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The Linguistic Link: Investigating Discourse Connectives in Arabic

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Abstract

This paper delves into the critical role of discourse connectives, a class of lexical units, in linking segments within discourse, from individual words to entire texts. It examines the literature on discourse connectives in Arabic, organized into three main sections. The first section delves into the classical Arabic perspective on the term al-ḥarf, or 'particle', as defined by grammarians, rhetoricians, and legal theorists. This provides a historical and theoretical foundation for understanding the significance of discourse connectives in Arabic discourse. The second section presents taxonomies of discourse connectives in Arabic, which helps categorize and understand the different types and functions of these connectives. This classification is essential for both theoretical and practical applications, providing a framework for analyzing and interpreting Arabic discourse. The third section focuses on the discourse connective bal ('nay', 'nay rather', 'indeed', 'even'), exploring its functions as delineated in Classical Arabic grammar. This provides a detailed examination of a specific connective, shedding light on its usage and implications within Arabic discourse. Overall, this paper provides a comprehensive overview of discourse connectives in Arabic, from classical perspectives to contemporary analysis, offering insights into their role in linking and organizing discourse at various linguistic levels.

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Introduction

Discourse connectives play a vital role in the cohesion and organization of discourse, serving as linguistic bridges that link segments within discourse, from individual words to entire texts. This paper explores the intricate landscape of discourse connectives in the Arabic language, delving into their historical, theoretical, and functional dimensions. The exploration of discourse connectives in Arabic is structured into three main sections. Firstly, we delve into the classical Arabic perspective on the term "al-ḥarf," or 'particle,' as elucidated by grammarians, rhetoricians, and legal theorists. This historical and theoretical inquiry lays the groundwork for understanding the significance of discourse connectives in Arabic discourse, tracing their evolution and conceptualization through classical Arabic scholarship. Secondly, we present taxonomies of discourse connectives in Arabic, providing a systematic categorization of the different types and functions of these connectives. This classification

framework aids both theoretical analysis and practical applications, offering a structured approach to analyzing and interpreting Arabic discourse. Lastly, the paper focuses on a specific discourse connective, "bal" ('nay', 'nay rather', 'indeed', 'even'), scrutinizing its functions as delineated in Classical Arabic grammar. Through an in-depth examination of "bal," we aim to shed light on its usage patterns and implications within Arabic discourse, drawing examples primarily from the Holy Qurʾān. Overall, this paper offers a comprehensive overview of discourse connectives in Arabic, from classical perspectives to contemporary analysis, providing insights into their role in linking and organizing discourse at various linguistic levels. By synthesizing existing scholarship, this exploration seeks to enhance our understanding of Arabic language and discourse analysis, contributing to the broader discourse on linguistic cohesion and communication.

I. Al-ḥarf: Concept defining

Review of literature on and about *al-ḥarf* 'particle' in Arabic indicates that its definition has not been a matter of consensus among classical and modern Arab grammarians, rhetoricians and jurisprudents. In retrospect, *al-ḥarf* was traditionally used with three different meanings, (1) the meaning of 'edge' and 'border' in ancient Arabic poetry, (2) the meaning of 'writing letters or consonants' in early Qur'anic exegeses, and (3) the meaning of 'a word' in early Arabic grammar. One of the most common definitions of this term is the one suggested by Sibāwayhi in his *magnum opus*, *al-Kitāb* (1980). This definition came in the context of his definition of speech. For him,

(1) الكَلِمُ إِسْمٌ، وَفِعْلٌ، وَحَرْفٌ جَاءَ لِمَعْنًى لَيْسَ بِإِسْمٍ، وَلا فِعْلٍ

(Speech consists of a noun, a verb, and a particle that comes to signify a meaning that is neither that of a noun, nor that of a verb-my translation)

In other words, *al-ḥarf* is the third part of speech, the first and the second being the noun and the verb. It comes with a meaning that is different from that of the verb and that of the noun. The definition above, it is remarkable, is not dissimilar to the one suggested by Ibn Mālik who, in his poem *al-Alfiyya* 'A thousand verse poem', also defines *al-ḥarf* as a part of speech:

(2) كَلاَمُنَا لَفْظٌ مُفِيدٌ فَاسْتَقِمْ   إسْمٌ وَفِعْلٌ ثُمَّ حَرْفُ الكَلِمْ

(Our language is useful/meaningful and logical/well-organized. It has a noun, a verb, and a particle).

