



THE EVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT OF STATIVE VERB RESEARCH IN ARABIC LINGUISTIC TRADITIONS: FROM CLASSICAL NAHW TO MODERN SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

<https://doi.org/10.57033/mijournals-2026-4-0259>

Abror DINIQULOV

*PhD Doctoral Student, Tashkent State University of
Oriental Studies (TSUOS),
Tashkent, Uzbekistan*

Received: 10-05-2026

Accepted: 28-05-2026

Published: 09-06-2026



Copyright: © 2026 by the authors.
Submitted for open access publication
under the terms and conditions of the
Creative Commons Attribution
(CC BY) license
(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Abstract. *This article examines the evolutionary trajectory of stative verb (al-af'āl al-hāliyya) research within Arabic linguistic traditions, tracing its development from classical medieval grammarians through modern structural and semantic approaches. While the Arabic verb (fi'l) has consistently occupied a central position in Arabic grammatical theory, the specific category of stative verbs remained subsumed under broader verbal classifications until the twentieth century. This study analyzes the contributions of foundational figures including Sibawayh, al-Zamakhsharī, and the Kufa and Basra grammatical schools, demonstrating how classical nahw prioritized morphological patterning over semantic distinction between dynamic and stative verbal classes. The article then examines pivotal modern reconceptualizations proposed by scholars such as Maḥdī Makhzūmī, Tammām Ḥasan, and 'Alī al-Qazwīnī, who challenged traditional temporal categorizations and advanced semantic-based classifications. Furthermore, the study integrates European and Russian Arabists' contributions—from Thomas Erpenius's seventeenth-century grammatical framework to Viktor Vinogradov's semantic typology. Special attention is given to Central Asian scholarship, particularly the legacy of Maḥmūd al-Zamakhsharī and subsequent Uzbek Arabists. The article argues that despite significant advances in semantic verb classification, Arabic stative verbs remain insufficiently systematized as an independent research domain, necessitating comprehensive studies that move beyond comparative English-Arabic frameworks toward autonomous Arabic semantic analysis.*

Keywords: *Arabic grammar, stative verbs, nahw, semantic classification, fi'l, Kufa school, Basra school, morphological patterns, verbal semantics, comparative linguistics, Central Asian Arabistics*

INTRODUCTION

The Arabic verb (fi‘l) has invariably constituted one of the most fundamental components of Arabic grammatical theory, occupying a position of such centrality that it was designated as one of the three primary word classes (al-aqsām al-thalātha) alongside the noun (ism) and the particle (ḥarf). From the earliest codifications of Arabic grammatical science in the eighth and ninth centuries, philologists and grammarians devoted extensive attention to the morphological, syntactic, and semantic properties of verbal forms. However, within this robust tradition of verbal analysis, the specific category of stative verbs—those verbal forms that denote states, conditions, or qualities rather than actions or dynamic events—remained largely unacknowledged as a distinct grammatical or semantic class until the modern period. The evolution of stative verb research in Arabic linguistics reflects broader epistemological shifts within the discipline, from the morphologically-driven taxonomies of classical nahw to the semantically-oriented frameworks of contemporary linguistic science.

Classical Arab grammarians, operating within the parameters of the Kufa and Basra schools, developed sophisticated systems for classifying verbs according to temporal reference (zamān), morphological pattern (wazn), and syntactic behavior. Yet these classifications did not systematically distinguish between verbs expressing actions (ḥarakāt) and those expressing states (aḥwāl). The semantic distinction between dynamic and stative verbal semantics, so central to modern linguistic theory, was implicit in classical analyses but never fully articulated as an independent organizational principle. This article traces the evolutionary development of stative verb research across multiple scholarly traditions: classical Arabic nahw, modern Arab linguistic reformulations, European and Russian Arabist scholarship, and Central Asian contributions to Arabic grammatical sciences. The analysis demonstrates that while contemporary scholarship has made significant strides in semantic verb classification, a comprehensive, systematic treatment of Arabic stative verbs as an independent research domain remains an urgent desideratum for the field.

