

EXCEPT FOR A FEW...
THE EXCEPTION IN QUR'ĀN 11.116

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One of the things which set Sībawayhi apart from his predecessors is the importance he attaches to the various sources on which he, and the other grammarians, based their grammatical rules. These are: the *kalām al-ʿarab* (Bedouin speech), pre-Islamic poetry, and the text of the Qur'ān. Sībawayhi only accepts an expression if he is absolutely certain it actually occurs in Bedouin speech. At the same time, he sees the text of the Qur'ān, that is, the officially accepted ʿUṭmānic text, the *Muṣḥaf*, as the prime example of the *kalām al-ʿarab*¹.

In the present article, I shall demonstrate the way Sībawayhi's ideas on the valuation of sources were taken up by his fellow grammarians, a problem which plays a central role in my research on the reception of the *Kitāb Sībawayhi* among the early Arab grammarians². For this I shall use the example of the various opinions on the exceptive particle *illā* as it occurs in Qur'ān 11.116. But let me first present a short analysis of the general rules on *illā* in the *Kitāb Sībawayhi*.

Penrice says in his *Dictionary and Glossary of the Koran with Copious Grammatical References and Explanations of the Text* (1873) that *illā* stands for *in lā*, that it means "unless, except, if not" and that it

¹ See Edmund Beck, "Arabiyya, Sunna und ʿĀmma in der Koranlesung des zweiten Jahrhunderts", *Orientalia* 15 (1946) 180-224: 364; Cornelis H. M. Versteegh, "Arabic Grammar and Corruption of Speech", *al-Abḥāt* 31 (1983) 139-160: 149. According to Carter, however, Sībawayhi was too early for the ʿUṭmānic text: "He uses the Qur'ānic text, official or otherwise, only to illustrate or confirm points of purely grammatical import"; see Michael Carter, *A Study of Sībawayhi's Principles of Grammatical Analysis*, Oxford, 1968: 50.

² Monique Bernards, *The Editor of Sībawayhi's Book. Al-Mubarrad's refutation: Study and Text*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, forthcoming.

commonly governs the accusative. Unfortunately, it is not quite as simple as that. Sībawayhi uses more than ten full pages of his *Kitāb* to discuss the various constructions with what he calls the "original" exceptive particle *illā*³. In short the rules are as follows:

When the thing excepted is placed after the general term and the proposition containing that term is affirmative, the exception is always put in the accusative, as in *atānī l-qawmu illā zaydan* or *ra'aytu l-qawma illā zaydan*.

When the exception is placed after the general term and the proposition containing that term is negative or implying a negation, for instance beginning with *law*, the thing excepted takes the place of the general term as a *badal/badalan min*. It is therefore dependent on the same regent and put in the same case as the general term, as in *mā atānī l-qawmu illā zaydun*; or it can be considered as a description of the general term, thus resembling an adjective (a *ṣifa*) and therefore be put in the same case, as in *mā ḡā'anī aḥadun illā zaydun*. However, according to trustworthy informants⁴, the exception in this type of exceptive sentence may also be put in the accusative, because *illā* incorporates the meaning of *wa-lākinna*: "the people did not come but Zayd did."

If the thing excepted belongs to a fundamentally different category from that of the general term, the accusative is usually preferred, in accordance with the dialect of the Ḥiǧāz, as in *mā ḡā'anī aḥadun illā himāran*, because a donkey can never take the place of or be a description of a human being. So, in this case the exception can be neither a *badal* nor a *ṣifa* and *illā* again takes on the meaning of *wa lākinna*, governing the accusative. The Banū Tamīm accept the interpretation of *illā* as a *badal* even in this type of exceptive sentence, but Sībawayhi prefers the accusative⁵.

³ Abū Bišr 'Amr b. 'Uṣmān Sībawayhi, *Kitāb Sībawayhi*, ed. 'Abdassalām Muḥammad Hārūn, 5 vols., Cairo: Maktabat al-Ḥanǧī and Riyad: Dār ar-Rifā'i, 1983: II, 310-315; 319-329; 331-335.

⁴ As Sībawayhi reports on account of Yūnus and 'Isā: Sībawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 319.

⁵ Sībawayhi, *Kitāb*: II, 319-20.

If the general term is not expressed at all, the thing excepted is put in whatever case the general term would have been, had it been expressed; thus *mā ḡā'anī illā zaydun* and *mā ra'aytu illā zaydan*.

