

Glossary

المعجم

The technical terms of Nahw, Sarf and Balagha, each with its Arabic, its transliteration, an English gloss, a definition of one or two sentences, and one worked example — and, where the term has a full entry, a way through to it.

Showing: 38 / 38

النَّحْو Nahw — Syntax

الْفَاعِل

al-fā'il

The doer / grammatical subject of a verb

The noun in rafʿ that comes after its verb and by which the act is done. It is never deleted; if it is unnamed, the verb is built for the passive and the object stands in its place.

WORKED EXAMPLE

نَجَحَ الطَّالِبُ

“The student succeeded.” Al-ṭālib is the fā'il, in rafʿ, marked by the ḍamma.

THE FULL ENTRY →

nā'ib al-fā'il

al-maf'ul bihi

al-jumla al-fi'liyya

الْحَال

al-ḥāl

The circumstantial accusative

A noun in naṣb, indefinite and derived, which states the state its owner was in when the act took place. It answers “how?”.

WORKED EXAMPLE

جَاءَ زَيْدٌ رَاكِبًا

“Zayd came riding.” Rākiban is the ḥāl in naṣb: it does not describe Zayd absolutely, but the state he was in as he came.

al-tamyīz

al-maʿfūl bihi

حَرْفُ الْجَرِّ

ḥarf al-jarr

The preposition

A particle that lowers the noun after it into jarr and carries the sense of its verb across to that noun. The best known are min, ilā, ‘an, ‘alā, fī, bi-, li-, kāf.

WORKED EXAMPLE

ذَهَبْتُ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ

“I went to the masjid.” Ilā is the ḥarf al-jarr; al-masjid is majrūr after it, marked by the kasra.

al-iḍāfa

al-iʿrāb

الإِضَافَة

al-idāfa

Annexation (the genitive construct)

The joining of two nouns so that the second lowers the first's tanwīn and is itself in jarr. It carries the sense of “of”, of “from”, or of “in”.

WORKED EXAMPLE

بَابُ الْمَسْجِدِ

“The door of the masjid.” Bāb loses its tanwīn as the muḍāf; al-masjid is majrūr as the muḍāf ilayhi.

al-i‘rāb

ḥarf al-jarr

الإِعْرَاب

al-i‘rāb

Case and mood inflection

The change that comes over the end of a word because of the governor entering upon it, whether the change is uttered or only intended. Its four states are raf‘, naṣb, jarr and jazm.

WORKED EXAMPLE

كَتَبَ زَيْدُ الدَّرْسِ

Zayd is in raf‘ because he is the fā‘il; al-dars is in naṣb because it is the object of the verb. Change the governor and both endings change with it.

THE FULL ENTRY →

al-mubtada’

al-fā‘il

al-jazm

الْجَزْمُ

al-jazm

The jussive

The fourth state of i'rāb, and one that belongs to verbs alone: the muḍāri' has its final vowel cut off — or, in the five verbs, its nūn dropped — after one of the jawāzim, such as lam, lammā, the lām of command, or lā of prohibition.

WORKED EXAMPLE

لَمْ يَذْهَبْ

“He did not go.” Lam is a jāzim: yadhhabu becomes yadhhab, its ḍamma cut away, and the past sense is carried by the particle.

al-i'rāb

al-fi'l al-muḍāri'

الْجُمْلَةُ الْفِعْلِيَّةُ

al-jumla al-fi'liyya

The verbal sentence

A sentence that begins with a verb: the verb, then its fā'il in raf', then its object in naṣb if it has one. It reports an event, and renews it in the telling.

WORKED EXAMPLE

فَتَحَ اللَّهُ قُلُوبَ الْعِبَادِ

Verb, then fā'il in raf' (Allāh), then the object in naṣb (qulūb), which is itself the first term of an idāfa.

al-fā'il

al-ma'fūl bihi

al-jumla al-ismiyya

الْجُمْلَةُ الاسْمِيَّةُ

al-jumla al-ismiyya

The nominal sentence

A sentence that begins with a noun: a mubtada' and its khabar, both in raf'. It states a fact rather than an event, and it is the sentence the Arabs use for what is settled.

