



## Violence-Related Grammatical Examples in *al-Kitāb: Nahw* Function, Semantic Residue, Cross-Cultural Reception

Musyfiqur Rahman\*

Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta  
Jakarta, Indonesia  
musyfiqur.rahman25@mhs.uinjkt.ac.id

Gautama Veri Vetiana

Institut Agama Islam (IAI) Al-Irsyad Jakarta  
Jakarta, Indonesia  
sejarahtama@gmail.com

Ahmad Sirfi Fatoni

Universitas Negeri Makassar  
Makassar, Indonesia  
ahmad.sirfi.fatoni@unm.ac.id

Umma Fatayati

Universitas Darussalam Gontor  
Jawa Timur, Indonesia  
ummafayati@unida.ac.id

Moh. Buny Andaru Bahy

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya  
Surabaya, Indonesia  
bunymohammad@gmail.com

### Purpose

*This article aims to examine violence-related grammatical examples in Sibawayhi's al-Kitāb through three analytical layers: nahw function, lexical-semantic residue, and the horizon of cross-cultural reception.*

### Method

*This study employs a qualitative library-based method with textual, intellectual-historical, and limited reception-hermeneutical approaches. The primary source is al-Kitāb, edited by 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn. The main data include idrib, uqtul, ḍaraba 'Abdullāhu Zaydan, ḍarabtu Zaydan, and qatalta Zaydan. Supporting sources include classical adab-nahw literature, modern studies on Sibawayhi, semantics, Arabic language pedagogy, and discourse and multicultural theories used as auxiliary concepts rather than as a single methodological framework.*

### Results/findings

*The article finds that these examples primarily function as technical devices for explaining verbal forms, agent-object relations, and transitive structures. However, this technical function does not entirely erase lexical meanings such as "to strike" and "to kill." Anecdotes and satire in the adab-nahw tradition are better understood as metalinguistic humor and criticism of pedagogical formalism rather than direct moral protests against violence.*

### Conclusion

*The article concludes that classical grammatical examples should be read by preserving their nahw legitimacy, recognizing their semantic residue, and allowing pedagogical contextualization without claiming empirical data on contemporary reception.*

### Keywords

*al-Kitāb, Sibawayhi, nahw, semantic residue, Arabic language pedagogy.*

\*) Corresponding Author

### Abstrak

#### Tujuan

Artikel ini bertujuan mengkaji contoh-contoh gramatikal bernuansa tindakan keras dalam al-Kitāb karya Sibawayhi melalui tiga lapis pembacaan: fungsi naḥw, residu leksikal-semantik, dan horizon resepsi lintas budaya.

#### Metode

Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif berbasis kepustakaan dengan pendekatan tekstual, sejarah-intelektual, dan hermeneutik-resepsional terbatas. Sumber primer penelitian adalah al-Kitāb edisi 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn. Data utama meliputi contoh idrib, uqtul, ḍaraba 'Abdullāhu Zaydan, ḍarabtu Zaydan, dan qatalta Zaydan. Sumber pendukung mencakup literatur klasik adab-naḥw, kajian modern tentang Sibawayhi, semantik, pedagogi bahasa Arab, serta teori wacana dan multikulturalisme sebagai konsep bantu.

#### Hasil/temuan

Artikel ini menemukan bahwa contoh-contoh tersebut pertama-tama berfungsi sebagai perangkat teknis untuk menjelaskan bentuk verba, relasi pelaku-objek, dan struktur transitif. Namun, fungsi teknis itu tidak sepenuhnya menghapus makna leksikal seperti “memukul” dan “membunuh”. Anekdot dan satire dalam tradisi adab-naḥw lebih tepat dibaca sebagai humor metalinguistik dan kritik terhadap formalisme pedagogis.

#### Kesimpulan

Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa pembacaan atas contoh gramatikal klasik perlu menjaga legitimasi fungsi naḥw, mengakui residu semantik, dan membuka kontekstualisasi pedagogis tanpa mengklaim data empiris resepsi kontemporer.

#### Kata kunci

al-Kitāb, Sibawayhi, naḥw, residu semantik, pedagogi bahasa Arab.

### المخلص

#### الهدف

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة الأمثلة النحوية ذات الدلالة على الأفعال العنيفة في الكتاب لسيبويه من خلال ثلاثة مستويات من القراءة: الوظيفة النحوية، والبقايا المعجمية الدلالية، وأفق التلقي العابر للثقافات.

#### الطريقة

يعتمد هذا البحث على المنهج النوعي القائم على الدراسة المكتبية، مع توظيف المقاربة النصية، والتاريخية الفكرية، والتأويلية التلقائية المحدودة. والمصدر الأساسي هو الكتاب لسيبويه بتحقيق عبد السلام محمد هارون. وتشمل البيانات الرئيسة أمثلة مثل بضرب، واقتل، وضرب عبد الله زيداً، وضرب زيداً، وقتلت زيداً. أما المصادر المساندة فتشمل كتب الأدب والنحو الكلاسيكية، والدراسات الحديثة عن سيبويه، والدلالة، وتعليم العربية، ونظريات الخطاب والتعددية الثقافية بوصفها مفاهيم مساعدة لا إطاراً منهجياً وحيداً.

