00 - Wiki - For everyone

Last updated Oct 23, 2023

Learning nahw analytically

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

"It is easy to create a dry, boring, but accurate resource for a complex topic. The challenge is to create something that is effective yet fun to learn from and to teach with."

Introduction

I have developed this system targeting three use cases, two primary and one secondary.

Primary use cases

1. Reviewing: If you have already studied نحو (Arabic syntax), this is a more intuitive, rapid system for reviewing it and
2. Learning under a teacher: This system offer a more engaging, student-centric, evidence-based system for teaching نحو before serious students step into deeper books. This part is still under development.

Secondary use case

3. Self-learning: Even though self-learners can use it, this system is, at its core, a reviewing and teaching system - there are no detailed explanations for difficult concepts.

Note:

1. A serious student of knowledge should not use this system while abandoning learning to comprehend classical grammar books.
2. The current version targets English-speaking learners. A full Arabic version is planned for later, إن شاء الله.

1. The target audience

Based on the above use cases, this system cater to three types of users - two primary and one secondary:

Learning scenario	Purpose
1. The **reviewer** who has already studied grammar books written in Arabic and is familiar with the نحو rules. Primary user.	This student can use this system for rapidly reviewing نحو rules after studying and understanding from the grammar books written in Arabic. The core concepts have been laid out with just enough hints to analyze and rapidly the rules. **A word of advice** The serious student of knowledge should NOT use this system (the current English version or the future Arabic version) while abandoning learning to comprehend grammar books written in Arabic. See below* for the reason.
2. The **learner(s) with teacher** scenario. Primary user. Early development stage.	Unlike traditional teaching, the teacher here is only a *facilitator of learning*, not a lecturer. The student is expected to use her prior knowledge of نحو to infer by herself as much of the rule as possible. Thus, the student expends mental effort on very different, and more pedagogically important, tasks in this system as compared to grammar reference books or traditional teaching. This system can also be employed for groups of students working together for collaboration-based learning. It can also function as a stepping stone for ultimately studying Arabic grammar books. The teaching method is explained later below. I hope it makes for a more fun, student-centric way to teach and learn نحو.
3. The **self-learner** with basic grammar skills but has not yet studied the نحو rules.* Secondary user.	This student can use this system to learn most of نحو without reading an Arabic grammar book IF they have basic Arabic grammar skills (mentioned later). However, some difficult concepts may require external help. Just as with the reviewer, I advise this student not to abandon learning to read grammar books written in Arabic.*

* The (long-term) objective (for the serious student) isn't just to learn grammar, but to learn how to read grammar books. This is because when you read the Islamic sciences as a whole, you will find grammar discussions in tafsir, hadith, fiqh (often interpreting Qur'an and hadith), and commentaries of books. Those discussions are often at a higher level than the (basic grammar) books, so students will likely need to pick up more advanced nahw books like commentaries of Alfiyya and the like, either to review the grammar or look up more advanced discussions. So if students struggle to read classical grammar texts, they will be stuck. - Ust Abdul Hakim Vazquez

2. The thought process

I mentioned above how a reader's thought process differs when using this system as opposed to grammar reference books. Below is a more verbose explainer:

With grammar reference books, the reader:	With this system, the reader:
1. Reads and comprehends the definition given to them.	
2. Reads and comprehends the examples that are given with full إعراب and how it relates to the rule. Occasionally, an incorrect usage is provided.	1. Compares the provided examples - both correct and incorrect usages laid out for comparison 2. Using their prior knowledge and hints, grammatically parses the إعراب of key parts under discussion 3. Uses the provided hints and deduces the rule and how the examples relate to it, and also why the incorrect usage is so.
3. Mentally compares the examples as they arent laid out for easy comparison.	4. Compares their understanding of the rule with the provided explanation.
4. Armed with a completion explanation, circles back to re-analyze.	5. Armed with the complete explanation, circles back to re-analyze.

Teachers: A similar comparison can be made to teaching the traditional method. Try doing so yourself. It will help you appreciate this system's benefits better.

