

# The Influence of Al-Jurjani On Sakkaki's Scholarly Activity

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**Abstract:** Abu Ya'qub Sakkaki is regarded as one of the prominent scholars who left a profound impact on both classical and modern linguistic studies. His significance lies in the distinctive nature of his approach, which diverged from traditional methodologies. His work is marked by precise linguistic organization, a departure from conventional authorial styles, and a logical structure influenced by philosophical reasoning. Drawing upon the insights of earlier scholars most notably 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani and his theory of *naẓm* (systematic composition) Sakkaki's *Miftaḥ al-'Ulum* (The Key to the Sciences) rose to prominence as a foundational text in the field of Arabic linguistics. This work continues to hold a lasting place in the history of scientific linguistic inquiry in the Arabic language.

Among the critical issues in which Sakkaki followed Jurjani are the concepts of meaning, the meaning of meaning, and the challenges related to reception and semantic indication.

**Keywords:** Sakkaki, Jurjani, theory of *naẓm*, science of rhetoric, meaning, meaningfulness, semantics, interpretation.

**Introduction:** Abu Ya'qub al-Sakkaki based his studies on rhetoric and linguistics on the theory of *naẓm* proposed by al-Jurjani. This theory was originally developed to uncover the essence of the Qur'an's miraculous nature by highlighting the lofty features of the divine text through its eloquence, style, and secrets. In this theory, al-Jurjani focused on the stylistic expression, arrangement, and artistic structure of Qur'anic verses, striving to analyze the key aspects of its inimitability (*i'jāz*). Through this approach, he illuminated the Qur'an's choice of words, its elegant composition, and the aesthetic features of its rhetorical style. He also examined the structural composition of the Qur'an that is, its *naẓm* and analyzed how certain grammatical and rhetorical tools affect the text.

However, as 'Abdullah Sula emphasized, al-Jurjani concentrated more on form that is, the external expressive tools while overlooking the original spiritual and moral content of the verses, their impact on human life, and their social-ethical dimensions. In other words, instead of highlighting how the Qur'anic verses brought

about moral reform for humanity, he centered his attention on their artistic expression.

It was precisely this issue the connection between rhetoric (*balaghā*) and speech that became a turning point in al-Sakkaki's rhetorical research. By linking rhetoric to speech, he began to systematize its components with a unique order and structure. In this process, he integrated generalization and classification. Through the concept of *naẓm* (speech composition), he activated mechanisms of definition and organization.

Muḥammad Abid al-Jabiri described *Miftaḥ al-'Ulum* as an "organon" (i.e., a logical instrument) for the Arabic rhetorical systems. He explained it as follows: "Sakkaki's connection to Aristotle lies in the fact that, just as Aristotle systematized Greek philosophy, Sakkaki sought to systematize and codify the Arabic rhetorical sciences." Based on this, the main purpose behind Sakkaki's writing of *Miftaḥ al-'Ulum* was to avoid linguistic errors, facilitate language learning, protect the Qur'an, and ease the processes of understanding and composing texts and speeches. To

this end, he categorized the causes of speech errors into three types:

the individual word (mufrad),

the compound structure (ta'lif), and

the semantic appropriateness of composition (mutabaqa) that is, the alignment of speech with its intended meaning. This necessitates analysis of error from the level of individual words to complex expressions.

Thus, he considers the science of *ṣarf* (morphology) to be a discipline that serves to correct speech errors related to individual words (mufrad). Meanwhile, he understands the science of *naḥw* (syntax) as one aimed at correcting errors in compound expressions (ta'lif). Later on, he turns to the sciences of *ma'ani* and *bayan*, describing them as disciplines that ensure the semantic appropriateness of complex expressions that is, their contextual suitability.

Moreover, al-Sakkaki includes other auxiliary fields alongside these core disciplines, such as *ta'rif* (definition), *istidlal* (deduction), and *khiṭaba* (rhetoric). He states:

"I devoted full attention to the science of *naḥw*, but realized that its perfection cannot be complete without the sciences of *ma'ani* and *bayan*. With the help of Allah, I gained complete benefit from these two sciences. Then, understanding that the completeness of *ma'ani* also depends on the sciences of *ta'rif* and *istidlal*, I found it appropriate to include them as well."