#### النتائج

يتبين أن هذه الأمثلة تؤدي أولاً وظيفة تقنية في شرح صيغ الأفعال، وعلاقة الفاعل بالمفعول، وبنية الفعل المتعدي. غير أن هذه الوظيفة لا تمحو تماماً المعاني المعجمية مثل الضرب والقتل. كما أن النواذر والسخرية في تراث الأدب والنحو أقرب إلى الفكاهة الميتalinguistic ونقد الشكلائية التعليمية منها إلى الاحتجاج الأخلاقي المباشر على العنف.

#### الخلاصة

يخلص البحث إلى ضرورة قراءة الأمثلة النحوية الكلاسيكية قراءة تحفظ مشروعيتها النحوية، وتعترف ببقاياها الدلالية، وتتيح إمكانات لوضعها في سياق تربوي دون ادعاء وجود بيانات ميدانية عن التلقي المعاصر.

#### الكلمات الرئيسية

الكتاب؛ سيبويه؛ النحو؛ البقايا الدلالية؛ تعليم العربية

## INTRODUCTION

The Arabic grammatical tradition occupies an important position in the history of Arabic-Islamic humanities. It is not merely a technical discipline that regulates the structure of words and sentences, but also one of the earliest instruments through which Muslim scholars preserved the authority of the language of revelation (Shah, 2003), organized exegetical practice, and established standards of valid linguistic expression. Within this tradition, Sibawayhi's *al-Kitāb* holds a fundamental place as one of the earliest and most systematic formulations of *naḥw*. Carter (2004) emphasizes that Sibawayhi's significance lies not only in the formulation of grammatical rules, but also in the construction of a linguistic system that shaped the way the Arabic-Islamic tradition understood language, order, and the authority of expression. Shahid (2024) likewise shows that *al-Kitāb* cannot be understood merely as a work of formal grammar, since it demonstrates sensitivity to context, usage, and metapragmatic conventions in early Arabic linguistic practice. The authority of *al-Kitāb* is also reflected in Abū 'Uthmān al-Māzinī's statement that anyone wishing to write a major book on *naḥw* after Sibawayhi must approach the task with humility (Ḍayf, 1992).

As a grammatical work, *al-Kitāb* employs numerous examples of sentences to explain syntactic relations, such as the relationship between the verb (*fi 'l*), the agent (*fā 'il*), and the object (*maf'ūl bih*). Grammatical examples function as pedagogical and analytical devices that simplify abstract relations into recognizable forms. For this reason, they are not necessarily intended as social representations or moral messages. The issue arises when several examples in *al-Kitāb* use verbs denoting forceful or violent actions, such as *ḍarabtu Zaydan* (I struck Zayd) (Sibawayhi, 1983a), *qatalta Zaydan* (You killed Zayd) (Sibawayhi, 1983b), as well as imperative forms such as *iḍrib* (strike) and *uqtul* (kill) (Sibawayhi, 1983a). Within the internal logic of *naḥw*, these examples serve a technical function. Yet when words meaning *to strike* or *to kill* are repeatedly used as neutral examples, a question arises as to the extent to which their technical function suspends, or still leaves behind, their lexical meaning.

This article does not seek to judge Sibawayhi or the *naḥw* tradition anachronistically. Sibawayhi was not teaching violence, and *al-Kitāb* is not a moral text intended to represent social action directly. An example such as *ḍaraba Zaydun 'Amran* (Sibawayhi, 1983a) is primarily used to demonstrate the relationship between the verb, the agent, and the object. Nevertheless, grammatical examples are not entirely empty of meaning. A word meaning "to strike" or "to kill" does not automatically lose its lexical content simply because it is used as a grammatical illustration. Its technical function may suspend direct social reference, but it does not entirely erase the semantic residue attached to the word.

For this reason, the term *linguistic violence* is used in this article cautiously and in a limited sense. The term does not imply that every word denoting a forceful action is automatically an instance of violence, nor does it equate *naḥw* examples with physical violence or with Bourdieu's symbolic violence in the full sense of social domination. Rather, it is used as a working term to indicate the representational tension between the technical function of grammatical examples and the lexical residue that remains legible.

The perspective of cross-cultural reception remains relevant, but it is positioned here as an interpretive horizon rather than as field data. Arabic and the *naḥw* tradition have long moved beyond the Arab world. Green (2023) shows that Arabic functioned as a language of knowledge, religion, and culture in South Asia for more than a millennium. In the Nusantara context, Mahfud et al. (2021) demonstrate that Arabic influence extended beyond lexical borrowing to social, religious, legal, literary, philosophical, and cultural domains. Thus, grammatical examples also travelled along with the transmission of *naḥw* rules, although this article does not claim to have empirically measured their reception in non-Arab Muslim institutions.

Within this framework, discourse theory and multiculturalism are used as auxiliary

concepts. This limited use of discourse theory resonates with Malik and Wirajaya's (2025) application of Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis, which examines textual structure, social context, and cognitive process in reading a religious text. Fairclough (1996) reminds us that language can function as a social practice that shapes meaning; Bourdieu (1991) shows that symbolic forms may become naturalized through repetition; while Taylor (1994) and Kymlicka (1995) provide an ethical horizon concerning recognition and plurality. However, this article does not employ these theories to uncover hidden ideologies in the words *ḍaraba* or *qatala*, since both explicitly denote forceful action. What is analyzed is the relationship between lexical meaning, grammatical function, pedagogical repetition, and the possibility of rereading these examples in changing contexts.