Expected outcomes

3. What this method can (and cannot) help with

A. For reviewers, learners with teachers, and self-learners

✓ Convey the concept quicker	Generally speaking, this holds true due to the concise nature of the rule representation.
✓ A deeper understanding of نحو rules	compared to a reference book, given identical time investment as your time is spent analyzing the examples rather than the explanatory text.
✗ Learning precise definitions	Use reference books for this. Precise definitions are only occasionally provided.
✗ Cover all minutiae of نحو	Out of scope. The objective is to convey the core concepts. Plus, I am not that qualified.
✓ Providing numerous examples for each case	I have collated examples from ibn Hisham's شرح قطر الندى and from نيل المنى. Some topics have more examples than others.
✓ Convey rule hierarchy for easier ingestion	See Chapters 12, 37 or 42 for examples on what this means.
✓ Easier comparison of rules	The tables and the examples within are laid out so as to easily compare and contrast similar rules
✓ Expose gaps in your knowledge so you can fill them in	because you cannot deduce the rule from the examples till you know the underlying concepts
✗ Replace classical references	This system is for either 1) reviewing or 2) a stepping stone to eventually read classical books
✓ Proficiency in recognizing a rule's usage in other texts	when practiced with other texts and examples
✗ Reading, writing or speaking Arabic proficiently	as it requires more than just knowing the نحو rules

B. For the reviewer

✓ Easier to review with, and make recalling ==concepts== and examples far quicker	than when using a reference book, for reasons already mentioned and explained.

C. For learners with teachers, and self-learners

✓ Learning the rules conceptually	since you are expected to analyze the sentences and infer the rules.
✓ Expose gaps in your knowledge so you can fill them in	because you cannot deduce the rule from the examples until you know the underlying concepts
✓ Make it easier to understand a classical grammar book afterwards.	This system can be used as a stepping stone for reading classical grammar books.
✗ A roadmap to learn Arabic grammar, ordered from simple to complex topics	This system is provided only as content (*how* to study) without a roadmap (*what* to study first). I do not yet have the data or the experience to recommend a roadmap. The self-learner could perhaps use the difficulty level given for each table to decide what to study first.

Pre-reqs

4. What are the prerequisites to using this system ?

A. For the reviewer
All that is required is that you understand how to 'read' the tables in each page. Please go through the related sections in the Wiki and you are set.

B. For learners with teachers, and self-learners
The more you know of the following, the easier the time you will have:
1. You know your sarf tables or can at least recognize sing, dual and plurals in the common forms.
2. You know إعراب and its various types: فتحة، ضمة، كسرة، ، الألف، الياء، الواو etc.
3. You are able to parse <u>basic</u> Arabic sentences into their constituent parts. مبتدأ، خبر، فاعل، مفعول، حال. These are only mentioned where a rule cannot be deduced otherwise.
4. You have a solid beginner vocabulary. Difficult sentences are translated.

How to study a chapter

5. What's the reading order for a table?

Read Table heading → Study the **Observe** columns and hints → Try deducing rules yourself → Check against Infer column

Let's look at an example, one of the simplest ones.

1. When to use the singular form of a فعل؟

Infer	Observe group ①	then Compare
Regardless of فاعل being sing, dual or plural	✓ خَضَرَ الرجلُ	قامث هندُ ✓
1. If فاعل is مذكر ⇐ فعل is مفرد مذكر	✓ حضرَ الرجلان	قامثِ الهِنْدان ✓
2. If فاعل is مؤنث ⇐ فعل is مفرد مؤنث	✓ حضرَ الرجالُ	قامثِ الهِنْداتُ ✓
	✗ حضرًا الرجلان ✗	قامَتَا الهِنْدان ✗
	✗ حضروا الرجالُ ✗	قُمْنَ الهِنْداتُ ✗
	✓ يَخْطُرُ الرجالُ	تَقومُ الهِنّداتُ ✓

1. **Table heading** - indicates the topic addressed and is vital to know what patterns you should focus on.
2. **Observe** columns, its examples and hints - Analyze these without looking at Infer. How to analyze **Observe** is explained in the next section.
3. Deduce as much as possible of a rule using the examples and the provided hints.
4. Infer column should be used to check your inferences and when reviewing

Activity Now try this out on the above table. It's one of the simplest ones.

