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## The notion of *zarf* in the Arabic linguistic tradition

### Abstract

This contribution aims at presenting the arguments produced by Arabic grammarians in the discussion on the *zarf*. By providing different viewpoints, the paper addresses various aspects of the issue, focusing in particular on its definition(s) and features, as well as its collocation within the overall Arabic grammatical system.

### Keywords

Arabic, *zarf*, adverbs, Arabic linguistic tradition, Arabic linguistic thinking.

### 1. Introduction: a history of the definition

The Arabic grammatical studies define the *zarf*<sup>1</sup> as the element providing information on place or time, inflected in the accusative (*našb*), or constructed with a prepositional locution containing a combination either of accusative plus genitive marks or *ḥarf al-ğarr* plus genitive.

The term itself is possibly a loanword from the Greek ἀγγεῖον (‘recipient’, ‘receptacle’),<sup>2</sup> used by Aristotle to indicate the temporal or spatial circumstances, and is thus defined by Sībawayhi (d. 180/796):

This is the chapter about those temporals and locatives that receive an accusative; this is because they are containers in which the things happen and exist; the reason why they receive the accusative is because they are what in which something happens and in which something exists. (*hādā bāb mā yantašib*

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<sup>1</sup> Pl. *zurūf*. ‘Adverb’ (Lane, 1968: 1910).

<sup>2</sup> On the possible Greek source of *zarf*, see Versteegh (1977: 8–9).

*min-al-`amākin wa-l-waqt wa-ḍāka li-`annahā zurūf taqa`u fihā al-`ašyā`  
wa-takūn fihā fa-ntašaba li-`annahu mawqū` fihā wa-makūn fihā`<sup>3</sup>*

The category of *zarf* is characteristically not explicitly defined in most classical grammatical texts. This is very clear from the first treatise that gave definitions of grammatical terms, the *Risālat al-Ḥudūd* by al-Rummānī (d. 384/969): *zarf* does not find a place within the 92 items explicitly defined in the treatise, yet it is used in two passages as a commonly known concept. In one of the two passages, it is described as follows:

The *zarf* that can be in the nominative is the one that can be brought back to its original [form]; the one which cannot is the *zarf* that is outside its original [form], since it includes what does not belong to it in its original [form]. The first one is e.g. *Zaydun ḥalfa[u]-ka* ‘Z. is behind you’, the second one is e.g. ‘*ataytuhu šabāḥan* ‘I came to you in the morning’, which cannot be in the nominative since it includes specifically *šabāḥa yawmika* ‘in the morning of your day’. (*aḏ-`zarf allādī yağūz raf`ahu huwa aḏ-`zarf al-mutamakkin bi-`iğrā`ihi `alā `ašlihi wa-allādī lā yatamakkan huwa aḏ-`zarf al-ḥāriğ `an `ašlihi bi-taḍminihi mā laysa lahu fī `ašlihi fa-al-`awwal naḥw zaydun ḥalfa[u]ka wa aḏ-`tānī `ataytuhu šabāḥan lā ya`rif li-`annahu tuḍammin šabāḥ yawmika ḥaššatan`)<sup>4</sup>*

The attitude of not providing detailed explanations of grammatical notions comes as no surprise, especially in grammatical treatises that do not belong to the line of pedagogical grammars. Further explanations on the features may be inferred from the linguistic discussion presented in the treatises, mostly focused on morpho-syntactic aspects used to describe the functions of the element at issue.

## 2. Classifications of the *zarf*

According to Sībawayhi’s tripartition of parts of speech,<sup>5</sup> *zarfs* belong to the category of nouns (*ism*), because on the one hand they are distinct from the particles (*ḥarf*) that have “a meaning that is neither noun or verb”,<sup>6</sup> and on the other hand, share semantic and syntactic features with the nouns.