Previous studies have paved the way for this discussion. Murtadho (2025) shows that Arabic textual analysis may examine lexical choices, tonal variation, and structural patterns in relation to meaning and rhetorical effect. Al-Malakh (2001) reads grammatical examples in *al-Kitāb* as reflections of Arab social reality; Wahīb (2020) discusses violence in Arabic *naḥw* thought; Hameeduddeen (2023) examines the productivity of the verb *ḍaraba* in the verbal sentence (*jumlah fi liyyah*); while Aldekhan et al. (2024) relate Arabic grammatical thought to social violence in modern Arabic language education. However, few studies have simultaneously distinguished between internal grammatical function, lexical-semantic residue, and forms of humor or internal critique directed at *naḥw* examples within the *adab* tradition.

This article offers a reading that balances the technical authority of *naḥw*, the lexical meaning that remains, and the history of the tradition's internal reception of such examples. It asks the following questions: How do examples denoting forceful action function within the internal logic of *al-Kitāb*? How can the lexical-semantic residue of examples such as *ḍaraba* and *qatala* be understood without accusing Sibawayhi of normalizing violence? How can anecdotes and satire in the *adab-naḥw* tradition be read as metalinguistic humor and critique of pedagogical formalism, and what implications does this have for contextualizing the teaching of *naḥw* in cross-cultural spaces?

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative library-based method with textual, intellectual-historical, and limited reception-hermeneutical approaches. The primary source of the study is Sibawayhi's *al-Kitāb*, particularly the sections containing grammatical examples with verbs denoting forceful or violent actions, such as *idrib*, *uqtul*, *ḍaraba* 'Abdullāhu Zaydan, and *ḍarabtu Zaydan* (Sibawayhi, 1983a), as well as *qatala Zaydan* (Sibawayhi, 1983b). The edition used is that of 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, since it is one of the most widely cited scholarly editions in modern studies of Sibawayhi and the *naḥw* tradition.

This study does not claim to provide a complete quantitative mapping of all verbs denoting forceful or violent actions in *al-Kitāb*. Rather, it focuses on a close reading of paradigmatic examples that are relevant to the discussion of grammatical function, semantic residue, and the history of the tradition's internal reception. Therefore, examples such as *idrib*, *uqtul*, *ḍaraba* 'Abdullāhu Zaydan, and *ḍarabtu Zaydan* (Sibawayhi, 1983a), as well as *qatala Zaydan* (Sibawayhi, 1983b), are placed at the center of the analysis because they explicitly contain verbs associated with striking and killing and occupy an important place in grammatical explanation.

The data were selected based on three criteria. First, the form contains a verb or construction that is lexically related to forceful or violent action. Second, the form has a clear grammatical function in *naḥw* discussions, such as the explanation of *fi l amr*, *jumlah fi liyyah*, transitive verbs, agents, and objects. Third, the form allows for an examination of the relationship between technical function and semantic residue. Based on these criteria, the selected data are not intended to represent the entirety of *al-Kitāb* statistically, but rather to serve as an entry point for conceptual and historical analysis.

To clarify the basis of the research data, the grammatical examples analyzed in this

article are summarized in **Table 1**. Rather than merely listing forms and meanings, the “Analytical Relevance” column in this table is designed to show how each datum is read through three analytical layers: grammatical function, semantic residue, and the possible pedagogical problem arising from the repetition of examples.

**Table 1.** Data on Grammatical Examples Denoting Forceful or Violent Actions in *al-Kitāb*

| No. | Data in al-Kitāb                                              | Grammatical Function                                                                                         | Analytical Operationalization                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.  | īdrib “Hit!” — Vol. I, p. 12                                  | Imperative verb (fi’l amr) used to explain the verbal form as an expression denoting an event.               | Used to examine the internal grammatical function of examples in al-Kitāb. This datum shows that an imperative form denoting forceful action is first employed by Sibawayhi as an example of a verbal form derived from an event-word, not as a moral command or a direct social representation.                                |
| 2.  | uqtul “Kill!” — Vol. I, p. 12                                 | Imperative verb (fi’l amr) used to explain the relation between verbal form and event nouns such as al-qatl. | Treated as a boundary case for testing grammatical abstraction in relation to a verb with an extreme lexical meaning. In the article, this datum shows that the technical function of naḥw may suspend direct social reference, but it does not entirely erase the lexical intensity of “killing.”                              |
| 3.  | ḍaraba ‘Abdullāhu Zaydan “‘Abdullāh hit Zayd” — Vol. I, p. 34 | Verbal sentence (jumlaḥ fi’liyyah) used to explain the relation between verb, agent, and object.             | Used as the main example for explaining the relation between fi’l, fā’il, and maf’ūl bih. The article uses this datum to argue that, internally, it is valid as a technical device of naḥw, while semantically it still carries the conceptual relation between the striker and the one struck.                                 |
| 4.  | ḍarabtu Zaydan “I hit Zayd” — Vol. I, p. 83                   | Past transitive verb with first-person subject suffix and an explicit object.                                | Used to show how semantic residue operates when the agent of forceful action appears in the first person. This datum supports the discussion of representational tension: the example remains grammatical, but the form “I struck” makes the subject’s involvement appear closer in the pedagogical space.                      |
| 5.  | qatalta Zaydan “You killed Zayd” — Vol. III, p. 171           | Past transitive verb with second-person subject suffix and an explicit object.                               | Used to extend the analysis from the semantic field of “striking” to that of “killing.” In the article, this datum tests the boundary between the technical function of a transitive verb and a stronger lexical-semantic residue, while supporting the argument that such examples require contextual explanation in teaching. |

