

## Nahw - The Grammatical States in Arabic Language

The concept of Grammatical States is the cornerstone of نحو . Without the proper understanding of grammatical states you can end up saying *The rat ate the cat* when you actually want to say *The cat ate the rat*. An oft cited example for this is from the Quran:

... وَاذْبَتَلَىٰ اِبْرٰهِيْمَ رَبَّهُ ۗ ...

“And remember when the Lord of Ibrahim tested him...” (Al-Baqarah: 124)

Notice the *fatha* at the end of اِبْرٰهِيْمَ and the *dhamma* at the end of رَبَّهُ (...*Ibrahima Rabbuhu*...).

Now if someone was to say the same thing as (...*Ibrahimu Rabbahu*...), that is, switch the *fatha* with the *dhamma*, that would mean “Ibrahim tested his Lord”, which would change the meaning altogether

[Thanks to [Fajr](#) who posted this explanation [here](#)].

In English language we seldom see nouns changing their grammatical structure in sentences no matter whether they are subject, object, or part of possession in a sentence. Take for example the following three sentences in English:

1. *The house fell*
2. *I entered the house*
3. *Door of the house*

Notice the noun **house**: no matter how it occurs in the sentence (Subject in the first, Object in the second, and possessive in the third) its form does *not* change. The word *house* remains *house*. Not so in

Arabic! The word for *house*, البيت, will change *grammatically* (and *not* structurally) when the above

three sentences are rendered in Arabic:

1. ( البيت at the end of سقط البيت )
2. ( البيت at the end of دخلت البيت )

3. الـبـيـتِ بـابِ الـبـيـتِ (*kasra* at the end of الـبـيـتِ)

This is a classic example of change in grammatical state in the Arabic Language. Technically speaking there are 4 grammatical states in Arabic:

1. رَفَع
2. نَصَب
3. جَر
4. جَزَم

Let's start with some simple rules:

1. whenever a noun is the subject in a sentence it automatically goes in the *state* of رَفَع i.e. its last letter will have a *dhamma* on it
2. whenever the noun is the object it goes in the *state* of نَصَب and its last letter will have a *fatha* on it
3. whenever a noun occurs in a possessive phrase it will automatically go in the *state* of جَر i.e. its last letter will have a *kasra* on it
4. the state of جَزَم is experienced only by the مُضَارِع (present and future tense) and we will tackle this in a later post, Insha Allah

The name given to this process i.e. reflecting grammatical states on the last letters of words by using *dhamma*, *fatha*, and *kasra* is إعراب .

You should remember here that an اسم in Arabic Language covers more than simply nouns. It spans the

definition of Adjective, Adverb, Noun, and Pronoun. Therefore, rather than saying that an اسم goes into a certain grammatical state, we will desiccate the اسم into each of these categories and will see in which grammatical state each category falls. For now, let us take another example using three Arabic words: زيد ، ولد ، ضرب meaning *Zaid, boy, and hit* when read from left to right. Using these three words and the grammatical states 1-3 noted above we will see how we can convey different ideas. This example also shows the fact that there is no Subject-Object order in Arabic, as there is in English:

1. ضَرَبَ وَكَدَّ زَيْدٌ *Zaid hit a boy*

2. ضَرَبَ وَكَدَّ زَيْدٌ *A boy hit Zaid*

3. ضَرَبَ وَكَدَّ زَيْدٌ *Zaid's boy hit...*

Notice how the the nouns *Zaid* and *boy* are being made subject, object, and part of a possessive phrase just by switching from one grammatical state to another. This is, thus, the concept of *Grammatical States* in Arabic. More on this in a later post, Insha Allah!