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Syntactic Optimality vs. Communicative Optimality: The Syntax of Present-Tense Constructions in Classical Arabic

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates present-tense verbal constructions in Classical Arabic with special focus on the discrepancy between syntactic optimality and communicative optimality. Specifically, this study challenges the traditional view that Arabic is completely rule-governed, drawing on the observation that many documented linguistic usages deviate from prescriptive syntactic constraints. Ibn Hisham al-Anṣari's *Mughni al-Labib* formed the primary corpus for this study. The focus was on Qur'anic recitations and Prophetic ḥadith; poetic data was excluded to avoid rhythmic and metrical justifications. Adopting Optimality Theory (OT), four types of syntactic deviations were highlighted: substitution of final long inflectional vowels with short vowels in non-jussive contexts, retention of long inflectional vowels in jussive constructions, deletion of indicative/subjunctive inflectional suffixes, and non-canonical subjunctive marking in jussive contexts. Although early Arab syntacticians consider such deviations anomalous, dialectal, or metrical-poetic exceptions, and often reinterpret them to fit established rules, this study argues that these deviant forms, despite violating rigid syntactic rules, still achieve communicative optimality and reflect dialectal or historical variations. Such non-prescriptive usages represent authentic linguistic remainders that can enrich the Arabic syntactic system. It was concluded that Arabic syntactic rules are not inviolable and Arabic syntax is flexible enough to accommodate such usages.

Keywords: Classical Arabic; Communicative Optimality; Linguistic Remainders; Optimality Theory; Present-Tense Constructions; Syntactic Deviation; Syntactic Optimality

1. Introduction

Arab syntacticians have inductively examined the speech of Arabs and derived syntactic rules that govern linguistic usages of Arabic. These syntactic rules formed the foundations of Arabic linguistic structures and gained special status among linguists. Early syntacticians and their disciples considered their work in formulating rules perfect or at least close to perfection, which made them adhere strictly to the rules they formulated. More importantly, they believe that language is completely rule-governed, and native speakers of Arabic always conform to syntactic rules. Therefore, syntactic rules controlled the linguistic inquiry of any linguistic phenomenon because they believe that the interpretation of any linguistic usage should always stem from these syntactic rules [1].

Accordingly, early syntacticians have labeled linguistic structures that violate their syntactic rules as "anomalous", "dialectal variants" [2], or "metrical-poetic exceptions". More importantly, they offered various interpretations to such instances in order to subsume them under their established rules [3]. They have also adopted various terms to evaluate linguistic usages, such as "most frequent", "common", "most well-known", "famous", "attested", "rare", "very rare", "weak", among others [4].

However, early syntacticians' approach to linguistic analysis and formation of syntactic rules has not gone uncontested. Some scholars have identified several weaknesses in this approach such as mixing linguistic evidence from different tribal dialects, limiting the collection of linguistic data to certain tribes while excluding others, and confining linguistic evidence to a specific historical period. Other weaknesses include prioritizing form over meaning and restricting grammatical codification and standardization to the written language only. Indeed, glorifying the books of syntax and written materials in this way has forced subsequent syntacticians to strictly follow the approach of their predecessors, which has in turn led to obliterating some attempts and viewpoints proposed by later syntacticians and linguists [5].

More importantly, early syntacticians' approach falls short of explaining several documented linguistic structures that are used by native speakers of the language and still deviate from the established syntactic rules. Many of these linguistic deviations can be subsumed under the umbrella of "the remainder", a concept that was introduced by the French linguist Jean-Jacques Lecercle in his book "The Violence of Language". This concept refers to a set of linguistic usages that are employed by native speakers of the language though they do not conform to syntactic rules. Although such linguistic usages evade syntactic rules and linguistic norms, they do not undermine the linguistic system but rather enrich it [6]. In other words, these deviant forms do not destabilize the linguistic system, but they assert the productive nature of the language. "The remainder", according to Lecercle's theory, reflects how actual language use go beyond what is permitted by formal structural rules, thus emphasizing the creative nature of the language.

Ababneh provides some explanations for "the remainder" in Arabic proposing that it might be attributed to the freedom of expression Arabic makes available to its speakers; Arabic grants its speakers a degree of linguistic freedom that allows them to say what they want within spontaneous, unconscious usages [1]. It is also possible to say that such deviant linguistic usages originated in metrical-poetic language but eventually leaked from poetic language into prose. Alternatively, they could have infiltrated from everyday colloquial usages (i.e., tribal vernaculars) into formal linguistic usages.

However, "the remainder" in Arabic is not limited to unconscious, spontaneous linguistic usages; it is found in conscious usages as well, including the Qurʾan and Prophetic Ḥadith. Undoubtedly, these sacred texts cannot be reduced to unconscious usage. Thus, it can be said that "the remainder" in Arabic is empirically attested in conscious usage of the language. Likewise, it cannot be claimed that "the remainder" is exclusive to poetic language to the exclusion of prose, simply because numerous instances of what is commonly referred to as metrical-poetic need have been documented in non-poetic texts [7].