This preliminary statement, though, poses a major issue in terms of (modern) classifications.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Kitāb I*: 201.8–9

<sup>4</sup> *Risālat al-Ḥudūd*: 83

<sup>5</sup> *aqsām al-kalām*, namely nouns, verbs, and particles: “*fā-l-kalim ism wa-fi`l wa-ḥarf.*” *Kitāb I*: 1.1

<sup>6</sup> *ḥarfūn ḡā`a li-ma`nā laysa bi-sm wa-lā fi`l.* *Kitāb I*: 1.1

<sup>7</sup> The differentiation between prepositions and nominalized adverbs does not seem to cause an issue to classical grammarians, but modern scholars have addressed it differently. For instance, Wright (1986: 280–82) and similarly Fischer (1972: 134) discuss of those “prepositions” that exhibit some

The two following examples:

- i) *fī d-dār*
- ii) *'amāma d-dār*

do present a difference. Despite the fact that – semantically – both point at a location in relation to an object, the element *fī* in the example (i) is grammatically a preposition, whereas *'amāma* in (ii) is a nominal element.

For the purpose of their classification, Arabic grammarians – and particularly Sībawayhi – have identified three substantial requisites that need to be met to consider an element as a *zarf*, and the co-occurrence of these is required for the classification of the adverbs:

- a) lexical/semantic: the term must have the specific meaning of a locative or temporal;
- b) syntactic: it must occur in the syntactic position of a *zarf*;
- c) morphological: the term must be inflected in the accusative.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, upon internal classification, the temporal adverbs possess such qualities more than others, followed by locatives. Nouns like *dāḥil* or *nāḥiyya* are not always included in the category but are still accounted for because of semantic reasons. Furthermore, adverbs never act as *maf'ūls*, for this would affect their form in constructions such as the passive,<sup>9</sup> in case of topicalization,<sup>10</sup> and when being complements of an active participle.<sup>11</sup>

The claim for the coexistence of a number of criteria is a self-evident necessity perceived by grammarians for some of the requisites might still occur in other given occasions, as for instance in the likely confusion between a *maf'ūl* (*bihi*) and a *zarf* which would both be inflected in the accusative. As in the following example from the *Kitāb Sībawayhi*:<sup>12</sup>

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nominal characteristics, whereas Badawi, Carter and Gully point out that “Arabic has two categories of word which map on to the Western class of prepositions, though they have different origins and should not be equated. There are true prepositions [...] and there are pure nouns with adverbial inflection and prepositional function.” (Badawi, Carter and Gully 2004: 57). As for their syntactic behavior, they add: “Syntactically, the behavior is equivalent, i.e. they form an annexation unit with their nouns, which accounts for the two types often being classed as undifferentiated ‘prepositions’.” (Badawi, Carter and Gully 2004: 57)

<sup>8</sup> For Sībawayhi, aside from a few rare exceptions, it is absolutely necessary for a *zarf* to exhibit an accusative. If it does not, this cannot be considered as such. In fact, a word with an ending in *ḍamma* cannot be classified as an adverb, and the same goes for prepositional sentences, which other grammarians considered as instances of *zarfs*.

<sup>9</sup> *Kitāb* I: 90.14; 93.20

<sup>10</sup> *Kitāb* I: 33.14

<sup>11</sup> *Kitāb* I: 75.11; 93.20

<sup>12</sup> *Kitāb* I: 177.9

iii) *'istawfayta 'ayyām-a-ka*

where the accusative in *'ayyāmaka* is not the declension as of the adverbs, but rather as of an object, since the verb *'istawfayta* is a transitive verb governing objects with a temporal meaning.