WORKED EXAMPLE

الْعِلْمُ نُورٌ

"Knowledge is light." Two nouns, no verb, both in raf' — and the claim is a standing one, not an event.

al-mubtada'

al-khabar

al-jumla al-fi'liyya

الْخَبَرُ

al-khabar

The predicate

What is predicated of the mubtada' and completes the sense with it. It is in raf', and it may be a single word, a whole sentence, or a zarf.

WORKED EXAMPLE

الطَّالِبُ يَقْرَأُ

"The student is reading." Here the khabar is not a word but a whole verbal sentence, yaqra'u, in the place of raf'.

THE FULL ENTRY →

al-mubtada'

al-jumla al-ismiyya

المَفْعُولُ الْمُطْلَقُ

al-maf'ūl al-muṭlaq

The absolute (cognate) object

A maṣḍar in naṣb from the same root as its verb, brought to confirm the act, to specify its kind, or to number it.

WORKED EXAMPLE

فَرِحَ الْوَلَدُ فَرَحًا شَدِيدًا

“The boy rejoiced greatly.” Faraḥan is the absolute object: it repeats the verb’s own root and, with shadīdan, states the kind of the rejoicing.

al-maṣḍar

al-maf'ūl bihi

المَفْعُولُ بِهِ

al-maf'ūl bihi

The direct object

The noun in naṣb upon which the act of the doer falls. Its sign is the fatḥa in the singular, the yā' in the dual and the sound masculine plural.

WORKED EXAMPLE

قَرَأَ عُمَرُ الْكِتَابَ

“Umar read the book.” Al-kitāb is the maf'ūl bihi, in naṣb by the fatḥa.

THE FULL ENTRY →

al-fā'il

al-maf'ūl al-muṭlaq

al-ḥāl

المُبْتَدَأُ

al-mubtada'

The subject of a nominal sentence

The noun in raf' with which a sentence begins, free of any expressed governor — it is raised by the act of beginning (al-ibtidā') itself.

WORKED EXAMPLE

المَسْجِدُ قَرِيبٌ

"The masjid is near." Al-masjid is the mubtada', in raf'; qarīb is its khabar, also in raf'.

THE FULL ENTRY →

al-khabar

al-i'rāb

al-jumla al-ismiyya

نَائِبُ الْفَاعِلِ

nā'ib al-fā'il

The deputy subject (of a passive verb)

The object that stands in the fā'il's place once the verb is built for the passive: the doer is deleted, the object is raised, and the vowels of the verb change.

WORKED EXAMPLE

كُتِبَ الدَّرْسُ

"The lesson was written." Al-dars was manṣūb as the object; now, with kutiba, it is marfū' as nā'ib al-fā'il.

al-fā'il

al-ma'fūl bihi

التَّمْيِيز

al-tamyīz

The accusative of specification

A noun in naṣb, indefinite, that lifts an ambiguity in what precedes it — in a measure, a weight, a number, or in a sentence as a whole. It answers “in what respect?”.

WORKED EXAMPLE

امْتَلَأَ الْكُوبُ مَاءً

“The cup filled with water.” The cup filled — but with what? Mā’an, in naṣb, specifies it.

al-ḥāl

al-maʿūl bihi

الصَّرْف Sarf — Morphology

الفِعْلُ الْمَزِيدُ

al-fi'l al-mazīd

The augmented verb

A verb with one, two or three letters added to its root — and “an increase in the building is an increase in the meaning”: causation, intensity, mutuality, reflexivity, or seeking.

WORKED EXAMPLE

عَلِمَ ← أَعْلَمَ، قَتَلَ ← قَاتَلَ

The hamza of af'ala makes the verb transitive — he knew, he informed. The alif of fā'ala makes it mutual — he killed, he fought.

al-fi'l al-mujarrad

al-mīzān al-ṣarfī

al-maṣdar

الفِعْلُ الْمُضَارِعُ

al-fi'l al-muḍāri'

The imperfect verb

The verb of the present and the future, which must begin with one of the four letters gathered in the mnemonic anaytu (hamza, nūn, yā', tā'). It is marfū' until a nāṣib or a jāzim enters upon it — alone among verbs, it is mu'rab.

