

## JANUSZ DANECKI

The notion of *tamakkun* in Sibawayhi's grammar

It is a very peculiar trait of the Arabic grammatical theory that a number of categories are applied indiscriminately to different linguistic phenomena. Decisive is the form and not the function. In our linguistic tradition this approach was for a very long time different: each linguistic phenomenon or a linguistic entity needed its own descriptive instruments. Contrary to, this the Arabic theory is maximally general and maximally abstract. For instance, the inflexional affixes were categorized according to their form and not according to where they appeared. If a nominal suffix is formally identical with a verbal one, both are treated and called identically. Sibawayhi classes them all as *mağārī al-kalām*: their place is at the end of words and as such they are treated the same. No distinction is made between verbal and nominal suffixes (endings). So the ending (or suffix) *-a* is called *naṣb* irrespectively of where it appears. In nouns the ending *-a* indicates one of the nominal cases ("accusative", dependent case<sup>1</sup>), while in verbs *-a* indicates some of the forms of a mood called "subjunctive". It is the form and not the function of this ending which decides about its classification.

In our grammatical tradition the approach is different. For example, the nominal ending *-is* in Latin (as in *vit-is*) is classified separately from the verbal ending *-is* (e.g. *bib-is*), although both are formally identical, even their position in a word is the same. For the Latin grammarians not the form was important but the fact that some of the endings appeared with nouns, others were added to verbs. Their formal identity was never noticed. This might be the result of the history of these teachings: in the Alexandrian school which served as the base for later grammars (and our grammatical tradition, too), the paradigm was the most important object of research.<sup>2</sup> The Arab grammarians

<sup>1</sup> The term "dependent case" for Sibawayhi's *naṣb* was proposed by M. Carter. Cf. his *An Arab Grammarian of the Eight Century A.D. A Contribution to the History of Linguistics*, JAOS 93, 2, 1973, p. 153.

<sup>2</sup> Б. А. Ольховников, *Теория языка и вид грамматического описания в истории языкознания. Становление и эволюция канона грамматического описания в Европе*, Moscow 1985, p. 86.



never bothered with paradigms, they hunted for similar phenomena across the system of the language, irrespectively of word-classes. Their attention was rather drawn by unusual phenomena, especially those which did not fit an imagined paradigm. The internal logic of their classification was different. It is not enough to find an *-a* at the end of words and to classify it as *naṣb*; this *-a* must also have a specific, very general, but common type of functioning. This type of functioning characteristic for *-a* is called *i'rāb*, which means that the appearance of *-a* is caused by a certain factor. If this is the case, then *-a* is called *naṣb*. In nouns the ending will be caused by a preceding verb, in verbs the ending would appear under the influence of the *an* or *kay* particle. If there is no factor causing the appearance of the *-a* ending (as is the case in the adverb *fawq-a* 'over'), the ending would not be called *naṣb*. In other words the mere form of an ending is not enough to classify it as such; also its function is taken into consideration.

These general grammatical concepts underwent a significant change and were elaborated during the long history of the Arabic grammatical thought. One observes a considerable difference between the ideas of Sībawayhi and of those who followed him, even in the next two or three generations. This general problem has hardly been touched upon. The recent publications of J. Owens showed how considerable these differences are and how complicated is the process of extracting the development from the material which is to our disposition.<sup>3</sup>

One of such notions which very early began to change is that of *tamakkun*. It seems that the initial meaning of the term very soon was changed and became to be understood just as it is today. In Sībawayhi's *Al-Kitāb*, however, the term *tamakkun* had much wider application than it has now: it did not possess the meaning of nominal inflection only, but designated quite a number of inflexional categories. One might see in the development of the meanings of *tamakkun* the process of very broad and rather instinctively understood words becoming very strict and defined terms and notions. In other words, it is the process of creating terminology.

The term *tamakkun* could be the invention of Sībawayhi just as a number of other general notions seem to be the product of his reflexion on Arabic grammar. One cannot, however, quote his own definition of the term; in accordance with the whole grammatical (and not only grammatical) tradition, no explicit definitions were given.<sup>4</sup> It is then necessary to extract the meaning of the term by a thorough analysis of fragments in which it appears. Since the term *tamakkun* plays rather important role in modern Arabic linguistic theory, some attention has been paid to its analysis.

