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Optionally Omitting the Subject in Nominal Sentences: I

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Abstract

While the nominal subject is an essential component in Arabic, the purpose of this paper is to investigate the reasons for its absence. A comparative historical descriptive method is used in the study. Thus, the study discusses the mentioned issue for several outstanding Arab grammarians, beginning with Sībawayhi and progressing to Al-Sīrāfī and Al-Mubarrid. This paper demonstrates that the existence of verbal or contextual evidence that could lead the recipient to know the omitted nominal subject conditions the optional omission of the nominal subject.

Keywords: Omitting, nominal subject, ellipsis, estimation.

1. Introduction

The subject is an essential component on which the nominal sentence is based. It is the component known to senders and recipients alike. In addition, the sender seeks to tell the recipient something about this element through the other part of the nominal sentence, called by grammarians a predicate (khabar). The recipient shares the sender's knowledge of the subject in nominal sentence but does not know of the predicate. As long as the subject in nominal sentence is one of the essential components on which the nominal sentence is based, it is worth asking several questions: Is it possible to omit the subject despite what was previously mentioned about its significance in the nominal sentence? If possible, what are its conditions? In which context it may be omitted and in which context it may not?

Answering these questions requires looking into the theory of omitting the subject in nominal sentence and its history from Sībawayhi to the modern era. This paper considers the optional omission of the subject, which means that the obligatory omission of the subject in nominal sentence is not one of the objectives of this study. This comes through reviewing the opinions of nine grammarians, whom I consider among the most famous and most influential Arab grammarians, as they represent different periods of the development of Arabic grammar throughout history such as Sībawayhi and Al-Mubarrid. In addition to the induction approach; the study relies on an attempt to compare and track the reflection and influence among grammarians across different eras, which necessitated addressing the topic of such grammarians according to the historical sequence of their biographies and writings.

2. Material and methods

It is necessary to start by addressing the main terms that grammarians use in their approach to the theory of optional omission of the subject in nominal sentence; so that there is no need to address the interpretation of those terms at the beginning of the consideration of the views of grammarians and researchers about the mentioned omission.

2.1 Ellipsis (Idhmār)

The lexical search for ellipsis (Idhmār) indicates that it is the infinitive of the verb adhmara (he prevented something from being seen), i.e., he hid it [1]. Terminologically, it is to suggest the presence of a word in the linguistic structure without being mentioned therein, such as udrus ḥattā tanjaḥa (Study to succeed); as that way, the verb in the present tense

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here is accusative with hidden *an* after *hattā* (to). The hidden word may be a letter, a name, or a verb [2]. Ellipsis may mean a pronoun in the sense of using a pronoun instead of a noun. Therefore, ellipsis does not necessarily refer to phonetic omission. Thus, the term ellipsis expresses better than any other term the idea of omission because it means the concept of memorizing what has been omitted from the linguistic structure. This concept combines omission and ellipsis in the sense of a pronoun; i.e., using a pronoun instead of a noun [3]. On the other hand, some see that ellipsis is a general term for omission, whether it is phonetic or synthetic. According to Sībawayhi, the concept of the term "ellipsis" means that the sender hides one of the components of the sentence. In the books of later grammarians, it means either pronouns that indicate or denote nouns or the concept of omission [4]. Thus, it can be said that the term "ellipsis" constitutes mental or intellectual activity, while omission constitutes the physical action of excluding the omitted component from speech. As long as the mental action precedes the physical action, it is more profound and worthy of referring to both actions together [5]. Omission can be classified into several main types: phonetic omission, such as omitting the letter *nūn* in *lam yaku(n)* (It was not) and the letter *yā'* in *lam 'ubāle(y)* (I didn't care), and the morphological omission towards omitting the letter *wāw* in *ya(u)sil* (he arrives) and in *lam yaku(um)* (he did not wake up), and others. As for synthetic or structural omission, it may be at many levels, including omitting a word, such as *la (ba'sa) alayka* (It is okay for you), and *laysa illa (thalika)* (only that). and omitting a prepositional phrase, such as *kana (miqdāru masāfati qurbihi) qāba qawsayni aw adnā* "(The extent of his proximity) was just around the corner" [6]. Omitting the subject belongs to the latter type of omission.