Most linguistic theories, such as Universal Grammar [8,9], posit that syntactic rules are inviolable and Universal across all natural human languages [10]. This assumption should extend to Arabic in the sense that its syntactic rules should uniformly apply to all the linguistic usages produced by its native speakers during the period of linguistic documentation. However, there is abundant evidence that actual language usage does not strictly conform to these syntactic rules as demonstrated in some Qurʾanic recitations, Prophetic Ḥadith, and classical Arabic poetry and prose. Indeed, this raises an important question: Can we still interpret actual linguistic usages that violate syntactic rules within the framework of standard prescriptive grammar?

In the present paper, we argue that the Optimality Theory (OT) can account for such linguistic usages (i.e., "the remainder") exemplifying with actually used present-tense verbal constructions that deviate from prescriptive syntactic rules. This theory assumes that syntactic rules are violable, which makes "the remainder" interpretable within a contextual rather than rule-based framework. Specifically, this theory can explain actual linguistic usages that contradict syntactic principles [11].

Proponents of the Optimality Theory [12,13] have proposed a set of principles including universality, violability, hierarchical ranking and inclusiveness. The principle of universality asserts that the theory must be applicable across all natural human languages. This principle is recognized by most modern linguistic theories such as Transformational Grammar. The principle of violability refers to the fact that syntactic constraints can be violated under certain conditions, which is the focus of the present study. Hierarchical ranking dictates that linguistic constructions are evaluated according to a hierarchy of syntactic constraints, ranking from the most important to the least important. The linguistic output that satisfies the highest-ranked constraint is referred to as the optimal candidate. The principle of inclusiveness indicates that the theory must comprehensively account for linguistic phenomena across multiple dimensions [14].

In order to apply the Optimality Theory to a given language, two opposing forms of the same linguistic structure should exist: a syntactic form that complies to the syntactic rules and another form that deviates from them. However, the deviant form is still accepted by native speakers as part of actual usage [15]. A simplified OT constraint hierarchy for such competing linguistic forms is ranked along the following two dimensions:

- Syntactically optimal candidate/output: complies with prescriptive syntactic rules (e.g., preserves typical overt inflectional mood marking).
- Communicatively optimal candidate/output: violates prescriptive syntactic rules but preserves communicative clarity; it is still communicatively effective and maintains the intended meaning.

These rankings can account for the use of certain non-canonical syntactic structures: Syntactic optimality in such structures is sacrificed in favor of communicative directness.

It would be erroneous to subsume the entire Arabic language under formal syntactic rules because there exists a considerable body of non-canonical usages of present-tense verbal constructions that resist prescriptive syntactic explanations. Therefore, embracing Optimality Theory to analyze linguistic usages that violate syntactic rules enables us to understand such linguistic outputs in a more accurate and objective fashion. The present study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the syntactic aspects of non-canonical present-tense verb constructions documented in Ibn Hisham al-Anṣari's book "Mughni al-Labib" [16]?
2. What are the syntactic conditions violated by these non-canonical present-tense verbal constructions?
3. What are the Optimality features manifested in the actual usages of these non-canonical verbal constructions?

The significance of this study stems from the fact that it asserts that linguistic usages can be subject to a type of optimality different from syntactic optimality. This distinction necessitates separating prescriptive syntactic rules from the actual linguistic usages of present-tense verbal constructions that were produced by native speakers of the language during the period of linguistic documentation/restriction.

2. Literature Review

Deviation from syntactic rules in certain linguistic usages has been investigated in several studies and in different Arabic syntactic constructions (see, e.g., [1,17,18,24], among others). However, none of the previous studies has addressed deviations from syntactic rules in present-tense verb constructions as demonstrated in the examples documented in Ibn Hisham al-Anṣari's "Mughni al-Labib" [16]. The present study addresses syntactic violations in actually used present-tense verb constructions as an attempt to fill this gap in the literature. Specifically, this study tackles actual usages of non-canonical present-tense verb constructions in Classical Arabic prose, analyzing them as deviations from prescriptive syntactic rules across four key axes:

1. Substitution of the final long vowel [-ii] with the short *kasra* vowel [-i] in non-jussive constructions
2. Retention of the final long vowel in jussive constructions
3. Deletion of indicative and subjunctive short inflectional vowel suffixes
4. Non-canonical assignment of subjunctive marking to a syntactically jussive verb

The study draws on the concepts and terminology adopted in the previous studies such as "Linguistic Accumulation" [17], "The flexibility of Arabic" [18], "Linguistic License" [19], "Linguistic remainders" [20], "the remnant" [1,21–24] .

3. Methodology

This study investigates a subset of syntactic violations involving present-tense verb constructions that are interpreted in terms of communicative optimality. Specifically, this study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach to Precisely characterize non-canonical present-tense verb usages as documented in Arabic syntactic sources. The study also draws on the Optimality Theory to identify the varying degrees of optimality achieved by such linguistic usages through measuring their conformity and/or deviation from syntactic norms. Furthermore, the study provides explanations for the existence of such non-canonical linguistic usages based on their syntactic structure and contextual motivations.