WORKED EXAMPLE

يَكْتُبُ — لَنْ يَكْتُبَ — لَمْ يَكْتُبْ

Marfū'; then manṣūb after lan; then majzūm after lam. One verb, three states, three endings.

al-jazm

al-i'rāb

الفِعْلُ الْمُجَرَّدُ

al-fi'l al-mujarrad

The bare (unaugmented) verb

A verb whose every letter is a root letter, nothing added. The bare triliteral runs through six bābs and no more, fixed by the vowel of the ‘ayn in the past and in the present.

WORKED EXAMPLE

نَصَرَ يَنْصُرُ، ضَرَبَ يَضْرِبُ، فَتَحَ يَفْتَحُ

Three of the six bābs: fatḥa then ḍamma, fatḥa then kasra, fatḥa then fatḥa. The bāb fixes everything derived from the verb afterwards.

al-fi'l al-mazīd

al-mīzān al-ṣarfī

الفِعْلُ الْمُعْتَلُّ

al-fi'l al-mu'tall

The weak verb

A verb with a weak letter among its roots. It is of four kinds: mithāl (weak first), ajwaf (weak middle), nāqis (weak last), and lafif (two weak letters).

WORKED EXAMPLE

وَعَدَ (مِثَال)، قَالَ (أَجْوَف)، رَمَى (نَاقِص)

Weak in the first, the middle, the last — and each kind has its own rules of i'lāl, which is why the “irregular” verb is not irregular at all.

al-i'lāl

al-mīzān al-ṣarfī

الإِعْلَالُ

al-i'āl

The alteration of a weak letter

The change that comes over a wāw, a yā' or an alif in a word — by substitution, by vowelling, or by deletion — so that the word is easier on the tongue. It is a rule, not an irregularity.

WORKED EXAMPLE

قَوْلَ ← قَالَ، مَوْزَانَ ← مِيزَانَ

The wāw is moved and becomes an alif; in mīzān the wāw becomes a yā' for the kasra before it. Neither word is “irregular” — both obeyed a rule.

al-mīzān al-ṣarfī

al-fi'l al-mu'tall

اسْمُ الْآلَةِ

ism al-āla

The noun of instrument

The derived noun of the thing the act is performed with. Its established patterns are three: mif'al, mif'āl and mif'ala.

WORKED EXAMPLE

مِبْرَد، مِفْتَاح، مِكنَسَة

File, key, broom — the three patterns, one after the other.

al-wazn

اسْمُ الْفَاعِلِ

ism al-fā'il

The active participle

The derived noun of the one who does the act: on the pattern fā'il from the bare triliteral, and from the augmented verb on the pattern of its muḍāri' with a mīm in place of the prefix and a kasra before the last letter.

WORKED EXAMPLE

كَتَبَ ← كَاتِبٌ، اسْتَغْفَرَ ← مُسْتَغْفِرٌ

"One who writes", "one who seeks forgiveness". The pattern, not the dictionary, tells you the second.

THE FULL ENTRY →

ism al-maf'ūl

al-maṣḍar

al-ṣifa al-mushabbaha

اسْمُ الْمَفْعُولِ

ism al-maf'ūl

The passive participle

The derived noun of the thing the act falls upon: on the pattern maf'ūl from the bare triliteral, and from the augmented verb on the pattern of its muḍāri' with a fathā before the last letter.

WORKED EXAMPLE

كَتَبَ ← مَكْتُوبٌ، أَرْسَلَ ← مُرْسَلٌ

"Written", "sent". Note the single letter that separates mursal (sent) from mursil (one who sends): the vowel before the last letter.

ism al-fā'il

nā'ib al-fā'il

المَصْدَر

al-maṣḍar

The verbal noun

The noun of the act itself, free of any time: “writing”, as against “he wrote” and “he writes”. The Başrans hold it to be the origin from which the verb and every derived noun come.

