THE ARABIC SENTENCE: TOWARDS A CLEAR VIEW
Fatima A. Alkohlani [*]
ABSTRACT

Throughout the linguistic tradition, the sentence has been considered the basic unit of grammatical study. This is a very clear indication of the special and important status of the sentence in the linguistic studies from ancient times to the present. Traditional Arabic grammarians were no exception in this regard. They gave serious attention to this pivotal entity since it is the ultimate structure in which the traditional Arabic grammatical theory operates. However, despite its attested significance in the linguistic studies, the sentence still eludes a structural definition that establishes it as a unit of text analysis in modern Arabic studies. It is because of this situation that many modern Arabic linguists consider the sentence a vague and problematic entity, and thus, they avoid employing it in their studies. Instead, they usually confine themselves to the unit of the clause. In order to define the sentence and establish it as a unit of text structure, the present study sets criteria for determining sentence boundaries. It proposes a syntactic and semantic criteria that draws on both traditional Arabic grammarians and modern linguists views of the sentence. To this effect, the study starts by highlighting the importance of the sentence as a unit of text, then discusses the status of the sentence in modern Arabic linguistics, and sheds some light on its treatment in the Arabic traditional grammar. This paves the way for establishing criteria for identifying sentence boundaries in modern Arabic written text.

Field of Research: *Arabic Sentence, text analysis, text units, Arabic text, Arabic Linguistics.*

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* King Abdulaziz University
falkohlani@kau.edu.sa

نحو تصور واضح للجملة في اللغة العربية
فاطمة بنت عبد الله الكحلاني
ملخص البحث

احتلت الجملة مكانة مهمة في مجال الدراسات اللغوية منذ القدم إلى وقتنا الحاضر، وذلك لأنها التركيب اللغوي الأساسي الذي بُنيت عليه وتمحورت حوله الدراسات النحوية على مر العصور. وقد كان لهذا التركيب اللغوي أهمية كبيرة في التراث العربي النحوي على وجه الخصوص لأنه يعد البنية الأساسية التي تدور حولها النظرية النحوية التقليدية. وعلى الرغم من هذا الدور المحوري للجملة والذي تؤكده الدراسات اللغوية عامة، إلا أنها لازالت تفتقر في الدراسات اللغوية العربية المعاصرة إلى تعريف واضح يرسم حدودها ويمكن من خلاله توظيفها كوحدة للتحليل اللغوي في النص المكتوب. وقد نتج عن ذلك شيوع مفهوم يصور الجملة تركيباً لغوياً معقداً غير واضح الحدود، مما أدى إلى عزوف اللغويين العرب المعاصرين عن توظيف هذا التركيب اللغوي الأساسي في دراساتهم وتحليلاتهم لبنية النص، والاكتفاء بالعبارة كوحدة لغوية أساسية للتحليل النصي. وفي محاولة لسد هذا الفراغ في الدراسات اللغوية العربية تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى استنباط أسس واضحة لتعريف الجملة وتعيين حدودها مما يمكن اللغويين المعاصرين من توظيفها في مجال الدراسات النصية. وانطلاقا من ركيزتين أساسيتين هما: جهود النحويين العرب القدماء في وصف الجملة أولاً، وتصور الجملة في الدراسات اللغوية المعاصرة ثانياً، تستنبط الدراسة معيارين يمكن من خلالهما تحديد أبعاد هذا التركيب اللغوي في النص، وهما المعيار النحوي التركيبي والمعيار الدلالي. وتتألف هذه الدراسة من ثلاثة مباحث رئيسية، حيث تبدأ أولاً بالتمهيد لموضوع البحث موضحة أهمية الجملة في الدراسات اللغوية القديمة والمعاصرة كتركيب لغوي مستقل من جهة وكوحدة تمثل مستوى من مستويات بنية النص من جهة أخرى. وتنتقل الدراسة بعد ذلك إلى مناقشة وضع هذا التركيب اللغوي في الدراسات اللغوية العربية المعاصرة، ملقية الضوء على كيفية تناوله قديماً في التراث النحوي العربي. وتخلص الدراسة من ذلك كله إلى استنباط المعيارين اللغويين: النحوي التركيبي والدلالي، اللذين يمثلان أساساً واضحاً لتعيين حدود الجملة في النص العربي المعاصر المكتوب، وتقدم وصفاً تفصيلياً لهما.

