Origin and Conceptual Evolution of the Term *taḥšīṣ* in Arabic Grammar

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1 Introduction: *Taḥšīṣ*, a Forgotten Term?

The third volume of *The foundations of Arabic linguistics*, subtitled *The development of a tradition: Continuity and change*, constitutes an appropriate framework for showing that not everything is said with the *Kitāb* of Sibawayhi (d. 180/796?). It is in this context that I undertake the archeology of the technical term *taḥšīṣ*, commonly rendered as ‘particularization’, whose history and evolution within the Arabic grammatical tradition I trace. Ibn al-Ḥājib (d. 646/1249) first drew my attention to this category, of which I had never heard in my Arabic studies.

*Taḥšīṣ* remains a little-known term. First of all, it is not treated as a separate category in the Classical Arabic grammars,\(^1\) which do not reserve a special chapter to it. Moreover, the term is almost completely absent from Orientalist grammars, which simply ignore it as such (Silvestre de Sacy 1831; Forbes 1863; Palmer 1874; Socin 1885; Donat Vernier 1891; Howell 1911; Fleisch 1961, 1979; Blachère and Gaufroy-Demombynes 1975). Finally, contrary to expectation, neither the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, nor the *Encyclopedia of Arabic language and linguistics* devote an entry to *taḥšīṣ*.

When the term or the concept denoted by it are mentioned, it is usually in passing. Thus, in the *Encyclopedia of Arabic language and linguistics*, Hoyt (2009:316b) mentions the phenomenon in the entry “Specificity”, but does not give its name, while the entry “*ʾIḍāfa*” incidentally mentions the phenomenon by citing *iḫtiṣāṣ* (cf. Ryding and Versteegh 2007:295b). Likewise, in the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* *taḥšīṣ* is quoted incidentally in the entries

\(^*\) In quotes, I keep the author’s transliteration. I thank Michael Carter and Jean Druel for their remarks, which helped me to improve this article.

\(^1\) Note also that the root *ḥ-ṣ-ṣ* is only used four times in the Qur’an, twice for *yaḥuṣṣuḥu bihi* (2/105; 3/74), once for *ḥāṣṣatan* (8/25) and once for *ḥaṣṣatun* (59/9) (cf. ʿAbd al-Baqi 1997:297).

By placing this work in the context of continuity and change, I have three objectives: i. to conduct an archeological search of the term taḫṣīṣ in Arabic grammar; ii. to trace the evolution of its conceptual content; iii. to identify its origin. First, however, we need to define the notion of taḫṣīṣ, which, given the scattered nature of the information, can only be done by a combination of sources.

2 Tahṣīṣ: First Definition

2.1 Lexical Family and Meaning of ʾḥ-ṣ-ṣ

The term taḫṣīṣ is a verbal noun (maṣdar) of what is called in the Orientalist tradition Form II faʿala/yufaʿilu from the root ḥ-ṣ-ṣ. Form I of this verb, ḥaṣṣa/yahuṣṣu means ‘to distinguish, to specify; to apply in particular to, to be characteristic of’. Of this basic verb, two derivations are frequently used, the active participle ḥāṣṣ and the passive participle maḥṣūṣ. As for the first, it should be understood either as ‘peculiar, specific’, opposed to ʿāmm ‘general’, or as ‘particularizing; someone who/something which particularizes’, opposed to maḥṣūṣ ‘someone/something particularized, specific, specified’. The latter in turn is well known in Arabic grammar, especially to designate the specific object of praise or blame in structures involving ‘afʿāl al-madḥ wa-l-ḏamm, the praised or blamed object being the maḥṣūṣ bi-l-madḥ ʾaw bi-l-ḏamm.

From this verb base some augmented stems are derived: the monotransitive Form II ḥaṣṣaṣahu ‘to particularize, to specify’, which is the factitive of Form I and whose maṣdar is taḫṣīṣ; a bi-transitive Form VIII, direct and prepositional, ḵṭṣṣahu bihi ‘to dedicate s.th. to s.o., to confer distinction upon s.o. by s.th.; of equivalent meaning with ḥṭṣṣahu lahu; a monoprepositional ḥṭṣṣa bihi ‘to be peculiar to; to concern, regard s.th.; to be distinguished, marked by’; a monotransitive ḥṭṣṣahu ‘to take exclusive possession of’ with the meaning of ‘to characterize s.th.;’ an intransitive ḥṭṣṣa ‘to distinguish one’s self, to specialize’, with a passive form uḥṭṣṣa (bi-) ‘to be characterized, specified (by), to become specific (to)’. Finally, from Form II a Form V is derived taḥaṣṣaṣa

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2 A number of well-known works of ʿuṣūl al-fiqh contain a chapter entitled al-ʿāmm wa-l-ḥāṣṣ ‘the general and the particular’.

3 Cf. Ibn al-Sarrāj, ʿUṣūl, 1, 156.