What is striking about Sībawayhi's definition above is the fact that it lacks clarity in the sense that it does not specify exactly what *al-ḥarf* consists of. Since Sībawayhi, classical Arab grammarians extended the meaning of *al-ḥarf* to *ḥarf al-maʿānā* 'particle of meaning', probably in order to differentiate it from *ḥarf al-mabnā* which refers to 'letter of the alphabet'. For Ibn Hišām (n.d), *al- ḥarf* is a subcomponent of what he refers to as *mufradat* 'single entities', which include nouns, verbs, and adverbs. Carter (1981) uses *al-ḥarf* to refer to 'grapheme', 'phoneme', 'consonant', 'radical', 'morpheme', and to a *'a bit that comes for a meaning'*. His definition, much like that of Sībawayhi mentioned above, lacks precision; therefore, it cannot help us to clarify the meaning of the term *al-harf*.

Though the term *al-ḥarf* was common among Arab and non-Arab linguists, there seems to be no agreement over its semantic content. In actual fact, the issue whether or not it has semantic content has prompted a heating debate among Arab linguists. Two groups can be distinguished in this respect. The first group holds two basic views regarding it. First, it considers that *al-ḥarf* has no meaning in itself and that it acquires it in something else. And second, it claims that it is not a functional category as it does not have a governing power over the elements it precedes.

The view that *al-ḥarf* has no semantic content is reminiscent of the definition suggested above by Sībawayhi in the framework of his definition of *al-kalim* 'speech'. For the latter *al-kalim* is composed of, in addition to a noun and a verb, a *'ḥarf ǧāʾa li maʿnan laysa ʾism wa lā fiʿl'* 'a particle whose meaning is not that of a noun, nor that of a verb (my translation). Similar to Sibawayhi, Abu Ḥayyān al-Ġarnāṭī in *Manhaǧ al-Sālik ʿalā Alfiyyat Ibn Mālik* (1947) holds the view that *al-harf* does not indicate meaning in itself.

In contradistinction to the first group of linguists who consider that *al-ḥarf* does not have meaning in itself and that it is not functional, the second group holds the view that it, *al-ḥarf,* does not have meaning in itself and that it signifies it in something else. One proponent of this view is Weiss (1976:27). The latter claims that in general *al-ḥurūf*, to varying degrees, have their meanings in something else. In the same vein, in *al- Īḍāḥ fī ʿIlal al-Naḥw*, al-Zaǧǧāǧī (1982: 54) argues that *al-ḥarf* [is] *mā dalla ʿalā maʿnan fī ġayrihi* 'the particle is something that signifies a meaning in something else' (-my translation).

The first and the second groups of linguists seen above all of them agree on the fact that *al-ḥarf* is a functional category that affects the lexical items it precedes; that is, -on the fact that it acts as a *ʿāmil* that operates over the other constituents, nouns and verbs, it comes before. Corroborating this view, in *Words and their Meanings,* Jackson (1980:143) argues that "*al-ḥurūf* "*make their contribution to the grammar of sentences rather than to their referential meaning*". While the other parts of speech, nouns and verbs, have the capacity of 'standing alone', *al-ḥarf,* on the other hand, does not have this capacity. In *al-Muḫaṣṣaṣ*, Ibn Sidā (n.d.) argues that the particles […] are required by the verb and the noun, or the sentence. However, these other categories (i.e., the noun and the verb) are different because they can *stand by themselves*. These particles are like the machine (*ʾāla*), and the other two parts (i.e., the verb and noun) have become the deed (*al-ʿamal*) for which the machine and its actions have been prepared (the first italics are mine).

One example about the functional governing power of *al-ḥarf* is *kāna wa aḫawātuhā* '*kāna* and its sisters'. The latter assign nominative case to the subject and accusative to the predicate they come before.