The primary corpus for this study is Ibn Hisham al-Anṣari's book "Mughni al-Labib" [16]. This text is selected due to its richness in linguistic evidence drawn from Arabic poetry, Qur'anic recitations and Prophetic traditions/Ḥadith. The examples retrieved from this source provide robust evidence that actual usages of present-tense verbal constructions can deviate from prescriptive syntactic rules. Although Ibn Hisham cites several poetic examples in which present-tense verbs violate syntactic rules [16], the discussion in the current study will completely exclude poetic examples as poetry always allows syntactic manipulation for rhythmic or aesthetic reasons [3]. In fact, many linguists reject any syntactic motivation for structures that violate prescriptive syntactic rules in poetry and instead argue for phonological explanations rooted in metrical needs [25,26].

The purpose of this study is not to criticize prescriptive syntactic rules per se or to evaluate early syntacticians' viewpoints regarding these rules because these issues have been thoroughly studied in prior research. Rather, this study adopts a descriptive approach to examine documented non-canonical usages of the present-tense verb in classical Arabic prose.

The data analysis will be restricted to non-poetic examples that involve non-canonical present-tense verbal con-structions. Such syntactic violations are not reducible to poetic exceptions simply because they are attested in prose such as Qur'anic recitations. It will be shown that these examples, while violating prescriptive syntactic rules, still achieve communicative optimality. However, before we embark on these issues, it is worth giving a brief description of the present-tense verbal constructions in Arabic, to which we turn next.

4. A Sketch on Arabic Present-Tense Verbal Constructions

The present-tense verb can inflect for three moods: indicative, subjunctive, and jussive. Mood marking on present-tense verbs is indicated by suffixes attached to the verb's stem [27]. In other words, it is the suffix on the verb that indicates the mood of the present-tense verb in Arabic.

Each one of these three moods occurs under specific circumstances in Arabic. The present-tense verb is marked for the indicative mood if not preceded by a subjunctivizing or jussive particle and not suffixed with the *nuun* of emphasis [ن-] or *nuun* of feminine plural [ن-] [27,28] . Put differently, the present-tense verb appears in the indicative mood when it occurs independently of any subjunctivizing or jussive particle. The present-tense verb inflects for the subjunctive mood if preceded by subjunctivizing particles such as (أَن) *an* 'to', (لن) *lan* 'will not', (كَي) *kay* 'to', (حَتَّى) *ḥatta* 'to', and (لِكَي) *li-kay* 'to'. The present-tense verb appears in the jussive mood if preceded by jussive particles such as the negative particle (لم) *lam* 'did not' and the imperative/prohibitive (لا) *la* 'don't', as well as conditional markers such as (إِنْ) *in* 'if', (مهما) *mahma* 'whatever', (حيثما) *ḥaythuma* 'wherever', (متى) *mata* 'when', (ما) *ma* 'what', and (مَن) *man* 'who' [29].

The form of the present-tense verb varies depending on its mood; it carries different inflectional endings in each mood. Thus, a sound present-tense verb which is not attached to overt subject pronouns for second and third persons plural masculine, 2nd person singular feminine, or dual is marked for the indicative mood by the visible/apparent short inflectional vowel suffix *ḍamma* (ُ), which will be transliterated as [-u], whereas it is marked for the subjunctive mood by the visible/apparent short inflectional vowel suffix *fatḥa* (َ), which will be transliterated as [-a]. The jussive inflection is characterized by the absence of a final short inflectional vowel suffix; the jussive mood inflects with *sukuun* (ْ),

which indicates zero short inflectional vowel suffix. Consider the following illustrative examples with the verb (يكتب) *yaktub* 'to write'. Notice that the short vowel [-u], which is called ḍamma, appears in the Arabic script as (ُ◌), whereas the short vowel [-a], which is called fatḥa, appears in the Arabic script as (َ◌). The jussive inflection is marked in the Arabic script with *sukuun* (ْ◌), which indicates zero short inflectional vowel suffix; however, in the English transliteration, it is marked by the absence of a final short inflectional vowel suffix.

(1) Present-tense verb in the indicative mood:

يكتبُ الولدُ الدرسَ

Ya-ktub-u al-walad-u al-dars-a

3.sg.m-Write-ind. the-boy-nom. the-lesson-aAcc.

'The boy is writing the lesson.'

(2) Present-tense verb in the subjunctive mood:

لن يكتبَ الولدُ الدرسَ

Lan Ya-ktub-a al-walad-u al-dars-a

Will-not 3.sg.m-Write-sub. the -boy-nom. the-lesson-acc.

'The boy will not write the lesson.'

(3) Present-tense verb in the jussive mood:

لم يكتبْ الولدُ الدرسَ

Lam Ya-ktub al-walad-u al-dars-a

Did-not 3.sg.m-Write the-boy-nom. the-lesson-acc.

'The boy did not write the lesson.'

