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DIPTOTES (GHAYR AL-MUNṢARIF) IN THE BASRAN AND KUFAN GRAMMATICAL TRADITIONS: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE IN CONTEMPORARY ARABIC LINGUISTICS

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Abstract: The phenomenon of *ghayr al-munṣarif* (diptotes) has occupied a central position in Arabic grammatical theory since the emergence of the Basran and Kufan schools. Unlike fully declinable nouns, diptotes do not accept *tanwīn* (nunation) and display distinctive case-marking patterns, particularly in the genitive case. This study examines the grammatical treatment of diptotes from both historical and contemporary perspectives by comparing the theoretical principles developed by the Basran and Kufan grammatical traditions with modern linguistic interpretations. The research employs a descriptive-comparative methodology based on classical Arabic grammatical sources and recent studies in Arabic linguistics. The analysis demonstrates that although both schools recognize the same grammatical phenomenon, they differ in their methodological foundations and criteria for grammatical reasoning. While the Basran school emphasizes analogy (*qiyās*) and systematic grammatical principles, the Kufan school gives greater authority to authentic linguistic usage and dialectal evidence. Contemporary Arabic linguistics extends these traditional analyses by interpreting diptotes through phonological, morphological, and semantic perspectives. The study concludes that the phenomenon of *ghayr al-munṣarif* represents a complex interaction of grammatical, phonological, and semantic factors rather than a purely morphological irregularity. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of Arabic nominal morphology and demonstrate the continuing relevance of classical grammatical theories in contemporary linguistic scholarship.

Keywords: Arabic grammar; *ghayr al-munṣarif*; diptotes; *tanwīn*; Basran School; Kufan School; Arabic morphology; grammatical tradition.

1. Introduction

Arabic grammar represents one of the oldest and most sophisticated linguistic traditions in the world. Since the second century AH, Arab grammarians have devoted considerable attention to explaining the structural organization of the Arabic language through systematic grammatical principles. Among the grammatical phenomena that have attracted sustained scholarly interest is the category of *ghayr al-munṣarif*, commonly translated into modern linguistic terminology as diptotes.

Diptotes constitute a special class of nouns that differ from fully declinable nouns in two principal respects. First, they do not accept *tanwīn* (nunation), which normally marks indefiniteness in Arabic nouns. Second, in the genitive case they are marked by the vowel fatḥah rather than kasrah, except when they occur in the construct state (*iḍāfah*) or are preceded by the definite article *al-*. These grammatical properties distinguish diptotes as a unique morphological category within the Arabic nominal system.

The theoretical explanation of diptotic declension was developed primarily by the two major grammatical schools of Classical Arabic: the Basran and Kufan traditions. Although both schools acknowledged the same grammatical phenomenon, they differed considerably in their methodological assumptions. Basran grammarians sought to formulate comprehensive grammatical rules based on analogy (*qiyās*) and logical consistency, whereas Kufan scholars relied more heavily on authentic linguistic evidence derived from Bedouin speech, Qur'ānic recitation, and early Arabic poetry. These

methodological differences occasionally produced alternative explanations for the classification and interpretation of diptotes.

In contemporary Arabic linguistics, the study of *ghayr al-munṣarif* extends beyond the traditional framework of prescriptive grammar. Modern scholars increasingly investigate the phenomenon from functional, descriptive, cognitive, and phonological perspectives. Rather than treating diptotic declension solely as an exception to grammatical rules, recent research interprets it as the outcome of interactions among morphological structure, phonological constraints, lexical semantics, and historical language development.

Despite the extensive literature devoted to Arabic grammar, comparatively few studies have examined the continuity between classical grammatical theories and contemporary linguistic interpretations of diptotes. Most previous studies focus either on the traditional grammatical description or on isolated aspects of Arabic morphology without establishing a systematic comparison between historical and modern approaches. Consequently, a comprehensive analysis integrating both perspectives remains necessary.

