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'Imāla

The term *'imāla* is used by the medieval Arab grammarians to denote the fronting and raising of Old Arabic *ā* toward *ī*, and the old short *a* toward *i* (Levin 1992:74, esp. n. 1). Although the term *'imāla* denotes the fronting and raising of both *ā* and *a*, the ancient Arabic sources almost completely ignore the *'imāla* of short *a*, and the term in these texts usually denotes the *'imāla* of long *ā* (Levin 1992:74). The few grammarians who mention the *'imāla* of short *a* deal with it only when it occurs in the proximity of *r* (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 293.6–294.5; Zamaxšārī, *Mufaṣṣal* 160.10–11; Ibn Ya'īš, *Šarḥ* II, 1265.19–1266.7; Ibn 'Aqīl, *Šarḥ* II, 527.6–528.4). Literally, *'imāla* means 'inclination'. It was known by this name because the person who pronounces *ā* and *a* with *'imāla* 'inclines' the *'alif* in the direction of *yā'* and the *fatḥa* in the direction of *kasra* (Levin 1992:74–75, esp. n. 3).

The Arab grammarians saw the *'imāla* as a phenomenon close to that known today as 'vowel harmony'. In their view, *'imāla* and → *'idgām* 'assimilation of consonants' show much similarity (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 279.11–16; Ibn Jinnī, *Xaṣā'is* II, 141.16; Zamaxšārī, *Mufaṣṣal* 158.11–13; Ibn Ya'īš, *Šarḥ* II, 1252.22–1253.14).

In Sibawayhi's (d. 180/796) view, the occurrence of *'imāla* includes both *ā* and the preceding consonant (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 284.8–11, 292.13–14, 293.6–294.2). This suggests that he noticed that the phenomenon of the fronting of *ā* is combined with the fronting of the point of articulation of the preceding consonant (→ vowel raising).

The grammarians regarded *'imāla* as a legitimate phenomenon from the normative point of view when it occurred in certain conditionings, but cases deviating from these conditionings were regarded as errors (Levin 1992:75, n. 5). In the *Kitāb*, *al-'alifu llatī tumālu 'imālatan*

šadīdatan 'the long *ā* which is pronounced with strong *'imāla*' is counted among the legitimate sounds of Arabic, which may be used in reading the *Qur'ān* and poetry (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 452.8–10).

Sibawayhi, al-Mubarrad, and Ibn as-Sarrāj do not say anything about the quality of the vowel of the *'imāla*. It is therefore impossible to get any idea of this quality in the 8th and 9th centuries and to judge whether the vowel of the *'imāla* was closer to *ē* or *ī*. According to as-Sirāfī and Ibn Jinnī (10th century), the vowel of the *'imāla* was pronounced somewhere between *ā* and *ī* (Sirāfī, *Šarḥ* I, 306.3–4; Ibn Jinnī, *Sirr* I, 50.1–2; Ibn Jinnī, *Xaṣā'is* III, 120.10–13; Ibn Jinnī, *Munṣif* I, 42.11–17). Similar information is given by Ibn Ya'īš (*Šarḥ* II, 1252.12–1253.1). This suggests that the vowel of the *'imāla*, at least in most dialects, was *ē*.

'Imāla occurred in Old Arabic (Levin 1971: I, 9–61), but it was not a general phenomenon, occurring only in some of the old dialects (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 284.1–6). These dialects sometimes also differed from each other with respect to *'imāla*, since the *ā* shift was not homogeneous in all of them (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 284.1–6, 284.11–13). It also occurred in some Middle Arabic dialects (Levin 1971: I, 62–73; Levin 1975:261–265) and in many modern Arabic dialects (Levin 1971: I, 79–412).

'Imāla and the factors conditioning its occurrence were described for the first time by Sibawayhi. His description of *'imāla* is based on the linguistic situation prevailing in his time and environment, mainly al-Baṣra and its surroundings in southern Iraq. This is confirmed by evidence in the *Kitāb* (Sibawayhi, II, 294.4–5; Levin 1992, n. 14). The description of *'imāla* by all later grammarians is based on that of Sibawayhi.