2.2 Estimation (taqdīr)

The term "estimation" means the comprehensive grammar or receiver perception of the original deep structure of the sentence that appeared to the receiver, i.e., the surface structure in which phonetic omission, morphological omission, or synthetic/ structural omission occurred. The omitted element or compound is apparent in the deep original structure, but it is omitted in the surface structure. Thus, estimation is the recipient's or grammar's perception of the original deep structure in the surface structure of speech before omission occurs [7]. It is argued that estimation means interpreting the grammatical structures that one or more of its components have been omitted and thus moving from a grammatical structure that is inappropriate or in line with the basic grammatical rules to a complete structure that is not omitted and is consistent with grammatical rules. Consequently, this brings us back to the concept of moving from the superficial structure (in which omission occurred) to the original deep structure (in which there is no omission) [8].

2.3 Omission (hathf)

Before proposing the theory of optional omission of the subject and discussing the different views, it is worth considering the need for this theory first. In this context, Ibn Ya'īsh says: (We Know that the subject and the predicate are a proper sentence through which the meaningfulness is given because the subject is the topic of meaningfulness and the predicate is the comment of meaningfulness, so they are

necessary, except that... so one of them is omitted...) [9]. This means that the sentence that is composed of a subject and a predicate is a helpful sentence in which the meaningfulness is not given except both the subject and the predicate are mentioned because the predicate is the content of the meaningfulness, while the subject is the one on which the meaningfulness depends because it is related to the new information. This further information must have a given on which is based, which is the subject. The subject is the one on which the meaningfulness is based, and therefore the subject and the predicate are necessary for the meaningfulness given in the sentence.

Since both are necessary, it must resort to interpreting places where the subject is not mentioned and does not appear in the explicit speech or superficial structure. Abd Al-Rahman Ayoub [10] calls this subject to a logical formality represented in the necessity of the presence of the subject and the predicate: (The grammarian's saying to omit the subject or the predicate when they are not mentioned is subject to a logical formality that necessitates the existence of the subject and the predicate together...) (p. 158). This means that the subject and the predicate can only constitute a helpful sentence if they unite. However, if one is absent, the grammarian or the recipient resorts to omission and assumption [11]. This is what Abd al-Qāhir Al-Jurjānī says too [12].

Some explain the necessity of resorting to omission and assumption through the need of explaining the syntax and its apparent signs in the surface structure, and this means the need for interpreting and defining the grammatical functions of the surface structure components [13]. There is no doubt, however, that the need to interpret and define grammatical functions is, in one way or another, due to the issue of achieving meaningfulness in the surface structure of the sentence and the necessity of attributing the meaningfulness related to new information to what is given as previously mentioned.

Following this introduction which included defining objectives, methodology, terminology, and the need to resort to the theory of omitting the subject, we move on to put forward that theory in the optional omission of the subject and in the concurrent and different opinions of grammarians and researchers regarding that omission. Since Sībawayhi had the lead in grammatical theorizing about the topic of the study, it is natural that the discussion begins with addressing what he said about that.

3. Results & Discussion: Optional omission of subject in the nominal sentence

In the context of optional omission of subject in the nominal sentence Sībawayhi says:

This is a chapter in which the subject is implied, and the predicate is apparent. That is if you saw the image of a person. It became a sign for you to know the person; you would say (Abdullah, by Allah) as if you said (that is Abdullah or this is Abdullah), or if you heard a voice and recognized the voice. It became a sign for you to know the person, you would say (Zayd, by Allah), or if you touched a body or smelled a smell, you would say (Zayd)... If you were told about the merits of a man and they became a sign for you to know him, you would say (Abdullah); also, if a man said, "I passed by a man who was merciful to the poor, righteous with his parents," you would say (So-and-so, by Allah) [14].

It is noted above that Sībawayhi deals with examples where

the subject is not mentioned and resorts to interpretation to explain them. Some may think that Sībawayhi was the first to resort to interpretation. Still, the use of understanding began early with Abdullah bin Abi Ishaq and then developed during the period of Al-Khalil Bin Ahmed [15]. In this context, Abu Makārim asserts: (Setting rules and giving interpretations are no longer actually limited to texts and linguistic phenomena, but somewhat exceeded them to what is supposed to exist as well...) [16]. Thus, the implied or omitted subject, like other things implied or omitted in the Arabic language, is what is supposed or assumed to exist. However, this implication or omission may be permissible under conditions discussed later.

The most apparent cause of synthetic or structural omission is when the recipient can discover and know the compound(s) omitted from a speech by evidence of case or context. This is confirmed by Sībawayhi above, as it is clear from the context and the point that you mean (you are Abdullah) when you aim to show him that you know him [17].

