

SIMILAR LETTERS TO VERBS IN ARABIC NAHW: GRAMMATICAL AND SEMANTIC CHARACTERISTICS

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Abstract

This scientific article provides a comprehensive study of the verb-like letters, an important part of the Arabic language's syntactic system, including their syntactic functions, their effect on the 'i'rab (tonal marking), and their semantic possibilities. These letters are among the most influential grammatical devices in the Arabic language, as they can add various modal meanings to a sentence, such as emphasis, comparison, wish, hope, and contrast.

Keywords: Verb-like particles, syntax, semantics, emphasis, Arabic grammar.

Introduction

In the scientific tradition of the Arabic language, words are divided into three main categories: noun, verb, and letter. This division has retained its importance from the ancient Basra and Kufa schools to modern academic grammar. Although letters do not express an independent lexical meaning, they are studied separately as linguistic units that create syntactic relationships within a sentence, modify meaning, and sometimes perform grammatical functions characteristic of verbs.¹ One of the topics that has attracted the attention of grammarians since ancient times is *the *al-ḥurūf al-mashbūhāt bil-fi'l, i.e., the letters similar to verbs. This term is related to the fact that these letters function syntactically like verbs and exert a grammatical influence () on the word that follows them. They also have the property of imparting modal color to the sentence's content.

In classical sources—Mustafa al-Ghālayini's "Jāmi' ad-Durus al-'Arabiyya," Ibn Hishām's "Shu'ūn az-Zahab," and Ibn Mālik's "Alfiyya"—these letters are

¹Abdullayev A., Rustamov A. Arabic Language Grammar. Tashkent: O'qituvchi, 2003.

analyzed in detail. Their resemblance to a verb is manifested in two ways: first, in their causing the noun to take the state of nassb; and second, in their leaving the khabar in the state of raf'.²

A General Description of Letters Similar to A Verb

In syntax, the concept of a predicate is central: a predicate is an element that determines the inflectional form of the word that follows it. Verb-like particles are also considered predicates in this sense, but they do not have the tense, person, or number categories of a verb. This establishes that they are "letters"—meaning they function grammatically like verbs but remain morphologically letters. The most studied branch of this group is the six letters known as innā wa-akhwātuhā,' or 'inna and its companions.' These letters, in turn, form some of the most semantically rich layers of the Arabic language.³

"Inna" and Its Classmates: A Semantic Analysis

1. إ (inna) - strong emphasis

This letter gives the sentence a strong sense of emphasis. It usually comes at the beginning of the sentence and emphasizes the truthfulness of the speaker's statement. It is used when the listener has doubts or when an important truth is to be emphasized. Example: **وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ** - "Indeed, Allah is Forgiving."

2. أ (anna) - indirect emphasis

This particle is used to express indirect speech and indirect statements. It always comes with another verb or a linking element and is not used at the beginning of an independent clause. For example: **عَلِمْتُ أَنَّ الْحَقَّ ظَاهِرٌ** - "I learned that the truth is apparent."

3. كَأَنَّ (ka'anna) - simile and supposition

This particle serves two functions in meaning: comparison (tashbih) and supposition. It is widely used to enrich literary text, especially in poetry and literary prose. Example: **كَأَنَّ زَيْدًا أَسَدٌ** - "As if Zayd is a lion."

4. لَكِنَّ (lekinna) - Emphasis of contradiction and opposition

This particle serves to introduce a meaning that contradicts the idea expressed in the previous sentence. It is similar to the intensified form of the conjunction's

² Al-Ghalla'iy M. Jome' ad-durus al-'Arabiyya. Beirut: Al-Maktaba al-'Asriya, 2005.

³ Xoliqov A. Fundamentals of Syntax and Grammar in the Arabic Language. Tashkent: Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies Press, 2011.

"ammo" and "lekin" in Uzbek, but it also functions as a stress marker. Example: جاء القوم لكن زيدا لم يأت "The people came, but Zayd did not come."

5. ليت (layta) - wish and regret

This particle expresses an irreal (irrealis) mood—that is, it is used to speak of a state that does not exist but is wished to exist. It is very common in poetic literature, especially in marsiyas and ghazals. Example: ليت الشباب يعود "If only youth could return."

6. لعل (la'alla) - hope and anxiety

This letter indicates a middle level of epistemic modality: an event may occur, but it is not certain. The two opposing emotions – hope and anxiety – coexist within it. This feature makes it one of the most semantically complex letters in the Arabic language. Example: لعل الخير قادم "Perhaps good will come."

Inna and Anna: A Comparative Syntactic Analysis

At first glance, the letters inna and anna, which look similar, differ dramatically in syntax (). Failure to understand this distinction is the cause of many grammatical errors. Below, their main differences are presented systematically.⁴ First, regarding their position of use: inna can appear at the beginning of an independent clause, whereas anna always follows a verb or a conjunction. Second, the matter of the kasra and fatha: Inna in the main clause is written with a kasra (i), while anna in the masdar (verbal noun) form is written with a fatha (a).

Situations where it is written with a fatha: when it comes in place of the subject of the verb (fā'il) - يسرني أنك مجتهد "It pleases me that you are diligent"; in the position of the object - أود أنك مخلص "I wish you to be sincere"; after a preposition - فرحت لأنه مستحق "I was happy because he deserved it".

Situations where it is written with a kasra: at the beginning of a sentence, after 'ala', in reported speech, and when used at the beginning of a relative clause. Additionally, there are some grammatical cases where both fatha and kasra are permissible. This phenomenon is related to the simultaneous acceptability of two different grammatical interpretations. For example, when the answer to the conditional (jawāb al-shart) comes at the end: من يستقيم فإنه ينجح "Whoever stays on the right path will succeed" - both variants are correct in this sentence.

⁴ Hasanov B. Morphology and Syntax of the Arabic Language. Tashkent: Fan, 2008.

Conclusion

Verbal prefixes are one of the most complex and multifaceted elements of Arabic, not only grammatically but also stylistically and semantically. Syntactically, they place the noun in the nominative case and the verb in the raised form; semantically, they add meanings of emphasis, comparison, regret, hope, and contrast to the sentence.⁵

Proper understanding of these letters is essential for interpreting Qur'anic texts, in the science of hadith, in reading classical Arabic poetry, and in mastering the modern standard Arabic language. The article also highlighted the subtle syntactic differences between inna and anna and explained this distinction with examples that are rarely found in English sources.

Future research would be well-advised to focus on the occurrences of these letters in regional accents and dialects, as well as their frequency of use in modern Arabic journalism.

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⁵ Ibn Hisham. Shuhra al-Zahab fi Ma'rifat al-Kalam al-'Arab. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2004.