As pointed out by Owens:

This example simultaneously underlines the non-lexical component of Sībawayhi's *ẓarf*, the fact that independent syntactic criteria must be met for an item to belong to the *ẓarf* category, for *'ayyām* elsewhere is classified as a locative [...]. It also indicates that morphological form, accusative form is not a sufficient condition for an item's inclusion in the locative class. (Owens, 1989: 225)

This is further clarified in the following examples:<sup>13</sup>

iv) *zaydun waṣṭ-a l-dāri*<sup>14</sup>v) *zaydun fī waṣaṭ-i l-dāri*<sup>15</sup>vi) *ḍarabtu waṣaṭ-a-hu*<sup>16</sup>

In the example (iv) *waṣṭa* is a *ẓarf*; whereas in the example (v), despite the resemblances between the two, *waṣaṭ* cannot be considered as a locative due to the genitive case. The last, (vi), is discussed by Sībawayhi with the aim of demonstrating that *waṣaṭ* may also act as a noun and be an object, other than a locative.

## 2.1. *ism* or *ṣifa*

In Sībawayhi's classification, three distinct sub-categories are modeled on a functional basis, and the division is designed as follows: (i) the first group consists of those elements belonging neither to the *ism* nor the *ẓarf* categories (as *bi-*); (ii) the second category contains those adverbs that may be nouns as well, because they may be governed by particles such as *min* (as for *ḥalfa*)<sup>17</sup>; finally, (iii) the third category includes those elements which are pure *ism* and that cannot be *ẓarf* in any case (e.g., *ḥimār*, 'donkey').

<sup>13</sup> The three following examples are from *Kitāb* I: 173.

<sup>14</sup> 'Zayd is in the middle of the house.'

<sup>15</sup> 'Zayd is in the middle of the house.'

<sup>16</sup> 'I hit him in his middle.'

<sup>17</sup> For an extensive discussion on *ḥalfa*, see Kasher (2016)

In literature, beside some few opponents who would consider *zarfs* even as belonging to the category of verbs,<sup>18</sup> *zarfs* are generally considered nouns<sup>19</sup> also because they may receive a predicate (*mā yuḥbaru bihi wa-yuḥbaru 'anhu*). Nonetheless, inconsistency in terminology is attested as early as in the eighth century. According to Talmon (2000: 247–248), Kūfan use of *ṣifa* for *zarf* goes back to what he calls the period of *Old Iraqi Grammar* and results from a borrowing from the Syriac and Greek traditions. The concurrent use of *zarf* and *ṣifa* is in fact attested as early as in the *Kitāb al-'Ayn*, in which al-Ḥalīl (d. 175/791) describes the adverbs as follows:

The *zarf* is a container of anything, as much as a pitcher is a container of something [that is] in it. The *ṣifāt* like *'amāma* and *quddāma* are called *zurūf* [as well]. You [may] say *ḥalfaka zaydun* ('behind you is Zayd') and it is in the accusative because it is a container (*zarf*) of what it is in it. (*wa-ḡ-ḡarf wi 'a' kull ṣay' ḥattā l'ibrīq ḡarf limā fihi wa-ṣ-ṣifāt naḥw 'amāma wa-quddāma tusammā zurūfan taqūl ḥalfaka zaydun 'innamā intaṣaba li-'annahu ḡarf limā fihi*)<sup>20</sup>

The use of *ṣifa* was preserved in the Kūfan context, in opposition to the Baṣran use of *zarf*,<sup>21</sup> in line with a traditional difference in terminology attested in the two traditions. *Zarfs* in Kūfan works are often named *ṣifa*,<sup>22</sup> for Kūfans tended to classify this as an attribute to the noun, and at times replaced it with *maḥall*,<sup>23</sup> as reported in some instances of al-Farrā's (d. 207/822) *Ma 'ānī al-Qur 'ān*.<sup>24</sup>

For the Kūfan grammarian, a *ṣifa* characterizes a word and has an adverbial function, as *yawma* does in:

vii) *'ataytuka yawma l-ḡuma 'ati*

In the example:

<sup>18</sup> *wa-ḥadda ba'd al-naḥwiyyīn al-fi'l bi-'anna qāla: huwa mā kāna ṣifa ḡayr mawṣūf; naḥw qawlik: ḥādā raḡul yaqūm. fa-yaqūmy ṣifa li-raḡu; wa-lā yaḡūz 'an taṣif yaqūm bi-ṣay'in. qīla lahu fa-'inna ḡ-zurūf qad takūn ṣifāt li-l-'asmā', wa-lā tūṣif ḥiyya. fa-qāla: aḡ-zurūf wāḡi 'a mawāqi 'al-'af'āl, fa-l-'af'āl 'alā l-ḥaqīqa ḥiyya allatī yūsaf biḥā. Īdāḥ: 54*