However, mood marking is indicated in a different manner if the sound present-tense verb is attached to overt subject pronouns for second and third persons plural masculine (e.g., (تكتبونَ) *ta-ktub-uuna* '2.pl.m-write' and (يكتبونَ) *ya-ktub-uuna* '3.pl.m-write), 2nd person singular feminine (e.g., (تكتبينَ) *ta-ktub-iina* '2.sg.f-write'), or dual (e.g., (تكتبان) *ta-ktub-aani* '2.dual-write' and (يكتبان) *ya-ktub-aani* '3.dual-write'). Specifically, if such verbs are in the indicative mood, the final *nuun* (ن-) and its following short vowel are retained, while if such verbs are in the subjunctive or jussive moods then the final *nuun* (ن-) and its following short vowel are deleted (i.e., the verbs will then end with the preceding long vowels). The following examples illustrate this point.

(4) Present-tense verb attached to overt subject pronoun for third person plural masculine in the indicative mood:

الاولادُ يكتبونَ الدرسَ

Al-awlaad-u Ya-ktub-uuna al-dars-a

The-boys-nom. 3-Write-pl.m.ind. the-lesson-aAcc.

'The boys are writing the lesson.'

(5) Present-tense verb attached to overt subject pronoun for third person plural masculine in the subjunctive mood:

الاولادُ لن يكتبوا الدرسَ

Al-awlaad-u lan Ya-ktub-uu al-dars-a

The-boys-nom. Will-not 3-Write-pl.m.sub. the-lesson-aAcc.

'The boys will not write the lesson.'

(6) Present-tense verb attached to overt subject pronoun for third person plural masculine in the jussive mood:

الاولادُ لن يكتبوا الدرسَ

Al-awlaad-u lam Ya-ktub-uu al-dars-a

The-boys-nom. Did-not 3-Write-pl.m the-lesson-aAcc.

'The boys did not write the lesson.'

When a present-tense verb ending with the long vowel [-aa], [-uu], or [-ii] appears in the indicative mood, then it is marked with an assumed (silent or invisible) indicative suffix *ḍamma* [-u] for articulatory considerations; it is not easy to pronounce the short indicative vowel suffix *ḍamma* [-u] with these three final long vowels. This means that these three final long vowels are retained in the indicative mood but without any visible indicative mood marker. Consider the following examples.

(7) Present-tense verb ending with the long vowel [-aa] in the indicative mood:

يسعى

Ya-sʿaa

3.sg.m-strive

'He strives'.

(8) Present-tense verb ending with the long vowel [-uu] in the indicative mood:

يدعو

Ya-dʿuu

3.sg.m-call

'He calls.'

(9) Present-tense verb ending with the long vowel [-ii] in the indicative mood:

يرمي

Ya-rmii

3.sg.m-throw

'He throws.'

In the subjunctive mood, the present-tense Verb ending with the long vowel [-aa] is marked with an assumed (silent or invisible) subjunctive *fatḥa* [-a] for articulatory considerations. It is not easy to pronounce the short subjunctive vowel suffix *fatḥa* [-a] with the final long vowel [-aa]. This means that this final long vowel is retained in the subjunctive mood but without any visible subjunctive mood marker. However, the present-tense Verb ending with the long vowel [-uu] or [-ii] is marked for the subjunctive mood with a visible/apparent subjunctive suffix *fatḥa* [-a]. This is shown below:

(10) Present-tense verb ending with the long vowel [-aa] in the subjunctive mood:

لن يسعى

Lan Ya-sʿaa

Will-not 3.sg.m-strive

'He will not strive'.

(11) Present-tense verb ending with the long vowel [-uu] in the subjunctive mood:

لن يدعوَ

Lan ya-dʿuu-a

Will-not 3.sg.m-call-sub.

'He will not call'.

(12) Present-tense verb ending with the long vowel [-ii] in the subjunctive mood:

لن يرميَ

Lan ya-rmii-a

Will-not 3.sg.m-throw-sub.

'He will not throw'.

As for the jussive mood marking in such verbs, it is indicated by deleting the final long vowel and substituting it with a corresponding short vowel: the long vowel [-aa] is substituted with the short vowel [-a] which is called *fatḥa* and appears in the Arabic script as (َ); the long vowel [-uu] is substituted with the short vowel [-u] which is called *ḍamma* and appears in the Arabic script as (ُ); the long vowel [-ii] is substituted with the short vowel [-i] which is called *kasra* and appears in the Arabic script as (ِ). Put differently, the jussive mood marking in such verbs is indicated by deleting the final long vowel while retaining the preceding diacritic mark (short vowel) to signal the deleted long vowel. Consider the following illustrative examples:

(13) Present-tense verb ending with the long vowel [-aa] in the jussive mood:

لم يسعَ

lam Ya-sʿa

did-not 3.sg.m-strive

'He did not strive'.

(14) Present-tense verb ending with the long vowel [-uu] in the jussive mood:

لم يدعُ

lam ya-dʿu

did-not 3.sg.m-call

'He did not call'.

(15) Present-tense verb ending with the long vowel [-ii] in the jussive mood:

لم يرمِ

lam ya-rmi

did-not 3.sg.m-throw

'He did not throw'.

The major point to be deduced from the above paradigms is that the final long vowels in present-tense verbs are always retained in the indicative mood and appear without any visible indicative suffix; however, these final long vowels are always deleted in the jussive mood and substituted with a corresponding short vowel.