Based on Table 1, the analysis in this article is not directed at assessing *al-Kitāb* as a whole as a text containing linguistic violence. Rather, it aims to read specific examples that reveal the tension between grammatical function and the residue of lexical meaning. Therefore, the findings of this study are not projected as a corpus-based generalization, but as a close reading that may serve as a basis for further quantitative or empirical research.

The analysis is carried out in four stages. First, the study examines the internal function of grammatical examples in *al-Kitāb* in order to explain that examples denoting forceful actions originally function as analytical tools, not as direct representations of social reality. Second, the study analyzes the semantic residue that remains attached to these verbs by distinguishing between lexical meaning and syntactic function. Third, the study reads anecdotes and poetic critiques in the *adab* and *naḥw* traditions as forms of metalinguistic humor and criticism of grammatical formalism, rather than as simple evidence of moral protest against violence. Fourth, the study draws conceptual pedagogical implications by positioning non-Arab Muslim societies as a horizon of transmission, not as objects of field research.

Through this method, the article does not seek to show that the structure of *naḥw* in *al-Kitāb* contains errors, nor does it intend to claim that Sibawayhi deliberately normalized violence. Instead, the article distinguishes three layers of analysis: grammatical function, lexical residue, and the possibility of pedagogical reception. This distinction is important so that criticism of classical grammatical examples does not fall into anachronism, while also avoiding a formalism that closes off the possibility of ethical reading.

## RESULT/FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### The Internal Function of Examples Denoting Forceful Actions in *al-Kitāb*

A reading of examples denoting forceful actions in *al-Kitāb* must begin with the internal logic of Sibawayhi's grammatical project. *Al-Kitāb* is not a work of social ethics, but a grammatical treatise (Lancioni et al., 2019) intended to explain the structure of the Arabic language. Therefore, examples such as *idrib*, *uqtul*, and *daraba* 'Abdullāhu Zaydan must first be understood as tools for explaining how Arabic forms verbs, connects actions with agents, and marks objects within clause structure. At the beginning of *al-Kitāb*, Sibawayhi (1983a) defines verbs as examples derived from expressions denoting events associated with nouns (*amthilah ukhidzat min lafẓ aḥdāth al-asmā*). He then gives the examples *uqtul* and *idrib* and relates them to the event nouns *al-qatl* and *al-darb*. Within this framework, *uqtul* and *idrib* are not moral commands to kill or strike, but examples of verbal forms that show how events are encoded within the linguistic system.

Sibawayhi (1983a) even emphasizes that these examples are not the events themselves: *wa-laysat al-amthilah bi-al-aḥdāth* ("the examples are not the events themselves"). This statement is important because it shows that Sibawayhi himself distinguishes between linguistic form and the event to which it refers. In other words, grammatical examples in *al-Kitāb* should be understood as tools of linguistic representation, not as reports of social action.

The sentence *daraba* 'Abdullāhu Zaydan also functions within this framework. It presents the basic structure of the verbal sentence (*jumlah fi'liyyah*): *daraba* as the verb, 'Abdullāh as the agent, and Zayd as the object. This example shows how the agent occupies the nominative position and the object the accusative position (Sibawayhi, 1983a). Thus, Sibawayhi's central concern is not the act of striking as a social event, but the grammatical relation produced by a transitive verb.

This point is important so that the reading of examples denoting forceful actions does not lead to an unfair accusation. Sibawayhi was not constructing a social narrative of violence; rather, he was developing an analytical system for explaining Arabic. In this respect, grammatical examples must be distinguished from direct social representation. However, this distinction does not mean that grammatical examples are entirely empty of meaning (Aldekhan et al., 2024). The point that must be maintained is one of balance: internally, the example is technical, but lexically, it still carries meaning.

One reason why *daraba* became a productive example in the *naḥw* tradition is its grammatical flexibility. Hameeduddeen (2023) shows that *daraba* is a transitive verb that can collocate widely with pronouns, can be used in *maf'ūl mutlaq* constructions, and allows variations indicating intensity, frequency, and instrument of action. Forms such as *darabtuḥu darban*, *darabtuḥu darbatayn*, and *darabtuḥu sawṭan* demonstrate that this verb is effective for explaining many chapters of grammar. By contrast, verbs such as *kataba*, *darasa*, or *naṣara* do not always possess the same degree of flexibility across all such constructions.

The dominance of *daraba* in the tradition of *naḥw* examples can therefore be explained on grammatical grounds, rather than merely through ideological assumptions about violence. This very reason reinforces the need for careful reading. If *daraba* was chosen because of its technical flexibility, criticism of its use should not be directed at Sibawayhi's intention. A more appropriate critique should be directed at the way the example has been transmitted, repeated, and at times detached from its historical explanation within changing pedagogical contexts (Peled, 2010).