As for the issue of the miraculousness of the Qur'an, as Abdullah Sula described, it is a complex and central matter that has led to a diversity of opinions among people. This is because the Qur'an does not contain a specific verse that clearly states it is miraculous due to its eloquence, unique style, or artistic inimitability. Allah the Exalted describes the Qur'an as "the most beautiful speech" and as "a marvelous book." However, He does not specify exactly what aspect of the Qur'an constitutes its inimitability whether it lies in its style, wording, content, narratives, moral ideas, or perhaps a combination of all these elements.

Nevertheless, one thing is certain: the Qur'an is a book of reformation. It is a divine message intended to provide answers to the community, resolve disputes, and fundamentally transform human life. Therefore, the Qur'an is not only a text of beautiful expression and literary eloquence but also a powerful tool for transforming souls and reforming society.

His use of the science of rhetoric (*khiṭaba*), his definitions of rhetorical concepts, and his approach in classifying them into chapters and sections added a level of organization and logic that was absent in many

earlier studies. On the other hand, his reliance on rhetorical principles also influenced his style his expressions are concise but carry profound meaning. His words demand re-reading and focused attention, and at times, even require consulting other works for clarification. His *Miftaḥ al-'Ulum* is among the most extensively interpreted, explained, and analyzed works in the field.

Sakkaki's Study of Rhetoric and His Reliance on the Works of Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani

Relying on the conclusions presented in *Dala'il al-I'jaz* and *Asrar al-Balagha*, Sakkaki absorbed many of Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani's views in the fields of rhetoric, grammar (*naḥw*), and logic (*manṭiq*). In particular, he adopted Jurjani's ideas on *ma'ani al-naḥw* (grammatical meanings), closely following his approach in this domain.

One of the key points where Sakkaki aligns with Jurjani's thought is the issue of "meaning" (*ma'na*) and the "meaning of the meaning" (*ma'na al-ma'na*). Sakkaki expresses this concept through the term *istidlal* (inference/deduction). This term has been widely discussed by scholars active in the fields of knowledge and epistemology. Indeed, the pursuit of meaning is the primary activity of human thought. Thus, this concept has been interpreted by thinkers and scholars to serve their own intellectual, philosophical, and scientific goals. This phenomenon, much like the concepts of "literal" and "figurative" (*ḥaqiqah* and *majaz*), or "evidence" and "analogy" (*dalil* and *qiyas*), constitutes one of the foundational ideas in understanding, expressing, communication, and interpretation. On this basis, the art of rhetoric is recognized as the foundation of effective communication.

In this context, Sakkaki proposes a unique perspective on the concept of *istidlal*. He integrates a logical approach with grammatical terminology. On this foundation, he attempts to explain the eloquence (*balagha*) of speech, not merely as the external ornamentation of rhetorical art (i.e., stylistic embellishment), but as a process of deduction based on reasoning, by which affirmation or negation is achieved. This process does not occur at the level of a single sentence, but rather through a composition of interconnected sentences. Sakkaki states:

"This is the act of affirming or not affirming a predicate to a subject, and it is realized through compound sentences."

Thus, according to Sakkaki, *istidlal* is not something that occurs within a simple sentence; rather, it takes place through structures composed of multiple sentences.

He also states:

“By saying ‘through compound sentences’, I oppose those specialists in this field who consider a single sentence to be a proof or inference, because in such cases, affirmation or negation is simply assumed.”

The “structures” referred to here differ in *istidlal* and in *‘ilm al-ma‘ani* (the science of meanings): in the science of meanings, these structures serve to construct utterances that convey clear denotations, while in inference, they serve the purposes of affirming or prioritizing testimony that is, of affirming or denying a claim.