Coming back to the view of the second group of linguists regarding the semantic content of *al-ḥarf* , al-Zaǧǧāǧī in *Īḍāḥ* (1982) and az-Zamaḫšarī in *al-Mufaṣṣal* (1979:283) argue that *al-ḥarf* signifies meaning in something else. In the same book, Al-Zaǧǧāǧī further argues that *al-ḥurūf* 'particles', much like nouns, acquire meaning from the elements they are connected with. He argues that It has been said that the noun signifies its nominatum (musammāhu) but does not convey a communicative meaning (in isolation) until it is connected to a noun like it, or a verb or sentence (...) likewise the particle: if you mention it, it signifies the meaning for which it was established. But it does not convey a communicative meaning by your mentioning it until you connect it with something to complete its meaning. In this regard there is no difference between the noun and the particle. (p.49)

Said otherwise, much like the noun and the verb, *al-ḥarf* acquires meaning from verbs and from nouns it is used with.

So far, this section has attempted to delimit the meaning of the term *al-ḥarf* in Arabic poetry, in early Qur'anic exegeses, and in early Arabic grammar. It has also discussed the debate among Arab linguists over the sematic content of *al-ḥarf*. In what follows I move on to consider the views of classical Arab grammarians, old Arab rhetoricians, and legal theorists/jurisprudents regarding the category *al-ḥarf*.

2. Al-Ḥarf According to Classical Arab Grammarians

al-Ḥarf as an indispensable part of speech has appealed to the linguistic sensibilities of a number of classical Arab grammarians. In *aṭ-Ṭirāz al-Mutaḍammin li asrār al-Balāġa wa ʿulūm Ḥaqāʾiq al-Iʿǧāz*, Al-Yamani (1968) considers the study of *al-ḥurūf* part and parcel of the work of the grammarian because, he argues, it is part of the science of *al-iʿrab* 'case and mood inflection'. In their study of *al-ḥurūf*

(plural of *al-ḥarf*), classical Arab grammarians focused mostly on their formal and semantic aspects at the detriment of others, argumentative ones, e.g. For instance, Sibawayhi (1966), al-Rummani (1981) and al-Harawī (1975) focused on the governing power of *al-ḥurūf* over verbs and nouns; i.e., on their powers as inflection-changing elements. This formal approach appears in classical Arab grammarians' categorization of *ḥurūf al-al-ma'ānī*, which they classified as *ḥurūf 'āmila* 'operative particles', *ḥurūf muhmala* 'inoperative particles', *ḥurūf zāida* 'redundant or augmentive particles', *ḥurūf al-'atf* 'coordinating particles', *ḥurūf al-jazm* 'jussive particles' and *ḥurūf al-naṣb* 'subjunctive particles'.

3. Al-Ḥarf According to old Arab Rhetoricians

In addition to classical Arab grammarians, *al-ḥarf* appealed to the linguistic sensibilities of old Arab rhetoricians. Al-Ġurġānī (n.d.) and Al-'Askarī (1977), for example, studied *al-ḥarf* within the framework of *al-balāġa* 'rhetoric', more specifically within the framework of what they referred to as *al-faṣl wa al-waṣl* 'disjunction and conjunction'. For them, *al-balāġatu hiya ma'rifatu al-faṣl mina al-waṣl* 'rhetoric is differentiating between conjunction and disjunction'. They conceived *al-ḥurūf* as crucial constituents of rhetoric. What is noticeable about the approach of old Arab rhetoricians to *al-ḥurūf* is that it was too selective in the sense that their studies were confined to the stylistic significance of a limited number of *ḥurūf* 'particles' chief of which is *wa* 'and'.

4. Al-Ḥarf According to Legal Theorists/Jurisprudents

Much like classical Arab grammarians and rhetoricians, legal theorists/jurisprudents were also attracted by *ḥurūf al-ma'ānī*. al-Āmidī (1914), al-Baṣrī (1964), Ibn Qayyim al-ğawziyya (n.d), and al-Ġazālī (1970) are good examples in this respect. In their view, knowledge about *ḥurūf al-ma'ānī* 'particles of meaning' is a prerequisite for every scholar who seeks to understand al-Qur'ān and Islamic jurisprudence. Weiss (1984:15) argues that "if someone is going to determine what the law requires, he must be versed in the language of those instruments or sources in which the law is embodied", with one of these instruments being *ḥurūf al-ma'ānī*. For Al-Ġazālī (1970), [an understanding of] "legal issues rests on them (particles), and the need for them *is very great*" (p. 299). He adds that any understanding of al-Qur'ān rests on the argumentative structure that orients the scholar towards the intended meaning. For him,