So there are three kinds of exceptive sentence. First: the *istiṭnā' muttasil*, the "joined exception", in which the thing excepted is put in the same case as the general term as a *badal* or a *ṣifa*. Second: the *istiṭnā' munqati'*, the "severed exception", in which the thing excepted is always put in the accusative because *illā* incorporates the meaning of *wa-lākinna*, whatever the case ending of the general term may be. (Incidentally, in Sibawayhi's view the term *munqati'* refers to the fact that general term and exception have different case endings and not, as has been the interpretation of later grammarians, to the fact that they belong to different categories). And third: the *istiṭnā' mufarraḡ*, the "void exception", in which the general term is not mentioned and the exception takes whatever case the general term would have had. This type of exceptive sentence is discussed by Sibawayhi as if it were an *istiṭnā' muttasil*. Neither this third type of exception nor the other possible constructions with *illā*, for instance those in which the exception precedes the general term, are relevant to the subject under discussion here⁶.

These, then, are the rules given by Sibawayhi for the construction of exceptions with *illā*. If we compare this to the way Mubarrad treats the same subject about sixty years later in his *Muqtaḍab*, we see that his rules are more or less the same. The division of the chapter on *istiṭnā'* into paragraphs differs from that in the *Kitāb* and some paragraphs which do occur in the *Kitāb* do not in the *Muqtaḍab*, but the general

⁶ See Sibawayhi, *Kitāb*, II, 335ff. On the general rules of *illā* see William Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*. Third, revised edition, 2 vols., Cambridge: University Press, 1967: II, 335-37; H. Reckendorf, *Arabische Syntax*, Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1921: 502-12; *Die Syntaktischen Verhältnisse des Arabischen*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967 (Photomechanischer Nachdruck): 712-26; and Michael Carter, "A note on classical Arabic exceptive sentences", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 20 (1975): 69-72.

principles are the same, mostly expressed in the same technical terminology⁷.

There is, however, some disagreement between the two authors about the regency in the *istiṭnā' munqati'*. Sībawayhi says that the exception is governed by the previous part of the utterance in the same way as *dirhaman* is governed by *'iṣrūna* in *'iṣrūna dirhaman*. In other words *zayd* is put in the accusative through regency of *illā*⁸. Mubarrad, on the other hand, says that the accusative occurs because *illā* takes the place of a verb which governs the accusative. In his view, the underlying construction is *lā a'nī zaydan*, "I do not mean Zayd" or *astatnī minhum zaydan*, "I except Zayd from them", just as is the case with the accusative of the vocative⁹.

Let us now take a look at the exception in Qur'ān 11.116: *fa-lawlā kāna min al-qurūni min qablikum ūlū baqiyyatin yanhawwā 'an al-fasādi fī l-ardi illā qalīlan mimman anḡaynā minhum*, "...or if there had been, of the generations before you, men of a remainder forbidding corruption in the earth – except a few of those whom we delivered from them"¹⁰. Here we find the exceptive particle *illā* followed by an accusative, *qalīlan*. This, of course, is visible in the consonantal text. If we apply the rules given by Sībawayhi to this construction, we see that: one, the general term is mentioned; two, the proposition containing the general term is implying a negation, because there were no men of a remainder, except etcetera; and three, the general term and the exception belong to the same category, that of human beings. Thus, on the basis of the rules there is no reason at all not to see the exception as an

⁷ Abū al-Abbās Muḥammad bin Yazīd al-Mubarrad, *Kitāb al-Muqtaḍab*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abdalḥāliq 'Uḏayma, 4 vols., Cairo: Dār at-Tahrīr, 1965-68: IV, 389-421.

⁸ Sībawayhi, *Kitāb*, II, 319; see also I, 95 and II, 330-331 and Michael Carter, "Twenty Dirhams in the *Kitāb* of Sībawaihi", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 35 (1972): 485-96.

⁹ Mubarrad *Muqtaḍab* IV, 389-94.

¹⁰ Translation from Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, 2 vols., London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, and New York: The Macmillan Company, 1971: I, 253.

istiṭnā' *muttaṣil* with *qalīlun* in the nominative, as a *ṣifa* or maybe even a *badal*. According to the rules, *illā qalīlun* should at least be considered correct, if not better than *illā qalīlan* and this is exactly what we find as the opinion of a number of other early grammarians. Farrā', for instance, states that reading the nominative ending '*alā niyyat al-waṣl*' in this verse is correct, too. It has been said both of Ġarmī and of Māzinī that they allowed the nominative as a *ṣifa* in this verse. Aḥfaṣ also mentions the nominative as a correct alternative¹¹.