Sakkaki’s understanding of the concept of the grammatical agent (*‘amil*) significantly diverges from that of his predecessors. The grammatical agent is one of the most extensively studied concepts in Arabic grammar. Some grammarians even consider it a theoretical foundation for explaining case endings (*i‘rab*). In other words, the *‘amil* is viewed as a key tool for explaining the structural and syntactic relationships between lexical units within a sentence.

Sakkaki uses this concept (the “*amil*” or “governing element”) to explain the relationships in language, from the smallest units of a sentence to complex syntactic structures. Some grammarians have even described this factor as the very reason for the grammatical art whether the *‘amil* is explicit (i.e., visibly clear), implicit (i.e., assumed to exist but not stated), or elided (i.e., replaced by another element). They analyzed the relationship between the *‘amil* and the *ma‘mul* (i.e., the element governed by the *‘amil*) based on philosophical principles. One of their famous sayings is: “Had it not been for ellipsis and implied interpretation, grammar would have been incomprehensible.”

Thus, the *‘amil* is considered the mechanism that regulates the structure of linguistic components the interrelations between words, the arrangement of sentences, the signs of inflection (*i‘rab*), and syntactic functions. Early grammarians used this concept as a theoretical tool to define the meanings of linguistic units. According to them, this tool enabled the analysis of the phonetic and morphological forms of Arabic language structure.

With the concept of the *‘amil*, the structure of all Arabic language constructions can be explained and generalized through a small number of rules. This is because the main goal of a grammarian is to control the vast number of linguistic units, to classify them, and to develop general rules based on them. From this perspective, Sakkaki introduced the concept of the grammatical “*amil*” (the operative element). In his view, this concept serves as a mechanism that organizes all inferential structures. This is achieved

through attributional (*isnadi*) relationships, i.e., the link between a subject and what is attributed to it.

For example, attributing a predicate to a subject: through this, something can be affirmed or denied. However, this view applies only to declarative structures, not to imperative (commands) or interrogative (questions) constructions, because such sentences do not reach the level of affirmation or denial in other words, they cannot serve as a basis for logical inference. Therefore, not every phrase can fulfill the function of inference.

Specifically, the predicative (*isnad*) connection between the subject (*mubtada*) and the predicate (*khabar*) appears in two forms:

When the predicate is attributed to the subject in a self-evident manner, either in the form of affirmation or negation:

In the case of affirmation: In the sentence “Man is an animal.”

In the case of negation: In the sentence “Man is not a horse.”

When information is given about something in a sentence (which is the predicate), this information is not always clearly and directly connected to the initial word in the sentence (i.e., the subject). To make the relationship between them understandable, a third element — a linking idea or medium — is needed.

Example:

“The world was created.”

In this sentence:

Subject – The world

Predicate – was created

However, this predicate is simply stated. Is it true or not — it is unclear. Because the state of the “world” being “created” is not explicitly demonstrated. Therefore, we need an additional idea that helps us understand this predicate.

Third factor (linking idea):

If we say:

“The world is a friend of what is created.”

Here, the word “created” refers to “friend”. Logically, we then understand:

If the friend is created, then the one close to it (i.e., “the world”) also has a connection to being created.

In this case, to fully understand the predicate, a two-part idea is formed:

Friend – is created

The world – is close to that friend

Thus, in order to understand the connection between the predicate and the subject, a third idea that establishes a logical link is required.

Another simple example:

"The sun is shining." This is a clear sentence because shining is characteristic of the sun.

Let's consider the following sentence:

"Whatever the sun shines on has a shadow."

Here, we are talking about the shadow, but in order to connect it to the sun, we understand it through the fact that the sun shines on something. That is, the connection is not direct—there is an intermediary (the thing being illuminated). Thus, in some sentences, understanding the message correctly requires an intermediate connecting idea. This makes the sentence complete, comprehensible, and logically sound.

According to al-Sakkaki, meaning is formed on three levels:

Letter level – this is the smallest unit, formed through letters.

Word level – words are made from letters, and each word has its own specific meaning.

Sentence (propositional) level sentences are formed from words. These words may sometimes be explicit, and sometimes hidden. In fact, sometimes only one letter is visible, while the rest is implied (such as the imperative "ف" in Arabic verbs).