### Semantic Residue and the Problem of Representation

Although the internal function of examples such as *daraba* and *qatala* is technical, these words still retain semantic residue. The verb *daraba* still means "to strike," and *qatala* still means "to kill." When these words are used in grammatical examples, their

syntactic function is indeed abstracted, but their lexical meaning does not disappear entirely (Michaelis, 2003). This is what this article refers to as semantic residue.

In the semantics of thematic roles, verbs do not merely fill syntactic positions; they also encode conceptual relations among participants in an event. Rissman and Majid (2019) explain that the verb *eats* encodes a relation between someone who eats and something that gets eaten. By the same analogy, the verb *ḍaraba* in the example *ḍaraba ‘Abdullāhu Zaydan* does not only establish a grammatical relation between *fā’il* and *maf’ūl bih* but also preserves a semantic relation between the one who strikes and the one who is struck. Likewise, *qatala Zaydan* syntactically indicates the relation between a transitive verb, a pronominal agent, and an explicit object, while semantically it still evokes a relation between the one who kills and the one who is killed.

At this point, discourse theory may be used in a limited sense. The repetition of linguistic forms can make something appear natural. Fairclough (1996) explains that language as social practice participates in shaping and reproducing structures of meaning in social life. If this insight is applied cautiously to grammatical examples, the repetition of examples depicting aggressive actions may shape a particular symbolic atmosphere in language learning. This does not mean that learners will become violent because they study such examples, but rather that the imaginative world of grammatical learning continuously presents agent-object relations in the form of striking, killing, or being subjected to an action.

In this context, Bourdieu (1991) is useful not for equating the example *ḍaraba Zaydun ‘Amran* with symbolic violence in the full sense of social domination, but for reminding us that symbolic forms may become normalized through repetition. An example that initially functions merely as a grammatical aid may become a formula that is no longer questioned. When such a formula is repeatedly used in classrooms (Humaidah et al., 2024), books, commentaries, and memorization, its lexical content may appear ordinary and no longer in need of explanation.

It is important, however, to emphasize that this analysis does not rely on uncovering a hidden ideology. The words *ḍaraba* and *qatala* already clearly denote forceful actions. Therefore, the issue is not to search for violence hidden behind the words, but to understand how words whose meanings are explicitly forceful can function neutrally in grammatical terms while still carrying semantic residue when reproduced. With this formulation, the critique of *naḥw* examples does not become an excessive application of critical theory, but rather an analysis of the tension between grammatical abstraction and lexical meaning.

The problem, therefore, does not lie in the validity of the grammatical structure, but in the relationship between repetition, naturalization, and reception. A technical example may remain grammatically valid yet become representationally sensitive when it circulates and is reproduced in pedagogical spaces that pay greater attention to the ethics of language. In textbook studies, language cannot be understood merely as a formal system, since teaching materials also communicate values, behaviors, and social assumptions (Sitio et al., 2023). Thus, in contemporary multicultural societies, language is evaluated not only in terms of grammatical accuracy, but also in terms of how it represents intersubjective relations, shapes learners’ understanding, and interacts with the moral values that live within society.

This article does not claim that all examples containing forceful actions must be removed. Total removal could instead cut learners off from the history of tradition. What is needed is contextualization. Teachers may explain that an example such as *ḍaraba Zaydun ‘Amran* is a classical formula with a technical function, while also showing that the same structure can be explained through more neutral or constructive examples, such as *kataba Zaydun risālatan* (Zayd wrote a letter), *qara’a al-ṭālibu kitāban* (the student read a book), or *sā’ada Zaydun ‘Amran* (Zayd helped ‘Amr). In this way, the rules of *naḥw* are preserved, while the pedagogical atmosphere becomes more reflective.

## Adab-Nahw Satire and Criticism of Grammatical Formalism

One important element in this discussion is the presence of anecdotes, poetry, and humor in the *adab-nahw* tradition that turn the example *Zayd struck 'Amr* into an object of play and satire. These materials, however, need to be read proportionally. They should not necessarily be understood as direct ethical protests against physical or domestic violence, since the genre of *adab* often operates through humor, irony, hyperbole, and mockery of intellectual pedantry. Thus, the value of these materials does not lie in proving that the classical tradition had a moral anti-violence agenda, but in showing that grammatical examples were not always received as formulas entirely empty of meaning.

This reading allows for a more balanced position. On the one hand, it avoids the excessive claim that classical literatures were advancing a modern moral critique of violence. On the other hand, it preserves the fact that *nahw* examples once became objects of humor, satire, and metalinguistic reflection. In other words, the *adab-nahw* tradition did not only produce grammatical authority; it also provided space to laugh at grammatical formalism when it appeared too far removed from common sense and everyday linguistic experience.

Satirical criticism appears in poetry attributed to 'Ammār al-Kalbī. He mocks grammarians who were so preoccupied with analogy and formal rules that they seemed to set fictional figures such as 'Abdullāh and Zayd against one another. In one of his verses, he states that, because of their foolishness, grammarians incited conflict between 'Abdullāh and Zayd, so that striking and pain continued without end (Jinnī, 1952). The following is al-Kalbī's criticism in poetic form:

مَاذَا لَقِينَا مِنَ الْمُسْتَعْرِبِينَ وَمِنْ \* قِيَاسِ نَحْوِهِمْ هَذَا الَّذِي ابْتَدَعُوا  
What have we suffered from those who claim Arabness,  
and from this grammatical analogy they have invented?