Finally, it remains to be indicated that the substitution of final long vowels with corresponding short ones in jussive constructions also applies to pre-final vowels in some verbs. If a present-tense verb ending with a consonant preceded by a long vowel, such as (يكون) *ya-kuun* 'to be', appears in a jussive construction then the pre-final long vowel is deleted and substituted with a short corresponding vowel. The motivation of this substitution is to avoid consonant clustering (having two consecutive *sukuun*'s). The following example illustrates this point.

(16) Indicative form: (يكونُ) *ya-kuun-u* '3.sg.m-be-ind.'
Jussive form: (لم يكُن) *lam ya-kun* '3.sg.m-be'

5. Aspects of Present-Tense Verbs Violation of Syntactic Rules

Having established the theoretical and methodological framework, we now move to presenting and analyzing empirical evidence retrieved from Ibn Hisham's book. The next

four subsections highlight the four types of syntactic deviation identified in the corpus. The frequencies of these four types of syntactic deviation are shown in the following **Table 1**.

Table 1. Number and frequency of each type of syntactic deviation in the corpus.

	Syntactic Deviation	Number	Frequency
1	Substitution of the final long vowel [-ii] with the short kasra vowel [-i] in non-jussive constructions	7	22.6%
2	Retention of the final long vowel in jussive constructions	8	25.8%
3	Deletion of indicative and subjunctive short inflectional vowel suffixes	10	32.2%
4	non-canonical assignment of subjunctive marking to a syntactically jussive verb	6	19.4%
	Total	31	100%

The above table shows that deletion of indicative and subjunctive short inflectional vowel suffixes is the most frequently occurring type of syntactic deviation documented in the corpus. Although the numbers and frequencies of these deviations may appear at a cursory glance modest, they represent authentic, rather than anomalous, usages of Classical Arabic. In other words, the existence of such non-canonical forms in Classical Arabic prose suggests that syntactic deviations are not completely marginal; rather, they represent a recurrent phenomenon in documented usage.

5.1. Substitution of the Final Long Vowel [-ii] with the Short Kasra Vowel [-i] in Non-Jussive Constructions

The first deviation pattern observed in the corpus involves replacing long indicative inflectional vowels with short ones in indicative constructions, which constitutes apparent violation of syntactic rules. In this subsection we examine some examples to illustrate this phenomenon.

Recall that, according to prescriptive syntactic rules, the present-tense verb ending with the long vowel [-ii] retains its long vowel in the indicative and subjunctive moods (examples 9 and 12 above). However, if preceded by a jussive particle, it appears in the jussive mood which is marked by deleting this final long vowel and substituting it with the

corresponding short vowel *kasra* [-i] which appears in the Arabic script as (ِ) (see example 15 above).

However, Ibn Hisham cites several examples of present-tense verbal constructions that violate this syntactic rule [16]. One such example is found in the recitation of the following Qur'anic verse with the shortened verb form (يَسْرِ) *yasri* 'it passes' instead of the expected full verb form (يَسْرِي) *yasrii* [16].

(17) (وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَسْرِ) [Al-Fajr: 4]

wa-l-layli idha yasrii

Translation: 'And [by] the night when it passes.'

Although, prescriptively speaking, the full form of the present-tense verb *yasrii* (with the final long vowel [-ii]) is the expected form because this verb is in the indicative mood, a recitation of this verse that employs the shortened verbal form *yasri* (with the short *kasra* vowel [-i]) is documented in the corpus. This latter recitation employs the jussive form of the verb though it occurs in an indicative context. The verb is not preceded by a jussive particle in this example, so its final long vowel [-ii] should be retained as explained in example (9) above. Therefore, this recitation violates the prescriptive syntactic rule that governs present-tense verbs of this type.

Table 2 below further illustrates how Optimality Theory evaluates these two competing forms:

Table 2. OT evaluation of (يَسْرِي) *yasrii* vs. (يَسْرِ) *yasri*.

Candidate	Syntactic Optimality	Communicative Optimality	Output
(يَسْرِي) yasrii (indicative)	✓	✓	Optimal
(يَسْرِ) yasri (Jussive)	X	✓	Less optimal

Although the candidate *yasri* violates syntactic rules by omitting the expected long vowel, it still satisfies communicative intelligibility. According to the ranking, it is outranked by the syntactically and communicatively optimal form *yasrii*.

Early syntacticians refer to this phenomenon as "substitution of the long vowel [-ii] with the short *kasra* vowel [-i]", while modern syntacticians term this phenomenon as "reduction to a short vowel". The following example further asserts

that Arabs normally delete the final long vowel [-ii] and substitute it with the short *kasra* vowel [-i] in non-jussive contexts:

(18) لا أدر

la adri

not I-know

'I don't know.'

The above example represents a clear deviation from prescriptive syntactic rules as the present-tense verb is in the indicative mood but replaces its final long vowel [-ii] with the short *kasra* vowel [-i], which is a jussive marker. The ex-

pected prescriptive usage of this verb should retain the final long vowel [-ii] as the verb is not governed by a jussive particle. This prescriptive usage is given below. Notice that the verb in this example is preceded by the negative *la* which is not a jussive particle.