<sup>19</sup> *Kitāb* I: 80, 89, 108, 201, 206

<sup>20</sup> *Kitāb al-'Ayn*, root *ḡ-r-f*, VIII: 157

<sup>21</sup> For a discussion on the differences in terminology between the grammatical schools, see among others Carter (2000).

<sup>22</sup> 'Adjective', 'attribute' (Lane 1968: 3054).

<sup>23</sup> What grammatical meaning *maḥall* conveys is not exactly evident, Versteegh suggests that in later traditions could be closer to the notion of *mawḍi'*: "Zamaḥṣarī in discussing the case-ending of a conjoined noun in the *nidā'* distinguishes between *lafḡ* and *maḥall* in exactly the same way as Zaḡḡāḡī distinguishes between *lafḡ* and *mawḍi'*." (Versteegh 1978: 278)

<sup>24</sup> i.e. *Ma 'ānī al-Qur 'ān* I: 28.3; 340.6; II: 385.5; III: 219.1

viii) *'inna yawm-a l-faṣl mīqāt-u-hum 'ağma 'īna*<sup>25</sup>

the accusative vocalization of *yawma* is due to *'inna*, whereas *mīqātuhum* is its predicate and is inflected in the nominative. But, even inflecting *mīqātuhum* in the accusative, the syntax would still be correct, for *yawma* would assume the functions of a *ṣifa* and *mīqātuhum* would therefore become *'inna*'s noun.

The following example, instead:

ix) *qa'adtu laka 'alà wağhi-ṭ-ṭarīq*<sup>26</sup>

according to al-Farrā' could be reduced to:

x) *qa'adtu laka wağha-ṭ-ṭarīq*

by dropping *'alà* and attributing an accusative ending to its complement. This modification is possible because of the meaning of *ṭarīq*, which conveys a locative meaning<sup>27</sup> as much as *yawm* or *layla* do, and for this reason may be considered a *ṣifa*.

Such feature allows these terms to occur in the position of locatives or – as an alternative – to be introduced by a preposition. Some other words are given the possibility to act as locatives and this is due to their semantic component, as in the cases of *dāhila*,<sup>28</sup> *'alāna*,<sup>29</sup> and *'idā*.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, if for Sībawayhi adverbs are a sub-category of the nouns and are substantially considered as such, for al-Farrā' prepositions like *li*-<sup>31</sup> or *bi*-<sup>32</sup> are also included in the group, whereas in the *Kitāb* these are neither nouns nor adverbs.<sup>33</sup>

### 3. Further formulations

Further differences and argumentations with regard to the *zarf* are ascribable to grammarians from both grammatical schools, such as al-Aḥfaṣ (d. 215/830), al-Mubarrad (d. 285/898), and Ṭa'lab (d. 291/904), whose arguments are mainly

<sup>25</sup> Qur'ān XLIV: 40

<sup>26</sup> *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān* I:375.3

<sup>27</sup> “*li-'anna aṭ-ṭarīq ṣifa fī-l-ma'nā fa-iḥtamala mā yaḥtamiluhu al-yawma wa-l-laylata.*” *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān* I:375.3

<sup>28</sup> *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān* III: 219.1

<sup>29</sup> *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān* I: 467.8

<sup>30</sup> *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān* III: 158.13

<sup>31</sup> *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān* II: 385.5

<sup>32</sup> *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān* I: 404.11

<sup>33</sup> *Kitāb* I: 1.1–2; 1.7; 2.18–20; 3.8–9

based on Sībawayhi's and al-Farrā's theories but at times presenting interesting divergences.