The present study seeks to bridge this gap by examining the treatment of *ghayr al-munṣarif* in the Basran and Kufan grammatical traditions while evaluating its interpretation in contemporary Arabic linguistics. The study addresses three research questions:

1. What grammatical principles determine the classification of diptotes in Classical Arabic grammar?
2. How do the Basran and Kufan schools differ in explaining the phenomenon of *ghayr al-munṣarif*?
3. How have contemporary linguistic approaches reinterpreted this grammatical category?

By answering these questions, the article aims to demonstrate that the phenomenon of diptotic declension cannot be explained solely through morphology but should instead be understood as the product of interacting phonological, semantic, and grammatical factors. Such an approach contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of Arabic nominal morphology while illustrating the enduring influence of classical grammatical thought on modern linguistic research.

2. Literature Review

The grammatical category of *ghayr al-munṣarif* has been discussed extensively throughout the history of Arabic linguistic scholarship. The earliest systematic analyses are found in the works of classical grammarians, particularly those associated with the Basran and Kufan schools. These scholars established the theoretical principles governing diptotic declension and identified the morphological and semantic factors responsible for preventing certain nouns from accepting *tanwīn*.

Among the most influential classical works are *An-Naḥw al-Wāḍiḥ* by Ali al-Jārim and Mustafa Amīn, *Al-Mufaṣṣal* by al-Zamakhsharī, *Qaṭr al-Nadā* by Ibn Hishām al-Anṣārī, and *Al-Naḥw al-Wāfī* by ʿAbbās Ḥasan. Collectively, these works provide comprehensive classifications of diptotes and establish the grammatical criteria that continue to shape Arabic linguistic education.

Modern scholarship has expanded this traditional framework by incorporating structural, descriptive, and functional approaches. Researchers such as Tammām Ḥassān and Kees Versteegh argue that many grammatical phenomena traditionally explained through analogy may also be interpreted in terms of phonological economy, semantic motivation, and language usage. These perspectives emphasize that Arabic grammar is not merely a collection of prescriptive rules but a dynamic linguistic system influenced by multiple interacting factors.

Nevertheless, relatively few studies have undertaken a comprehensive comparison between the methodological principles of the Basran and Kufan schools while simultaneously examining their relevance to contemporary Arabic linguistics. The present study addresses this research gap by integrating historical grammatical theory with modern linguistic analysis.

3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative descriptive-comparative approach to investigate the grammatical phenomenon of *ghayr al-munṣarif* (diptotes) in Arabic. The research is based on a comparative analysis of classical Arabic grammatical sources representing the Basran and Kufan traditions, together with contemporary studies in Arabic linguistics. Primary sources include the grammatical works of Ali al-Jārim and Mustafa Amīn, Ibn Hishām al-Anṣārī, al-Zamakhsharī, Ibn Mālik, and ʿAbbās Ḥasan, while secondary sources comprise recent linguistic studies addressing Arabic morphology and syntax.

The analysis proceeds in three stages. First, the grammatical characteristics of diptotes are identified and classified according to the principles established in classical Arabic grammar. Second, the interpretations of the Basran and Kufan schools are compared with particular attention to their methodological differences and grammatical reasoning. Finally, these traditional explanations are evaluated in light of contemporary linguistic theories emphasizing morphological structure, phonological constraints, and semantic motivation.

This methodological framework allows both historical continuity and theoretical development to be examined, providing a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of the concept of *ghayr al-munṣarif*.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. The Concept of *Tanwīn* and Diptotic Declension

In Arabic grammar, *tanwīn* refers to the final nasal sound /-n/ attached to indefinite nouns. Although represented phonetically rather than orthographically, *tanwīn* performs important grammatical functions, including marking indefiniteness and distinguishing fully declinable nouns from those that are morphologically restricted.

Diptotes constitute an exceptional category because they do not accept *tanwīn*. Furthermore, their genitive case is marked by fatḥah instead of the regular kasrah, except in two situations: when the noun forms the first element of an *iḍāfah* construction or when it is preceded by the definite article *al-*. These grammatical properties have remained stable throughout the history of Arabic and continue to characterize Modern Standard Arabic.