(19) لا أدري

la adrIi

Not I-know

'I don't know.'

The OT evaluation of (لا أدري) *la adrIi* vs. (لا أدر) *la adri* is given in **Table 3** below:

Table 3. OT evaluation of (لا أدري) *la adrIi* vs. (لا أدر) *la adri*.

Candidate	Syntactic Optimality	Communicative Optimality	Output
(لا أدري) *la adrIi* (Indicative)	✓	✓	Optimal
(لا أدر) *la adri* (Jussive)	X	✓	Less optimal

Under this constraint ranking, the second candidate is less optimal than the first candidate because it only satisfies communicative clarity, but not syntactic optimality.

Similarly, the Qur'anic verse given below has two recitations: (i) It is read with the final long vowel [-ii] retained (i.e., *Yama ya'tii*) by Ubay and Ibn Mas'ud in both pauses and connected recitations. This recitation conforms strictly to prescriptive syntactic rules as the present-tense verb is in the indicative mood, hence its final long vowel should be maintained. (ii) This verse is also read with shortened form (i.e., *yawma ya'ti*) by al-A'mash and Ḥamza in both pauses and connected recitations [30,31]. This latter recitation does not conform to syntactic rules as the shortening of the final long vowel is an indicator of the jussive mood, but the verb is not preceded by any jussive particle; the verb is in the indicative mood. Nevertheless, this recitation is still fully accepted and acknowledged in the Qur'anic recitation traditions.

(20) (يَوْمَ يَأْتِ لَا تَكَلَّمُ نَفْسٌ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ) [Huud:105]

yawma ya't-ii la takallamu nafsun illa bi'idhnih

'On the Day it comes, no soul will speak except by His permission'.

In fact, syntacticians were very strict concerning linguistic usages that substitute a final long vowel with a short *kasra* vowel in non-jussive contexts. They considered these usages ill-formed structures because such instances lack jussive particles to trigger the attested vowel substitutions.

However, the above examples assert the existence of many linguistic usages that do not comply with prescriptive syntactic rules, which weakens syntacticians' viewpoint.

The many occurrences of acceptable linguistic usages that deviate from syntactic rules, though not satisfying syntactic optimality, achieve another version of optimality, namely, communicative optimality, as validated by native speakers' practice. In other words, reducing a final long vowel to a short vowel in absence of jussive particle constitutes an attested usage pattern that achieves communicative optimality despite diverging from syntactic rules. Such usages highlight the flexibility of Arabic morphosyntactic system in accommodating expressive and communicative needs.

Summary of Deviation Type 1:

- Deviation: Shortening of final [-ii] to [-i] in indicative/subjunctive environments
- Rule Violated: Indicative/subjunctive verbs should retain [-ii]
- Examples: *yasri* instead of *yasrii*; *la adri* instead of *la adrī*
- Optimality interpretation: Communicative optimality overrides syntactic optimality

5.2. Retention of the Final Long Vowel in Jussive Constructions

A second recurring deviation pattern in the corpus involves retaining the final long vowel in jussive contexts,

which contradicts prescriptive deletion rules.

According to the syntactic rules governing present-tense verbs that end with one of the three long vowels (i.e., [-aa], [-uu], and [-ii])—as in, respectively, (يسعى) *yasʿaa* 'to strive', (يدعو) *yadʿuu* 'to call', and (يرمي) *yarmii* 'to throw'—such verbs retain their final long vowel in the indicative mood (see examples 7–9). However, if preceded by a jussive particle or conditional operator that triggers jussive mood, such verbs assume the jussive mood by deleting the final long vowel and substituting it with a corresponding short vowel as in (لم يسعَ) *lam yasʿa*, (لم يدعُ) *lam yadʿu*, and (لم يرمِ) *lam yarmi* (see examples 13–15).

However, actual language usage presents robust evidence that Arabic does not always conform to such strict syntactic rules. In fact, linguistic usages produced by the native speakers sometimes evade prescriptive syntactic rules, thus giving rise to an alternative linguistic choice permitted within the language's expressive system. A relevant example appears in the recitation of the following Qur'anic verse.

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ ۚ إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَٰئِكَ كَانَ (21) (عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا) [Al-Isra: 36]

wa-la taqfu ma laysa laka bihi ʿilmun Inna as-samʿa wal-baṣara wal-fuʾada kullu ulaʾika kana ʿanhu masʾula

Translation: 'And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart—about all those [one] will be questioned'.