REMEMBER! Focus not on the Infer column, but rather on the **Table heading** and the **Observe** columns.

6. How do I 'read' the examples and hints to infer rules?

In short, by analyzing **patterns** in the examples and with assistance from the provided **hints**.

A. What kind of patterns should I analyze in the examples?

Remember! First study the table heading. This is vital to know what patterns you should focus on:

a. What is the form of a particular word category? (e.g. فَاعِل أو مُكْرِم for a doer)
b. What are the specific conditions of a word that causes a rule to activate?
  i. Its gender or number? مذكر، مؤنث، مفرد، جمع
  ii. Its definiteness? معرفة، نكرة، إضافة
  iii. Its role? مبتدأ، خبر، فاعل، مفعول، حال etc.
  iv. Simple or compound? مفرد، مركب
  v. Is the word being brought forward or delayed, or assumed?

Naturally, there are far too many patterns in any sentence. This is why hints are used to direct you in the right direction.

B. Types of hints

i. Indicating usage allowance, preference, and prohibition

Observe the icons in the table below.

a. **Type 1** is used for examples if only correct/incorrect usage exists for them. Example: See اسم الفعل Table 44-1.1
b. **Type 2** is now self-explanatory. Example: See اسم الفاعل مؤنث Table 31-1.1

Type 1	Type 2
✓ Correct usage	✓ Preferred
	✓ Not preferred
✗ Incorrect usage	✗ Incorrect

Providing correct and incorrect usages is an oft-used technique in this system .

ii. Highlighting

To draw your attention to a key pattern in the examples that cause the rule, highlighting is used to indicate correct patterns or incorrect usages.

a. Example: what can be a فاعل. Table 31-1.1

iii. Multiple patterns

Sometimes, there are multiple patterns to compare and contrast in a table. In such a case, Pattern 1 and Pattern 2 will use different colors. If they occur elsewhere in the row, your attention will be called to Pattern 1, and to Pattern 2, so you can compare across them.

a. Example: See اسم التفضيل on whether it should always be مفرد مذكر. Table 47.2

Note All highlight colors are RG-blind safe and photocopy-friendly (i.e. you can differentiate between them in B&W, so color printing is not necessary).

iv. Indicating order of words

Notations are sometimes used to hint at a rule. Observe the **Notation** columns and try to infer what each notation means.

<div dir="rtl">

هَلْ زيدٌ قام أبوهُ

</div>

Meaning	Notation		Notation	Meaning		Notation	Meaning
هَلْ زَيدٌ come together	هَلْ + زَيدٌ		هَلْ ...	هَلْ begins sentence		∵	Because
هَلْ comes after زَيدٌ	هَلْ ↶ زَيدٌ		... هَلْ	does not begin it		∴	Therefore
قامَ comes before زَيدٌ	زَيدٌ ↶ قَامَ		هَلْ ... زيدٌ	هَلْ and قامَ are not consecutive		⇐	Implies
They are equivalent	زَيدٌ قَامَ أبوهُ ⇔ قَامَ أبو زَيدٍ		زيدٌ ☞ هُ	هُ points to زيدٌ			Or

The above are building blocks and can be combined.

Explanation	Condition
هَلْ starts the sentence, and is followed by زِيدٌ. They are consecutive	✓ هَلْ ... & هَلْ ↶ زيدٌ ✗ هَلْ ... زيدٌ

v. Indicating assumed words

Assumed words are grey amongst black text.
- a. Example: مَنْ أنتَ؟ أنا زيدٌ
- b. For more examples, see حذف المبتدأ وجوبًا.

vi. Difficulty level of rule extraction

Note the **1** in the table

1. When to use singular form of فعل؟

Infer	Observe ①	Observe
Regardless of فاعل being sing, dual or plural	✓ حضرَ الرجلُ	قامتْ هندُ
		قا... ...لان...

