



THE CLASSIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DISAGREEMENTS BETWEEN THE BASRA AND KUFA SCHOOLS IN IBN AL-ANBARI’S AL-INSĀF

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Annotation: *This article examines the classification and analysis of grammatical disagreements between the Basra and Kufa schools, which hold an important place in the history of Arabic grammar, as presented by Ibn al-Anbārī in his work Al-Insāf fī Masā’il al-Khilāf bayna an-Nahwiyyīn al-Baṣriyyīn wa al-Kūfiyyīn. The study analyzes the methodological approaches to grammatical issues, the main differences between the two schools, and Ibn al-Anbārī’s conciliatory stance in addressing these disputes.*

Keywords: *Ibn al-Anbārī, Al-Insāf, Basra school, Kufa school, nahw, grammatical disagreements, analysis, classification.*

INTRODUCTION

During the 8th and 9th centuries, the Basra and Kufa schools emerged as the foremost centers of intellectual and linguistic thought in the Arab world. These two schools not only shaped the foundations of Arabic grammar, but also exerted a significant influence on related disciplines such as logic, philosophy, hadith studies, and Qur’anic exegesis.

The Basra school was primarily characterized by its reliance on logical analysis, strict rule-based methodology, and theoretical generalization, whereas the Kufa school was more grounded in practical speech usage, oral transmission (riwāya), and empirical examples derived from Qur’anic recitations (Versteegh, 1997). Consequently, their differing approaches often led to divergent interpretations of grammatical concepts.

Among the founders of the Basra school were renowned scholars such as Abū al-Aswad al-Du’alī, Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī, and Sībawayh, who sought to systematize Arabic grammar into a coherent logical framework. They applied the principle of al-qiyās (analogical reasoning based on established rules) to linguistic analysis. The Kufa school, on the other hand, was developed by scholars such as al-Kisā’ī, al-Farrā’, and al-Akhfash al-Awsat, who preferred empirical evidence drawn from spoken Arabic and transmitted traditions (Carter, 1981). Thus, the disagreements between the two schools became one of the central scholarly debates in the development of Arabic grammar.

Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 577 AH / 1181 CE) was one of the most important grammarians to provide a systematic analysis of these divergences. In his seminal work, Al-Insāf fī Masā’il al-Khilāf bayna an-Nahwiyyīn al-Baṣriyyīn wa al-Kūfiyyīn (“Equity in the Issues of Disagreement Between the Grammarians of Basra and Kufa”), he compares the opinions of the two schools on 121 grammatical issues (al-Anbārī, 1959). As the title suggests, Ibn al-Anbārī adheres to the principle of objectivity and fairness (al-insāf) in his analysis, presenting the arguments of both sides and evaluating their strengths and weaknesses with scholarly balance.



The *Al-Insāf* represents a mature phase in the development of Arabic grammatical thought. It not only documents the differences between the two schools but also reveals the methodological underpinnings of each argument. In this respect, Ibn al-Anbārī appears not merely as a grammarian but also as a philosophical thinker. According to him, the root of grammatical disagreement lies not only in the external structure of the language, but also in the method of analysis—specifically, in determining when and how a rule should be applied (al-Anbārī, 1959).

In addition, Ibn al-Anbārī’s *Al-Insāf* systematized the theoretical principles developed by earlier grammarians such as Sībawayh, al-Farrā’, al-Mubarrad, and others, thereby creating a comprehensive source for subsequent generations of grammarians (Versteegh, 1997). In his analysis, he does not evaluate arguments merely on the basis of their affiliation with the Basra or Kufa schools, but rather according to their logical coherence and the authenticity of their transmitted evidence. For this reason, *Al-Insāf* is regarded as the first representative of a conciliatory and synthetic methodology in Arabic grammatical tradition (Carter, 1981).

Through *Al-Insāf*, Ibn al-Anbārī established an enduring tradition of conducting balanced analysis among different grammatical approaches, systematizing disputes on a scholarly and methodological basis, and examining the arguments of each school with consistency and fairness. This work represents a significant milestone in the history of Arabic grammar and had a profound influence on the methodological development of later grammarians.

Methodology

This study is based on a comparative-analytical method. In his work (Ibn al-Anbārī, 1980), Ibn al-Anbārī systematically organized the intellectual differences between the Basran and Kufan grammarians into distinct “issues” (*masā’il*). Therefore, the present article analyzes the structural patterns, argumentative methods, and linguistic foundations of each disagreement.