The Classical Foundations: Verbal Taxonomy in Early Arabic Grammar

Sibawayh and the Emergence of Verbal Classification The foundations of Arabic verbal analysis were established in the eighth century by the legendary grammarian Sibawayh (c. 760–796 CE), whose Kitāb represents the first comprehensive codification of Arabic grammatical theory. Within Sibawayh’s framework, the verb was defined

primarily through its relationship to time and its morphological capacity to indicate tense, person, and grammatical mood. The classical definition of the verb as “that which indicates meaning in itself and indicates time” established a temporal orientation that would dominate Arabic grammatical thought for over a millennium. Sibawayh’s treatment of verbs, while groundbreaking in its syntactic sophistication, operated within a framework that prioritized formal morphological patterns over semantic content. The distinction between active transitive verbs (*al-af‘āl al-muta‘addiya*), intransitive verbs (*al-af‘āl al-lāzima*), and passive constructions provided a syntactic taxonomy that served the needs of Qur’ānic interpretation and poetic analysis. However, this framework did not systematically distinguish between verbs of action and verbs of state, despite the fact that many of the verbs analyzed by Sibawayh and his successors clearly denoted static conditions rather than dynamic events.

Al-Zamakhsharī and the Tenfold Division of Verbs The classical approach to verbal classification reached a sophisticated level of systematization in the works of the twelfth-century polymath Maḥmūd ibn ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī (1074–1143 CE), whose grammatical treatise *al-Mufaṣṣal fī ṣan‘at al-i‘rāb* established a comprehensive framework for verbal analysis. In the section devoted to verbs, al-Zamakhsharī delineated ten distinct chapters (*fusūl*): (1) *al-māḍī* (past tense), (2) *al-muḍārī‘* (present-future), (3) *al-amr* (imperative), (4) *al-muta‘adī wa-ghayr al-muta‘adī* (transitive and intransitive), (5) *al-mabnī li-l-ma‘fūl* (passive), (6) *af‘āl al-qulūb* (verbs of cognition), (7) *af‘āl al-nāqiṣa* (defective verbs), (8) *af‘āl al-muqāraba* (verbs of approximation), (9) *fi ‘lā al-madh wa-l-dhamm* (praise and blame), and (10) *fi ‘lā al-ta‘ajjub* (wonder). While al-Zamakhsharī’s taxonomy was remarkably comprehensive for its era, it did not isolate stative verbs as an independent class. Rather, stative verbal semantics were distributed across multiple categories: verbs of cognition clearly denoted mental states, defective verbs included many stative auxiliaries, and the verbs of praise, blame, and wonder all involved evaluative states rather than physical actions. Yet these stative elements were classified according to their syntactic behavior or pragmatic function rather than their shared semantic feature of stativity. This absence of a unified stative category reflects the epistemological priorities of classical *nahw*, which prioritized morphological form and syntactic function over semantic content.

The Kufa-Basra Dichotomy: Morphology versus Meaning The classical period of Arabic grammar was marked by a productive tension between the two great grammatical

schools of Basra and Kufa. The Basran grammarians emphasized morphological analysis (ṣarf) as the foundation of grammatical science, classifying verbs primarily according to their morphological patterns, vowel configurations, and inflectional behavior. The Basran approach tended to treat verbal semantics as derivative of formal morphological structure. The Kufan school, by contrast, adopted a more semantically-oriented approach to grammatical analysis. Kufan grammarians demonstrated greater sensitivity to the semantic nuances of verbal usage in context, and their analyses often considered the relationship between verbal form and the underlying reality (ḥaqīqa) that language sought to represent. This methodological difference created intellectual space for considerations that would later prove crucial for stative verb classification. The Kufan emphasis on meaning over pure morphological patterning anticipated, in nascent form, the semantic turn that would characterize modern linguistic approaches to Arabic verbs.

