious encouragement’. Jumla ‘inšā‘yya means an exclamatory sentence, and on the other hand, a declarative sentence is called jumla ‘iḥbā‘yya or

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1 Al-Farrā’ (d. 207/822) uses the term tahrīr only once in his Ma‘ānī (111, 268). He states that tahrīr is accusative, quoting a Qur’ānic verse fa-qāla la-hum rasūlu llāhi nāqata llāhi ‘and the messenger of Allah said to them “Allah's she-camel”’ (Q. 91/13), where nāqata ‘she-camel’ with an accusative ending has the meaning of tahrīr. However, he also adds examples of tahrīr with a nominative ending, such as hāḍā l-‘aduwwu hāḍā l-‘aduwwu ‘this enemy, this enemy’ and hāḍā l-laylu fa-rtaḥilū ‘This night and go away’ (111, 268 f.).

2 Firanescu (2009) deals with the relationship between modern speech act theory and traditional Arabic grammar.