al-Aḥfaš, for instance, refers to Sībawayhi's propositions defining the *zarf* as "what something lies in",<sup>34</sup> but developing a small contribution to the theory by stating that not every noun either inflected in the accusative or conveying an adverbial meaning is a *zarf*.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, repetitions are found in al-Mubarrad's *Kitāb al-Muqtaḍab*, which however reports a major difference in the terminology: even though this is partly observed by Sībawayhi, here the term *zarf* is often substituted with *maf'ūl fīhi*,<sup>36</sup> earlier used to describe adverbs but never as an alternative name. A parallel development in Kūfan terminology can be also found in Ṭa'lab: if *šifa*<sup>37</sup> remains the first choice to substitute *zarf*, *waqt*<sup>38</sup> comes to identify the temporal adverbs in opposition to the locatives.<sup>39</sup>

From a syntactic viewpoint, the *zarf* is framed in what Owens calls "separation and non-identity system" (Owens, 1989: 223), examples of which are *dirhaman* in

xi) *'iṣrūna dirhaman*<sup>40</sup>

and the accusative mark of *ḥalfaka* in

xii) *huwa ḥalfaka*

"It is inflected in accusative because [the elements] are placed in it and exist in it and are governed by what comes before [...] just like *'iṣrūna* governs *al-dirhama* in the construct *'iṣrūna dirhaman*".<sup>41</sup>

A further designation regards its being or not an indispensable element.<sup>42</sup> The former usually coincides with the position of the *ḥabar* in some nominal propositions, while the *ḡayr mustaqarr* coincides with not having the function of *'āmil* in the sentence. Issues on the possibility for the *zarf* to be a governor are treated in conjunction with a similar reasoning.

<sup>34</sup> al-Aḥfaš, *Ma'āni al-Qur'ān*: 49.11

<sup>35</sup> al-Aḥfaš, *Ma'āni al-Qur'ān*: 364.10

<sup>36</sup> *Muqtaḍab* IV: 328. More on *zarf* and *maf'ūl fīhi* in presented Binaghi (2017)

<sup>37</sup> *Maḡālis*: 477

<sup>38</sup> *Maḡālis*: 175

<sup>39</sup> The same distinction appears also in Ibn Kaysān's theory, who maintains the terminological difference between the two categories.

<sup>40</sup> For further details on this, see Carter (1972).

<sup>41</sup> *Kitāb* I: 170.18

<sup>42</sup> Indispensable '*mustaqarr*', indispensable '*ḡayr mustaqarr*'. Also called *mulḡan* or *laḡw*.

The possibility for a *zarf* to assume the functions of an *'āmil* is subjected to some further conditions, for as stated by Sībawayhi it cannot act as an *'āmil* within a nominal sentence (independently from its status of indispensable element). The result of such a theorization is that it cannot affect any changes in the vocalisation of the utterance and does not cause declensional shifts on to the subject, which are instead caused by the *ibtidā'*.

Moreover, attributing governing features to a *zarf* is considered impossible due to the theory stating that the element acting as the *'āmil* of the sentence must be logically coincident with the governed noun, as for instance in *'abdullāhi 'aḥūka*.<sup>43</sup>

In a similar case,

(i) *fihā 'abdullāhi qā'iman*

the predicate – which is *fihā* – is not logically coincident with the subject *'abdullāhi* but is rather the element which points its location. For this reason it cannot cause the change of its vocalization into the nominative case. The absence of other elements which might cause this vocalisation shows that what actually assumes the function of governor within the proposition is the *ibtidā'*.

Further discussion on the *zarf* are also presented in the *'Inṣāf*, where it is discussed more extensively in two issues: *rafa 'al-ism bi-z-zarf* and *an-nāṣib li-l-zarf 'idā waqa' ḥabaran*.