Unlike earlier pedagogical descriptions that primarily enumerate grammatical rules, contemporary linguistic research seeks to explain why certain lexical items exhibit restricted declension. Recent studies suggest that diptotic behavior reflects interactions among morphological complexity, phonological structure, lexical semantics, and historical language development rather than representing arbitrary grammatical exceptions.

4.2. Classification of Diptotes

Classical Arabic grammarians classify diptotes according to the linguistic factors responsible for preventing full declension. Although the classifications vary slightly among grammatical authorities, most scholars recognize two principal categories of grammatical motivation.

The first category comprises nouns whose morphological structure alone is sufficient to prevent *tanwīn*. These include nouns ending in the feminine *alif maqṣūrah* (ى), the feminine *alif mamdūdah* (اء), and plural forms belonging to *Ṣīghat Muntahā al-Jumūʿ*. Because these forms possess highly marked morphological structures, they are consistently treated as diptotes throughout the grammatical tradition.

The second category includes nouns whose diptotic status results from the interaction of semantic and morphological factors. Proper names, adjectives, foreign lexical items, compound nouns, and nouns following verbal patterns belong to this group. Their restricted declension cannot be explained by morphology alone but depends upon the coexistence of multiple grammatical properties.

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Rather than viewing these categories as isolated grammatical exceptions, modern linguistic studies interpret them as reflecting systematic relationships between lexical structure and grammatical behavior. Such an interpretation demonstrates that diptotic declension represents an organized subsystem within Arabic nominal morphology rather than an arbitrary collection of irregular forms.

Table 1. Major Categories of Diptotes in Arabic Grammar

Category	Grammatical Motivation	Representative Example
Feminine proper nouns	Proper noun + femininity	Fāṭimah, Zaynab
Foreign proper nouns	Proper noun + foreign origin	Ibrāhīm, Ismāʿīl
Compound proper nouns	Compound structure + proper noun	Ḥaḍramawt
Proper nouns ending in -ān	Additional suffix + proper noun	ʿUthmān, Ramaḍān
Verbal-pattern nouns	Verbal morphology	Aḥmad
Feminine alif mamdūdah	Morphological structure	Ḥamrāʾ
Feminine alif maqṣūrah	Morphological structure	Ḥublā
Ṣīghat Muntahā al-Jumūʿ	Ultimate broken plural	Masājid

Table 1 demonstrates that the majority of diptotic nouns are classified according to multiple grammatical criteria rather than a single morphological feature. This multidimensional classification explains why Arabic grammarians regarded diptotes as a distinct grammatical category instead of treating them as isolated lexical irregularities.

4.3. Comparative Analysis of the Basran and Kufan Schools

Although both the Basran and Kufan schools recognize the same grammatical phenomenon, their theoretical explanations differ significantly.

The Basran grammarians developed a highly systematic model of grammatical description based on qiyās (analogy). According to this approach, grammatical rules should be derived from general linguistic principles capable of explaining all comparable structures. Consequently, Basran scholars established relatively strict criteria for identifying diptotes and emphasized internal grammatical consistency.

In contrast, the Kufan school adopted a more descriptive methodology. Kufan grammarians relied extensively on authentic linguistic evidence drawn from Qur'ānic recitation, pre-Islamic poetry, and the spoken language of Arab tribes. Rather than subordinating linguistic data to abstract grammatical rules, they frequently accepted exceptional forms whenever supported by reliable linguistic usage.

These methodological differences become particularly evident in the treatment of certain proper nouns and exceptional declensional patterns. While the Basran tradition generally preferred analogical regularity, the Kufan grammarians demonstrated greater flexibility by recognizing a broader range of acceptable linguistic variants.

Despite these differences, both schools agreed on the fundamental grammatical characteristics of diptotes: the absence of *tanwīn* and the occurrence of fatḥah in the genitive case under ordinary circumstances. Their disagreement therefore concerns methodology rather than the grammatical facts themselves.