كلمات مفتاحية: الجملة العربية، تحليل النص، بنية النص، النص العربي المكتوب، الدراسات النصية.

1. Introduction

The sentence has always been considered an important linguistic unit of text throughout the linguistic tradition. It is, Chafé (1979, p. 162) argues, "one of the most obvious, most strongly signaled of linguistic units." This special status of the sentence is attributed to the importance of its inner structure as a unit, as well as its role as a unit of text structure.

As the highest component of grammatical structure, the sentence is the most useful unit to the purpose of grammatical analysis (Allerton 1969, p. 29; Halliday and Hasan 1976, p. 8). This is why it has been the domain of grammatical study from ancient times to the present (Chafé, 1994, p. 140). When investigating language phenomena, traditional linguists operated within the sentence boundaries where the grammatical structure is the main source of the sentence connectedness. Hoey (1983) points out that most of the significant linguistic research was conducted under the influence of Chomsky's theory that mainly operates within the sentence limits.

However, not only is the sentence a crucial element for grammatical investigation, but it is also an important unit for text studies. Because of its status as the highest unit of grammatical structure, the sentence contributes significantly to the organization of text. On the one hand, it is regarded as a central element for expressing cohesion in text. Cohesion, as Halliday and Hasan explain (1976, p. 1, 10), is a textual strategy that operates primarily above the sentence to give text its unified whole as opposed to a collection of unrelated sentences. It refers to "the set of semantic recourses for linking a sentence with what has gone before." This makes this unit. i.e. the sentence, "the pivotal entity" for analyzing and describing the way in which cohesion is expressed in text.

On the other hand, the sentence has also great impact on the flow of text. The onset of a sentence is considered a strategically significant position because it is the point where continuity as well as breaks in continuity can be signaled (Hasselgård, 2004, p. 77). It is also the information contained in this position that carries the flow of discourse by locating and orienting the sentence within its context as well as contributing to the development of the coming discourse. This is because constituents in the sentence initial position have bi-

directional function: they serve as a point of departure for what follows, and they indicate the primary basis for linking what follows to its context (Levinsohn, 1994, p. 7).

Because of its importance as a unit for grammatical analysis as well as text studies, the sentence needs clear criterion that distinctly determines its boundaries. In the written form of the Western languages, the sentence boundaries have been clearly marked by beginning and ending signals that are provided by the writing system of these languages. Thus, in these languages the written sentence is identified as a unit that begins with an initial capital letter and ends with a full stop (Allerton 1969; Halliday 2004; Lyons 1977). This is, however, not the case in the Arabic language. In Modern Written Arabic, the sentence still needs a clear criterion that marks its boundaries in order to be identified as a unit of text analysis.

However, before the present study proceeds, two important things should be pointed out. Firstly, the sentence that is under discussion in this study is the sentence in the written form of the language. It is important to make a distinction between the two forms of the language, i.e. written and spoken, when identifying sentence limits because this unit of text displays different features in each form. In written text, for instance, sentences are usually well-formed grammatical constructions, whereas spontaneous speech could display syntactically incomplete sentences, ellipses, or anacolutha, i.e. when a sentence starts with one type of syntactic structure and ends in another (Chafé 1979, p. 162; Kammensjö 2005, p. 85). Deciding whether a certain chunk of text constitutes a sentence or not is determined through different means in the written and spoken medium of language.