الأُصُولِيُّ فِي فَهْمِهِ لِلنَّصِّ مُطَالَبٌ بِإِتْقَانِ الحَالَةِ الإِسْتِدْلَالِيَّةِ الَّتِي تَرْسُمُ مَنْهَجًا لِاسْتِنْبَاطِ الأَحْكَامِ، وَيَدْخُلُ فِي هَذَا الإِتْقَانِ مَعْرِفَتُهُ لِلْمَعَانِي اللَّغَوِيَّةِ الَّتِي تُسْتَقَاذُ مِنَ النَّصِّ، ثُمَّ مَعْرِفَتُهُ مُرَادَ الشَّارِعِ. وَقَدْ يَظْهَرُ هُنَا نَوْعٌ مِنَ التَّمْيِيزِ بَيْنَ اللَّغَوِيِّ وَالنَّحْوِيِّ وَالأَصُولِيِّ فِي فَهْمِ النُّصُوصِ الشَّرْعِيَّةِ، وَذَلِكَ أَنَّ اللَّغَوِيَّ وَالنَّحْوِيَّ، يَلْتَزِمُ كِلاَهُمَا فَقَطْ بِالضَّوَابِطِ المِنْهَجِيَّةِ المَبْنِيَّةِ عَلَى تَوَخِّي الفَائِدَةِ وَالصَّوَابِ.

Having discussed the views of classical Arab grammarians, old Arab rhetoricians, and of legal theorists/jurisprudents regarding the semantic content of *al-ḥarf*, I now move on to discuss some of its properties.

5. Properties
a) Linkage

One of the major properties of *ḥurūf al-ma'ānī* in Arabic is linkage. *Ḥurūf al-ma'ānī* are generally used to link words, phrases, sentences, and texts/discourse. Arabic and English, being two genetically-distant languages, differ in terms of this property. Holes (1994: 216) argues that *"the normal means of coordinating sentences (and other elements) in Arabic is syndetic, i.e. by the use of conjunctions"*. In English, by

contrast, the means of coordinating them is both syndetic and asyndetic. To illustrate, consider the following examples from Arabic and English:

(2) أَخرَجَتِ السَّيَّارَةَ مِنَ المِرآبِ وأَغلَقتِ البَابَ وَأَطفَأَتِ المَصَابِيحَ وَذهَبَتْ إِلَى الجَامِعَةِ.

'aḥrağati ssayyarata min al-mir'ābi wa aġlaqati al-bāba wa aṭfa'ati al-maṣābīḥa wa dahabat ila al-ğāmi'ati'.

In English, the Same Sentence Can be written as Follows

(3) She put the car out of the garage, locked the door, put the lights off and went to university.

In (2), the discourse connective *wa* separates all the sentences in a clear illustration of syndetic linkage. In (3), the same sentence was written with the connective *and* used only once, at the end of the text, and with the use of the punctuation mark, comma. It is interesting to mention that over the last centuries, with the influence of European languages, especially English and French, Arabic has started to adopt conventions such as the use of punctuation marks and asyndetic linkage.

b) Multifunctionality

Another property of *ḥurūf al-ma'ānī* 'particles of meaning' in the Arabic language is multifunctionality. By way of example, *ḥarf al-ma'nā* 'wa' can be used to perform a number of functions; four of which are:

b) 1. Addition
Consider the Example Below

(4) الصِّينُ وإيطَالَيا وإيرَان هِي الدُّوَل الأَكْثَرُ تَأَثَّرَا بِفِيرُوس

(*aṣṣīn waiṭālyā wa irān hiya dduwalu al aktaru ta'atturan bi al-fīrūs fi al-'ālam*)

In (4), the discourse connective 'wa' is used for addition.

c) 1. Swearing an Oath

In Q 86: 1-2 the discourse connective *wa* is used for swearing an oath.

