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THE ORIGIN, TERMINOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS AND LINGUISTIC EQUIVALENTS OF GHAYR MUNSARIF IN ARABIC GRAMMAR: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

The category of *ghayr munsarif* constitutes a distinctive component of the Arabic inflectional system and has long attracted the attention of both classical and contemporary grammarians. Despite extensive discussions in Arabic grammatical literature, the historical evolution of this concept, its terminological diversity, and its cross-linguistic equivalents have not received sufficient scholarly attention. This study investigates the lexical origin, grammatical interpretation, and terminological development of *ghayr munsarif* within the Arabic grammatical tradition. It also examines the possibility of identifying an equivalent category in Uzbek grammar. The research adopts descriptive, historical-comparative, and contrastive linguistic approaches. The corpus consists of major classical grammatical sources, including the works of Sibawayh, Ibn Malik, Ibn Hisham, Al-Zamakhshari, and Al-Suyuti, alongside modern studies by Abdulaziz Safa, Admo Tarabay, Emil Yaqub, and Abbas Hasan. The analysis demonstrates that Arabic grammarians employed various designations, such as *mā lā yansarif*, *al-mamnūʿ min al-ṣarf*, and *ghayr al-munsarif*, reflecting differences in grammatical interpretation and theoretical orientation. The findings further indicate that Uzbek does not possess a direct structural counterpart to this grammatical phenomenon, although partial parallels may be observed in certain instances of case synonymy and morphological neutralization. The study argues that the descriptive term *non-tanwin nouns* may provide a more accurate equivalent for Uzbek linguistic scholarship.

Keywords: *ghayr munsarif*, *al-mamnūʿ min al-ṣarf*, tanwin, Arabic grammar, grammatical terminology, contrastive linguistics, case system, inflection.

1. Introduction

The distinction between fully declinable (*munsarif*) and partially declinable (*ghayr munsarif*) nouns constitutes one of the fundamental classifications in Arabic grammatical theory. Within the Arabic inflectional system, *ghayr munsarif* refers to a group of nouns that exhibit restricted declension, typically characterized by the absence of tanwin and the replacement of the genitive marker *kasra* with *fatha* under specific grammatical conditions. Since the formative period of Arabic grammatical scholarship, this phenomenon has attracted considerable attention from grammarians due to its complex interaction between morphological, syntactic, and semantic factors.

Classical scholars, including Sibawayh, Ibn Malik, Al-Zamakhshari, and Ibn Hisham, discussed this category extensively and proposed different criteria for its classification and interpretation. Their analyses reveal not only variations in terminology but also divergent theoretical perspectives regarding the nature of inflection and nominality in Arabic grammar. Modern linguists have continued this discussion by re-examining traditional definitions and proposing alternative terminological formulations (Safa, 2009; Tarabay, 2001; Yaqub, 1992).

Despite the rich grammatical heritage surrounding *ghayr munsarif*, previous studies have predominantly focused on its morphological rules and syntactic behavior. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to the historical development of the term, the diversity of its

terminological representations in grammatical literature, and its possible equivalents in non-Arabic linguistic traditions. In particular, the issue of identifying an appropriate counterpart for *ghayr munsarif* in Uzbek grammar remains largely unexplored.

Against this background, the present study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the lexical and grammatical origins of the term *ghayr munsarif*?
2. How has this concept been interpreted by classical and modern Arabic grammarians?
3. What terminological variants have been employed in Arabic grammatical literature?
4. To what extent can an equivalent category be identified in Uzbek grammar?

Accordingly, the study aims to examine the historical evolution, terminological interpretations, and comparative linguistic aspects of *ghayr munsarif* through the analysis of both classical and contemporary grammatical sources.

2. Materials and Methods

This study is grounded in a corpus of both classical and contemporary works on Arabic grammar and linguistic terminology. The primary sources comprise major grammatical treatises representing different stages of the Arabic grammatical tradition, including *Al-Kitāb* by Sibawayh, *Tashīl al-Fawāʾid* by Ibn Malik, *Al-Mufaṣṣal* by Al-Zamakhshari, *Qaṭr al-Nadā* and *Shudhūr al-Dhahab* by Ibn Hisham, *Hamʿ al-Hawāmiʿ* by Al-Suyuti, and *Al-Ājurrūmiyyah* by Al-Ajurrumi. In addition, modern studies devoted to the phenomenon of *ghayr munsarif* and Arabic grammatical terminology, particularly those by Abdulaziz Safa (2009), Admo Tarabay (2001), Emil Yaqub (1992), Abbas Hasan (1974), and Fuad Niʿma, were consulted.

The research adopts a qualitative approach, as the investigation focuses primarily on the interpretation, classification, and comparative analysis of grammatical concepts rather than on quantitative measurement.