'Imāla occurred both in medial and final position. The factors conditioning medial *'imāla* differed from those of final *'imāla*.

According to Sibawayhi, there were three types of medial *'imāla* in the Arabic spoken in Iraq in the 8th century:

- i. Medial *'imāla*, conditioned by the vocalic environment of medial *ā*. This *'imāla* occurs when the vowel of the syllable adjacent to *ā* is *i* or *ī*, e.g. *'imāḍ* 'pillar' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 279.17), *kilāb* 'dogs' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 279.21), *šimlāl* 'brisk camel' (Siba-

wayhi, *Kitāb* II, 279.21), 'ābid 'worshipper' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 279.11), 'ālim 'one who knows' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 279.11), mafātīḥ 'keys' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 279.11). Note that 'imāla occurs irrespective of whether *i* or *ī* follows or precedes *ā* (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 279.10–21).

With some speakers, 'imāla also occurs when *ā* is preceded by *y* (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 281.19–282.3), e.g. bayyā' 'seller' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 281.20), kayyāl 'grain measurer' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 281.20), šaybān [proper name] (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 282.2).

This type of 'imāla, conditioned by the occurrence of *i* or *ī* in the syllable adjacent to *ā*, does not occur if one of the *ḥurūf al-musta'liya*, i.e. one of the emphatic consonants *ṣ*, *ḍ*, *ṭ*, *ḍ* or one of the back consonants *q*, *g*, *x* is adjacent to *ā* (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 285.17–286.6), e.g. qā'id 'sitting' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 285.19), gā'ib 'absent' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 285.19), ṭā'if 'walking around something' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 285.19), āṭis 'sneezing' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 286.5). However, Sibawayhi mentions that 'imāla does occur in the immediate proximity of these consonants in the dialect (or dialects) of certain people whose speech cannot be considered as an example of good Arabic (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 285.17–286.6).

Sibawayhi also mentions the exceptions *an-nās* 'the people' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 285.7) and the proper name *al-hajjāj* (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 285.8), where 'imāla occurs although no *i* or *ī* is found in the proximity of *ā* (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 285.5–8).

ii. Medial 'imāla occurring in the 3rd person masculine singular perfect of *Iw/y* verbs, as in ṭāba 'he was good' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 281.13), xāfa 'he was afraid' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 281.13), ḥāba 'he feared' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 281.13). This 'imāla occurs only in verbs where the first vowel in the 1st and 2nd person is *i*, as in ṭibtu and xiftu. It is only found in the speech of some of the people of al-Hijāz (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 281.10–14) and is not conditioned by the vocalic or consonantal environment.

Sarauw (1908:35) was the first to notice that Sibawayhi distinguishes between these two types of 'imāla. In his view, 'imāla conditioned by the vocalic environment occurred in the dialects of the eastern tribes Tamīm, Qays, and 'Asad, although Sibawayhi does not explicitly

say so (Sarauw 1908:33). However, it can be inferred from his remarks (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 36.20–37.21) that this 'imāla occurred in the dialect of Tamīm (Levin 1971:II, 422–424, n. 10).

iii. The third type of medial 'imāla, occurring in nouns of *Iw/y* roots, is conditioned by the consonantal environment of *ā*. It occurs only in the proximity of front consonants, not in that of the *ḥurūf al-musta'liya* (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 285.10–16, 289.15–18), e.g., bāb 'door' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 285.10), māl 'flocks' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 285.10), and 'āb 'disgrace' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 285.10) are pronounced with 'imāla, as against sāq 'leg' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 289.16), qār 'large herd of camels' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 289.16), gāb 'forest' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 289.16). Sibawayhi does not say in which dialect this particular 'imāla occurred.