(5) ﴿وَٱلسَّمَاءِ وَٱلطَّارِقِ وَمَا أَدْرَىٰكَ مَا ٱلطَّارِقُ ٱلنَّجْمُ ٱلثَّاقِبُ إِن كُلُّ نَفْسٍ لَّمَّا عَلَيْهَا حَافِظٌ﴾

wa ssamā'ii wa ṭṭariq wa mā adrāka ma ṭṭāriq annağmu ṭṭāqib in kullu nafsin lammā 'alayhā ḥāfiẓ

By the Sky and the Night-Visitant (therein). And what will explain to thee what the Night-Visitant is? (It is) the Star of piercing brightness; There is no soul but has a protector over it (Yusuf, Ali)

In (5), Allah swears by the sky and by the star [1] that pierces brightness that there is nothing His votaries (i.e., those who have a sense of true understanding) can be afraid of since He assumes the responsibility of protecting them. Allah swears that He will protect them in ways that are unknown to them. Man may be an insignificant creature, a mere animal; but Allah swears He will bring him to a position of dignity higher than all other creatures on earth. He swears to guarantee his protection.

d) 1. Contrast

(6) أَحْمَدٌ مُتَفَائِلٌ وَسَعِيدٌ مُتَشَائِمٌ

aḥmadun mutafa'ilun wa sa'īdun mutašā'imun
(Ahmed is optimistic and Said is pessimistic).

In (6), the discourse connective *wa* 'and' expresses contrast between the optimism of Ahmed and the pessimism of Said.

e)   1. Sequencing
Consider

(7) أَخْرَجْتُ السَّيَّارَةَ مِنَ المِرآبِ وأغَلقتِ البَابَ وَأطْفَأتِ المَصَابِيحَ وَتوجهت إلى العمل

'aḫraǧati ssayyarata mina al-mirʾābi wa aġlaqati al-bāba wa aṭfaʾati al-maṣābīḥa wa tawaǧǧahat ila al-ʿamal'.

In (7), the discourse connective *wa* 'and' signals the sequencing of four events, driving the car out of the parking lot, closing the door, switching off the light, and heading towards the work. In this case, 'wa' can be translated as 'then' in the English language.

f)   1. Repetition and parallelism

(8) يَكِدُّ وَيَجِدُّ مِنْ أَجْلِ نَجَاحِ الجَمْعِيَّةِ التَّنْمَوِيَّةِ.

yakiddu wa yaǧiddu mi aǧli inǧāhi al-ǧamʿiyyati.

In (8), the discourse connective *wa* 'and' links lexical items with almost the same meaning, *yakiddu* (To work hard) and *yaǧiddu* (To work hard). In Arabic, repetition and parallelism are achieved only through the connective *wa* as (9) shows:

(9) إِنَّ مَا تَثَلَّجُ لَهُ الصُّدورُ وَتَرْتَاحَ لَهُ النُّفوسُ وَيَبْعَثُ عَلَى الثِّقَةِ بِحُسْنِ مُسْتَقْبَلِنا مَا نَرَاهُ مِنْ اقّدامِ ابْنَاءِ بَلْدِنا الحَبِيبِ عَلَى الأَعْمَالِ الخَيِّرَيةِ وَجِدِّهِمْ وَنَشَاطِهِمْ فِي تَأْلِيفِ الكَلِمَةِ وَضَمِّ الشَّمْلِ وإِتّخاذِ المَقْصِدِ بِنَجاحِ البِلادِ وَتَقَدُّمِها وَأَخْذِهِمْ بِالوَسَائِلِ الحَدِيثَة .

'inna mā taṯluǧu lahu ṣṣudūru wa tartāhu lahu nnufūsu wa yabʿatu ʿala ttiqati bi ḥusni mustaqbalinā mā narāahu mi iqdāmi abnāʾi baladinā al-ḥabībi ʿalā al-ʾaʿmāli al-ḫayriyyati wa ǧiddihim wa našāṭihim fī taʾlīfi al-kalimati wa ḍammi aššamli wa ittiḫādi al-maqṣidi bi naǧāḥi al-bilādi wa taqaddumihā wa aḫdihim bi al-wasāʾili al-ḥadīṯati'.

In (9), *wa* 'and' not only links ideas but also juxtaposes every single repetition or parallelism; it links *taṯluǧu lahu ṣṣudūru* and *tartāhu lahu nnufūsu* (relief and feel-good). It also links *ǧiddihim* and *našāṭihim* (their vigorousness and their hard-working spirit), and it links *naǧāḥi al-bilādi* and *taqaddumihā*. (The success of the country and its progress). To sum up, in the section above I have attempted to define the term *al-ḥarf* 'particle'. I began by identifying how it was used in ancient Arabic poetry, in early Qur'anic exegeses, and in early Arabic grammar.