<sup>3</sup> J. Owens, *Early Arabic Grammatical Theory. Heterogeneity and Standardization*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia 1990.

<sup>4</sup> Confer the remarks of D. V. Frolov on defining grammatical concepts in Arabic linguistic theory: Д. В. Фролов, *Способы определения понятий в традиционной арабской грамматике. Проблемы арабской культуры. Памяти академика И. Ю. Крачковского*, Moscow 1987, pp. 170–192.



Werner Diem in his article *Nomen, Substantiv und Adjectiv bei den arabischen Grammatikern*<sup>5</sup> gives a profound explanation of the term as it is used in Sibawayhi's work. Diem renders its meaning as *Festigkeit*, i.e. 'stability, solidity'<sup>6</sup>. His contention is that the term was referred by Sibawayhi primarily to syntax, and that it hardly can be interpreted as a morphological category. *Tamakkun* refers to such syntactical functions as attribution, determination etc., hence it has nothing to do with the notion of full declensional liability of nominals. W. Diem notes, however, that Sibawayhi is inconsistent in his use of the term. The noun *kam* ('how many/much') has no declension it is therefore not *mutamakkin* — to use Sibawayhi's terminology. It has only implicit flexion (virtuelle Flexion — as Diem puts it). This is, according to Diem, a sort of self-contradiction: if *tamakkun* is to be understood as a syntactical category, it should be so independently of its outward form. Still, it was Diem and not Sibawayhi who defined *tamakkun* as a syntactical category, so I am not sure whether Sibawayhi should be held responsible for this inconsistency. Whatever the case may be, terminological consistency in Arabic grammatical tradition is worthy of further analysis.

Ulrike Mosel in her *Die syntaktische Terminologie bei Sibawaih*<sup>7</sup> also approaches the term *tamakkun* from syntactical point of view. Her analysis is completely different from that of W. Diem whose work she seems not to know. She carefully analyses the way Sibawayhi uses the term and, by rearrangement classifies his material. Following Jahn's German translation of *Al-Kitāb* U. Mosel proposes literal rendering of the terminology and *tamakkun* is translated as *Fähigkeit*—'capability' and *mutamakkin* as *fähig*—'capable'. Nonetheless she notes that such a translation says nothing about the meaning of the terms<sup>8</sup>, and in the adduced examples usually the original Arabic words appear.

U. Mosel notes several different applications of the term *tamakkun* and its derivatives: for defining nouns (*asmā'*), verbs (*af'āl*) and describing such grammatical categories as determination (*nakira/ma'rifa*), number (singular/plural) and gender (masculine/feminine)<sup>9</sup>. Mosel's approach is, then, extended in comparison with Diem's. The number of categories covered by the notion of *tamakkun* is much greater, the range of its application much wider. It hardly can be squeezed into nominal categories. Moreover, she is not as decisive as Diem is in

<sup>5</sup> Published in "Oriens" 23–24, 1970–71, pp. 312–332.

<sup>6</sup> Similar translation of the term *tamakkun* is proposed by M. Carter in his *Arab Linguistics. An Introductory Classical Text with Translation and Notes*, Amsterdam 1981, pp. 16–17 where the term establishment (lit. 'being firmly in position') is used.

<sup>7</sup> Published in 1975 in Munich.

<sup>8</sup> U. Mosel, *Die syntaktische Terminologie bei Sibawaih*, München 1975, Bd. I, p. 75: "Da die Übersetzung 'fähig' bzw. 'Fähigkeit' allein nichts über die Bedeutung der Termini aussagt, werden sie zunächst unübersetzt gelassen."

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 77–80.



defining *tamakkun* as either a morphological or a syntactical category. Her, rather, is the striving at showing all the possible usages of *tamakkun* in *Al-Kitāb* without commenting on them. As a nominal category *tamakkun* is seen by U. Mosel as the capability of nouns to accept flexional endings in accordance with the given factor, which means also that syntactic factors are considered. In other words, U. Mosel accepts the traditional view according to which neither syntactical nor morphological categories are treated distinctively. Nevertheless it is the morphological considerations which play decisive role in her approach to the description.