In the recitation of Zayd Ibn Ali of the above verse, the jussivized verb is read as (وَلَا تَقْفُو) *wa-la taqfuu* (with a retained final long vowel [-uu]) instead of the expected shortened form (وَلَا تَقْفُ) *wa-la taqfu* [4]. Notice that this verb is preceded by a jussive particle, namely, the imperative/prohibitive *la*, so it should be marked for the jussive mood by deleting its final long vowel and substituting it with a corresponding short vowel. Indeed, this is not applied in this transmitted recitation, which represents a deviation from the prescriptive syntactic rule that governs such syntactic structures. Nevertheless, this reading is still accepted in the Qur'anic recitation traditions. The next verse also has a documented fully-accepted recitation that violates prescriptive syntactic norms:

قَالُوا أَإِنَّكَ لَأَنتَ يُوسُفُ ۖ قَالَ أَنَا يُوسُفُ وَهَٰذَا أَخِي ۖ قَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَيْنَا ۚ إِنَّهُ (22) (مَن يَتَّقِ وَيَصْبِرْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ) [Yusuf: 90]

Qalu a-innaka la'anta Yusuf Qala ana Yusuf wa-hadha akhi Qad manna Allahu ʿalayna Innahu man yattaqi wa-yaṣbir fa-

inna Allaha la yuḍiʿu ajra al-muḥsinin

Translation: 'They said, "Are you indeed Joseph?" He said, "I am Joseph, and this is my brother. Allah has certainly favored us. Indeed, he who fears Allah and is patient, then indeed, Allah does not allow to be lost the reward of those who do good"'.

According to Arabic prescriptive syntactic rules, both the Protasis (i.e., the verb of the Conditional clause) and the Apodosis (i.e., the verb of the main/result clause) of a conditional sentence introduced by a jussive conditional particle must appear in the jussive mood [32]. The verb (يَتَّقِي) *yattaqii* in the above verse represents the Protasis as it occurs in the Conditional clause of a conditional sentence introduced by the jussive conditional particle (مَن) *man* 'who', hence, prescriptively speaking, should be jussivized. This is further supported by the fact that the conjoined verb (يَصْبِرْ) *yaṣbir* appears in the jussive mood; recall that the jussive inflection with such type of verb is characterized by the absence of a final short inflectional vowel suffix (see example 3 above). However, in the recitation by Qunbul from Ibn Kathir for the above Qur'anic verse, the final long vowel [-ii] in the verb (يَتَّقِي) *yattaqii* is retained, which indicates unjussivization [16].

Similarly, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣri's recitation of the Qur'anic verse given below involved unjussivized version of the present-tense verb (i.e., *nuwaffii*, with retained final long vowel [-ii]) [4], despite its position as the apodosis (main/result clause) of the conditional sentence, where deletion of the final long vowel and substituting it with a short corresponding vowel (jussivization) would typically apply.

مَن كَانَ يُرِيدُ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَزِينَتَهَا نُوَفِّ إِلَيْهِمْ أَعْمَالَهُمْ فِيهَا وَهُمْ فِيهَا لَا (23) (يُبْخَسُونَ) [Huud: 15]

Man kana yuridu al-ḥayata ad-dunya wa-zinataha, nuwaffi ilayhim aʿmalahum fiha wa-hum fiha la yubkhasun

Translation: 'Whoever desires the life of this world and its adornments – We fully repay them for their deeds therein, and they therein will not be deprived'.

Such linguistic usages/recitation performances (i.e., retention of the final long vowel in jussive constructions) demonstrate a clear deviation from the syntactic rule as these usages did not apply the expected final long vowel deletion in jussive constructions.

Some early syntacticians considered this phenomenon a metrical-poetic exception that is found only in poetry. They

attributed it in prose (Qur'anic recitations) to phonological lengthening which does not contradict syntactic rules [25,33]. These scholars argue that what appears to be a final long vowel in these verbs is not a real long vowel but mere phonological lengthening of the final short vowel [34]. Others argue that some jussive particles like the imperative/prohibitive *la* may lack syntactic force to trigger jussive mood in certain contexts [35].

Reviewing such justifications reveals that they are clear attempts to reconcile non-prescriptive actual linguistic usages with prescriptive syntactic rules that require deleting the final long vowel and substituting it with a short vowel in jussive contexts. Such attempts reflect the rigidity of prescriptive rules to the extent of forcing non-canonical usages to comply with syntactic rules. However, the occurrence of such usages in prose suggests that they are not restricted to metrical-poetic reasons. More importantly, some syntacticians acknowledged these usages and considered them authentic dialectal features of certain Arab tribes [4], which challenges the aforementioned prescriptive justifications. Accordingly, we argue that such examples can be indicative of the inherent flexibility of actual usages in Arabic. In other words, these linguistic usages are authentic Arabic structures that, though lost one aspect of prescriptive correctness, fulfilled one type of optimality: communicative optimality. These linguistic usages prioritize communicative efficacy over syntactic rigidity.

What lends further plausibility to our conjecture is the fact that the aforementioned prescriptive justifications fall short of explaining similar structures in prophetic traditions, which are insusceptible to metrical-poetic constraints or phonological lengthening. Consider the following Prophet's ḥadith which is documented in al-Bukhari [36].

(24) (مَنْ أَكَلَ مِنْ هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ فَلَا يَغْشَانَا فِي مَسَاجِدِنَا) [36]

Man akala min hadhihi al-shajarati fa-la yaghshaa-na fi masajidina

'Whoever eats from this tree [garlic], let him not approach us in our mosques'.