Secondly, based on two different approaches to sentence study, linguists distinguish between two types of sentences; text sentence and system sentence. Whereas the term text sentence refers to the sentence as "language behavior" that is "context-dependent," the system sentence is "an abstract, theoretical entity in the linguist's model of the language system" (Lyons, 1977, p. 29). Since the goal of the present study is to identify the sentence as a unit of text that could be employed for text studies, the concept of system sentence that is isolated from its communicative context does not serve the study's goal. What serves this goal, however, is the text sentence that

is context-dependent; and thus it is this concept of the sentence that is employed here.

In what follows, the study first discusses the status of the sentence in modern Arabic Linguistics. Then, it lays the basis for a different approach that paves the way for establishing criteria for identifying the sentence as a unit of text structure in modern Arabic text.

2. An Overview of the Sentence in Modern Arabic Linguistics

Despite its attested significance as a unit of text structure in the linguistic studies, the sentence still eludes a clear definition that marks its beginning and ending points in modern Arabic linguistics. Because of the vague view of the sentence boundaries in written Arabic texts, many linguists avoided employing it as a unit of analysis in their text studies. Instead, they usually confined themselves to the unit of clause when describing their data. el-Shiyab (1995, p. 241), for example, states that selecting the sentence as the basic unit of analysis "does cause problems in Arabic." In order to avoid any kind of confusion, he adopts the clause as the "minimal unit for the analysis" in his studies. This difficulty in determining sentence limits in written Arabic is usually ascribed to the unreliability of the punctuation system on the one hand, and on the other hand to the unusual length of this unit.

Because it is used in a highly variable and idiosyncratic way in Arabic, the punctuation system is actually not a reliable means for determining sentence boundaries (Ditters 1991; Meiseles 1979; Stetkevych 2006). Whereas English employs punctuation systematically in writing, Ghazala (2004, p. 230) argues, Arabic writers use it "poorly and haphazardly, by way of decoration," or sometimes disregard it completely. To examine the usage of punctuation in Modern Standard Arabic, Khafaji (2001, p. 16) compared the prescriptive rules of punctuation in Arabic textbooks to actual use in a modern text and the intuition of Arabic teachers. He concluded that there is a "wide range of discrepancy among native writers of Arabic" in the way they employ punctuation marks in text. Although writers of modern literary and journalistic Arabic make use of the punctuation system, Meiseles (1979, p. 289) points out, they use it in "such a random way that makes it impossible to

claim for any systematic norm."

Signaling the Arabic sentence limits is also considered problematic because of the length of this unit in the Arabic text. Modern Arabic linguists find it hard to describe the sentence as a unit of text structure because of the unusual length they ascribe to it. el-Shiyab (1990, p. 149), for instance, indicates that it is "very hard to draw the line between what a sentence or a clause is" in an Arabic text. This, he argues, is because the sentence in Arabic is very long and contains among its constituents many adverbial clauses.

However, The uncertainty usually associated with attempts to determine the limits of the sentence in modern written Arabic could be generally disputed by linguists assertion that this constituent could be set apart in any language since it is far from being a matter of arbitrary decision. Native speakers of any language, Lyons (1977) asserts, are normally able to recognize the sentences in any written text in their language. What they need, however, is to pay attention to the signals provided by the grammatical system in their particular language.

The fact that the European punctuation system cannot be relied on for identifying sentence boundaries in Arabic, does not mean that Arabic lacks other means to do so. The reason that this system failed to provide a systemic tool for signaling the sentence limits in Arabic is because it is a system of other language that was employed in the Arabic language without being completely systemized in it. In Arabic, punctuation is considered an innovation under the influence of European languages and was not introduced to the language until perhaps the latter part of the nineteenth century, as Holes (1995, p. 204) indicates; Even today, he adds, "no fully standardized system of punctuation exists." That this system is not reliable in Arabic, does not in fact matter because every language has its own native system of textual chunking.