The term *tamakkun* (in all its derivative forms such as verbs and participles) appears in Sībawayhi's *Al-Kitāb* a few dozen times. Syntactically and semantically there seems to be a direct relationship between the term and the primary meaning of the verb *tamakkana*—namely: 'to be able to'. This is confirmed by the distribution of the verb — it is used with the prepositions *fī* and *min* although the former appears in the majority of all the examples. This usage is very well illustrated by a bayt from 'Umar Ibn Abī Rabī'a's poetry:

*wa-tamakkantu fī ʾn-nafs ḥaytu tamakkanat*  
*nafsu l-ḥabībi min al-muḥibbi ʾl-muḡram*

I have been able to master [my] soul, just as  
 the soul of the beloved masters the soul of the desperate lover.<sup>10</sup>

In Sībawayhi's *Al-Kitāb* it is the preposition *fī* which is used with *tamakkana*. It is difficult to tell whether it introduces the verbal object or just a circumstantial phrase. In such expressions as *yatamakkan fī ʾl-kalām* (or, once, with the variant *fī an yakūna kalāman* — I, 207.6)<sup>11</sup> it seems to mean circumstantials, i.e. it is said where actually does the *tamakkun* occur. So a foreign noun (*ism a'ḡamī*) is said to obtain *tamakkun* in speech (*fī ʾl-kalām*) (II, 19.4). Here, speech (*kalām*) is to mean language generally and Arabic in particular. One could also surmise that spoken language is meant. In other words, *yatamakkan fī ʾl-kalām* means "can be used in spoken Arabic language", i.e. in its declination and grammatical peculiarities in general becomes similar to other Arabic words. It is that different grammatical categories or different words might or might not have *tamakkun* in spoken language. Thus, *tanwīn* is said to indicate *tamakkun* in speech: *li-tamakkunihi fī ʾl-kalām* (II, 13.7–8): a noun consisting of three "letters" (radicals) — which is the minimal number in Arabic nouns — has *tanwīn* since it is the simplest (*li-ḥiffatihi*) and it has *tamakkun*. On the other hand, the word *ladun*: *lā yatamakkan fī ʾl-kalām* (II, 44–45). The expression

<sup>10</sup> *Der Diwan des 'Umar Ibn Abi Rebi'a*, ed. by P. Schwarz, vol. I, Leipzig 1901, p. 62.

<sup>11</sup> I quote the Būlāq edition of Sībawayhi's *Al-Kitāb* (1318 A. H.); the Roman numerals indicate volume, the subsequent Arabic numerals — page and line(s) respectively.



*tamakkana fī* is also applied to nominals (*asmā'*: I, 204.15; I, 207.6; II, 205.20; II, 311.last), to circumstantials (I, 284.13), verbs (*af'āl*: II, 160.21), adjectives (*ṣifāt*: II, 211.8), word structures (*abniya*: II, 186.19; 349–350).

*Tamakkun* used with the preposition *min* introducing object is very rare. I have been able to find one example in *Al-Kitāb*: the words *ḍuḥan* and *saḥar* are said not to be declinable in *ḡarr* (genitive, oblique): *lā yatamakkanān min al-ḡarr* (I, 115.7). Literal translation would be: they are unable to appear in genitive, with the sense of overpowering present in the expression *tamakkana min*.

Usually, however, *tamakkun* is used without object. The given category is just called *mutamakkin* without any other specifications. The participles usually keep their verbal meaning, i.e. the participle has the same meaning as the verb, as in *al-wāḥid ism mutamakkin* (II, 34.11) "the numeral 'one' is a *mutamakkin* nominal part of speech".

Often the internal object of *maf'ūl muṭlaq* is used in definitions. This serves to express comparison. For example the fact that *qaṭ* has different *tamakkun* than *ḥasbuka* is expressed in the following way: "*qaṭ*" *lā tamakkanu hādā āt-tamakkun* (II, 35.16): '*qaṭ* does not have this (or: such) *tamakkun*'. The same construction is used to explain the lack of *imāla* in *mā*: it is said not to have the same *tamakkun*, and *dā*: *lam tamakkan tamakkun "dā"* (II, 267.11).