Final 'imāla occurred only in some of the Iraqi dialects in the 8th century (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 281.4–5, 281.9–10). It was not usually conditioned by the presence of *i* or *ī* in the syllable preceding final *ā*, and it was not precluded in the immediate proximity of the *ḥurūf al-musta'liya* (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 287.15–20), e.g. ḥublā 'pregnant' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 281.6), mu'tā 'given' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II 287.18), saqā 'he gave to drink' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 287.19), da'ā 'he called' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 280.18). The pausal form of the feminine ending *-at* was also affected by it, as in ḍarbāḥ 'one act of striking' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 292.14) and 'axḍāḥ 'one act of taking' (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 292.14). As-Sirāfi, Sibawayhi's commentator (10th century), states that the 'imāla of this ending was widespread in al-Baṣra, al-Kūfa, and Mosul and their surroundings (Sirāfi, *Šarḥ* I, 349.3).

In most cases there was no difference between the behavior of the endings *ā* and *ū*. With some speakers, 'imāla of final *ā* in certain endings occurred in pause. The endings Sibawayhi mentions in this respect are the accusative and genitive pronoun suffix of the 3rd person singular feminine *-hā*, and the genitive pronoun suffix of the 1st person plural *-nā* (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 284.16–21).

'Imāla occurred also in some Middle Arabic dialects, and the phenomenon is also known today in many modern Arabic dialects, both

in medial and final position. The medial ʾimāla vowel in most modern dialects is *ē*, but in some of them it is *ī* (Levin 1971:I, 387–388; also for the occurrence of diphthongization after the ʾimāla vowel in Cyrenaica and usually in Malta). The final ʾimāla vowel is in most cases a short, unstressed vowel. In some of the dialects the vowel is *i*, in others *e*, and in some of them the vowel is between *i* and *e* (Levin 1971:388–390; also for other variants).

The data gathered from some Middle Arabic and modern Arabic dialects shows that Sibawayhi's description of the ʾimāla is authentic and accurate (Levin 1992:80–88). This inference is mainly based on a discovery by Blanc (1964:42–49) that in the modern *qeltu* dialects of Iraq and Anatolia and in the modern dialect of Aleppo, the factors conditioning the medial ʾimāla correspond to those described by Sibawayhi in the 8th century. The same type of medial ʾimāla also occurs today in Turkey, in the dialects of the districts of Alexandretta and → Antiochia (Arnold 1996:4), and in the dialects of the districts of Adana and Mersin (Procházka 1996:192). Medial ʾimāla in these modern dialects is conditioned by the historical vocalic environment: ʾimāla usually occurs when the historical vowel of the syllable adjacent to *ā* was *i* or *ī*, e.g. *klīb* 'dogs' in Jewish Baghdadi, *klēb* in Christian Baghdadi, Mosul, Anatolia, and Aleppo; *uḥēm* (<*wiḥām) 'carving during pregnancy' in Aleppo (Barthélemy 1935–1954:887); *jīmāʿ* 'mosque' in Jewish Baghdadi, *jēmāʿ* in Christian Baghdadi and in Mosul and Anatolia; *mafētīḥ* 'keys' in the Jewish dialect of Mosul, *mfētīḥ* in Aleppo (Levin 1994:219); *sakīkīn* 'knives' in the Muslim dialect of Mosul, *sakēkīn* in the Jewish dialect of Mosul (Jastrow 1989:285). These examples show that in these modern dialects, medial ʾimāla occurs in the proximity of old *i*, even if it has dropped out or changed. The historical character of the factors conditioning medial ʾimāla in these dialects is also shown by the fact that it does not occur in the proximity of *ə* < *a* or *ə* < *u*, as in the examples *xabbāz* 'baker' and *sakkān* 'inhabitants' in Jewish Baghdadi.

Evidence supporting the authenticity of Sibawayhi's description of ʾimāla is also furnished by texts in Middle Arabic dialects. Recently, Blau and Hopkins noticed in unpublished manuscripts of early Judaeo-Arabic texts from the 9th and 10th centuries the occurrence of medial

ʾimāla under conditions very similar to those described by Sibawayhi (Hopkins 2005:195, 211). The occurrence of the type of medial ʾimāla described by Sibawayhi is also attested by examples found in the text of the vernacular poetry of Ṣafīyy ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī in the 14th century (Levin 1975:261–264).

The inference that Sibawayhi's description of ʾimāla is authentic and accurate is also supported by his information that some people pronounce the form *an-nās* 'the people' with ʾimāla, as an exception to the usual conditioning factors. The same exception is found today in some of the *qeltu* dialects: the form *nēs* 'people' occurs in Christian Baghdadi and in the dialects of northern Iraq and Anatolia (Levin 1994:220).