Several complementary research methods were employed. First, the descriptive method was used to explain the lexical and grammatical meanings of *ghayr munsarif* and to systematize the relevant terminological data. Second, the historical-linguistic method facilitated the examination of the diachronic development of the term and its usage across different grammatical traditions. Third, the comparative method enabled the identification of similarities and differences among the definitions proposed by classical and modern grammarians. Finally, a contrastive linguistic approach was applied to compare the grammatical characteristics of Arabic and Uzbek case systems in order to evaluate the existence of possible functional equivalents.

The data were collected through textual analysis of grammatical treatises, terminological dictionaries, and contemporary linguistic studies. Subsequently, the extracted data were categorized according to three analytical parameters: (1) terminological variation, (2) grammatical interpretation, and (3) cross-linguistic correspondence. This classification provided the basis for interpreting the historical evolution and theoretical diversity of the concept of *ghayr munsarif*.

3. Results

3.1. Lexical and Grammatical Origin of the Term

The analysis of classical Arabic lexicographical and grammatical sources demonstrates that the term *munsarif* originates from the triliteral root *ṣ-r-f* (صرف), which in Arabic lexicons denotes such meanings as "to turn," "to redirect," "to change," or "to transfer from one state to another." Classical grammarians subsequently adopted this lexical notion to describe the ability of nouns to undergo inflectional variation.

The concept of *ṣarf* is closely associated with *tanwīn*, a fundamental marker of nominal inflection in Arabic. According to traditional grammatical descriptions, *tanwīn* refers to the final alveolar nasal sound /n/ realized phonetically at the end of indefinite nouns. Examination of

classical sources reveals that Arab grammarians generally distinguished between two principal categories of tanwīn: genuine (*al-tanwīn al-aṣīl*) and non-genuine (*al-tanwīn ghayr al-aṣīl*).

The study further indicates that genuine tanwīn was subdivided into four major types: *tanwīn al-tamakkun*, *tanwīn al-tankīr*, *tanwīn al-ʿiwaḍ*, and *tanwīn al-muqābala*. Among these categories, *tanwīn al-tamakkun* occupies a central position because it serves as an indicator of full nominality and complete declinability. Consequently, the absence of this type of tanwīn became one of the principal criteria for identifying *ghayr munsarif* nouns.

3.2. Grammatical Interpretations of *Ghayr Munsarif*

The comparative examination of grammatical treatises reveals the existence of two dominant interpretative traditions concerning the definition of *ghayr munsarif*.

The first tradition defines *ghayr munsarif* primarily as a noun that does not accept tanwīn. This interpretation is evident in the works of Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad, Sibawayh, Ibn Malik, Ibn Hisham, and Ibn Aqil. Representatives of this approach consider the absence of tanwīn to be the essential grammatical feature distinguishing partially declinable nouns from fully declinable ones.

The second tradition broadens the definition by characterizing *ghayr munsarif* as a noun that accepts neither tanwīn nor the genitive marker *kasra* under ordinary syntactic conditions. This interpretation is particularly prominent in the writings of Ibn al-Hajib and several contemporary scholars, including Abdulaziz Safa.

The findings indicate that these divergent definitions stem from different theoretical understandings of the relationship between nominality and inflection. While the first group regards the absence of genitive *kasra* as a secondary consequence of tanwīn loss, the second group considers both characteristics to be equally constitutive features of the category.

3.3. Terminological Variation in Arabic Grammatical Tradition

The investigation demonstrates a remarkable degree of terminological diversity in Arabic grammatical literature. Classical and modern grammarians employed numerous designations to refer to the same grammatical phenomenon, reflecting both chronological development and differences among grammatical schools.

The most frequently attested terms include *ghayr al-munsarif* (غير المنصرف), *mā lā yansarif* (ما لا ينصرف), *al-mamnūʿ min al-ṣarf* (الممنوع من الصرف), *al-ism alladhī lā yansarif* (الاسم الذي لا ينصرف), *ghayr al-maṣrūf* (غير المصروف), and *mā lā yajrī* (ما لا يجري).

Textual analysis reveals that Sibawayh predominantly employed the expressions *mā yansarif* and *mā lā yansarif*, whereas Al-Zamakhshari preferred the designation *ghayr al-munsarif*. In contemporary grammatical literature, however, the term *al-mamnūʿ min al-ṣarf* has become the most widely accepted designation.

The study additionally confirms that some modern linguists, most notably Emil Yaqub, questioned the semantic adequacy of the expression *al-mamnūʿ min al-ṣarf* and proposed the alternative term *al-mamnūʿ min al-tanwīn*. This proposal was motivated by the argument that the lexical meaning of *ṣarf* in the traditional expression has gradually diverged from its original semantic content.

3.4. Cross-Linguistic Comparison with Uzbek Grammar

The contrastive analysis reveals substantial typological differences between Arabic and Uzbek grammatical systems. Arabic nouns are generally inflected according to a three-case system consisting of nominative, accusative, and genitive forms, whereas Uzbek employs a six-case paradigm.