The syntactical use of *tamakkun/tamakkana* forms hardly gives a clear picture of its meaning. Some more light is shed by the application of this term to different grammatical categories. And although U. Mosel has given a fairly comprehensive overview of the usage, below a maximally complete list of applications of *tamakkun/tamakkana* in Sībawayhi's *Al-Kitāb* will be presented. Of course, the classification is my own and I am not completely sure whether all possible usages have been noted.

### Group I: Parts of speech

#### A. *Asmā'* — Nominal parts of speech

1. Fully declined nouns.
2. Nouns with bi-consonantal roots (*yad-*, *dam-*,: II, 308; II, 305.5).
3. Indclinable nouns: *a'mā*, *af'ā* (II, 280.19).
4. maṣḍars in general and maṣḍars of the type *subḥāna*, *sa'dayka* (I, 190.8–11).
5. Names of Qur'ānic sūras such as *ṣād*, *sīn* (II, 30.16).
6. Circumstantials (*zurūf*) as a sub-class of nominal parts of speech are described in a detailed way from the point of view of *tamakkun* (II, 44–ff.).

#### B. *Af'āl* — the verbs

1. Generally, the verbs are regarded to be less *mutamakkin* than *asmā'* (I, 6.9–10).
2. There is a differentiation between verbs depending on the degree of *tamakkun*: some verbs are more *mutamakkin*, other are less. For instance *laysa* ('not to be'), a defective verb is called a non-*mutamakkin* one (II, 400.11).

C. *Ḥurūf* — prepositions, particles etc.

1. All *ḥurūf* are almost without exception called non-*mutamakkin*; instead of *tamakkun* they are said to have their “place” (*mawḍiʿ*), i.e. function.<sup>12</sup> (E.g. I, 291.5).

2. In some cases (e.i. in *qaṭ*, ‘an), the *sukūn* is said to be caused by the lack of *tamakkun* in *ḥurūf* (I, 387.19; II, 35.16).

## Group II: Grammatical categories

D. Determination

Generally indetermined word is called to be more *mutamakkin* than a determined one (II, 22.17), and hence *tanwīn* (the indefinite article) indicates a *mutamakkin* noun (II, 155.3).

E. Number

Singular (*wāḥid*) and plural (*ḡamʿ*, *ḡamīʿ*) are taken into consideration; dual is not considered, probably because of its similarity in grammatical functioning with singular. Singular is more *mutamakkin* than plural is the unmarked term in the opposition (II, 15.20).

F. Gender

Masculine is classified as more *mutamakkin* than feminine (II, 13.6; II, 22.16–17), since it is primary.<sup>13</sup>

## Group III: Phonemes

G. Phonemes, and more general sounds are sometimes described from the point of view of their morphological functions. It is, in such instances, their *tamakkun* which is described. Consequently, some phonemes are said to have greater *tamakkun* than other.

1. The phoneme ʾ (*hamza*) is either stable (as a root phoneme or a prefix phoneme) and then it is called *hamzat al-qaṭʿ* — the dividing *hamza*. But it also appears in the form of *hamzat al-waṣl* — the eliding *hamza*. Their respective *tamakkun* is said to be different (II, 273.8). One should understand here that *hamzat al-qaṭʿ* has lesser *tamakkun* than *hamzat al-waṣl* since it cannot elide.

2. The phoneme *y* is regarded to have greater *tamakkun* than *w* since the change *w* → *y* is typical (as in *maʿdī* which hypothetically should be *maʿdūy*); while opposite process is not observed (II, 260.8).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. in this respect the discussion in C. H. M. Versteegh, *The Arabic Terminology of Syntactic Position*, “Arabica” 25, 2, 1978, pp. 261–281.

<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere (I, 7.4 and II, 23.1) Sībawayhi states that masculine is primary, since the word *šayʿ* ‘a thing’ which is masculine can denote any noun irrespective of its gender.



Generally, these remarks do concern single phonemes, but in their grammatical, morphological functions, and not as independent entities. In other words, morphological phenomena are described here and not phonology.

#### Group IV: Word formation processes

A number of phenomena which are to be classified as word-building processes are considered by Sībawayhi from the point of view of *tamakkun*. Generally, typical word-forms are said to have a greater *tamakkun* than rare forms. For instance, the ending *-atun* in forms of the type *fa'latun* are called more *mutamakkin* than in other forms since *fa'latun* is more usual than *fu'latun* (II, 182.11).