Then, I went on to discuss its semantic value as it was understood by three groups of scholars, classical Arab grammarians, rhetoricians, and legal theorists. In what follows, I give some taxonomies of *al-ḥurūf in* Arabic.

6.   Taxonomies of Al-Ḥuruf
The table below displays the taxonomy of *ḥurūf al-maʿānī* suggested by Sibawayhi:

Table 1: Sibawayhi's taxonomy of *ḥurūf al-Maʿānī*

Particle	Function	Example
waw 'and'	addition	حَضَرَ اللِّقَاءَ الوَزِيرُ وَنَائِبُهُ
fa 'then'	order	نَظَّلَ عَلِيٌّ فَمُحَمَّدٌ
ṯumma 'then'	sequencing	إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ثُمَّ كَفَرُوا ثُمَّ آمَنُوا ثُمَّ كَفَرُوا ثُمَّ ازْدَادُوا كُفْرًا لَمْ يَكُنِ اللَّهُ لِيَغْفِرَ لَهُمْ
aw 'or'	choice	إِخْتَرِ الأَكَفتَ ةَثُمَّ الأَكْثَرَ خِبْرَةً
am 'or'	choice	أَهُوَ فُلَانٌ أَمْ فُلَانٌ
lā 'not'	negation	لَأَتْلَهَ عَنْ خُلُقِي وَتَأْتِي مِثْلَهُ *** عَارٌ عَلَيْكَ إِذَا فَعَلْتَ عَظِيمٌ
lākin 'but'	contrast	حَظَرَ الطُّلَّابُ لَكِنْ غَبَّ المُعَلِّمُ
bal (no equivalent)	denial of expectation	لَمْ يَحْضُرْ زَيْدٌ بَلْ عُمَرْ
ḥattā 'even'	elaboration	أَكَلَ السَّمَكَةَ حَتَّى ذَيْلَهَا

Another taxonomy is proposed by Ezzeddine.

Table 2: Ezzeddine's taxonomy

Type	Example
ḥurūf al-ǧawāb 'particles expressing answer'	أَجَلْ - بَلَى - نِعَمَ - لَا
ḥurūf annafy 'particles expressing negation'	لَمْ - لَنْ - لَمَّا - مَا - لَا
ḥurūf aššarṭ 'particles expressing condition'	لَوْلَا - لَوْ - إِذْ مَا - إِنْ لَوْمَا
ḥurūf attaḫṣīṣ 'particles expressing exception'	لَوْمَا - لَوْلَا هَلّاَ - أَلَّا
ḥurūf al-istiqbāl 'particles expressing future'	إِنْ - آنْ - سَوْفَ - ا - لَنْ - سَ
ḥurūf attanbīh 'particles expressing notification'	يَا - هَا - أَلَّا - أَلَا
al-ḥurūf al-maṣdariyya 'nominal particles'	مَا - لَوْ - كَيْ - أَنَّ - أَنْ

Before moving to the third section in this paper, it is worth mentioning that the taxonomies provided by Classical Arab grammarians about *ḥurūf almaʿānī* 'particles of meaning' are problematic. In general, two major problems are begged in them. The first of which is that they are not systematically-based; in other words, there is no clear system that they are based on. The second problem is that they are overlapping. By way of example, while some grammarians put *inna* under the heading of *inna wa akhawatuha* 'inna and its sisters' considering it a functional particle, others, on the other hand, put it under that of particles that express future tense. This overlap can perhaps be attributed to the difference in the theoretical background underlying each and every taxonomy; i.e., whether this background is grammar, syntax, semantics or pragmatics.

6. Functions of Bal

Literature on *ḥurūf almaʿānī* 'particles of meaning' indicates that *bal* has been given considerable attention by classical Arab grammarians and rhetoricians. For example, Az- al-Zamaẖšarī (1979), Sibawayhī (1966), al-Murādī (1976), al-Ǧurǧānī (n.d.), Ibn Hišām (n.d.), and al-Harwī (1975) all of them devoted much space to it in their works. Of Western linguists who were interested in 'bal', Wright (1933) is perhaps one of the most known. In the section that follows, I review some of the functions of this discourse connective that have been identified in some of the works above. An examination of the occurrences of *bal* in Arabic indicates that

it is polyfunctional; it has at least four major functions which are:

Retraction (Idrāb in Arabic)

The first function of the discourse connective *bal* in Arabic is *Idrāb* 'retraction'. *bal* can be used to correct, turn away or to digress from previous statements. Syntactically, it can be used after an affirmative proposition or after a command, and it can be followed by a sentence (*ǧumla,* in Arabic) or by a single entity (*mufrad,* in Arabic). When followed by a single entity, *bal* expresses two different types of retraction; the first is what is referred to as 'invalidating retraction' (*iḍrāb ʾibṭālī,* in Arabic). This type of retraction happens when the statement of the previous sentence is invalidated to be replaced by something to the contrary, as in:

(10) أَمْ يَقُولُونَ بِهِ جِنَّةٌ بَلْ جَاءَهُم بِٱلْحَقِّ وَأَكْثَرُهُمْ لِلْحَقِّ كَرِهُون (Q23: 70)

am yaqūlūna bihi ǧinnatun bal ǧāahum bil-ḥaqqi wa-aktaruhum lilḥaqqi kārihūna

Or do they say, "He is possessed"? Nay, he has brought them the Truth, but most of them hate the Truth (Yusuf Ali, 2006)

In (10), the first statement (the unbelievers' claim that the Prophet Mohamed, peace be upon Him, is mad) is invalidated to be replaced by the fact that He has brought them the Truth, though the majority of them do not believe it. The second type of retraction is what is referred to in the Arabic language as *iḍrāb ʾintiqālī* 'shifting retraction' (Azzaoui, B. 2009:66).

It is a retraction in which we move from one theme or intention to another. The essence of this type of retraction is that it does not invalidate what precedes *al-ḥarf*; rather, it transfers what follows it into a new meaning. Explaining it, Ibn ʿĀšūr, in his seminal book, *ʾa-Ttaḥrīr wa a-Ttanwīr* (1984, 289/30), stresses that:

حَرْفُ بَلْ مَعْنَاهُ الجَامِعُ هُوَ الإِضْرَابُ، أَي: انْصِرافُ القَوْل أَوِ الحُكْمِ إِلَى ما يَأْتِي بَعْدَ بَلْ فَهُو إِذا عَطَفَ المُفْرداتِ كانَ الإِضْرابُ إِبْطالًا لِلْمَعْطُوفِ عَلَيْهِ: لِغَلَطٍ فَي ذِكْرِ المَعْطُوفِ أَوْ لِلاِحْتِرازِ عَنْهُ فَذَلِكَ انْصِرافٌ عَنِ الحُكْمِ .وَإِذا عَطَفَ الجُمَلَ فَعَطْفُهُ عَطْفُ كَلامٍ عَلَى كَلامٍ وهُو عَطْفٌ لَفْظِيٌّ مُجَرَّدٌ عَنِ التَّشْرِيكِ فِي الحُكْمِ ويَقَعُ عَلَى وَجْهَيْنِ، فَتَارَةً يُقْصَدُ إِبْطَالُ مَعْنى الكَلامِ نَحْوَ قَوْلِهِ تَعالَى: أَمْ يَقُولُونَ بِهِ جِنَّةٌ بَلْ جَاءَهم بِالْحَقِّ سُورَةِ المُؤمِنون:الآية 70.　　فَهو انْصِرافٌ فِي الحُكْمِ، وتارَةَ يُقْصَدُ مُجَرَّدُ النَّقَلِ مِن خَبَرٍ إِلى آخَرَ مَعَ عَدَمِ إِبْطالِ الأَوَّلِ نَحْوَ قَوْلِهِ تَعالَى ：وَلَدَيْنا كِتابٌ يَنْطِقُ بِالْحَقِّ وهم لَا يُظْلَمُونَ بَلْ قُلُوبُهم فِي غَمْرَةٍ (المومنون: 63-64) فَتَكُونُ بَلْ بِمَنزِلَةِ قَوْلِهِمْ دَعْ هَذَا فَهَذا انْصِرافٌ قَوْلِيٌّ، ويُعْرَفُ أَحَدُ الإِضْرابَيْنِ بِالْقَرائِنِ والسِّياقِ.