On the other hand, the fact that many Arab writers choose to make their sentences long is not a reason to discard such a useful concept as the sentence. In English, for example, although the sentence "may be fully as long as the paragraph," as Longacre (1976, p. 281) indicates, this, however, does not pose any obstacle for distinguishing its boundaries. Chafé and Danielewicz (1987, p. 105) show that in English academic writing "a relatively normal distribution of sentence lengths centered around a mean of 24

words." Longacre (1992, p. 114) considers this an option to the writer that enables him to convey a message through his style. "When propositions that could have been presented seriatim as separate sentences are combined into sentences which display internal coordination or subordination," he argues, "the text producer's discourse strategy is at work here."

3. The Arabic Sentence: An Inside view

Deciding what constitutes a single complete sentence in a written text is considered problematic in modern Arabic linguistic studies, as discussed above. In my view, this is because no clear criterion for identifying the limits of this constituent has been set in modern Arabic studies yet. Trying to determine sentence boundaries by means of a writing system of other languages whose conventions are not standardized in Arabic is the main cause of the uncertainty of sentence limits in written Arabic text. Instead of employing an outside system that is not reliable in the Arabic language, the present study suggests syntactic and semantic signals that are provided by the Arabic language system itself for marking Arabic sentence boundaries. It draws on both traditional Arabic grammarians' and modern linguistics' view of the sentence in order to set these criteria. In traditional Arabic grammar, the sentence is regarded as a central concept because it is the ultimate structure in which the traditional Arabic grammatical theory operates. Trying to delimit it and specify its boundaries occupied many Arab grammarians in order to establish it as a unit within which they can work. In order to investigate how traditional Arabic grammarians defined the notion of "sentence" as it is perceived in modern linguistics, regardless of the different technical terms they used, however, it is important to examine two grammatical terms, *jumlah* 'sentence' and *kalaam* 'speech.' Although their implication is often confused, these two terms actually refer to two different concepts according to the definitions provided by traditional grammarians.

The term *jumlah* 'sentence' implies a predicative constructions that is usually dependent and not necessarily informative. The *jumlah* 'sentence,' Ibn Hishaam (1964, p. 382) indicates, is commonly used to refer to dependent clauses like *jumlat al-shart* 'protasis,' *jumlat al-jawaab* 'apodosis,' *jumlat al-qasam*

'oath' or *jumlat al-silah* 'relative clause,' which do not stand the test of *ifaadah* 'being informative.' *Kalaam* 'speech,' However, is a unit of speech which is independent, informative and capable of standing alone (Ibn Jinni, 1983, p. 17).

In view of that, the Arabic conception of *kalaam* 'speech' as a grammatical term, for many grammarians, "approaches what is commonly regarded-- in linguistic literature- as a sentence." On the other hand, the term *jumlah* 'sentence,' whose main condition is said to be no other than predication, is very similar to what is considered a clause in modern linguistics (Goldenberg, 1988, p. 58). In traditional Arabic grammar, therefore, *kalaam* 'speech,' which corresponds to the sentence as it is perceived in modern linguistics, is any independent structure that is capable of standing alone and communicating a complete meaning. There are then two conditions for a structure to be considered a sentence in traditional Arabic grammarians' view; to be syntactically independent and semantically informative or communicative (Abd al-Latiif 1996, p. 24; Amaayrah 1984, p. 78).

Like traditional Arabic grammarians, modern linguists realize the importance of taking both the syntactic and semantic criteria into consideration when defining the sentence. Halliday (2004, p. 373) states that two basic systems determine how one clause is related to another to form a sentence: "the degree of interdependency, or taxis" and "the logico-semantic relations." Chafé (1979, p. 162) also considers "syntactic closure" as one manifestation of sentencehood, while the other is "expressing a complete thought." A modern Arab linguist, Humaydah (1997, p. 131), moreover, takes both the syntactic and semantic aspects into consideration when describing the sentence as "a chain of elements that are tied together in accordance to the grammatical structure rules, to convey a complete intended meaning."