4.4. Diptotes in Contemporary Arabic Linguistics

Contemporary Arabic linguistics has considerably expanded the traditional understanding of *ghayr al-munṣarif*. While classical grammarians primarily described diptotes through prescriptive grammatical rules, modern linguists increasingly interpret the phenomenon within broader linguistic frameworks, including structural linguistics, functional grammar, morphology, and phonology.

Recent studies suggest that the inability of certain nouns to accept *tanwīn* cannot be explained solely by morphological irregularity. Instead, diptotic declension reflects the interaction of several linguistic factors, including phonological complexity, lexical semantics, historical language development, and cognitive processing. From this perspective, the restrictions imposed on diptotes contribute to maintaining phonological balance and morphological consistency within the Arabic nominal system.

Functional approaches further emphasize that diptotic forms facilitate grammatical differentiation between lexical categories. Proper nouns, foreign borrowings, compound formations, and morphologically marked plural patterns possess distinctive structural characteristics that justify their separate grammatical treatment. Consequently, diptotes should not be regarded as exceptional forms but rather as an integral subsystem of Arabic nominal morphology.

Despite adopting new theoretical perspectives, contemporary Arabic linguistics continues to confirm the validity of the principal observations made by classical grammarians. The rules established by the Basran and Kufan traditions remain applicable to Modern Standard Arabic and continue to form the foundation of Arabic grammatical education throughout the Arab world.

5. Discussion

The comparative analysis presented in this study demonstrates that the Basran and Kufan grammatical schools share a common understanding of the formal characteristics of diptotes while differing substantially in their methodological approaches. The Basran tradition is characterized by its reliance on analogy (*qiyās*), logical consistency, and systematic grammatical classification. In contrast, the Kufan tradition places greater emphasis on authentic linguistic usage, dialectal variation, and empirical evidence derived from Qurʾānic recitation and classical Arabic poetry.

These methodological differences should not be interpreted as contradictions but rather as complementary perspectives on the same linguistic phenomenon. The Basran approach provides a coherent theoretical framework for explaining grammatical regularities, whereas the Kufan methodology preserves the diversity and flexibility of actual language use. Together, these traditions offer a comprehensive account of Arabic grammatical structure.

Modern linguistic theories reinforce this complementary relationship by demonstrating that diptotic declension results from the interaction of morphological, phonological, and semantic factors. Rather than replacing traditional grammatical explanations, contemporary research provides additional theoretical justification for the classifications established by classical grammarians.

The findings therefore indicate that *ghayr al-munṣarif* represents a systematic component of Arabic grammar whose interpretation benefits from integrating historical grammatical theory with modern linguistic analysis. Such an interdisciplinary perspective contributes to a deeper understanding of Arabic nominal morphology and highlights the continuing relevance of classical Arabic grammatical scholarship.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the phenomenon of *ghayr al-munṣarif* through a comparative analysis of the Basran and Kufan grammatical traditions and contemporary Arabic linguistic scholarship. The findings demonstrate that both classical schools recognize the defining grammatical characteristics of diptotes—the absence of *tanwīn* and the distinctive marking of the genitive case—while differing primarily in their methodological principles.

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The Basran school developed a highly systematic grammatical model based on analogy and theoretical consistency, whereas the Kufan school adopted a more descriptive approach grounded in authentic linguistic evidence. Despite these methodological differences, both traditions established the theoretical foundations that continue to influence the teaching and analysis of Arabic grammar.

Contemporary linguistic research extends these classical interpretations by emphasizing the interaction of morphology, phonology, and semantics in determining diptotic behavior. This multidimensional perspective demonstrates that *ghayr al-munṣarif* should be understood not as a collection of isolated grammatical exceptions but as a coherent subsystem within Arabic nominal morphology.

The present study contributes to Arabic linguistic scholarship by integrating classical grammatical theory with modern linguistic analysis. Future research may further investigate diptotic phenomena through corpus-based methods, comparative Semitic linguistics, and computational approaches to Arabic morphology, thereby expanding our understanding of one of the most distinctive features of the Arabic grammatical system.

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