The above inference is also confirmed by Sibawayhi's description of the final ʾimāla: in comparing final ʾimāla as described by him with that occurring today in some modern dialects, it can be inferred that the situation in Sibawayhi's period was, in general, similar to that prevailing in the modern *qeltu* dialects and in the dialect of Aleppo (Levin 1992:86–88): in the *qeltu* dialects of Iraq and Anatolia and in Aleppo, just as in Sibawayhi's period, final ʾimāla is not conditioned by the existence of historical *i* or *ī* in the syllable preceding final *ā*, e.g. *ḥablē* 'pregnant' in Jewish and Christian Baghdadi and in the Jewish dialect of Mosul (Blanc 1964:150), and *ḥablē* in Aleppo (Barthélemy 1935–1954:144). This example corresponds to *ḥublā* in Sibawayhi's period (see above). Other examples are *a'mi* 'blind' in Jewish Baghdadi (Blanc 1964:84), *skāgi* 'drunkards' in Jewish Baghdadi, and *sakāgi* in Christian Baghdadi and in the Muslim dialect of Mosul (Blanc 1964:82). One of the most striking points of resemblance between final ʾimāla in some old and some modern dialects is the behavior of the final *ى*: in some dialects in Sibawayhi's time, the ʾimāla of this *ā* occurred only in nouns and adjectives, and not in verbs (Sibawayhi, *Kitāb* II, 284.13–16). In the modern *qeltu* dialects and in Aleppo the situation is exactly the same, as illustrated by the examples *ḥablē* and *a'mi* vs. *banā* 'he built' (Levin 1992:87–88).

There is, however, another type of medial ʾimāla, not mentioned by Sibawayhi, which occurs today in many modern dialects outside Iraq. This medial ʾimāla is conditioned by the consonantal environment of *ā*, and it occurs in

many Lebanese dialects, in the Druze dialects of the Ḥōrān and the Golan, in the dialects of the Syrian desert oases Qarītēn, Palmyra, and Suxne, in the Bedouin dialects of Sāḥil Maryūt in Egypt, and in the Jabali dialect of Cyrenaica (Levin 1971:I, 186–234). In the dialects of Malta, medial *ʾimāla* occurs in any consonantal or vocalic environment, but sometimes it is conditioned by the historical consonantal environment of old *ā* (Levin 1971:I, 295–302).

The factors conditioning the occurrence of the medial *ʾimāla* in the above-mentioned dialects, except for those of Malta, can be summarized as follows:

- i. *ʾImāla* usually occurs when the old *ā* is surrounded by two front non-emphatic consonants or by *h* and a front non-emphatic consonant (the furthest back consonant to be considered front according to this definition being *k*), e.g. *kēn* ‘he was’ in Beirut; *bēb* ‘door’ in Sāḥil Maryūt; *lġēm* ‘bit’ in Beirut; *čuhhēl* ‘youngsters’ in Palmyra; *člīb* ‘dogs’ in Suxne (Levin 1971:I, 209).
- ii. *ʾImāla* is precluded when one of the historical emphatic consonants *ṣ*, *ḍ*, *t*, *ḍ*, *ẓ* occurs in the immediate proximity of the old *ā*, e.g. *ḥītān* ‘walls’ and *ḥṣān* ‘horse’ in Palmyra; *naḍāfi* ‘cleanliness’ in Beirut; *aḍām* ‘bones’ in Palmyra (Levin 1971:I, 209).
- iii. *ʾImāla* is frequently precluded in words containing an emphatic consonant, even when it does not occur in the immediate proximity of old *ā*. Usually this phenomenon occurs when one of the labials *b*, *m*, *w*, *f* or the lateral consonant *l* is adjacent to the old *ā*. For example: *ṭwāl* ‘high [pl.]’ in Beirut; *ṣabāya* ‘women’ in Cyrenaica (Levin 1971:I, 210).
- iv. When one of the back consonants *q*, *g* < *q*, *ʾ* < *q*, *x*, *ḥ*, *ʿ*, *ʾ* or one of the consonants *w*, *r*, *k* occurs in the immediate proximity of old *ā*, *ʾimāla* occurs in some cases but not in others. The factors conditioning the occurrence of *ʾimāla* in this position are very complicated, and there are many differences between the various dialects in this respect (Levin 1971:210, 212–233).