Accordingly, identifying a certain segment of text as a complete sentence in this study is determined on syntactic and semantic grounds. Drawing on both traditional Arabic grammarians' and modern linguists' views of the sentence, two criteria are taken into consideration for marking Arabic sentence boundaries: its structural independency and its capability of communicating a complete thought.

4. The Syntactic Criterion

When defined in terms of its internal structure, the sentence is said to be structurally independent. The structural independency of the sentence as a unit, Allerton (1969, p. 42) explains, should be interpreted as meaning not only not dependent on another element but also not depended on by another element, or "not involved in a chain of dependence." So, as "a minimum structurally independent sequence," the sentence candidate "must be omissible leaving behind no non-sentences."

The unity of this independent sequence, however, relies on a network of internal dependency relations that bind its parts together as a unit. These dependence relations are governed by grammatical structure rules that determine how one element in the sentence is related to another. Recognizing the component parts of a sentence that are tied by the dependency relations, thus, facilitates determining this unit's boundaries on syntactic grounds.

In Arabic grammar, grammarians were able to specify the minimum, obligatory constituents of a sentence, the subject and its predicate and the verb and its agent, but they could not determine this unit's maximum limits. Instead, however, they specified the elements that could depend on the main predicate of the sentence and usually "occupy peripheral slots," Abd al-Latiif (1996, p. 48) argues. A sentence can be expanded or lengthened through the addition of specific optional grammatical elements, known in Arabic traditional grammar as *fadlah* 'extras,' which modify the idea stated by the basic components of the sentence. Identifying the grammatical elements that depend on the main predicate of the sentence, therefore, determines the sentence ending point.

According to the dependency relation that ties the sentence as a structurally independent unit, sentences in written Arabic are classified into three types: simple, compound, and complex.

The simple one clause sentence is the minimum form of the sentence as a unit. In Arabic, this sentence could be "verbless," consisting of subject and predicate, or "verbal," consisting of a verb and its subject and sometimes a direct object in addition to any *fadlah* 'extras,' that modifies the idea stated by the basic components of the sentence (Ryding, 2005, p. 58). The compound sentences, on the other hand, consist of more than one predication in

which the coordination relationship between the clauses "may or may not be expressed by a conjunction." While these coordinated clauses form independent predicative structures, they, however, "indicate the development of one idea" (Cantarino, 1975, p. 2). Here is an example of a compound sentence (Al Kohlani, 2010, p. 196):

(1)

[1a] و يجزم اليمنيون [1b] أنّ هناك من [1c] يغذي هذه التوجهات [1d] و يحضر لها المناخ بالمساندة المعنوية و المادية.

[1a] Yemenis assert [1b] that these inclinations are [1c] fostered by some outside power [1d] which facilitates its growth through moral and financial support.

In example (1), the two coordinated clauses, [1c] and [1d], are connected with the conjunction *wa* 'and.' Although they consist of two independent predications, they build up one idea that modifies the previous component of the sentence in [1b].

The complex sentence, which is the third type of the Arabic sentence, on the other hand, consists of a main clause and one or more dependent clauses. These dependent clauses are syntactically dominated by the main clause, and hence not able to function alone as complete sentences. They are conjoined to the main clause by "a variety of particles or function-specific phrases" (Holes, 1995, p. 215). In terms of the function they perform within the complex sentence, dependent clauses can be divided into four types: nominal, relative (or adjectival), adverbial, and conditional.