Each table will have one of these icons to indicate how difficult a rule is to extract.

Difficulty level

① Low   ② Med   ③ High

Difficulty depends on two factors:
1. Your background knowledge and skill
2. Limitations of the notation system to convey the complete rule (in which case, it's not your fault if you don't get it).

Use it as a barometer to either skip it, or pat yourself on the back if you get it right. Also, please remember that this is a work in progress, so the assigned difficulty level may be inaccurate.

7. Great! Which page should I begin with?

The below topics are arranged from simple to complex (in terms of using the system). Work your way through them sequentially to ease into using this system. As for the sequence of topics to study, this system does not come with any recommendations for it:

Other FAQs

8. What are your references?

1. All content is from Baghdadi's نيل المنى and Ibn Hisham's شرح قطر الندى.
2. The Table of Contents follows نيل المنى.
3. In some examples, I have changed proper names to uniformize the examples for ease of understanding (زيد to عمر, etc.).
4. In some scenarios, I have filled in implied examples (for gender, count, etc.) for full explication.
5. I only created three examples from my own self. These are in Table 15.4 (last row) and two in Table 33.2.C.i

9. Why invent a new system? What we have has worked for centuries!

If you havent, quickly read the 'Elevator pitch' provided on one of the other pages before you continue.

Done?

A. Take a deep breath

My argument is based on the core learning outcomes for students in an Arabic grammar class. The learning resource should teach students:

1. To learnt to dissect sentences grammatically by themselves.
2. To learnt to extract, compare and contrast the grammatical rules by themelves.

Any learning resource should be graded by

1. How well it aligns with and enables these outcomes.
2. How much extraneous, unnecessary effort it requires of a student to achieve these outcomes.
3. How much information it spoon-feeds rather than lets them discover the rules themselves.
4. When teaching a class, how much engagement power it has over the students.

While studying Baghdadi's نيل المنى and Ibn Hisham's شرح قطر الندى, I realized they are wonderful reference books, but meet none of the above standards for reviewing and for teaching. I expand on this further below.

Likewise, poems such as قطر الندى are great for memorizing rules but impotent at anything further.

Please don't misunderstand me. I am not saying they are bad books. - just that they are not the right tools for the learning outcomes.

These are the issues I found with most Arabic grammar books when used for teaching, and the mechanisms I have used to address them.

B. For reviewers, learners with teachers, and self-learners

Issue	How it is addressed in this system
1 A 'wall of text' approach devoid of appropriate sectioning and layout that makes it time-consuming to parse rules, to compare and contrast related rules, and to visualize their hierarchy.	1. To allow learners to easily compare & contrast the rules, laying out related examples side-by-side. See Table 31.1-4 2. To allow easier parsing, aligning child or related rules. See Chapter 42. 3. Wherever possible, using a flowchart scheme. See Chapter 42. This scheme helps students focus on the key task of analyzing the rules rather than waste time and effort trying to parse a wall of text and deciphering rule hierarchy.

C. For the reviewer

Issue	How it is addressed in this system
2 It is also time consuming to review using these books due to the wall of text.	The layout acts as a quick reference mechanism that, again, lets students focus on quickly reviewing what's important - the rules themselves. Adequate space is provided around a page for a student to further annotate it.