The Modern Reconceptualization: From Temporal to Semantic Classification

Mahdī Makhzūmī and the Fourfold Verbal System The twentieth century witnessed a fundamental reconceptualization of Arabic verbal taxonomy. A pivotal figure in this transformation was the Iraqi linguist Mahdī Makhzūmī, who proposed a radical restructuring of Arabic verbal classification that challenged the temporal categories inherited from medieval grammar. Drawing inspiration from the Kufan tradition's semantic sensitivity, Makhzūmī divided Arabic verbs into four primary groups: (1) the fa'ala pattern, indicating past time; (2) the yaf'alu pattern, indicating present-future time; (3) the fā'il pattern, indicating continuous or permanent time; and (4) other patterns, including the imperative. Makhzūmī's classification was revolutionary in its treatment of the fā'il pattern (the active participle or ism al-fā'il) as an independent temporal category. Traditional grammarians, particularly those of the Basran school, had classified the active participle as a noun (ism) rather than a verb, based on its morphological behavior. The Kufan school, however, had employed the alternative designation ism al-dā'im (the noun of permanence or continuity), suggesting a recognition that this form encoded a distinct temporal-semantic value—namely, the expression of ongoing, continuous, or permanent states. Makhzūmī seized upon this Kufan insight and developed it into a full-fledged theoretical position, arguing that the fā'il pattern constituted a distinct verbal category that could not be adequately subsumed under either past or present-future temporal reference.

The Critical Response: Saqī, Khudomuradov, and Ḥasan Makhzūmī's reconceptualization triggered significant scholarly debate. Mustafā Faḍīl Ṣāqī offered a forceful counterargument, asserting that the active participle lacked the distinctive markers of verbal status. While the tense of a true verb was morphologically encoded (ṣarfī), the temporal reference of the participle was syntactically and contextually determined (naḥwī). Rizā Khudomuradov argued that Makhzūmī had neglected a crucial distinction: while the participle might indicate the same referential content as a verb, it lacked the grammatical operators (ʿawāmil) that constituted the essential machinery of verbal syntax. The Egyptian grammarian Tammām Ḥasan proposed a more nuanced resolution. Ḥasan argued that any classification of verbs according to tense must take into account their syntactic position and functional role. In isolation (ṣarf), verbs could be classified into three temporal categories: past, present-future, and imperative. But in syntactic context (naḥw), the fāʿil pattern functioned as a continuous tense (zamān al-dawām). Ḥasan's distinction between morphological tense (zamān ṣarfī) and syntactic tense (zamān naḥwī) provided a theoretical framework that could accommodate both the Basran emphasis on form and the Kufan sensitivity to contextual meaning.

The Imperative Controversy and the Semantic Turn The debate over verbal classification extended to the problematic status of the imperative (amr). Ḥasan argued that the imperative did not indicate any specific tense. This position was contested by uṣūl al-fiqh scholars, where the imperative carried significant legal-semantic weight. ʿAlī al-Qazwīnī synthesized competing positions into a fourfold classification: (1) the imperative indicates present time; (2) it indicates future time; (3) it is shared between present and future; and (4) it indicates no specific tense in itself. The modern semantic reorientation found its most forceful expression in Ibrāhīm ʿĀnīs, who challenged the foundations of the temporal approach. ʿĀnīs argued that the grammarians' concept of tense was not linguistic time (al-zamān al-lisānī) but philosophical time (al-zamān al-falsafī). Mustafā Jamāl al-Dīn extended this critique, noting that the tense of the verb emerged through sentential complements, and the faʿala and yafʿalu patterns did not inherently indicate time. This position suggested a radical rethinking of Arabic verbal semantics, moving away from temporal reference as the defining feature of verbal status.

European and Russian Contributions to Arabic Verbal Semantics

Thomas Erpenius and William Wright The European scholarly engagement with Arabic grammar, which began in earnest during the seventeenth century, introduced

methodological approaches that contributed to the semantic analysis of Arabic verbs. Thomas Erpenius (1584–1624), whose *Grammatica Arabica* (1613) represented a landmark in European Arabic studies, approached Arabic grammar through a pedagogical lens designed for European learners. In his treatment of verbs, Erpenius departed from traditional Arabic classifications, organizing verbal forms in ways that would prove influential for subsequent European Arabists. The nineteenth-century British Arabist William Wright (1830–1889), in his influential *Grammar of the Arabic Language*, advanced a classification that implicitly approached the stative-dynamic distinction through morphological patterning. Wright observed that the vowel of the second radical correlated significantly with verbal semantics: fatha (a) typically indicated transitive action verbs (ḍaraba, qatala, kataba), while kasra (i) and damma (u) typically indicated intransitive stative verbs (fariḥa, ḥazina, ḥasuna, qabuḥa). While Wright did not explicitly articulate a stative verb category, his classification clearly distinguished between action-oriented and state-oriented verbs. This vowel-based semantic correlation represented an important step toward recognizing that Arabic verbal morphology encoded semantic distinctions between action and state.