The meaning of sentences depends on how they are used. This usage may be:

Based on the original meaning of each word, Through the grammatical connection between words in the sentence, or Dependent on the context in which the sentence is spoken.

Depending on the context, this usage may sometimes correspond to the literal/original meaning, and sometimes it deviates from the grammatical form to express a secondary or figurative meaning.

In his work *Miftah al-Ulum*, al-Sakkaki classifies word meanings into two types: rational ('aqliy) and contextual (wujudiy).

He considers it correct when a word is used in a way that expresses its own inherent meaning, that is, its original or basic meaning, with no need for it to be explained through other things.

If the meaning of a word depends on another concept, then this is a case of rational meaning (or potential/inferable meaning).

According to al-Jurjani's explanation, meaning refers to the word's specific, inherent meaning, which is called contextual (wujudi) meaning, i.e., the simple, direct

meaning. For example, in the sentence "The man ate an apple," each word is used in its literal sense: "the man" is capable of eating, "apple" is something that can be eaten, and "to eat" is an action associated with the man's nature. But if we say, "The man ate the earth," the meaning becomes incorrect, as a person cannot eat earth. In such a case, we must move away from the literal meaning and understand it through an intellectual or metaphorical meaning such as "to cultivate the land" or "to work the soil."

Here, the metaphorical meaning replaces the literal one and creates a new understanding based on the context. In this phrase, "The man ate the earth," the verb "to eat" does not convey its direct meaning (i.e., consuming food) but instead implies an action carried out through an instrument or means namely, the earth. That is, the verb is attributed not to a direct, but to a mediated or instrumental action.

Additionally, the third component namely, the object (maf'ul) is used metaphorically through intellectual reasoning to shift the verb from its literal meaning to a different interpretation. In this case, "earth" metaphorically refers to its produce, fruits, or harvest. Therefore, "The man ate the earth" comes to mean "The man ate the produce or fruit of the earth," which is a metaphorical expression understood by reason.

In al-Sakkaki's theory, the term *bayan maqam* (level of expression) refers to speech composed of words (phrases or expressions). The compatibility of words in terms of their meanings forms a coherent sentence. It is through such sentences that communication with various purposes is carried out. Properly selecting and placing words and organizing them in relation to other elements in speech results in two types of structure: the first is used to convey the basic (literal) meaning, and the second to express a secondary meaning that deviates from the original.

The literal meaning is not only determined by word order but is also bound by grammatical (syntactic) rules, and its correctness or incorrectness is assessed through syntax. For this reason, al-Sakkaki defines syntax (*nahw*) as follows: "Knowing how to construct the structure between words, and thereby absolutely conveying the original meaning, is all done based on rules derived from Arabic expressions." These rules help prevent errors in speech. In this regard, he agrees with al-Jurjani: syntax serves as a tool to understand the interconnection between words.

Grammar (*nahw*) rules are strict, and they guarantee the correct expression of the core meaning and the achievement of important communicative goals. According to classical scholars, the science of grammar studies the structural conditions of Arabic speech.



Through this, it becomes possible to determine whether a statement is linguistically correct or incorrect. Nahw primarily focuses on the structure and intonation of sentences and pays particular attention to i'rab (the changes at the ends of words indicating grammatical roles). These grammatical rules serve the purpose of conveying the intended meaning accurately. This is where the science of eloquence (balagha) begins.

Al-Sakkaki considers these two sciences grammar (nahw) and rhetoric (bayan) to be interconnected. Grammar studies the relationships and forms between words, while rhetoric analyzes the structure and deeper purpose of speech. Through this connection, bayan the process of understanding and making understood is fully realized. According to Sakkaki, moving from the primary meaning to reach various secondary meanings is essential. This process is not limited to lexical rules but is also dependent on the contextual (siyaq) placement of words.

These meanings, which are subject to context, cannot be enumerated definitively they can only be identified through the intended purpose of speech. However, all these multiple meanings remain linked to the original (primary) meaning. The primary meaning here serves as a foundation for understanding other meanings. The science of grammar defines this original meaning through its rules, and the science of rhetoric builds on it to identify additional meanings.