D. For learners with teachers, and self-learners

Issue	How it is addressed in this system

3 A 'definitions and rules primary, and examples secondary' approach. This is great for reference, but inefficient when learning because:
  A. This spoon-feeds rules and lifts much of the burden of rule analysis and comprehension from the reader.
	Arriving at answers through analysis (a higher-level cognitive act) leads to a deeper, quicker understanding and better retainment, as opposed to simply reading an answer (which requires simply understanding, a lower-level cognitive task). This is well known through common experience and through research. Summary: https://tophat.com/blog/blooms-taxonomy/. This system seeks to implement this paradigm using the following strategies
	    1. To indicate critical patterns that cause a rule, words and/or

	B. The reader spend more time deciphering the explanation than the examples.	إعراب are highlighted. See [Table 31-1.1](#)

	B. The reader spend more time deciphering the explanation than the examples.	إعراب are highlighted. See [Table 31-1.1](#) 2. To allow learners to deduce the rule, examples (correct and otherwise) are ordered in a specific sequence. See [Table 31-1.1](#) 3. To indicate usages that are allowed, incorrect, preferred and not-preferred, intuitive icons are used. See [Table 31-1.1](#) 4. To make students focus on the core learning outcomes, minimal commentary is used in complex examples. See [Chapter 21](#)
	4 The 'know how to read Arabic to learn نحو' problem which is a somewhat chicken-and-egg problem.	This is one of the biggest challenges I experienced as a non-native adult Arabic learner - fording the gap from being a beginner student to becoming an intermediate self-learner. This problem is only partially resolved in this system. I do so by expressing semantic rules via examples, and via language-agnostic symbols and zero commentary in the black text. This makes this system much more reliant on the student's critical thinking skills than their Arabic (or English) reading skills, as is needed in other learning mechanisms.
	5 The incredibly dry nature of learning نحو and its effect on motivation and class engagement.	Learning نحو using the traditional method relies on sheer motivation to grind through all the rules (unless you are the rare person who has an intrinsic love for it). Personally, my motivation sank every time I was faced with the task of memorizing new rules with no end in sight. Likewise, poems on نحو served their purpose well for a certain audience. However, for a modern-day adult non-native Arabic learner, they hold little pedagogical benefit. I hope that 1) the above mentioned learning mechanisms, and 2) the change in teaching approach I have described will make the learning experience more interesting. The planned accompanying exercise problems will hopefully make it rewarding too when students are able to apply the rules they have learnt.
	6 Even modern books have similar issues as #3 and #5	

E. For the teacher

Issue	How it is addressed in this system
7 Teaching Arabic becomes lecture-centric (i.e. talking head format) which goes back to Issue 1 (listening and understanding), instead of a more engaging system (student-centric analyzing and inferring).	Elsewhere in these pages, I have described how to use this system for teaching. It suffices here to say that the instructor now guides more than lectures, by engaging students' critical thinking and application skills instead of just being a talking head. It leads to more effective teaching as they can isolate gaps in a student's understanding far quicker, something impossible in a lecture format. The evidence on the issues with lecture-centric teaching as well as its low impact on student learning are well known through modern pedagogical research. It is time that we incorporated evidence-based teaching methods into our Islamic curriculums.

E. Translating to another language

Issue	How it is addressed in this system
8 This requires a translation of the entire book with all the complexities inherent in such an endeavor.	I have expressed the vast majority of semantic rules via examples and language-agnostic symbols, with near-zero English in the examples' column. This makes this system exponentially easier to translate to any language. Only the Grey explanatory text need be translated.

I began in Aug 2022 with the germ of the idea on how to structure my notes for quick review, and بِفَضْلِ الله fleshed out 19 of the 52 chapters that month, beginning with those topics that I personally needed to study.

As I was creating the notes for my personal use, I realized that they were extremely effective, even for teaching. I then iteratively added many features to make it accessible to others.

10. Why would this work? You are not an Arabic scholar/teacher!

- Spot on, I am not an Arabic scholar! I am just an early-intermediate Arabic student, so definitely expect some errors. Major points if you can spot them and let me know.
- However, I have been teaching university-level Computer Science since 2005 so I am decently trained on *how* to teach based on evidence-based methods.
- It is easy to create a dry, boring, but accurate resource for a complex topic. The challenge is to create

something that is effective yet fun to learn from and to teach with. I have tried to do that here.
- Every single rule, is from the mentioned sources and so are the examples (bar those mentioned in the 'Limitations' section). I have only re-arranged the content in an easy to learn manner.
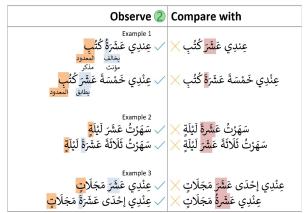
11. What are the limitations of this system?