إِنْ قُلْتُ قَافِيَةً بِكَرًا يَكُونُ بِهَا \* بَيِّنٌ خِلَافَ الَّذِي قَاسُوهُ أَوْ ذَرَعُوا  
If I compose a fresh rhyme,  
with a verse that differs from what they have measured and established,

قَالُوا لَحْنَتْ، وَهَذَا لَيْسَ مُنْتَصِبًا، \* وَذَلِكَ خَفَضٌ، وَهَذَا لَيْسَ يَرْتَفِعُ  
they say: "You have made a grammatical error; this is not in the accusative,  
that one is genitive, and this one is not nominative."

وَحَرَّضُوا بَيْنَ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ مِنْ حُمَقٍ \* وَبَيْنَ زَيْدٍ، فَطَالَ الضَّرْبُ وَالْوَجَعُ  
And out of foolishness, they incited conflict between 'Abdullāh  
and Zayd, so that striking and pain went on without end.

Traces of mockery toward grammatical artifice are also recorded by Rabbih (d. 940) in *al-Iqd al-Farīd*. Through the words of a manuscript copyist, the character of grammarians is sharply criticized and portrayed as full of manipulative cunning. The copyist takes the canonical example "'Abdullāh struck Zayd" as evidence of the absurdity of *nahw* pedagogy. In this article's reading, however, the satire is more appropriately understood as a critique of the formalism and artificiality of grammatical examples, rather than as a moral protest against the act of striking itself (Rabbih, 1983).

رَأَيْتُ بِأَحْمَادٍ فِي الصَّيْدِ \* أَرَانِيَا تُؤْخَذُ بِالْأَيْدِي  
O Hammād, I saw during the hunt  
rabbits being caught by hand.

إِنَّ دَوِي النَّحْوِ لَهُمْ أَنْفُسٌ \* مَعْرُوفَةٌ بِالْمَكْرِ وَالْكَيْدِ  
Indeed, the grammarians possess souls  
known for deceit and cunning.

يَضْرِبُ عَبْدُ اللَّهِ زَيْدًا وَمَا \* يُرِيدُ عَبْدُ اللَّهِ مِنْ زَيْدٍ

They say: “‘Abdullāh strikes Zayd,” although  
‘Abdullāh wants nothing at all from Zayd.

Another frequently cited story is the humorous anecdote about Dāwūd Pasha. In this story, an Ottoman minister questions why ‘Amr is constantly made the object of striking in *naḥw* examples. The humorous answer—that ‘Amr deserves to be struck because he “stole” the letter *wāw* from the name Dāwūd—is clearly not intended as an ethical argument, but as wordplay. The value of this anecdote lies in the way the tradition laughs at itself: in order to defend a grammatical example, the grammarians in the story create yet another fiction that is equally artificial (al-Manfalūtī, 2017; Rahman, 2024).

The peak of self-criticism toward the pedagogical tradition of *naḥw* also appears in the poetry of Abū Ḥayyān al-Naḥwī. As a figure deeply immersed in Arabic grammar, he laments his routine of reproducing examples that make Zayd and ‘Amr objects of action without any valid reason. In this context, Abū Ḥayyān’s poem need not be read as a modern ethical manifesto. It is more appropriately understood as an expression of intellectual fatigue and self-criticism toward a pedagogical habit that continuously repeats the same formula (al-Subkī, 1918).

غُذِّيتُ بِعِلْمِ النَّحْوِ إِذْ دَرَّ لِي تَدْيَا \* فَجَسَمِي بِهِ يَمِي وَرُوحِي بِهِ تَحْيَا

I was nourished with the science of grammar when milk flowed for me;  
my body grew through it, and my spirit lived by it.

وَقَدْ طَالَ تَضْرَابِي لِزَيْدٍ وَعَمْرٍو وَمَا اقْتَرَفَا ذَنْبًا وَلَا تَبَعَا غِيَا

Long has my striking of Zayd and ‘Amr continued,  
though neither committed a sin nor followed error.

وَمَا نَلْتُ مِنْ ضَرْبِهِمَا غَيْرَ شُهْرَةٍ \* بَغَيْرِ مَا يُجْدِي اسْتِهَارًا بِهِ شَيْئًا

I gained nothing from striking them except fame,  
a fame that brings no real benefit at all.

From these materials, this article concludes that an example such as *ḍaraba Zaydun ‘Amran* does not function merely as a technical formula but also becomes an object of humor and criticism within the *adab-naḥw* tradition. Such humor does not prove the existence of an ethical anti-violence movement, but it does show that grammatical examples can move beyond their technical space and become objects of cultural reflection. In other words, even within the classical tradition itself, grammatical examples were not always entirely neutral in their literary reception.

This reading allows the article to retain these classical materials without burdening them with claims unsupported by their genre and context. Anecdotes and poems are not treated as empirical evidence of trauma or moral objection to violence, but as evidence that the *adab-naḥw* tradition contains internal mechanisms for laughing at pedantry, criticizing formalism, and revealing the distance between grammatical logic and everyday common sense.