The first opens with a description of the earlier opinions, and with regards to the possibility of attributing a nominative inflection to the following element:

The grammarians of the Kūfan school state that the *zarf* attributes the nominative case to the noun in case it precedes it and they call it *zarf al-maḥall*. And among them there is who calls it *ṣifa*, and this [definition] reflects their examples *'amāmaka zaydun* and *fī-d-dār 'amrun*. al-Aḥfaš agrees with this opinion, as far as the first reasoning is concerned, and so does al-Mubarrad from the school of Baṣra. Grammarians from the Baṣran school state instead that the *zarf* attributes the nominative case to the noun in case it precedes it, and this happens because of the *ibtidā'*. (*ḍahaba al-kūfiyyūn 'ilā 'anna z-zarf yarfa 'u l-ism 'idā taqaddama 'alayhi wa-yusammūna z-zarfa l-maḥall, wa-minhum man yusammīhi ṣifa wa-ḍālika naḥwa qawlika 'amāmaka zaydun wa-fī d-dār 'amrun wa-'ilayhi ḍahaba 'abū l-ḥasan al-'aḥfaš fī 'aḥad qawlayhi wa-'abū l-'abbās muḥammad bin yazīd al-mubarrad min al-baṣriyyīn wa-ḍahaba al-baṣriyyūn*

<sup>43</sup> The best example of this case can be found in Sībawayhi's *Kitāb*: the sentence *'Abdullāh is your brother shows how subject and predicate can be logically coincident, since 'Abdullāh is your brother and your brother is 'Abdullāh. (Kitāb I: 6.11)*



'ilā 'anna *z-zarf* lā *yarfa*'u l-ism 'iḏā taqaddama 'alayhi wa-'innamā *yurfi*'u bi-l-ibtidā'<sup>44</sup>

As mentioned above, according to traditional Arabic grammar a *zarf* does not operate as a governor (*āmil*). Nonetheless, this may happen when few strictly defined conditions occur: for Sībawayhi the *zarf* cannot act as the *āmil* of a nominal sentence unless it “is an indispensable predicate and in this case is liable to operate as the *āmil* producing the accusative in a part of a sentence occurring as a *ḥāl* or a *tamyīz* denoting a measure of distance” (Levin, 2007: 146). Apart from this, the “canonical grammar” (Bohas, Guillaume, and Kouloughli 1990: 49) states that *zarfs* never trigger changes in the vocalization of the other elements within the sentence, and do not produce the nominative of the subject, caused instead by the *ibtidā'*.

According to Kūfans' argument, the reason of such construction is the underlying form of the sentence: for instance, in the example *'amāmaka zaydun* from the quote above, the underlying form would be *ḥalla 'amāmaka zaydun*. By dropping the verb – which is here not indispensable – its governing functions shift on to the *zarf*, which thus may produce a nominative in the following element, as much as a verb would do. One of the arguments reported by Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 577/1181) is a reference to the Qur'ān:

As stated in the Qur'ān: *fa-'ūla'ika la-hum ḡazā'u-d-ḏi'f* (QUR XXXIV, 37), where the term *ḡazā'* carries the nominative declension because of the *zarf*; or [in the position of] a *ṣifa*, as in *marartu bi-raḡulin ṣāliḥin fī-d-dār 'abūhi*, or also in the case of a *ḥāl*, as in the example *marartu bi-zaydin fī-d-dār 'abūhi*. (*ka-qawlik ta'āli fa-'ūla'ika lahum ḡazā'u-d-ḏi'f* [sūra saba' 34/37] *fa-ḡazā' marfū' bi-z-zarf wa-ṣ-ṣifa ka-qawlika marartu bi-raḡulin ṣāliḥin fī-d-dār 'abūhi wa-l-ḥāl ka-qawlika marartu bi-zaydin fī-d-dār 'abūhi*)<sup>45</sup>

Orthodox grammar does not envisage such effects, which would attribute governing prerogatives to elements which do not act as such. Hence, the Kūfan approach is rejected because “the underlying structure prevails”<sup>46</sup> in the attribution of the cases to the components of the sentence, as they all “depend from the *ibtidā'*”<sup>47</sup>

The Baṣran orthodoxy attributes the role of the governor to the *ibtidā'*, and even the co-occurrence of elements which may cause alternative declensions does not prevail on the main governor. On the wake of Sībawayhi's *Kitāb*,

<sup>44</sup> *Kitāb al-'Inṣāf*: 48

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>46</sup> *Kitāb al-'Inṣāf*: 52

<sup>47</sup> *Kitāb al-'Inṣāf*: 52

Başrans draw on examples where a *zarf* would be accompanied by declension-changing elements.