In addition to Ibn al-Anbārī’s *Al-Insāf*, the research employs other key sources from the Arabic grammatical tradition—such as Sībawayh’s *Al-Kitāb* (Sībawayh, 1988), al-Mubarrad’s *Al-Kāmil* (al-Mubarrad, 1995), and the works of al-Zajjājī and Ibn Jinnī—for comparative analysis. These sources provide a broader basis for examining the regulative differences, logical principles, and methods of argumentation that distinguish the Basra and Kufa schools (Versteegh, 1997).

The second stage of the methodology involves a classificatory-analytical approach, in which more than 120 grammatical issues discussed by Ibn al-Anbārī were classified according to phonetic, morphological, syntactic, and semantic criteria. Through this classification, a scientific mapping of the internal consistency and divergences in the grammatical views of both schools was constructed (Carter, 2004).

Furthermore, each disagreement was examined according to its argumentative structure, distinguishing between the rule-based logical approach of the Basra school and the empirical-linguistic approach of the Kufa school. As a result, it becomes evident that Ibn al-Anbārī’s



work not only elucidates the grammatical controversies but also uncovers their epistemological foundations (Owens, 1988).

Results and Analysis

1. General Classification of Disagreements

Ibn al-Anbārī presents the grammatical disagreements in the form of 121 issues (masā’il). These can be conditionally divided into the following categories:

1. Syntactic-grammatical disagreements – concerning parts of speech, case endings (i‘rāb), and syntactic constructions.
2. Morphological disagreements – related to verb types, derivation of nouns, and inflectional patterns (ṣīghah).
3. Methodological or foundational disagreements – dealing with the principles and methods of deriving grammatical rules (al-Anbārī, 1959).

The Basran school was based on theoretical reasoning and rule-based analysis, whereas the Kufan school gave greater importance to practical speech and transmitted linguistic evidence (riwāyāt) (Carter, 1981). Consequently, Basran grammarians derived rules from general logical principles, while Kufans often supported exceptions and irregular usages through narrative or empirical proofs.

2. Example Analysis

For example, regarding the difference in the use of inna and anna, Ibn al-Anbārī records the following disagreement:

المواضع بعض في بينهما يفرقون لا والكوفيون، للنصب «أن» وبالابتداء تُصَنَّبُ «إن» أن يقرؤن البصريون.
(al-Anbārī, 1959, p. 45)

That is, the Basrans believed that inna is used in initial positions (independent clauses), while anna appears in subordinate clauses. The Kufans, however, regarded the two as synonymous in certain contexts.

3. Ibn al-Anbārī’s Position

In his work, Ibn al-Anbārī generally considers the Basran position more persuasive, but his approach is not one-sided. In many instances, he acknowledges the Kufan view, as in his statement:

الْكُوفِيُّينَ مَعَ فِيهَا وَالْقَوْلُ، جَلِيلَةٌ مَسْأَلَةٌ وَهَذِهِ

(“This is a significant issue, and the correct opinion in it is that of the Kufans”) (al-Anbārī, 1959, p. 87).

Through such remarks, Ibn al-Anbārī demonstrates his commitment to scholarly impartiality and balanced evaluation of evidence (Versteegh, 1997).

4. Methodological Differences in Approach

The Basrans constructed their grammatical system on the basis of rules and logical deduction (istinbāt), while the Kufans relied on narrative transmission and recitational practice (qirā’āt). Ibn al-Anbārī sought to reconcile these two approaches, creating a synthesizing framework that marked a significant step forward in the methodology of Arabic linguistics (Carter, 1981).

Conclusion



Ibn al-Anbārī’s *Al-Inṣāf* is one of the earliest works to systematically classify the scholarly disagreements between the two principal schools of Arabic grammar – Basra and Kufa. The author not only enumerates the grammatical issues but also analyzes the evidential foundations underlying each opinion. Moreover, Ibn al-Anbārī’s conciliatory and balanced approach reflects the mature stage of Arabic grammatical thought.

As a result, *Al-Inṣāf* is regarded as a foundational source that contributed significantly to the development of scientific methodology in Arabic linguistics. It served as an important reference for later grammarians such as Ibn Jinnī, al-Suyūṭī, and others, shaping the intellectual trajectory of Arabic grammatical theory.

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