1. The Grey text is currently a mix of English and Arabic as it's geared towards English speakers with basic Arabic reading proficiency. Another version with full Arabic will be made once all chapters are complete, إن شاء الله

2. Naturally, the reader has to learn what the mathematical symbols used across the chapters mean. This knowledge has nothing with the reader's core learning objective and has a small learning curve. However, this effort is only required initially as the same symbols are used across all chapters.

3. Not all rules, or all parts of a rule can always be inferred. This can happen
    1. In complex cases
    2. Due to limitations of this system to convey all aspects of a rule
    3. Due to lack of critical thinking effort by the student
    4. However, with constant revision, recalling the rules by simply glancing at the examples becomes easier.

4. In some examples, I have intentionally not added information that fully explicate a rule. This is a conscious choice I made in case:
    1. It clutters the text
    2. It answers other aspects of a rule that the student must deduce yourself

5. The system has difficulty expressing some information. Examples include:
    1. How many مفعول do different variations of a فعل take? Table 30.2
    2. لا مشبهة بليس is used only in poetry, not prose. Table 26.3
    3. It is a خبر only when attached to a مبتدأ. Table 21.3
    4. Misc information about اسم الفعل. Table 44-1.3

6. The tashkeel is not completely visible on some words. See Table 52-1.2 This is a software bug in OneNote. It will be resolved in a future update, إن شاء الله

7. I have not included differences of opinion on most topics. For example,
    1. Differences amongst Kufan and Basran schools.
    2. Differences amongst scholars on a grammatical issue. E.g. ترخيم الثلاثيات allowed الفراء That المنادى - 37: (يَا حَكَ يَا حَكَمُ) can be abbreviated to يَا حَكَ المحركة
    3. I list only what Baghdadi or ibn Hisham presented as the primary rule.

12. Do I need to print in color? (or) I am color-blind.

Color printing will obviously help with quicker recognition as color does matter. However, you can print it in Black & White. This is because I have used B&W-friendly highlight colors. They appear as discernable shades of grey in a B&W printout, so long as the print quality is good.

Color blind Red-green blindness affects ~8% of male and 0.4% of female population. I have used highlight colors that are accessible to this demographic.

13. I found an error, or I have a suggestion!

Submit a bug report on the project page https://github.com/zahidsyed/learning-nahw-analytically/issues

14. How can I help?

- Spread the word.
- For now, I can use help with proofreading rules and translations. If interested, contact me through the project page https://github.com/zahidsyed/learning-nahw-analytically

15. What's the roadmap of features you plan to add?

Version	Planned features
v0.00 - v0.54	Add all chapters of نيل المنى
> v0.54	- Exercise template - Full Arabic text version - Port to Word for printability and working hyperlinks

16. Acknowledgements

Restricting myself to those who helped me attain Arabic reading and comprehension, beginning with the most recent:

1. My teachers at Al Salam Institute and their amazing Alimiyyah program. https://alsalam.ac.uk/
   Special shoutout to Ustadh Abdul Hakim Vazquez for patiently answering my questions, no matter how many I would lob at him, and for his feedback on this system.
2. Ustadh Khaled Nouman at Mishkah University who helped me improve my Arabic speaking and writing skills. https://mishkahu.com
3. Mufti Yusuf Mullan and his online Arabic program. Hands down, *the* pre-recorded course to learn to parse Arabic grammar that I have come across. www.shariahprogram.ca
4. Ustadh Ahmed bin Mahfooz who taught me selflessly for years, come (literal) rain or shine, seeking no remuneration for his tremendous efforts. https://taleem.education

My feeble thanks can do little justice to all your efforts. I pray that your recompense is with the One who rewards بغير حساب.

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