Another significant difference concerns the domain of inflection. In Arabic, the category of *iʿrāb* extends to both nouns and imperfect verbs, while in Uzbek grammatical relations are primarily expressed through nominal case endings and verbal tense-mood markers.

The findings indicate that Uzbek grammar lacks a direct structural equivalent of *ghayr munsarif*. Nevertheless, certain functional similarities may be identified in cases of morphological neutralization and case synonymy. For example, expressions such as *talabalarning biri* / *talabalardan biri* and *musiqani tinglamoq* / *musiqaga quloq solmoq* demonstrate partial overlap in grammatical function.

Despite these similarities, no systematic mechanism comparable to Arabic partially declinable nouns exists in Uzbek. Therefore, *ghayr munsarif* should be regarded as a language-specific grammatical category whose characteristics cannot be fully transferred to the Uzbek grammatical framework.

4. Discussion

The findings of the present study demonstrate that the concept of *ghayr munsarif* has undergone considerable terminological and theoretical development throughout the history of Arabic grammatical scholarship. The coexistence of multiple definitions confirms that Arab grammarians differed not only in terminology but also in their understanding of the relationship between nominality, inflection, and syntactic function. These findings corroborate the observations of Safa (2009) and Tarabay (2001), who emphasized that variations in grammatical terminology often reflect broader methodological differences among linguistic schools.

The analysis further reveals that the distinction between defining *ghayr munsarif* solely through the absence of *tanwīn* and defining it through the combined absence of *tanwīn* and genitive *kasra* represents two competing theoretical traditions. This divergence may be explained by the different approaches adopted by Basran and later grammatical scholars regarding the nature of inflectional categories. Similar observations have been reported by Yaqub (1992), who argued that terminological variation in Arabic grammar frequently originates from shifts in theoretical interpretation rather than from differences in grammatical facts.

Another important finding concerns the gradual predominance of the term *al-mamnūʿ min al-ṣarf* in modern grammatical literature. Although contemporary scholars increasingly favor this designation, the persistence of alternative expressions such as *mā lā yansarif* and *ghayr al-munsarif* indicates the continuing influence of the classical grammatical tradition. This continuity illustrates the strong conservatism that characterizes Arabic grammatical discourse.

From a contrastive linguistic perspective, the absence of a direct equivalent in Uzbek grammar highlights the typological specificity of Arabic inflectional morphology. While certain similarities can be identified in phenomena such as case synonymy and morphological neutralization, these parallels remain only partial and do not constitute genuine structural correspondences. Consequently, literal translation of the term may lead to conceptual ambiguity in Uzbek linguistic studies.

Based on the findings, the study proposes the descriptive expression *non-tanwin nouns* as a more appropriate equivalent for Uzbek scholarship. This designation reflects the primary grammatical characteristic of the category while avoiding inaccurate associations with the Uzbek case system. More broadly, the results confirm that *ghayr munsarif* represents a highly specialized subsystem within Arabic morphology, governed by both semantic and formal constraints, and therefore constitutes an important typological feature distinguishing Arabic from Turkic languages.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the lexical origin, terminological interpretations, and possible linguistic equivalents of *ghayr munsarif* within the framework of Arabic grammatical tradition. Through the analysis of both classical and contemporary grammatical sources, the research has demonstrated that the concept of *ghayr munsarif* occupies a distinctive position in the Arabic inflectional system and has undergone significant terminological and theoretical development throughout the history of Arabic linguistic thought.

The findings indicate that the notion of *ghayr munsarif* is historically rooted in the grammatical concepts of *ṣarf* and *tanwīn*. The study further reveals that Arab grammarians have not reached complete consensus regarding its definition: while some scholars define the category primarily through the absence of *tanwīn*, others consider the combined absence of *tanwīn* and genitive *kasra* to be its defining characteristic. In addition, the analysis identified considerable terminological diversity in Arabic grammatical literature, reflecting the existence of different grammatical traditions and theoretical orientations.

The contrastive analysis has shown that Uzbek grammar does not possess a direct structural equivalent of *ghayr munsarif*. Although certain functional similarities can be observed in instances of case synonymy and morphological neutralization, these phenomena do not constitute a grammatical category comparable to Arabic partially declinable nouns. Consequently, the study proposes the descriptive expression *non-tanwin nouns* as a more appropriate equivalent for use in Uzbek linguistic scholarship.

Overall, the phenomenon of *ghayr munsarif* represents a unique feature of Arabic morphology and highlights important typological differences between Arabic and Uzbek grammatical systems. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of Arabic grammatical terminology and may provide a theoretical basis for future comparative studies on inflectional categories in Semitic and Turkic languages.

Future research may focus on corpus-based investigations of *ghayr munsarif* usage in Classical and Modern Standard Arabic, as well as on the pedagogical implications of teaching this grammatical category to non-native learners of Arabic.

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