

Nahw - The Grammatical States playground: مبنى and معرب

Recall from our [earlier](#) discussion that إعراب is the name given to the process of reflecting grammatical states on the last letters of words by using *dhamma*, *fatha*, or *kasra*. To avoid false grammatical assumptions arising from vowel-less script (which is the case both in the writings of Classical Arabic and contemporary Arabic language) it is very important to know which words experience grammatical states in Arabic and which do not. Without this knowledge a reader may attribute grammatical states where they are not supposed to be attributed. In other words, by just looking at a *dhamma* a reader might assume the state of رفع whereas the word may very well be one which does not take any grammatical states.

To go about clearing this confusion the grammarians of Arabic Language have defined certain terms:

1. معرب : These are the parts of speech which do experience grammatical states and show these states by using *dhamma*, *fatha*, and *kasra*
2. True مبنى: These are the parts of speech which do not experience any grammatical states
3. Resembling مبنى: These are parts of speech which do experience grammatical states but do not show them at their ends for one reason or another

Below, I will explain in detail which part of speech falls under which category.

حرف

كل حرف مستحق للبناء

[Every حرف is worthy of being مبنى]

So says the author of *A Thousand Couplets*. From amongst the parts of speech in Arabic, none of the

حرف experience any of the grammatical state. Thus, we cannot say that **هه** or **في** is in نصب , رفع , or مبنى . It would be grammatically incorrect to say that. In Arabic Language, 100% of the حرف are مبنى .

فعل

فعل أمر ومضي بنيا
وأعربوا مضارعا إن عريا
من نون توكيد مباشر ومن
نون إناث كبير عن من فتن

*[The Amr verb and past tense are mabnee
And they (The Arabs) considered the imperfect Mu'rab if it is naked
From the attached nun of emphasis and from the nun of femininity
Like they (group of females) scared the one who was put in trial]*

Moving on to فعل , we know by now that فعل can be subdivided into 4 broad categories, namely , ماضى ,

نهي , and مضارع , امر .

The **نهي** conjugations are nothing but a variation of مضارع . If we remove the لا all we are left with is

مضارع in the state of جزم . For example, **لا تَشْرَبْ** becomes **تَشْرَبْ** which is a مضارع in the state of جزم .

Also, within the امر everything except the 2nd person active voice is nothing but مضارع in the state of

جزم due to the presence of لام with a *kasra* at the front. In addition to this, we have already [said](#) that the

2nd person active command of امر has special conjugations, different from those of 1st and 3rd person

active (and also the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person passive voice) since a command is almost always directed

towards a second person. Thus, for the purpose of Nahw we divide the فعل into 3 *different* different

categories. Note, that we are just shuffling around the same categories of فعل for the purpose of understanding the concept of معرب and مبني; no new categories are being defined:

1. ماضى
2. مضارع (including all conjugations except the 2nd person active voice)
3. امر (including only the 2nd person active voice)

In the ensuing discussion, the terms مضارع , ماضى , and امر are used as defined above, and not in the usual صرف terms

Out of these, ماضى is all مبني so no governing agent will ever cause it to enter a grammatical state i.e. alter its endings. The امر is also 100% مبني. The مضارع, however, is generally معرب ; one indication of this is the change in endings which takes place when we put a لم or a لن in front of a مضارع . Without a لم the مضارع has a *dhamma* whereas if we put a لن in front of it the ending changes to a *fatha*. Note that these changes are not received by either the ماضى or the 2nd person active command. In addition to this recall that the two feminine plurals which, if you [recall](#) , do not change when we add لم or a لن in front of the مضارع . For example, تَعْلَمْنَ remains تَعْلَمْنَ even if we add a لم or a لن in front of the مضارع . Thus out of the total 14 conjugations the two feminine plurals are مبني. The other 12 conjugations will change, i.e.

they will be معرب provided that the ن of emphasis is not there, which, if it is there, will make these conjugations مبني. It is important to note that the ن of emphasis is a separate word in the emphatic conjugations and cannot receive the change to undergo a grammatical state. Thus, it causes the مضارع to be مبني. It is now high time to re-read the verses from *A Thousand Couplets* given above for فعل

اسم

الاسم منه معرب ومبني
لشبهه من الحروف مدني
كالشبهه الوضعي في اسمي جنتنا
والمعنوي في متي وفي هنا

*[The Ism, from it are Murab and Mabnee,
Due to a resemblance to the particles which draws close,
Like the coinage resemblance in the two Isms of جنتنا ,
And the meaning resemblance in the words متي and هنا]*

If one notices, اسم and حرف are at the two ends of the Arabic Language spectrum: An اسم is defined within itself whereas a حرف requires additional information to be defined. Moreover, اسم are made up of a minimum of 3 letters whereas حرف are composed usually of two letters. There are, however, certain اسم which resemble حرف in that they are also composed of two letters. An example of this happens in جنتنا (*you came to us*) which has two اسم in it: تا (*you*) and نا (*us*). Thus, we say that such اسم resemble حرف on the basis of *coinage* i.e. in the way they are formed, and this resemblance causes the

مبني to get one characteristic of حرف i.e. become اسم.

Another part from the parts of speech is demonstrative pronouns which is closer to حرف on the basis of *meaning*. For example, the word متى could stand for:

1. Interrogation e.g. متى هذا الوعد ان كنتم صدقين (*when will this promise (be fulfilled) if your are from amongst the true*)
2. Condition i.e. it conveys the meaning *if* e.g. *when he comes, respect him; when I play, you watch*, which essentially can be conveyed in the form: *if he comes, respect him* or *if I play, you watch*

In both of these meanings it resembles a حرف which can be explained by the fact that for interrogation in Arabic we already have the particle called the *hamza* of interrogation, أ, and for condition we have the حرف called ان. Thus on the basis of this *meaning* resemblance the اسم متى becomes مبني .

Lastly, to understand as to why هنا is an example of an اسم which is مبني , consider the how the following meanings are conveyed in Arabic using حرف :

Interrogation - أ

Condition - ان

Negation - لا ، ما

Prohibition - لا

Emphasis - إِنَّ ن ثَقِيلَةً

Elevation - عَلَى

Longing / Wishing - لَيْت

Anticipation - لَمَّا

Containment - فِي

Destination - إِلَى

Origin / Initiation - مِنْ

Semblance - كَأَنَّ

Reference - ???

Now هُنَا is used for اِشَارَةٌ i.e. *to refer to something*. Every idea being conveyed in the above list has a

corresponding حَرْف in the Arabic Language, except هُنَا . Thus, the Arabic grammarians say: فَحَقُّهُ اِنْ

اِشَارَةٌ (So, it was also worthy of having a particle coined alongside it). In other words, اِشَارَةٌ

should also have a حَرْف coined for it and yet there is none. Thus, هُنَا is an اِسْم which is مَبْنِي due to the

resemblance to a حَرْف which should have existed but doesn't.

This shows , at least, that there are certain categories of اِسْم which are مَبْنِي due to one reason or another:

meaning, resemblance, dependancy etc. Below, I list these categories:

1. Personal Pronouns: *He, him, she, they, I, we* etc.
2. Interrogative Pronouns: من, ما, متى, أين (*Who, what, when, where*)
3. Relative Pronouns: الذى, التى (*Who, what, which*)
4. Demonstrative Pronouns: هنا, هنالك, هنا (*this, here*)

Finally, we are ready to put all this information together in the following 3 points:

1. مبنى All: حروف
2. 80 % of أفعال are مبنى and 20% are معرب
3. 80% of أسماء are معرب and 20% are مبنى