The Science of Bayan (Elucidation) Studies Eloquence in Two Directions:

One of them is the appropriateness of speech to the listener's state and the context in which it is spoken a concept that al-Jahiz referred to as "suitability to the situation." That is, there are specific modes of expression appropriate for each situation, and taking the listener's state into account requires expressing speech in various styles. This is because not every listener has the same level of knowledge or linguistic literacy, and they also differ in their capacity to understand or grasp the message. In this regard, Abdulaziz Atiq classifies people into three categories:

First situation: The listener is completely unaware of the content of the message.

In this case, the speech should not be expressed with any form of emphasis (i.e., using assertive means).  
Second situation: The listener is aware of the message but denies or refuses to accept it.

Here, the speech should be expressed with emphasis, in order to eliminate doubt and ensure the listener believes in the truth of the message.

Third situation: The listener knows the message but has

a stronger inclination toward denial. In this situation, the message should be delivered with even stronger emphasis the degree of emphasis increases according to the degree of the listener's denial. Al-Jurjani, in his *Asrar al-Balagha*, narrates an incident between Abu al-'Abbas the grammarian and the philosopher al-Kindi, as related by Ibn al-'Abbari. The philosopher al-Kindi came to Abu al-'Abbas and said:

"I think there is confusion in the speech of the Arabs."

Abu al-'Abbas asked him: "In what situation did you observe this?"

Al-Kindi replied: "The Arabs say: 'Abdullah is standing', then they say: 'Indeed, 'Abdullah is standing', and then: 'Yes, indeed, 'Abdullah is standing.' The words are repeated, but the meaning seems the same."

Abu al-'Abbas responded: "No, the meanings are different. 'Abdullah is standing' is a simple statement. 'Indeed, 'Abdullah is standing' is an answer to someone's question. 'Yes, indeed, 'Abdullah is standing' is a response to someone's denial."

Thus, emphasis (ta'kid) is not the main goal of speech but is used in response to specific circumstances. It is employed to remove denial. Just as there are degrees of denial, there are also degrees of emphasis. The excessive use of emphatic devices can indicate either the listener's strong denial, the speaker's weak use of linguistic tools, or the speaker's ignorance of the listener's condition. This creates a discrepancy between the speech that should be appropriate for the situation and the speech that is actually being delivered on the surface.

According to al-Sakkaki: Considering the Listener's State Taking the listener into account is one of the key factors in making a speech successful. This ensures that the recipient correctly understands the meaning and does not reject it due to misunderstanding or ignorance.

On this topic, Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani narrates from Ahmad ibn Khallad, who reports from his father the following incident:

"I said to Bashshar ibn Burd: 'Sometimes you say very strange things.' He asked, 'What kind of things, for example?' I replied: 'At times, you recite poetry so powerful that it shakes the heart and astonishes people. For example, these lines:

We endured the deadly wind,

Eyes flashed with rage, stars went dark.

Peace and blessings be upon the noble Messenger in the face of danger,

He saved us from weakness and elevated us to honor.

But at other times you say things like:

A hen laid eggs inside a cage,  
Clucking loudly, in a sweet voice.

Moreover, the eggs were of a unique shape,  
And the hen ran after the chicks.

Then Bashshar responded: 'Every word has its place and situation. The first lines carry a serious meaning. The second ones were dedicated to my neighbor Robaba. I do not buy eggs from the market.

Robaba herself keeps ten hens and one rooster. She collects the eggs for me and stores them. That's why, to me, those verses are more valuable than even Imru' al-Qays's famous lines "Qifa nabki" ("Stop, let us weep...")."

#### Taking the Listener's Condition into Account

Taking the listener's condition into account also requires that the content of the speech be adapted to suit the listener's needs and intellectual level whether that means making it concise or detailed.