In all these examples in which the subject is implied and that are mentioned by Sībawayhi, the listener or reader gets to know the implied subject through the context or case in which the speech or compound/surface structure is said. In this context, the point is not only the texts that are spoken or related to pronunciation or the tongue but also the speaker's features. The speaker's prior knowledge makes the recipient understand the implied thing through the speaker's features. When speaking, this knowledge makes him speak in a specific tone and automatically appear certain features that make the listener or addressee reach the implied or omitted subject. There is no doubt that whoever knows Abdullah speaks, when speaking, in a tone that shows different features from those that appear on the addressee or the listener who does not know him and from that tone told by those who do not know him. If Hassan [18] considers the tone or the voice to be a verbal presumption, then the speaker's features can be regarded as a case presumption. In addition, the case in these examples above refers to the implied or omitted subject in other ways. The listener or the addressee sees the speaker when he looks at an image of a person, for example. Thus, when he says (Abdullah, by Allah), it is natural for the recipient to realize that the speaker is talking about the owner of that image. Therefore, the omitted subject is recognized and assumed with (this is) or (he is). and the same applies for other examples. Undoubtedly, for the addressee or listener to reach the omitted one, he should occupy his sight and/or hearing, which is one of the means of sensory perception. This is also what Hassan says [19].

In the context of those examples Sībawayhi cited for the ellipsis and omission of the subject, he talks about the recipient's acquaintance with the determination of the deep structure by assuming the implied or omitted subject based on sensory perception through both hearing and sight. As for hearing, it defines the surface structure, but sight depends on it to recognize the omitted element of the deep structure based on the features of the speaker, his action (his action here is not a grammatical concept but a behavioral one), his view of a person's image, his hearing of a person's voice, his hearing of enumerating the qualities of a person, his taste of food or the like, his smell of something, and so on. Perhaps Sībawayhi's reference to the need for the listener or addressee to recognize the omitted subject constitutes the

basis for the principle of the condition of knowledge of the addressee or the listener with the implied subject to allow the subject to be told or omitted, as will be detailed later. Thus, for the correctness of the subject's ellipsis, we note that Sībawayhi requires an interaction between the addressee or the listener and the case in which the speech, compound, or surface structure comes and the accompanying features that appear on the speaker and the like. Carter confirms that this case that Sībawayhi talks about is a real case or context, and that omission or ellipsis is possible only when the actual case shows those omitted elements [20].

The term (the actual case) is an umbrella term for what the grammarians, including Al-Jurjānī, referred to. Suppose the speaker looks at a person's image, hears a person's voice, hears him enumerates the characteristics of a person, tastes food or the like, smells something, or sees the features of the speaker when he speaks. In that case, all of that and the like constitutes an actual case or context. This is how interaction occurs: the speaker does something and then utters, speaks with a superficial structure in which there is an implied or omitted subject, and certain features appear on him. All of this takes place in the hearing and sight of the listener or addressee, and through it, he arrives at the actual case in which the speech or the superficial structure was said, and through it, he reaches the omitted subject.

It is worth mentioning that Ibn Hisham distinguished between omitting the main elements (umda/emād) in the linguistic structure which needs case evidence and omitting the extra features (fadhlah) where the linguistic structure does not require case evidence [21]. However, Sībawayhi mentioned the context of the case and discussed the condition of the interaction of the recipient and the context. Carter asserts that the case Sībawayhi talked about constitutes a living reality, a real life, or a linguistic environment [22]. To a large extent, this case is not linguistic. As for the case with Ibn Hisham, Carter says it is more linguistic than with Sībawayhi. It may be words that appear in the superficial structure or something similar.

Interestingly, Al-Mubarrid improves the interpretation of the issue of the possibility of omission or ellipsis because he clarifies and defines a condition for the permissibility of omission clearly and directly: The omission of the subject must be preceded by a mention and an appearance in the surface structure so that it makes the listener or the addressee understand and reach the omitted subject. This condition is either verbal or linguistic. If we want to apply this condition and clarify what Al-Mubarrid said, then we can say: So-and-so asks you: Who is your student? You answered (Abdullah), that is, (he is Abdullah) or (my student is Abdullah). When you say "Zayd is not in his house," then his father says (going off), that is, (Zayd has going off) or (he has gone off). Also, you say "Amr and I traveled yesterday, and we had lunch and then toured the archaeological sites." I say who is your friend, or is he your friend..." In all of the preceding, the omitted subject in the speech or the previous surface structure was mentioned, and there is no doubt that this is verbal-linguistic evidence.