WORKED EXAMPLE

كَتَبَ كِتَابَةً

Kitāba — “writing” — is the maṣḍar of kataba, and here it also stands as the absolute object confirming its own verb.

THE FULL ENTRY →

al-maḥḥūl al-muṭṭaq

ism al-fā'il

al-fi'l al-mazīd

المِيزَانُ الصَّرْفِيُّ

al-mīzān al-ṣarfī

The morphological scale

The three letters fā', 'ayn and lām, set against the three root letters of a word so that its pattern can be read off. Whatever in the word does not answer to f-'l is an addition — and every addition carries a meaning.

WORKED EXAMPLE

اسْتَغْفَرَ — عَلَى وَزْنِ اسْتَفْعَلَ

Istaghfara weighs as istaf'ala: gh-f-r are the root; the alif, sīn and tā' are added, and they add the sense of seeking.

THE FULL ENTRY →

al-fi'l al-mujarrad

al-fi'l al-mazīd

al-wazn

الصِّفَةُ الْمُشَبَّهَةُ

al-ṣifa al-mushabbaha

The quasi-participle (settled quality)

A derived noun like the ism al-fā'il in form but not in sense: it states a quality that is settled in its owner and does not pass away — as against the participle, which reports an act.

WORKED EXAMPLE

حُسْنٌ ← حَسَنٌ، كَرُمٌ ← كَرِيمٌ

“Handsome”, “noble”. A man who is karīm is not doing something; he is something.

ism al-fā'il

الْوَزْنُ

al-wazn

The pattern (measure) of a word

The shape a root is cast in — the arrangement of its letters and vowels. Two words on one wazn share a meaning-type, which is why the pattern, not the dictionary, is what a student of Ṣarf memorises.

WORKED EXAMPLE

مِفْتَاحٌ، مِشَارٌ، مِيزَانٌ — عَلَى وَزْنِ مِفْعَالٍ

Key, saw, scales: one pattern, mif'āl, and one meaning-type — the instrument with which the act is done.

al-mīzān al-ṣarfī

ism al-āla

البَلَاغَةُ Balagha — Rhetoric

البَلَاغَةُ

al-balāgha

Eloquence

That speech should match the situation it is spoken in, while remaining faṣīḥ. It is predicated of the speech and of the speaker — never of a single word.

WORKED EXAMPLE

لِكُلِّ مَقَامٍ مَقَالٌ

“To every occasion its own speech.” The maxim is the whole science in four words: the same sentence is eloquent here and inept there.

al-faṣāḥa

‘ilm al-ma‘ānī

الفَصَاحَةُ

al-faṣāḥa

Clarity of expression

A property of the word and of the sentence: clear of harshness between its letters, of oddity, and of what breaks the rules of the language. It is the condition of eloquence, not eloquence itself.

WORKED EXAMPLE

الفَصِيحُ قَدْ لَا يَكُونُ بَلِيغًا

A sentence may be perfectly faṣīḥ — every word clear, every ending correct — and still be the wrong thing to say in that situation, and so not balīgh.

al-balāgha

الإيجاز

al-ījāz

Concision

To carry a large meaning in few words — either by deleting what the context supplies (ījāz ḥadhf) or by choosing words that hold more than they say (ījāz qīṣar). Its opposites are itnāb, which expands to a purpose, and musāwāt, which matches word to meaning exactly.

WORKED EXAMPLE

وَأَسْأَلُ الْقَرْيَةَ

“Ask the town.” The people of the town are meant, and the word “people” is deleted — the deletion is not a gap but a figure.

‘ilm al-ma‘ānī

al-majāz al-mursal

عِلْمُ الْمَعَانِي

‘ilm al-ma‘ānī

The science of meanings

The science of the structures of Arabic and what each does in its situation: statement and its counterpart, fronting and delay, deletion, restriction, joining and separating, brevity and expansion.

WORKED EXAMPLE

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ

The object is fronted before its verb, and the fronting is the claim: You alone we worship. Say na‘buduka and the exclusivity is gone.