In the modern dialects where medial *ʾimāla* is conditioned by the consonantal environment, final *ʾimāla* is also known. This final *ʾimāla* is conditioned by the consonantal environment of

old *ā* (Levin 1971:I, 235–251). This *ʾimāla* also occurs in dialects where medial *ʾimāla* does not occur at all (Levin 1971:I, 304–326). *ʾImāla* of the feminine ending *-at-* occurs in some dialects where final *ʾimāla* of other endings usually does not occur (Levin 1971:I, 326–327, 341–351). In the dialects of Malta, final *ʾimāla* usually does not occur (Levin 1971:I, 302). Final *ʾimāla* occurs only in pause in the dialects of Upper Egypt (Levin 1971:I, 371–376) and in the Lebanese dialect of Šḥīm (Levin 1971:I, 262–263, 273–278).

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Impairment → Language Impairment

Imperative → Mood

Imperfect → Tense

Impersonal Verb

1. INTRODUCTION

According to a classic definition, "An impersonal verb is a verb that occurs only in third person singular forms, has no specified agent, and has a dummy subject or no subject" (www.sil.org/linguistics/GlossaryOfLinguisticTerms/WhatIsAnImpersonalVerb.htm). The notion of 'impersonal verb' seems to have been unknown to Arab grammarians, who assumed that all verbs have either a 'real' subject (→ *fā'il*)

or a 'substitute for the subject' (*nā'ib fā'il*). Blachère (1975:266) highlights this ambiguity as follows: "L'appellation de *verbe unipersonnel* paraît devoir être préférée à celle de *verbe impersonnel*". There exists, therefore, a difference between unipersonal verbs, which occur only in 3rd person singular forms whose subject has a referent, and impersonal (or not-personal) verbs, whose subject has no referent. Badawi a.o. (2004:394) provide an example of such an ambiguity when they refer to "impersonal verbs, particularly those which have a subordinate clause as their agent, 'it is necessary that', etc.". They quote, among other examples: *yajibu 'an natawaqqafa 'inda-hum qalilan* 'we must pause with them a little', where the verb *yajibu* has the subordinate clause as its subject. Although this kind of verb is now perceived as impersonal, it has not always been treated as such, as shown in Ibn Jubayr (*Rihla* 199): *hā'ulā'i mimman inqata'a 'ilā llāh fa-tajibu mušāarakatu-hum* 'they are among those who dedicated themselves to God, therefore, it is necessary to help them'. The feminine *tajibu* proves that this verb, undoubtedly unipersonal, is neither impersonal nor 'non-personal' and has a real subject (*mušāarakatu-hum*).

2. UNIPERSONAL VERBS

Western authors agree that "our impersonal actives indicating natural phenomena, such as *it snows*, *it rains*, etc., are always expressed by the Arabs personally. They say either *talaja t-talju* 'the snow snows', *maṭara l-maṭaru* 'the rain rains', or *talajat as-samā'u* 'the sky snows', *maṭarat as-samā'u* 'the sky rains'" (Wright 1974:II, 271).

Wright continues: "In the case of words like *yajūzu* 'it is allowed', *yajibu* 'it is necessary', *yanbaġi* 'it behooves', etc., followed by '*an* with the subjunctive, the subject naturally is the following clause, and therefore the verb does not come under the head of impersonal".

In their recent grammar, Badawi a.o. (2004:395) confirm that "verbs denoting 'must', 'ought', 'may', 'suffice', etc. have '*an* clauses as their agents"; they implicitly acknowledge that since these verbs have a non-dummy subject, they are not impersonal verbs.

The above-mentioned verb 'to suffice' (*kafā/yakfi*) is quite controversial. According to Wright (1974:II, 161), in the example "*kafā bi-*