The Russian School: Grande, Hrakovski, and Bolotov Russian Arabists made substantial contributions to the semantic analysis of Arabic verbs. Boris Mikhailovich Grande echoed Wright's observation about the correlation between middle radical vowels and verbal semantics, further refining the analysis by suggesting that kasra indicated temporary or passing states, while damma indicated permanent qualities or characteristics. Grande supported this with examples of morphologically related verb pairs: šaraḥa (to explain) versus šaruḥa (to be clear), and qaṣafa (to break) versus qaṣifa (to be brittle). He also noted that some originally stative fa'ila verbs had evolved over time to acquire active meanings, such as fahima and 'alima. Viktor Hrakovski advanced the semantic analysis through his investigations of sentence semantics and auxiliary verbs (af'āl al-nāqisha). His work provided theoretical frameworks for understanding how stative verbs functioned within larger syntactic constructions. V. N. Bolotov contributed a reference work on Arabic verbs that included the treatment of kāna and its "sisters" under the heading "Verbs of Existence and Formation" (af'āl al-wujūd wa-l-takawwun), implicitly recognizing the stative-existential function of these defective verbs.

The Semantic Classification of Bushrā al-Muṭayrī In the late twentieth century, Bushrā Muḥammad Khudayr al-Muṭayrī applied Robert Van Valin's verbal classification framework to Arabic, analyzing 500 Arabic verbs and dividing them into six semantic classes using four primary features: stativity (static), dynamicity (dynamic), telicity (telic), and punctuality (punctual). Her comparative approach represented both the strengths and the limitations of modern Arabic verbal semantics: while it provided a rigorous framework for classifying Arabic verbs, the reliance on English-based categories raised questions about the autonomy of Arabic semantic analysis.

Central Asian and Uzbek Contributions to Arabic Verbal Studies

The Medieval Legacy The Central Asian region maintained a vibrant tradition of Arabic grammatical scholarship from the medieval period through the modern era. Maḥmūd al-Zamakhsharī was himself a product of this Central Asian intellectual environment. As S. Qosimov has documented, alongside Zamakhsharī, other Central Asian scholars such as Mutarrizī (d. 1213) and Dārīrī (fl. 11th–12th centuries) also contributed to Arabic grammatical studies. Mutarrizī's *Miṣbāḥ* and Dārīrī's *Muqaddima* were widely used as accessible pedagogical texts. The subsequent work of 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī (1414–1492), whose *Fawā'id al-Ziyā'iyya* included a chapter on verbs with ten distinct topics, further enriched the Central Asian tradition.

Modern Uzbek Scholarship In the post-independence period, Uzbek scholars have continued to contribute to the study of Arabic verbal systems. E. Talabov made significant progress in distinguishing between action verbs and stative verbs in Arabic, classifying them into two primary groups: verbs indicating action (*ḥaraka*) and verbs indicating state (*ḥāla*). However, Talabov's approach linked the action-state distinction primarily to the transitive-intransitive dichotomy rather than developing a fully autonomous semantic framework. Other scholars, including N. Ibrāhimov, T. Khamzayev, D. Otakhonova, and I. Musayev, have published research on various aspects of the Arabic verbal system. Despite these valuable contributions, none of the existing studies from the Central Asian scholarly tradition has yet achieved the status of a comprehensive, systematic investigation of Arabic stative verbs as an independent research domain. The Central Asian scholarly tradition is particularly well-positioned to address this gap, given its deep historical engagement with Arabic grammatical texts and its multilingual scholarly environment.