A nominal clause may function as sentential subject or complement of the main clause predicate, while relative (or adjectival) clauses function as modifiers of nouns in the main clause, and are placed directly after the noun they refer to. Adverbial clauses, on the other hand, act as circumstantial elements of the predicate of the main clause or the entire propositions. They usually mark peripheral relations such as: cause, purpose, time, manner, result, reason, concession (Holes, 2005, pp. 232-237). As for the conditional sentences, they consist of two clauses, in which the validity of one depends on the validity of the other. Example (1), that was discussed above, as well as the following three examples (2,3, and 4) illustrate the four types of dependent clauses in the complex sentence (Al Kohlani, 2010, p. 197):

(2)

[2a] إنها لغة الأيديولوجيا[2b] التي تعتقد أنّ مهمتها الانتصار على العدو وهزيمة

أمريكا المتغطرسة و إقامة نظام المستضعفين.

[2a] It is the discourse of ideology [2b] that believes its mission is to triumph over the enemy, defeat the arrogant America and create a system for the powerless.

(3)

[3a] والمعارضة الديموقراطية تطالب بإلغاء الحكومة تعسفا [3b] لأنها لا تملك النِّصاب القانوني لإسقاطه.

[3a] The democratic resistance is illegitimately demanding the abolition of the government [3b] since it does not have the legal quorum to do so.

(4)

[4a] ولو اتفق العرب على استخدام ما في أيديهم من أوراق في العراق وبشكل صادق و جماعي [4b] فلربما نجحوا فيما عجز عنه الآخرون بمن فيهم الولايات المتحدة.

[4a] Had the Arabs agreed to honestly and jointly use whatever cards they have in their hands in Iraq, [4b] perhaps they would have succeeded in achieving what others, including the United States, have failed to achieve.

The sentence in example (1) consists of a main clause [1a] and a nominal dependent clause [1b]. This nominal clause that is introduced by the complementizer *anna* functions here as a complement for the main clause. In the complex sentence presented in example (2), however, the predicate of the main clause [2a] is modified by the relative clause [2b] which comes directly after it. Example (3), on the other hand, illustrates the dependent adverbial clause (3b) that functions as a reason for the proposition expressed in the main clause [3a]. The last example, example (4), demonstrates a complex sentence that consists of two clauses connected with the conditional particle *law* 'if.' In this sentence, the validity of the conditional clause [4b] depends on the validity of the main clause [4a].

According to the syntactic criterion, therefore, in written Arabic a sentence boundary could be drawn only when all the constituents involved in the dependency relation within the sentence are realized. The two main constituents in the predicative relation in addition to any other optional constituent that modifies the idea stated by the main constituents are all within the boundaries of the

sentence. This is because all these elements form an independent grammatical structure that is tied together with a dependency relation.

5. The Semantic Criterion

Besides the structural interdependency within the sentence, "the logico-semantic relations" that bind its constituents form the second system that determines this unit boundaries (Halliday, 2004, p. 373). For a unit to be considered a sentence, Chafé (1979, pp. 162, 169, 180) argues, it is not enough to demonstrate structural independency. Besides the "Syntactic closure," it should also express a complete thought. A sentence boundary can only be drawn when "a focus has been successfully verbalized." This focus, he explains, is a "basic unit of memory that represents the amount of information to which a person can devote his central attention at any one time," and "which appear in language as sentences, syntactically closed." In Arabic grammatical tradition, the communicative value of the sentence is considered an essential aspect of its sentencehood. When defining the sentence, Arab grammarians, as discussed previously, stipulate that it should be capable of communicating a complete meaning (Abd al-Latiif 1996, p. 24; Amaayrah 1984, p. 78; Goldenberg 1988, p. 56).

As a segment of text, this meaning unit that conveys a complete thought has a significant rhetorical function (Callow 1998, p. 154; Hatima and Mason 1990, p. 173). An essential assumption underlying this view of the sentence is that text is a communicative event that progresses towards a communicative goal (de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981, p. 3; Halliday and Hasan 1976, p. 2). Each segment in a coherent text, whether a sentence or a paragraph, is active in fulfilling a certain rhetorical function that contributes to the text overall communicative goal. The function which a given segment performs defines the kind of relations it has with respect to adjacent segments, e.g. explanation, elaboration, comparison, justification, and contributes to the realization of the overall communicative purpose of the text producer. A sentence continues as long as it needs in order to achieve the function it is intended to serve in the text as a whole; and only when its rhetorical function has been fulfilled does it come to its end. This means that sentence boundary in text is realized by the fulfillment of its function.