Since such forms as *ilayka* or *allādī* are irregular and one should expect *ilāka* and *allādī* written with a long *alif* in the syllable *-lā-*, they are regarded as having lesser *tamakkun* than the regular forms (II, 104.22).

The same reasoning Sībawayhi applies to such unproductive affixes as *ya-* in *yarma* or *na-* in *nahšal*. Both affixes are used no more to form new words, while as inflexional affixes they do appear in verbs. Hence as word-building affixes *ya-* and *na-* are regarded as non-*mutamakkin*. Here, *tamakkun* has the meaning of productivity (II, 350.2–3). Generally, however, word-building affixes (*zawā'id*) are said to have a great *tamakkun* (II, 349.14–15).

#### Group V: Semantic categories

The notion of *tamakkun* seems to be rarely used with semantical categories. There is one rare instance when Sībawayhi differentiates between the notions of *qurb* (vicinity) and *bu'd* (distance). One can say in Arabic *inna qurbaka Zayd* 'Zayd is near you', but it is impossible to say *\*inna bu'daka Zayd* 'Zayd is far away from you'. From this Sībawayhi draws the conclusion that the notion of vicinity (*dunuww*) has greater *tamakkun* than the notion of remoteness has (I, 284.13–14).

This preliminary classification shows how wide is the range of application of *tamakkun* in Sībawayhi's grammar. It does not however draw us any nearer to the comprehension of this notion.

It seems that explication of this term should be attempted within the category of grammatical oppositions. It has already been noted, though not only in reference to Sībawayhi's theory, by J. Owens that the notion of *tamakkun* corresponds to the conception of markedness.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> J. Owens, *The Foundations of Grammar. An introduction to Medieval Arabic Grammatical Theory*, Amsterdam 1988, pp. 202–203. Owens cites R. Baalabakki's remarks from the article *Some Aspects of Harmony and Hierarchy in Sībawayhi's Grammatical Analysis*, "Zeitschrift für Arabische Linguistik" 2, 1979, pp. 7–22.



It is a rather easy task to reconstruct from the textual evidence on *tamakkun* the main notions of oppositions. There are the both terms — the marked and unmarked one. Their relationship corresponds roughly to both privative and gradual oppositions; in the latter the difference between the terms is not that of presence or absence but that of degree.

The unmarked term of the *tamakkun* opposition is called *mutamakkin*, while the marked one is called *gayr mutamakkin*. For instance, the numeral *wāḥid* is called *mutamakkin* (II, 34.11), while *kam* and *id* are defined as *gayr mutamakkinayn* (I, 291.16). These terms are rather rare, mostly Sībawayhi uses verbal forms and states that something *yatamakkan* or *lā yatamakkan*. *Hurūf* are said to: *lam yatamakkan fī ʾāl-kalām* (I, 291.5), while foreign words may have *tamakkun*, *tamakkun fī ʾāl-kalām* (II, 19.4). There is yet another word used to define the unmarked term of the opposition. In a few instances Sībawayhi uses the word *awwal* 'the first'. Thus masculine gender is called *awwal*, i.e. unmarked (II, 22.16). The term *awwal* is not used specifically for *tamakkun*, but is used as a general term for the unmarked term of the opposition. Usually, the markers of the opposition are not defined explicitly. Only in the case of *tanwīn* Sībawayhi states directly that *tanwīn* is the marker of a *mutamakkin* (noun): *at-tanwīn ʾalā mat al-mutamakkin* (II, 138.11, cf. also I, 7.5 where *tanwīn* is said to be the marker of an *amkan* noun)<sup>15</sup>.

Privative opposition based on the presence or absence of the markers are not the most typical types of constructions used by Sībawayhi with respect to *tamakkun*. His definitions usually appear as gradual oppositions; there, the terms are said to have the given property (*tamakkun*) to a greater or lesser degree. In such instances, comparative constructions are used. In them a terminology quite distinct from that of privative oppositions is used. Sībawayhi bases this type of oppositions on the notions of heaviness (*tuql*) and lightness (*hiffa*). The term of the opposition which has the given quality in a lesser degree is called lighter, while the marked one is called heavier. Thus verbs are heavier than nouns since nouns have greater *tamakkun* (I, 6.9–10). Similarly, masculine gender is called lighter (for them, says Sībawayhi, i.e. for the Arabs and beduins) than feminine, again because masculine has greater *tamakkun* (I, 7.3). The terms *tuql* and *hiffa*, as many early grammatical terms, must remain in some relationship to their general meaning, and originally are most probably metaphors. A marked term of the opposition is viewed