An intelligent listener can grasp hints and allusions, so when speaking to such an audience, it is appropriate to use a concise style (al-jazl). This is because they understand quickly, their minds are sharp, and they are capable of deeply perceiving words and meanings, understanding the connections between them, and drawing conclusions. On the other hand, elaboration (al-itnâb) becomes necessary for those who comprehend slowly or deliberately pretend not to understand. In such cases, meanings must be clarified, supported with evidence, and reinforced with explanations. This may sometimes be required to satisfy them, or to overcome their stubbornness and prove the truth to them.

#### The Second Persuasive Aspect of Bayan Science

The second persuasive aspect of the science of bayan is the study of meanings that are indirectly derived from speech through context and evidences (qara'in). Speech conveys meaning with its original, lexical usage, but at times it departs from this original meaning and takes on new meanings understood through context. In such cases, these meanings can be grasped through various clues and evidences.

There are many purposes for this, but the primary goal of a statement is either to convey a judgment or to make that judgment known to the listener. For example, if you say, "In the Middle Ages, America paid taxes to the Algerian ships to pass through the Mediterranean," this conveys previously unknown information to the listener—namely, the strength of the Algerian navy in the Mediterranean. This is referred to as the "benefit of the statement" (fa'idat al-khabar).

If you say, "I heard your lecture at the university

yesterday," it does not provide new information to the listener, because they are already aware of the event. However, through this statement, you are informing them that you were aware of the event. This is known as the "necessity of informative benefit" (lazim al-fa'idah). These are the basic functions of speech.

Yet, sometimes speech goes beyond these two levels and expresses new goals understood through context, such as pride, admiration, criticism, reproach, advice, guidance, and others. In such cases, words depart from their literal meaning and express other eloquent intentions aligned with the speaker's purpose. For instance, if someone says to a person who has committed oppression:

"The consequences of oppression will return to the oppressor,"

they are not simply trying to report an event but rather aim to reproach the oppressor.

#### CONCLUSION

This study has concluded that Abu Ya'qub al-Sakkaki presented an exemplary model of linguistic research. In his scholarly activity, he established a strong connection with the ideas and linguistic reflections of earlier linguists, particularly those of 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani. He made extensive use of the concepts put forward in al-Jurjani's works *Dala'il al-I'jaz* and *Asrar al-Balagha*.

In addition to this, Sakkaki also introduced his own independent reasoning and personal viewpoints. He regarded the aim and essence of vocabulary as a means of deeply understanding meanings, and he sought to link linguistics with other disciplines, including rhetoric. His primary goal was to present a perfected model of Arabic eloquence, supported by syntax (naḥw) and discourse.

Moreover, by emphasizing the clarity, organization, and classification of scholarly concepts, he was able to present Arabic linguistic research in a precise and systematic manner. In particular, he clarified the role of grammatical elements in revealing meaning and their place within deductive structures. In this framework, the science of bayan was introduced as a complementary component of grammatical activity.

From Sakkaki's views, we understand that the levels of meaning consist of:

Letters,

Words,

Phrases.

The scope of the science of bayan covers the following three aspects:

The alignment of speech with the psychological state of

the listener whether indifferent, doubtful, resistant, or denying; Al-Jaḥiẓ. *Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyin*. Beirut: Dar Ṣādir, 1968.

Deriving implicit meanings from words with the help of context that is, conveying the essential message through a statement and extracting necessary information from it; Understanding various purposes and meanings through context and evidence.

He also differentiated between lexical indication (the meaning a word conveys in usage) and rational indication (understanding meaning through reason). He defined the term ḥaḥiqah (literal meaning) as the use of a word in its originally designated meaning without any interpretation. Nevertheless, he considered it acceptable for the meaning to shift not to the word's original meaning, but to another meaning conveyed by the context. Such contextual evidence (qarinah) may be either linguistic or rational.

Sakkaki also succeeded in developing a rigorous methodology for linguistic research. At the same time, he did not close the door to ijtihad (independent reasoning); that is, he created his Miftaḥ al-'Ulum as a "key to the sciences," not as a closed system that limits ijtihad or encompasses linguistic studies in a restrictive way. Rather, he presented it as a source open to innovation and inclined toward development.

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