However, Sībawayhi includes this verse in a separate paragraph on exceptive sentences, in which *illā* can only have the meaning of *wa-lā-kinna* and thus must perforce take the accusative. Neither from the other verses of the Qur'ān cited as examples in this paragraph, nor from the explanation given on the basis of poetry and quotations from the *kalām* can one deduce Sībawayhi's reasons for discussing Qur'ān 11.116 in this particular paragraph¹².

I think we can understand his reasons better if we take a closer look at what Mubarrad has to say on this verse in his *Muqtaḍab*. What strikes us in Mubarrad's treatment of the subject? In the first place he discusses the verse in the paragraph on exceptive sentences in which the exception is of a different category than the general term and thus cannot be a *ṣifa* or a *badal*. He does not include a paragraph on exceptions which can only take the accusative because *illā* is used to incorporate the meaning of *wa-lākinna*. He says that he includes the verse in this particular paragraph because *lawlā* has the meaning of *hallā* "is not...?" As far as I can

¹¹ Abū Zakariyyā' Yahyā b. Ziyād al-Farrā', *Ma'ānī l-Qur'ān* ed. Aḥmad Yūsuf Naġātī and Muḥammad 'Alī an-Naġġār, 3 vols., Cairo: al-Hay'ā l-Miṣriyya l-Āmma li-l-Kitāb, 1980: I, 167; II, 30ff; Abū l-Ḥasan Sa'īd b. Mas'ada al-Aḥfaṣ al-Awsaṭ, *Ma'ānī l-Qur'ān*, ed. Fā'iz Fāris al-Ḥamad, 2 vols., Kuwait, 1981: 115, 404; Abū Ḥayyān Muḥammad b. Yūsuf, *Manḥaġ as-sālik fi l-kalām 'alā Alfīyyat Ibn Mālik*, ed. Sidney Glazer, New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1974: 170; Faḥr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī, *at-Taṣīr al-kabīr*, ed. 'Abdarrahmān Muḥammad, 32 vols., Cairo: Maṭba'a Bahiyyat al-Miṣriyya, 1938: XVIII, 75; Raḍī ad-Dīn Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Astarābādī, *Šarḥ Kāfiyat Ibn al-Ḥāġib*, 2 vols., Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Īlmiyya, 1969: I, 229.

¹² Sībawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 325-29.

see, this statement does not make things any clearer. But then he continues, saying that the grammarians allow the nominative *'alā l-wasf* in this type of expression, but that they do not allow it in this particular case, because they do not want to change the consonantal text of the Qur'ān. We have already seen that this is not true for all grammarians. It clearly shows Mubarrad's personal opinion on this matter¹³.

Maybe the opinion ascribed by Mubarrad to the other grammarians sheds some light on the reason why Sibawayhi made an exception of Qur'ān 11.116 and put it in a separate paragraph. Although Sibawayhi does not refer to the *Muṣḥaf* in this case, his statement on, for instance, the reading of Qur'ān 12.31 clearly shows his thinking on this kind of problem. In the chapter on the negative particle *mā* he says: *wa-miṭlu dālīka qawluhu "mā hādā bašaran" fī luġati ahli l-ḥiġāzi wa-banū tamīm yarfa'ūnahā illā man 'arafa kayfa hiya fī l-muṣḥafi*. This is extensively treated by Beck¹⁴.

This, I think, is the heart of the matter. As I have mentioned above, referring to the valuation of the sources, according to Sibawayhi the *Muṣḥaf* is the prime example of the *kalām al-'arab*. Consequently, when the sources contradict each other, he always prefers to follow the *Muṣḥaf*, whereas some of his colleagues do not hesitate to offer alternatives to this text. Baalbaki in his article on the treatment of *qirā'āt*, says that the difference in treatment by Sibawayhi and Mubarrad on the one hand, and by Farrā' and Aḥfaš on the other, lies in the fact that both Sibawayhi and Mubarrad have a tendency to reject material which does not conform to their grammatical norms, whereas Farrā' and Aḥfaš prefer to rely on what actually occurs in Beduin speech. This is also true for their pupil and colleague Ġarmī¹⁵.

¹³ Mubarrad, *Muqtaḍab* IV, 416. 2.