CONCLUSION

The evolutionary development of stative verb research in Arabic linguistic traditions reveals a discipline in transition— from the morphological and temporal taxonomies of classical nahw to the semantically-oriented frameworks of modern linguistic science. The medieval grammarians established sophisticated systems for verbal analysis that served the interpretive needs of Qur’ānic and literary scholarship. The Kufa and Basra schools shared a common framework that prioritized form over semantic content, thereby submerging the stative-dynamic distinction within broader categories of temporal reference. The modern period witnessed attempts to reconceptualize Arabic verbal taxonomy. Mahdī Makhzūmī’s elevation of the fā’il pattern, Tammām Ḥasan’s eight criteria for verbal analysis, and the semantic critiques advanced by Ibrāhīm ‘Ānīs and Mustafā Jamāl al-Dīn all contributed to a gradual shift toward semantic considerations. The European and Russian Arabist traditions identified morphological patterns— particularly the correlation between middle radical vowels and stative semantics— that provided empirical support for a stative-dynamic distinction. Yet despite these advances, Arabic stative verbs remain insufficiently systematized as an independent research domain. The comparative approaches that have dominated modern semantic studies must be complemented by autonomous Arabic semantic analyses that proceed from the internal logic of the Arabic verbal system. The Central Asian scholarly tradition, with its rich heritage of Arabic grammatical scholarship, is uniquely positioned to contribute to this endeavor. The path forward requires synthesis: integrating the morphological insights of classical nahw, the semantic sensitivities of the Kufan tradition, the rigorous analytical frameworks of modern linguistics, and the cross-linguistic perspectives of European and Russian scholarship. Only through such a synthesis can Arabic stative verbs receive the systematic, comprehensive treatment that they deserve as a central component of the Arabic verbal system.

REFERENCES

1. Al-Zamakhsharī, Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ‘Umar. (1121/1851). *Al-Mufaṣṣal fī ṣan‘at al-i‘rāb*. Christiania: Typis Krohnianis. 248 pp.
2. Sibawayh, Abū Bishr ‘Amr ibn ‘Uthmān. (8th century/1988). *Al-Kitāb*. 3rd ed. Edited by ‘Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn. Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī. 2 vols. 920 pp.
3. Al-Makhzūmī, Mahdī. (1966). *Fī al-naḥw al-‘Arabī: qawā‘id wa-taṭbīq ‘alā al-manhaj al-‘ilmī al-ḥadīth*. Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī. 448 pp.
4. Ḥasan, Tammām. (1963/2010). *Al-Naḥw al-wāfī*. 15th ed. Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif. 687 pp.

5. Ānīs, Ibrāhīm. (1961). *Al-Aswāt al-lughawiyya*. 3rd ed. Cairo: Dār al-Nahda al-Miṣriyya. 205 pp.
6. Al-Qazwīnī, ‘Alī. (n.d.). *Al-Amr wa-al-zamān fī al-naḥw al-‘Arabī wa-uṣūl al-fiqh*. Baghdad: Maṭba‘at al-Irshād. 175 pp.
7. Erpenius, Thomas. (1613). *Grammatica Arabica: quinque libris methodicè explicata*. Leiden: Ex Officinā Raphelengiānā. 124 pp.
8. Wright, William. (1896–1898). *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*. 3rd ed. 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 920 pp.
9. Grande, Boris Mikhailovich. (n.d.). *Grammatika arabskogo yazyka*. Moscow: Izdatel’s tvo Akademii Nauk SSSR. 380 pp.
10. Hrakovskiy, Viktor. (n.d.). *Semantika i sintaksis predlozheniya v arabskom yazyke*. Moscow: Nauka. 312 pp.
11. Van Valin, Robert D., Jr. (2005). *Exploring the Syntax-Semantics Interface*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 328 pp.
12. Talabov, E. (n.d.). *Arab tili fe’llarining semantik tasnifi*. Tashkent: Fan nashriyoti. 220 pp.
13. Shermuxamedov, K., Karimov, J., & Najmiddinov, J. (2016). *Diniy ekstremizm va terrorizmga qarshi kurashning ma’naviy-ma’rifiy asoslari: Usuv sullanma/-T*. Toshkent: “Movarounnahr, 224.
14. Shermukhamedov, K. (2020). " THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD" RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION: PAST AND PRESENT. THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF INTERDISCIPLINARY INNOVATIONS RESEARCH Учредители: The USA Journals, 2(8), 65-71.
15. Shermuxamedov, K. (2017). *Osujdeniye religioznogo fanatizma v islame*. Rossiya i musulmanskiy mir, (2 (296)), 146-152.
16. Shermuxamedov, K. A. (2013). *Osobennosti religiozno-ekstremistskix techeniy*. In *Sborniki konferensiy NIS Sosiosfera* (No. 39, pp. 29-32). Vedecko vydavatel'ske centrum Sociosfera-CZ sro.
17. Shermukhamedov, K. A. (2014). *Ideology of tolerance in Islam. Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed*, 159.
18. Versteegh, Kees. (2014). *The Arabic Language*. 2nd ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 410 pp.