BĀB AL-FĀʾ [FĀʾ + SUBJUNCTIVE] IN ARABIC GRAMMATICAL SOURCES

BY

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One of the most spectacular chapters in the Kitāb of Sībawayhi (d. 180/796) is the one which deals with the fāʾ that is followed by the subjunctive. Not only is this chapter meticulously crafted and arranged, but is also based on the premise of a one-to-one relationship between form and meaning. What this study proposes to do is examine the theoretical basis of this chapter as well as its structure, and make observations on a number of techniques used by Sībawayhi in arranging and interpreting its material. It also aims at comparing Sībawayhi’s analysis of this material with that of other grammarians in order to show how unique the text of the Kitāb is, and demonstrate how the lively and engaging discussion which Sībawayhi presents contrasts sharply with the mostly uninspiring and pedantic approach that characterizes not only most of the later grammarians, but, in this case, early grammarians of the third and fourth centuries A.H. (ninth and tenth centuries A.D.).

I. The Theoretical Basis of the Restoration of an

The bāb al-fāʾ in the Kitāb is part of Sībawayhi’s discussion of the subjunctive and the particles that either cause it or precede it but are not themselves the operants that govern it. To the latter category belong the particles ḥattā, lām,1 kay, fāʾ, wāw and aw.2 The attribution of the

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All grammatical examples, quotations, and poetic and Qur’ānic šawāhid will be transliterated with full vocalization.

1 Some grammarians exclusively refer by this lām to lām al-ḡuḥūd (see Suyūṭī, Hamṣ II, 7, l. 31), while others, including Sībawayhi (Kitāb I, 407, l. 21) cite as examples constructions like ḡīṭuka li-taʃ’ala where the lām is for taʃ’īl and has the meaning of kay or li-kay. See also Šantamārī, Nakat I, 693, l. 11. Furthermore, Suyūṭī (Hamṣ II, 8, ll. 6-9) reports that some grammarians confuse the terms lām al-ḡuḥūd and lām kay by using one instead of the other.

2 Later grammarians also add ǧumma to the particles that are followed by an elided
subjunctive in the verb that these particles precede to *an* forms the theoretical basis of this chapter, and we shall examine this basis by looking into the purpose which the restoration of *an* serves within the framework of the grammatical theory of Sibawayhi.

We may propose four reasons for the restoration of *an*:

(1) It preserves a basic principle of the theory of regimen which Sibawayhi applies, and at times explains, and which is generally accepted and elaborated on by the later grammarians. This principle is that for a particle to govern any grammatical case, i.e., to be a *ʿāmil*, it has to be, in the terminology of some later grammarians, specialized (*muḥtass*), in the sense that it can govern either nouns or verbs, but not both. In this respect, *lām* governs the genitive because, according to the general grammatical theory, it can only precede nouns. To accept that it also precedes verbs would be tantamount to annulling its ability to cause the genitive, hence the significance of restoring *an*. The same would be true of *hattā*, and also of *kay* when it precedes nouns and has the status of *hattā* and *lām*, as in *kay-mah, hattā-mah* and *li-mah.* The other three particles are conjunctions which the theory labels as unspecialized (*gayr muḥtass*) and incapable of causing the subjunctive by themselves.

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3 The clearest explanation of this principle in Sibawayhi’s *Kitāb* can be found in the chapter which deals with the indicative (I, 409-10), where a clear distinction is drawn between those operators that govern nouns and those that govern verbs. He particularly mentions the particles that cause the jussive and subjunctive and says that they do not govern the nouns.

4 For example, Ibn al-Anbārī justifies the subjunctive being caused by *an* and other particles by this principle: *innamā waqāba an tāmala li-ḥtiṣāsāna bi-l-fāl* (“It is mandatory that it has regimen because of its specialization in verbs [i.e., its exclusive use with verbs]”; *Asrār* 328, l. 4). The same statement is also used to explain the jussive after *lam* and its sisters (*Asrār* 333, l. 5). See also p. 253, l. 4 for the prepositions, and p. 336, l. 4 for the conditional particles.

5 As Sibawayhi explains (*Kitāb* I, 408, ll. 4-5), *an* is elided after *kay* on the analogy of *hattā*, since both of them precede a noun. Here, the noun is interrogative *mā*, which becomes *-mah* in pausal form.