Some may mistakenly think that Al-Mubarrid is the first to theorize this verbal or linguistic condition of optionally omitting the subject, but in fact, Sībawayhi preceded him, but in the form of examples without reference to the verbal evidence. It is true that Sībawayhi spoke only of the case evidence, but in the context of his dealing with the omission of the optional subject, he cited poetic examples referring to

verbal evidence prior to the omission [23].

As for Al-Sīrāfi, it is permissible to make (a dwelling) instead of (debris) [24]; However, Al-Jurjānī favors the ellipsis of a subject, not making (a dwelling) instead of (debris), justifying that (a dwelling) is more than (debris) and the apposition is substituted for something more than it or at least something like it [25].

There is no doubt that Sībawayhi mentioned or at least referred to the condition of saying the omitted subject in the surface structure preceding the speech. It is worth mentioning here that Sībawayhi influenced Al-Mubarrid. Still, Al-Mubarrid defined matters, clarified the condition, and highlighted it in a particular chapter that he called *Idhmār al-Mubtada'* (the ellipsis of the subject), not through other chapters, as Sībawayhi did.

Sībawayhi not mentioning these poetic examples in the chapter on the ellipsis or omission of the subject and mentioning them in other chapters, indicates the disorder in the arrangement and that Sībawayhi does not fulfill the ellipsis or omission of the subject. This means that Sībawayhi did not fulfill the topic or issue of the optional omission of the subject in its chapter. Also, the phenomenon of disorder in the arrangement requires the researcher not only to be satisfied with reviewing or considering the intended chapter according to Sībawayhi's name of its chapters, but also to consider other chapters that may be close in content or topic to the chapter to be studied. This requires a great effort that could have been dispensed with. In addition to what Al-Mubarrid highlights as condition of the pre-mention in the surface structure, which is verbal evidence, we see him follow Sībawayhi clearly and prominently in his reference to the evidence of the case in which speech, linguistic structure, or surface structure comes. There is no need to repeat explaining this, except that Al-Mubarrid comes with another example that differs from those presented by Sībawayhi to the reader. Likewise, Al-Mubarrid comes up with the possibility of omitting the optional subject in another place, which is the place of interruption of speech to tell about the unknown, or that the speaker thinks is unknown to the recipient, the listener, or the addressee: when I say (I passed by a man), I may believe or think that this man is not known to the recipient, the listener or the addressee, so I interrupt the speech, in the sense that I start with a new sentence, which is a nominal sentence that is not affected by the previous speech in terms of the syntactic aspect, to tell him who is this man I am talking about, so I say (I passed by the man, Zayd), that is, هو زيد (he is Zayd). Sībawayhi explains this by saying: "He said, (I passed by the man, Zayd), and then you put him in the position of the one who said to you (who he is?), even if he did not speak of that." [26]. That is, you put the recipient in the position of the one who asks: (Who is he?) This is another evidence that Al-Mubarrid is influenced by Sībawayhi. Al-Mubarrid cites the Qur'anic verse "of [what is] worse than that? The Fire" [27], that is, (It is the Fire), so (The Fire) is nominative for the ellipsis of a subject whose assumption is (It is) [28].

4. Conclusions

After discussing, comparing, and critiquing the views of grammarians and writers on the theory of the optional omission or ellipsis of the subject, we can say that the subject can be implied or omitted from the speech or the surface structure. However, this possibility cannot come to light

unless there is an essential condition agreed upon by the grammarians and researchers, which is the existence of verbal or case evidence that points the listener or the reader to the implied or omitted subject without ambiguity or doubt about the possibility of knowing the recipient and reaching the omitted or implied subject. Drawing that result is due to what the grammarians mentioned from the linguistic, poetic, prose, and Qur'anic examples, whose authenticity or content did not remain in doubt among the researchers.

This paper shows the development of the theory above, starting with Sībawayhi and ending with Al-Sīrāfi, trying to shed light the areas of innovation and the nature of progress in each stage and the other, taking into account grammarians who represent the successive stages of the development of Arabic grammar in general. Moreover, this article maintains partially the chronological sequence of these grammarians to describe and discuss the historical development in the theory of the optional omission of the subject. In conclusion, for completing the above chronological sequence, this paper will be followed by a coming study to investigate the discussed issue for other several Arab grammarians such as Ibn Jennī, Al-Jurjānī and others.

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