However, it is important to point out here that describing the structure and meaning of the sentence as being two independent components of its sentencehood is only theoretical. The syntactic and semantic aspects of the sentence are actually inseparable because they are in continuous interaction.

The grammatical structure of a sentence that ties its constituents together as a unit is the means by which the sentence achieves its communicative purpose. When we say that a sentence communicates a complete meaning, this means, Amaayrah (1984, p. 79) explains, that each of its constituent carries part of this meaning. The sentence as a whole, for al-Jurjaani (1984, p. 319), conveys one intended meaning, which is the outcome of the interaction of the meanings and structure of its constituents. The following example demonstrates this inevitable dependency between the grammatical structure of the sentence and the communicative meaning it expresses; and shows how the two systems, i.e. syntactic and semantic, work together in order for the sentence to serve a significant rhetorical function in text (Al Kohlani, 2010, p. 192):

(5)

[5a] أصبحت الديموقراطية اليوم هي النظام الذي يتجه إليه أغلب العالم، شرقيه وغربيه، بحيث يمكن القول اننا اليوم نعيش عصر الديموقراطية. [5b] لم تعد الديموقراطية، حسب تقدير الكثيرين، خياراً بين خيارات، كما كان الأمر حتى الأمس القريب، بقدر ما أصبحت، كما أرى نوعاً من الحتم، إذا كانت الدولة والمجتمع يريدان الانخراط في عالم تحول إلى كيان واحد، بقيم مشتركة، ومنطلقات متناسقة.

[5a] Democracy today has become the system of choice for 'most' of the world – both eastern and western countries alike – so that one may say we live in the age of democracy. [5b] As many would believe, Democracy is no longer one of the choices, as was the case until very recently, but has rather become inevitable <u>if</u> the state and society seek to join a world that has transformed into a single entity with shared values and consistent visions.

In the above example, the word sequence in [5b] represents a sentence because it is structurally independent, it communicates a complete thought, and it serves a specific rhetorical function in text. Structurally, this is a conditional independent sentence that consists of two dependent

clauses connected with the particle *ida* 'if.' Each of these two clauses consists of a main predicative structure in addition to other optional constituents that are connected to it by dependency relations. Semantically, this conditional structure of the sentence expresses two dependent ideas that convey one complete thought since the validity of one of these ideas depends on the validity of the other. Besides its independency and informativity, sentence [5b] also serves a rhetorical function in text since it clarifies and explains what was meant by the proposition mentioned in sentence [5a].

A sentence then, is an independent unit whose components are bonded syntactically and semantically in order to perform a communicative meaning that contributes to the overall communicative purpose of the whole text. Since the syntactic form and semantic content interplay to define the sentence as a unit of text, they are both, i.e. the structure and the meaning, considered essential criteria for identifying sentence boundaries in the present study.

6. Conclusion

To sum up, despite its importance as a unit for text analysis in modern text linguistics, the sentence has been avoided in Arabic textual studies due to the uncertainty in identifying its boundaries. This is because no reliable criterion for determining the limits of this constituent has been set in modern Arabic studies yet.

In order to establish the sentence as a unit of written Arabic text that could be employed in text studies, the present study suggests a syntactic-semantic criterion for the identification of its boundaries. Drawing on both traditional Arabic grammarians' and modern linguistics' view of the sentence, two aspects of this unit are taken into consideration: its structural independency, and its capability of communicating a complete thought. Accordingly, a sentence boundary is drawn in text when a grammatically-independent sequence of text-elements communicates a complete thought that contributes significantly to the realization of the text overall communicative purpose.

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