### The Transmission of Naḥw, the Horizon of Reception, and Pedagogical Contextualization

The tradition of *naḥw* did not remain confined to Basra, Kufa, or Baghdad. It travelled along with Islam, Qur’anic education, jurisprudence, exegesis, hadith, literature, and other scholarly practices. In non-Arab Muslim societies, *naḥw* became an important auxiliary science for accessing sacred texts and the broader Islamic scholarly tradition. In the Indonesian pesantren context, Yuningsih et al. (2023) note that the Kitab Kuning tradition includes auxiliary sciences for accessing Islamic knowledge, including Arabic grammar—syntax (*ilm al-naḥw*) and morphology (*ilm al-ṣarf*)—as well as rhetoric and logic.

Arabic grammar, therefore, is not merely a linguistic discipline, but also part of the intellectual history of Islam transmitted across regions (Selim, 2018).

In this process of transmission, what travelled was not only grammatical rules, but also the examples used to explain them. A student in a pesantren (Agustina et al., 2019), madrasa, or Islamic higher education institution may encounter *ḍaraba Zaydun 'Amran* not as part of Sibawayhi's analytical discussion in eighth-century Basra, but as a memorized formula or a standard classroom example. This context of reception differs from the context of its initial production (Connolly, 2014). Therefore, the meaning of a grammatical example cannot be assumed to remain fixed across all pedagogical situations. This point is also supported by Yuningsih et al.'s (2023) study of pesantren and the Kitab Kuning tradition in Sukabumi, which shows that classical Islamic learning remains strongly rooted in traditional pedagogical patterns even when limited forms of modernization are introduced.

Green (2023) emphasizes the importance of paying attention not only to the production of Arabic texts, but also to processes of reception and transmission (*traditio*) in the history of Arabic in South Asia. Mahfud et al. (2021) also show that Arabic in the Nusantara context is intertwined with many domains of cultural and religious life. Thus, classical grammatical examples do not exist within a closed philological space. They appear in classrooms, memorization, translation, commentaries, textbooks, and the authority of teachers.

It must be emphasized, however, that this article does not conduct empirical research on the reception of these examples in pesantren, madrasas, or Islamic higher education institutions. Therefore, the mention of these institutions is not positioned as field data, but as a horizon of transmission that explains why the issue of classical grammatical examples may have pedagogical relevance today. Further research is still needed to examine how teachers and students actually understand examples such as *ḍaraba Zaydun 'Amran* in contemporary classrooms. With this limitation, the multicultural perspective is not used to claim that the identity of a particular group has been injured by the example *ḍarabtu Zaydan*. Such a claim would require reception data that this article does not provide. The multicultural perspective is more appropriately used as an ethical horizon that reminds us that teaching materials move from one cultural world into another. Taylor (1994) indeed discusses recognition and misrecognition of identity, but in this article that idea is not applied directly to any specific identity group. It is used in a limited sense to underline that language teaching always takes place within a social space shaped by values, sensitivities, and ethical expectations.

In educational contexts, teachers have a contextual-pedagogical responsibility to explain the distinction between rules and examples (Sitio et al., 2023). Grammatical rules possess authority within the *naḥw* tradition, but the examples used to explain those rules are historical and conventional. Therefore, examples can be explained, contextualized, and supplemented. This principle is not presented as a practical novelty, as though modern textbooks had never used verbs such as *kataba* or *qara'a*. The novelty proposed in this article is more conceptual: it provides a historical-semantic basis for why distinguishing between rules and examples matters in the teaching of classical *naḥw*.

Through this approach, classical heritage can still be valued without being reproduced unreflectively. The example *ḍaraba Zaydun 'Amran* remains important to introduce to advanced learners because it is part of the history of the *naḥw* tradition (Benli, 2021). However, for beginning learners, especially children or educational environments more sensitive to the value of non-violence, teachers may use more varied examples. This is not a form of censorship, but a pedagogical strategy that distinguishes between the substance of a rule and the illustrative function of an example.

### Rereading Sibawayhi without Anachronism

One of the risks in this discussion is anachronism. It would be unfair to judge Sibawayhi by the standards of modern multicultural ethics, as though he were writing for a contemporary classroom. Sibawayhi lived in a different intellectual world, with a differ-

ent audience and different scholarly aims (Lancioni et al., 2019). Therefore, his examples must first be understood within the internal logic of early Arabic grammar. However, avoiding anachronism does not mean closing off the space for critique. Classical texts continue to live because they are reread. When a text remains part of education today, it enters a new context. Ethical questions about classical texts cannot be avoided, but they must be posed responsibly. This responsibility lies in the ability to distinguish between intention, function, and reception.

Sibawayhi's intention was grammatical analysis. The function of examples in *al-Kitāb* was to explain linguistic structure. Later reception, however, may generate new ethical questions. If these three layers are conflated, the reading will fall into one of two extremes: either unfairly accusing Sibawayhi, or freezing the tradition as though it could not be reread. This distinction makes a more balanced position possible.

This article also avoids generalizations about Bedouin Arab culture. The presence of verbs such as *ḍaraba* and *qatala* should not be taken as evidence that Bedouin or early Arab society was essentially violent. Such a claim would amount to an untenable cultural stereotype. It is more accurate to say that Sibawayhi constructed his grammar on the basis of linguistic sources recognized as authoritative in his time, including Bedouin speech, Arabic poetry, and usages regarded as eloquent (Carter, 2004). The examples he used emerged within a particular linguistic horizon, not as a total representation of the character of a society.