<sup>15</sup> One should notice here that Sībawayhi uses the term marker (*ʾalāma*) to denote *tanwīn*, which is in turn the marker of the unmarked term in the opposition. Still, he is firm in stating that marked terms are derived from unmarked ones. Cf. for instance his remarks in: II, 22–23. A similar sense of markedness is implied from Sībawayhi's statement that "markers are left out from what is regarded as heavy" (*tark* [...] *ʾalāma li-mā yastatqilūn* — I, 7.5). Since *taqīl* is the marked term of the opposition, it loses its formal marker, while the unmarked one retains it.



as one burned with a number of functions and markers. The more of these are attached to a word, the heavier it is, the less *tamakkun* it has. A 'heavy' word has little variability, while a 'light' word is liable to receive many functions. This variability, this potential readiness to function in different contexts is nothing else but *tamakkun*. Since *tamakkun* covers a great many grammatical functions, it usually is regarded not as a term in privative opposition but as a term in gradual opposition.

This gradual opposition is mainly expressed by degrees of comparison of the participle *mutamakkin*. This is, of course, expressed by the descriptive elative: *ašadd tamakkunan* — 'more/most *mutamakkin*'. In this way masculine gender is described — as more *mutamakkin* than feminine (I, 7.3). Almost synonymous is the expression with the so called absolute accusative. It is usually construed as follows: A has not the same *tamakkun* as B. The pronouns *man* 'who' and *mā* 'what' are said not to have the same *tamakkun* as full nouns such as *Zayd* or *rağul* 'man' (II, 135.18–18). Similarly, the verb *laysa* not to be has not the same *tamakkun* as a full verb *lam yatamakkan tamakkun al-fi'l* (II, 400.11). Synonymous with absolute accusative are comparative constructions introduced by the particle *ka-*. Describing the adverbs *amsi* 'yesterday' and *ğadu* 'tomorrow' Sībawayhi states: *lā yatamakkanān ka-Zayd* 'they do not have the same *tamakkun* as *Zayd* has' (II, 136.3).

In all these cases the gradual oppositions are expressed very generally: all the functions of a given class are related to another class. It is the class of time adverbs which is related to the class of "full" nouns. *Tamakkun* is not, then, understood as a single feature but as a set of features. These are not mentioned explicitly, but are only implied: *tamakkun* is to be looked for there where one class differs from the other. The difference in *tamakkun* between *laysa* and a full verb lies namely in the difference of functioning between *laysa* and the full verb. The same is to be said about *amsi* and *Zayd*: the limitations in functioning of *amsi* are the limitations in its *tamakkun* as compared with *Zayd*. The question remains open whether this functioning is meant to be syntactical only, as W. Dīem suggested. From the above classification it ensues that the range of functions and meanings is wider than syntactical. There are morphonological phenomena (cf. the problem of difference between *hamzat al-qat'* and *hamzat al-waṣl*), morphological questions (the productivity of suffixes such as *ya-*, *na-*), semantic problems (the difference between the concept of vicinity and remoteness, the meaning of diminutive forms — II, 138.11–ff.). They all are introduced into a system of oppositions subordinated to the general notion of *tamakkun*. *Tamakkun* is therefore understood as a wide range of different grammatical functions covering phenomena which range from phonology to syntax. These grammatical functions appear in different degree, hence they are thought within the system of gradual oppositions — *tamakkun* can be smaller in some cases and greater in other cases. There are also instances of complete lack of *tamakkun*. This leads to the conception of privative opposition: the absence or presence of *tamakkun*.



From the above analysis it is quite clear that Sībawayhi's understanding of *tamakkun* differs radically from that found in later Arabic grammatical theory. There, *tamakkun* is almost synonymous with nominal inflection. In other words *ism mutamakkin* is nothing else but *ism mu'rab*, since *i'rāb* is a synonym of *tamakkun*. The former term, however, became to be widely used in Arabic grammatical theory while *tamakkun* slowly fell into oblivion.