THE FULL ENTRY →

al-qāṣr

al-khabar wa’l-inshā’

al-ījāz

الاستِعَارَة

al-isti'āra

Metaphor

A simile with one of its two sides taken away and its particle with it, so that the word is used of what it does not literally name — with a qarīna, a sign in the speech, preventing the literal reading.

WORKED EXAMPLE

رَأَيْتُ أَسَدًا يَخْطُبُ

“I saw a lion delivering a khuṭba.” The likened (the man) is gone; only the lion is left. Yakhtubu is the qarīna: lions do not preach, so a man is meant.

THE FULL ENTRY →

al-tashbīh

al-kināya

al-majāz al-mursal

الجناس

al-jinās

Paronomasia (the pun)

Two words that resemble each other in their letters and differ in meaning. Complete (tāmm) when they match in every letter and vowel; incomplete (nāqish) when they differ in one.

WORKED EXAMPLE

وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ يُقْسِمُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ مَا لَبِثُوا غَيْرَ سَاعَةٍ

Sā'a the Hour, sā'a an hour: one form, two meanings — complete jinās, and the second use is the argument against the first.

al-ṭibāq

الْخَبَرُ وَالْإِنْشَاءُ

al-khabar wa'l-inshā'

Statement and non-statement

Khabar is speech that can be called true or false; inshā' is speech that cannot — the command, the prohibition, the question, the wish, the oath. Every sentence is one or the other.

WORKED EXAMPLE

أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ — الصَّلَاةُ عِمَادُ الدِّينِ

The first is inshā': a command, which no one calls true or false. The second is khabar: a claim, which may be affirmed or denied.

ʿilm al-maʿānī

الْكِنَايَةُ

al-kināya

Metonymy

To say a thing by naming something that always accompanies it, while the literal sense may also stand. Unlike metaphor, kināya does not forbid the literal reading — it simply is not what was meant.

WORKED EXAMPLE

فُلَانٌ كَثِيرُ الرَّمَادِ

“He has much ash.” His ash is not the point: much ash means much cooking, much cooking means many guests — the man is generous. And he may still, literally, have much ash.

al-istiʿāra

al-tashbīh

المَجَازُ الْمُرْسَلُ

al-majāz al-mursal

Metonymic (non-similitude) figurative usage

A word used of other than its literal sense on a relation that is NOT likeness — the part for the whole, the whole for the part, the cause for the effect, the place for its people — with a qarīna preventing the literal reading.

WORKED EXAMPLE

لَهُ عَيْنٌ سَاهِرَةٌ

The eye stands for the watchman entire: the part named for the whole. Where the relation IS likeness, it is not majāz mursal but isti'āra.

al-isti'āra

al-ījāz

القَصْرُ

al-qaṣr

Restriction (exclusivity)

Confining one thing to another: this quality to this subject, or this subject to this quality — by negation and exception, by innamā, by fronting what should have followed, or by 'aṭf.

WORKED EXAMPLE

إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ

Innamā restricts: deeds are by intentions and by nothing else. The restriction is carried by the particle, not by the words it joins.

ʿilm al-ma'ānī

التَّشْبِيه

al-tashbīh

Simile

To state that one thing shares a quality with another, by means of a particle such as ka- or ka-anna. Its pillars are four: the likened, the likened-to, the shared quality, and the particle.

WORKED EXAMPLE

الْعِلْمُ كَالنُّورِ

“Knowledge is like light.” Knowledge is the likened, light the likened-to, guidance the shared quality, and the kāf the particle. Delete the particle and it tightens towards metaphor.

THE FULL ENTRY →

al-isti‘āra

al-kināya

الطَّبَاق

al-ṭibāq

Antithesis

Bringing a thing and its opposite together in one speech — a figure of badī‘, which adorns speech that is already sound and clear.

WORKED EXAMPLE

وَتَحْسَبُهُمْ أَيْقَاظًا وَهُمْ رُقُودٌ

Waking set against sleeping in a single clause — the opposition is the point, and it is what makes the image hold.

al-jinās

al-balāgha