However, because this grammatical model was later transmitted to non-Arab societies, its examples could undergo shifts in meaning. Feng (2009) argues that different languages and cultures give rise to different language ideologies and linguistic models. If this idea is applied cautiously to *al-Kitāb*, Sibawayhi's grammatical model needs to be understood as a product of a particular linguistic horizon that later moved into other cultural horizons. It is at this point that reception-oriented reading becomes important, although in this article it remains limited to a conceptual framework rather than an empirical report.

### Toward a Reflective Pedagogy of Classical *Naḥw*

Based on the distinction between grammatical function, semantic residue, and the horizon of cross-cultural reception, the following pedagogical implications can be formulated conceptually. First, teachers need to explain the historical and technical function of classical examples. Learners need to understand that *ḍaraba Zaydun 'Amran* is a grammatical formula used to explain the relationship between the verb, the agent, and the object, not a sentence intended as a moral lesson.

Second, teachers need to distinguish between rules and illustrations. The rule concerning transitive verbs, agents, and objects remains valid, but the illustrations used to explain that rule may vary. By distinguishing between the two, learners can understand the authority of the tradition without assuming that every classical example must be reproduced identically.

Third, modern textbooks may include more constructive alternative examples, especially for beginning learners. Verbs such as "to write," "to read," "to help," "to respect," "to give," and "to learn" can be used to explain the same structure. However, this recommendation is not presented as a new finding that has never been practiced before. Rather, it is proposed as an implication of the historical-semantic analysis: classical examples need to be understood as part of the history of the discipline, while pedagogical examples may be adapted to the needs of contemporary learning.

Fourth, advanced learners should be introduced to the tradition's internal criticism. The satire of 'Ammār al-Kalbī, the account in *al-Iqd al-Farīd*, the humor surrounding Dāwūd Pasha, and the poetry of Abū Ḥayyān can be used to show that the *naḥw* tradition itself contains a reflective dimension. In this way, the teaching of *naḥw* is not limited to the memorization of rules, but also becomes an entry point for understanding intellectual dynamics, humor, and self-criticism in the history of Arabic-Islamic humanities.

Fifth, Arabic-Islamic humanities need to pay greater attention to the language sciences as part of the ethical history of Muslim knowledge. *Naḥw* is not merely an auxiliary science, but also part of the formation of ways of thinking, ways of reading texts, and ways of viewing authority. For this reason, the discussion of grammatical examples should not be treated as trivial. It touches on how tradition is transmitted, how authority is maintained, and how the ethics of reading are constructed within Muslim societies that continue to change.

## CONCLUSION

This article has shown that grammatical examples denoting forceful actions in Sibawayhi's *al-Kitāb* need to be understood through three layers of analysis: internal grammatical function, lexical-semantic residue, and the horizon of cross-cultural reception. Within the internal logic of classical *naḥw*, examples such as *idrib*, *uqtul*, and *ḍaraba* 'Abdullāhu Zaydan function as analytical tools for explaining the relationship between the verb, the agent, and the object. Sibawayhi did not use these examples to normalize violence, but rather to explain the structure of the Arabic language.

Nevertheless, these examples are not entirely empty of semantic content. Verbs meaning "to strike" and "to kill" still carry lexical residue that may become active again when such examples are repeatedly reproduced in teaching contexts. It is at this point that the problem of representation emerges. The issue does not lie in an error within the structure of *naḥw* or in Sibawayhi's intention, but in the shift in the function of examples when technical formulas move into different pedagogical and cultural spaces.

This article also emphasizes that anecdotes and satire in the *adab-naḥw* tradition need to be read carefully. These materials should not necessarily be treated as evidence of a classical moral protest against physical violence, but neither should they be ignored. They show that examples such as "Zayd struck 'Amr" became objects of metalinguistic humor, criticism of formalism, and internal reflection within the tradition. Thus, the classical tradition is not monolithic; it does not merely produce authority, but also preserves humor, wordplay, and self-criticism.

The contribution of this article lies in offering a more dialectical reading of classical grammatical examples. This reading does not reject the legitimacy of classical *naḥw*, but it also does not regard grammatical examples as entirely neutral. The legacy of *naḥw* can still be valued as a scholarly foundation, while its examples may be explained, contextualized, and, when necessary, supplemented with other examples according to contemporary pedagogical needs.

This study has several limitations. It discusses only selected examples from *al-Kitāb* and several materials from the later *adab* and grammatical traditions. It has not provided a complete corpus mapping of all examples denoting forceful actions in *naḥw* works, nor has it conducted field research on how teachers and students in pesantren, madrasas, or Islamic higher education institutions understand these examples. Therefore, future research may expand this study through quantitative mapping of grammatical examples across various *naḥw* works, comparison between classical and modern textbooks, studies of local manuscripts or commentaries in non-Arab Muslim societies, and empirical research on the reception of grammatical examples in contemporary classrooms.

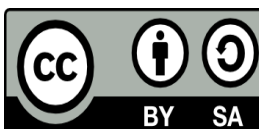
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