Istidrāk 'Remedy'

The second function that the connective *bal* has in the Arabic language is *istidrāk* 'rectifying or amending previous propositions'. Here, *bal* is used after a negative proposition or after a prohibition, as in:

(11) وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ قُتِلُواْ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ أَمْوَٰتًا ۚ بَلْ أَحْيَآءٌ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُون Q 3:169

walā taḥsabanna alladhīna qutilū fī sabīli l-lahi amwātan bal aḥyāon ʿinda rabbihim yur'zaqūn

Think not of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead. **Nay**, they live, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord (Yusuf Ali, 2006).

In (11), the connective *bal* is used to rectify the previous statement, the fact that the people who lose their lives for the sake of Allah are dead. On the contrary they are, for Allah, alive and they will find their sustenance with Him.

Intiqāl Min Ġaraḍ Li ʾāẖar 'Discourse Shift'

The third function of *bal* is what is referred to in the Arabic language as *intiqāl min ġaraḍ li ʾāẖar* 'shift or a transition from one topic or intention to another'. Consider:

(12) وَلَا نُكَلِّفُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا ۖ وَلَدَيْنَا كِتَٰبٌ يَنطِقُ بِٱلْحَقِّ ۚ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ بَلْ قُلُوبُهُمْ فِى غَمْرَةٍ مِّنْ هَٰذَا وَلَهُمْ أَعْمَٰلٌ مِّن دُونِ ذَٰلِكَ هُمْ لَهَا عَٰمِلُونَ (Q23: 62-63)

walā nukallifu nafsan illā wus'ʿahā waladaynā kitābun yanṭiqu bil-ḥaqi wahum lā yuẓ'lamūn bal qulūbuhum fī ghamratin min hādhā walahum aʿmālun min dūni dhālika hum lahā ʿāmilūn

We charge not any soul save to its capacity, and with us is a Book speaking truth, and they shall not be wronged. Nay, but their hearts are in perplexity as to this, and they have deeds besides that that they are doing. (Yusuf Ali, 2006)

In (12), there is a movement from one topic (the fact that Allah does not place more burden on any soul than it can bear and that He possesses a record which speaks the truth so clearly that no soul would ever be wronged) to another (in which Allah talks about the hearts of the unbelievers which are in confused ignorance of this fact) without invalidating the previous statement.

Tawkīd 'Emphasis'

The fourth function '*bal'* has in the Arabic language is *tawkīd* 'emphasis'. Consider the example below:

(13) أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِينَ يُزَكُّونَ أَنفُسَهُمْ ۚ بَلِ اللَّهُ يُزَكِّي مَن يَشَاءُ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ فَتِيلاً (Q4:49)

alam tara ilā alladhīna yuzakkūna anfusahum bali l-lahu yuzakkī man yashāu walā yuẓ'lamūna fatīla

Hast thou not turned Thy vision to those who claim sanctity for themselves? Nay-but Allah Doth sanctify whom He pleaseth. But never will they fail to receive justice in the least little thing (Yusuf Ali, 2006).

In (13), Allah calls our attention to a category of people who are sanctimonious; i.e. who tend to sanctify themselves. Using the connector *bal*, Allah emphasizes the fact that *only* He can sanctify whom He wants. The sentence following *bal* is an independent sentence. Here, *bal* has an emphatic function.

Conclusion

The preceding analysis has presented a sweeping overview of discourse connectives as they manifest in Arabic discourse. Commencing with a detailed examination of the concept of al-ḥarf, as defined by classical Arabic grammarians, rhetoricians, and legal theorists, the paper then transitioned to explore the taxonomies proposed around these connectives. Moreover, an in-depth exploration of the discourse connective

bal was undertaken, focusing on the delineation of its functions, primarily exemplified through the Holy Qurʾān.

This literature review is poised to be of considerable benefit to both native and non-native Arabic speakers, particularly those who harbor a keen interest in the nuanced dynamics of Arabic discourse connectives. By offering an accessible and succinct synthesis of extant scholarship, this review endeavors to alleviate the often cumbersome task of sifting through the labyrinth of classical Arabic grammar texts. It is imperative to underscore the scope limitations of this review, as it represents a partial rather than an exhaustive overview of the discourse connective literature within the Arabic language. This review seeks to establish a robust foundational framework from which to explore the multifaceted nuances of Arabic discourse connectives. It endeavors to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of these connectives, thereby enriching the dialogue surrounding Arabic language and discourse analysis.

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