¹⁴ Edmund Beck, "Der 'Uṭmanische Kodex in der Koranlesung des zweiten Jahrhunderts", *Orientalia* 14 (1945) 355-73: 359-61; Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* I, 59.

¹⁵ Ramzi Baalbaki, "The Treatment of *Qirā'āt* by the second and third century Grammarians", *Zeitschrift für Arabische Linguistik* 15 (1985) 11-32: 24; Monique Bernards, "The Baṣran Grammarian Abū 'Umar al-Ġarmī: his position between Sibawayhi and Mu-

With regard to Sībawayhi's rules, however, important as they may be to him, the case of Qur'ān 11.116 demonstrates that they can be "over-ruled" and restricted by an authoritative consonantal text which leaves no room at all for alternative readings. This approach we see again in Mubarrad's treatment and he is even more outspoken about it than Sībawayhi. Where the latter restricts himself to an implicit rejection of variant readings, Mubarrad openly criticizes a number of *qirā'āt*, as Baalbaki has pointed out¹⁶. The fact that with regard to Qur'ān 11.116 Mubarrad not only follows Sībawayhi's line of thinking, but also provides him with a plausible reason for his obscure placing of the verse, fits in very well with the thesis that Mubarrad, well-known as a critic of Sībawayhi in his younger years, felt a need to support and promote the *Kitāb Sībawayhi* later on and that his contribution to the consolidation of the *Kitāb* as authoritative text has been great indeed¹⁷.

To test the validity of this argument, let us take a look at the treatment of another Qur'ānic verse, 4.66: *mā fa'alūhu illā qalīlun minhum* "they would not have done it, save a few of them"¹⁸, where we face a similar problem, or rather, its exact opposite: *illā* followed by a nominative, whereas according to the rules an accusative is also allowed, because the general term is mentioned, the proposition containing that term is negative and the general term is of the same category as the exception. We see that in this case Sībawayhi applies the rules, stating that one who says *mā atānī al-qawmu illā abāka* really ought to say *mā fa'alūhu illā qalīlan minhum* as well. This, of course, would mean a change in the consonantal text of the *Muṣḥaf*. Nevertheless, he does not

barrad", *Proceedings of the Second Colloquium on the History of Arabic Grammar Nijmegen, April 29 - May 2, 1987*, ed. Michael Carter and Cornelis Versteegh, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1990: 35-47; see for instance the discussion on the declension of *ayy* when used as a relative, where Ġarmī supports his dissenting opinion by referring to Beidouin Speech.

¹⁶ Baalbaki (1985): 21.

¹⁷ Bernards (1990).

¹⁸ Translation from Arberry (1971): I, 110.

reject the use of the accusative in this verse, although he goes on to express a positive preference for the nominative in this type of expression¹⁹.

From the other early grammarians we only know Farrā's opinion²⁰ – he treats it the way he treats 11.116 and allows both nominative and accusative – and that of Mubarrad. In the *Muqtaḍab*, the latter discusses the verse in the context of a theoretical exposition on the use of the nominative as a *badal*, but does not mention the alternative reading with the accusative. I think we can interpret this as indirect criticism of Sībawayhi, something which is not at all unusual for Mubarrad. On the other hand, it is a well-known fact that he withdrew most of his criticism later on in his life and indeed, we see that Mubarrad in this case, too, eventually chooses to follow Sībawayhi's lead. In one of his later works, if not his last, the *Kāmil*, he states that *illā qalīlun* is the correct reading, but that one may read *illā qalīlan* as well²¹.

So, although we are confronted with an inconsistency in what we see as Sībawayhi's line of thought, this does not affect our opinion on Mubarrad's historical role, on the contrary: it even confirms it. If we add to this that Mubarrad says in the *Kāmil*, referring to the discussion on the regency of *illā*, that he only offers an interpretation of Sībawayhi's words, that he only tries to clarify things, without – and this he emphasizes – contradicting him, I think we may conclude that he felt he needed to present himself as the keeper *par excellence* of Sībawayhi's legacy.

¹⁹ Sībawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 311; see also Edward William Lane, *Arabic English Lexicon*, in eight parts, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1955: 76c.

²⁰ Farrā', *Mā'ānī* I, 166.

²¹ Mubarrad, *Muqtaḍab* IV, 395 and notes; see on the chronology *Muqtaḍab - Kāmil*: Janusz Danecki, *Literatura i Kultura w imperium Kalifów: Studium twórczości adabowej al-Mubarrada*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1982:64.