With the example:

xiii) *'inna fihā zaydan*

Sībawayhi shows how *fihā* does not cause any changes on the sentence's components, for it does not share the same properties with the verbs, and therefore cannot substitute a predicate and become the governor.

In this case the term *'inna* is to be considered as the *'āmil* of the sentence since it affects the declensional ending of the *mubtada'*, which shifts from the nominative to the accusative. Furthermore, it is clear from Sībawayhi's arguments that the *zarf* may act as a governor only when nouns occur as *ḥāl*. The statement is proved with some examples presenting cases like

xiv) *'abdullāhi fihā qā'iman*

or

xv) *fihā 'abdullāhi qā'iman*<sup>48</sup>

Under these circumstances the *zarf* becomes a governor causing the vocalization in the accusative of the active participle *qā'iman*. Yet, such theory is only deductable from some excerpts of the *Kitāb* and not really explicated, differently from other aspects of the issues are more extensively presented in the text, as for the sentences opening with *mā kāna*. in the section dedicated to the discussion on the sentences opening with *mā kāna*, the possibility to have the *zarf* operating as an *'āmil* is envisaged.<sup>49</sup> To have the requisites fulfilled, the core issue is to determine whether the *zarf* is – again – an indispensable element or not.

In the following examples, Sībawayhi presents two cases. In the first *fihā* is indispensable:

xvi) *mā kāna fihā 'aḥadun ḥayrun minka*<sup>50</sup>

whereas in the second it is not:

xvii) *mā kāna 'aḥadun ḥayrun minka fihā*.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup> *Kitāb* I: 222.15

<sup>49</sup> *Kitāb* I: 21.7–19

<sup>50</sup> *Kitāb* I: 21.7

<sup>51</sup> *Kitāb* I: 21.10

The *zarf* thus operates as the governor only when *mustaqarr*. To fully do so, it should occur in an antecedent position to the governed element. In all the other cases, the *zarf* is expected to be correctly positioned at the end of the sentence, as in (xvii).

Aside from the specimens mentioned above, there is a general lack of examples demonstrating the grammarian's theory, but seems to be quite clear from these statements that the main example these refer to is the classical

xviii) *fihā 'abdullāhi qā'imān*

where the element acting as the '*āmil* of the *mubtada'* – '*abdullāhi* – must necessarily be the *ibtidā'* and not the *zarf*. Therefore, what attributes the nominative ending to the term *qā'imān* – a *hāl* – is *fihā* but because and by means of the *ibtidā'*.

Başran grammarians rely on these directives to discuss the inadmissibility of Kūfāns' statement, as reported by Ibn al-Anbārī. After recalling that the main feature of the *ibtidā'* is being a non-manifest agent which rather belongs to an underlying structure, they hypothesize the possibility to have a manifest agent in the proposition which might replace the verb and act as such:

The main principle of the *zarf* is in fact that it cannot operate as an '*āmil*, but it does so [here] taking the verb's place. And if it were an agent and took the verb's place, then it would be possible its action on the agents. Therefore you would say: '*inna 'amāmaka zaydan o zannantu ḥalfaka 'amran*, and so on. This is because an agent does not operate on another agent, and therefore if the *zarf* attributed the nominative case to the noun *zayd* then it would become possible. And when the agent affects the noun then it cancels its functions, and it is not possible to say '*in<sup>52</sup> yaqūmu 'amran, o zannantu yaṭaliqun bakran*. When the agent extends its action on the noun, as in '*in ladaynā 'ankālan wa-ḡaḥīman* (QUR: LXXIII, 12), [we notice that] none of the Qur'ān readers ever went against the *naṣb*, which is an indicator for what we have sustained. Secondly, if they were [both] agents, the nouns would necessarily assume the nominative case through them in cases such as *bika zaydun ma'ḥūdun*, but it is unanimous conviction that it is not possible. ('*anna l-'aṣl fī-z-zarf 'anna lā ya'mala, wa-'inna ya'malu li-qiyāmihi maqām al-fi'l wa-law kāna ha hunā 'āmilan li-qiyāmihi maqām al-fi'l lamma ḡāz 'anna tadḥulu 'alayhi al-'amwāmil fa-taqūlu 'inna 'imāmaka zaydan wa-zannantu ḥalfaka 'amran wa-mā 'aṣhabbuhu ḡalika li-'anna 'āmilan lā yadḥulu 'alā 'āmilin fa-law kāna z-zarf rāfi'an li-zayd lammā ḡaza ḡalika wa-lammā kāna l-'āmil yata'addāhu 'ilā al-ism wa-yabḥuku 'amalahu kamā la yaḡūzu 'anna taqūlu 'inna yaqūmu 'amran*

<sup>52</sup> It is probably the case of a '*inna muḥaffafa* ('lightned') with a displacement of the subject to the right (*ta'ḥīr*).

*wa ẓannantu yaṅṭaliq bakran fa-lammā ta'addāhu l-'āmil 'ilā l-ism kamā qāla 'inna ladaynā 'ankālan wa-ḡaḥīman wa lam yurwa 'an min 'aḥadīn min al-qirā' 'annahu ka-'anna yaḏhabu 'ilā ḥilāf an naṣb dalla 'alā mā qulnāhu. wa-t-tānī 'annahu law kāna 'āmilan la-waḡaba 'anna yarfa'u bihi l-ism fī qawlika bika zaydun ma'ḥūdun wa-bi-l-'iḡmā' 'annahu lā yaḡūzu ḍālika)<sup>53</sup>*

Relying on the postulation that the *ẓarf* cannot be the governor, unless the conditions presented in the previous paragraphs are fulfilled, the majority of the Baṣran grammarians question the Kūfan assertion that “the *ẓarf* attributes the nominative case to the noun in case it precedes it” by adducing arguments on the predominance of the *ibtidā'* over all the other elements of the sentence, as well as on its characteristics as a non-manifest agent which rather belongs to an underlying structure.

Hence, even admitting the possibility to have a co-occurring manifest agent in the proposition which could replace the verb and act as such, such condition would still be implausible as in this case – where the *ibtidā'* would be forced to quit having its functions – there would be a contrast between two agents governing the same element, and they cannot coexist.

#### 4. Conclusions

As we have seen in the arguments presented in this paper, the discussion on the notion of *ẓarf* represents a characteristic example of the peculiar dialectical approaches typical of the Arabic linguistic tradition.

The canonical grammar is mostly based on Sībawayhi's propositions, later canonized in Baṣran works, but the discussion itself shrewdly serves the linguistic narrative of the process. Thus, it is utterly important to retrace the several contributions thrusting the development of the grammatical theories, and this was the intention of this paper, which aimed at presenting the opinions and the consequent debate on the definition and the features of the *ẓarf*.

Hence, if linguistic speculation and debates are the very basis of the whole Arabic linguistic tradition, the discussion on the *ẓarf* is no exception. Starting from how to name the element itself, to the approaches to its definition, divergent actors have proposed various interpretations of both substantial and circumstantial features of the *ẓarf*. Fiercely debated and framed within the wider discussion on what produces changes in noun inflection, the issue of the *ẓarf* as an *'āmil* and its relation to the government theory is ultimately resourceful and provides a point to ponder in the linguistic studies on the subject.

<sup>53</sup> *Kitāb al-'Inṣāf*: 49

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