In this version of this ḥadith, the long vowel [-aa] is retained in the verb (يَغْشَانَا) *yaghshaa-na* despite being governed by the imperative/prohibitive *la*, which is a jussive particle. According to the prescriptive rules of Arabic, this verb should be jussivized and thus should appear with a short vowel instead of the long vowel. However, the present-tense

verb in the version of the very same ḥadith that is documented in Muslim conforms to the strict syntactic rules whereby the verb is jussivized and the long vowel is deleted and substituted with a short corresponding vowel [37]. The verb in this latter version reads as (يَغْشَنَا) *yaghsha-na*. Thus, it can be said that such non-canonical linguistic usages represent authentic alternative structures that, though violate syntactic rules, still achieve communicative optimality. If early syntacticians had acknowledged such linguistic usages as dialectal variation, they would have spared us the burden of the aforementioned prescriptive justifications and helped us better understand that these non-canonical structures are in fact dialectal variants, some of which appeared in Qur'anic recitations and Prophet's ḥadith (cf. [38]).

The foregoing shows that the widespread occurrence of such non-canonical linguistic usages/performances in Qur'anic recitations and Prophet's ḥadith affirms their authenticity and asserts the flexibility of Arabic syntax. This widespread occurrence may suggest that these linguistic usages have emerged as a result of linguistic freedom that was available to Arabic speakers during a particular historical stage during which Arabic was undergoing evolution [39]. De-activation of jussive marking in some contexts might indicate a historical stage in which Arabic was shifting toward the loss of overt inflectional mood markers—a tendency observed in other Semitic languages as well [40]. Put differently, Although the retention of final long vowels in jussive contexts constitutes a syntactic deviation, it can be taken as an indication of the evolution of certain linguistic norms at a certain point in history in which syntactic structures started prioritizing communicative function over rigid syntacticity [40]. This in fact reflects the dynamic and evolutionary nature of Arabic as a living language.

The following **Table 4** summarizes the examples discussed under this type of syntactic deviation:

Table 4. Retention of the final long vowel in jussive constructions.

Expected Jussive Form	Attested Indicative Form
Wa-la taqfu	Wa-la taqfuu
Man yattaqi	Man yattaqii
Nuwaffi	Nuwaffii
Fa-la yaghsha-na	Fa-la yaghshaa-na

Summary of Deviation Type 2:

- Deviation: Retaining the final long vowel in verbs expected to appear in jussive form
- Rule Violated: Jussive verbs should delete final long vowels and replace them with short corresponding vowels
- Examples: *wa-la taqfuu* instead of *wa-la taqfu*; *man yattaqii* instead of *man yattaqi*; *nuwaffii* instead of *nuwaffi*; *fa-la yaghshaa-na* instead of *fa-la yaghsha-na*
- Justifications by early syntacticians: phonological lengthening
- Alternative view: Authentic dialectal variants or part of a broader morphosyntactic shift
- Optimality interpretation: Communicative optimality overrides strict syntactic rules

5.3. Deletion of Indicative and Subjunctive Short Inflectional Vowel Suffixes

The third identified deviation pattern in the corpus involves deletion of mood-marking suffixes in non-jussive contexts. While the previous subsection dealt with the unexpected retention of long vowels in jussive contexts, this subsection addresses instances in which the expected short inflectional vowels in indicative and subjunctive moods are completely deleted.

Recall that a sound present-tense verb appears in the indicative mood if it occurs independently of any subjunctivizing or jussive particle, and it is marked for the indicative mood in such cases by the visible/apparent short inflectional vowel suffix *ḍamma* (◌ُ), which is transliterated as [-u]. If it is preceded by a subjunctivizing particle, it manifests in the subjunctive mood which is marked by the visible/apparent short inflectional vowel suffix *fatḥa* (◌َ), which is transliterated as [-a]. If it is preceded by a jussive particle, it appears in the jussive mood which is marked by the absence of a final short inflectional vowel suffix; the jussive mood inflects with *sukuun* (◌ْ), which indicates zero short inflectional vowel suffix (see examples 1–3 above). This amounts to saying that the jussive mood is marked by deleting the short inflectional vowel suffixes that appear on the indicative or subjunctive verbal forms. Nevertheless, some examples cited by Ibn Hisham confirm the existence of linguistic usages that do not conform to these prescriptive rules [16]. A representative example of this phenomenon is attested in one documented/transmitted recitation of the following Qur'anic verse:

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَن تَذْبَحُواْ بَقَرَةًۖ قَالُوٓاْ أَتَتَّخِذُنَا هُزُوًاۖ (25) [Al-Baqarah: 67] (قَالَ أَعُوذُ بِٱللَّهِ أَنْ أَكُونَ مِنَ ٱلْجَٰهِلِينَ

wa idh qala Musa li-qawmihi inna Allaha y-a'mur-u-kum an tadhbaḥu baqarah, qalu atattakhidhuna huzuan, qala aʿudhu billahi an akuna mina al-jahilin

Translation: 'And [recall] when Moses said to his people, "Indeed, Allah commands you to slaughter a cow." They said, "Do you take us in ridicule?" He said, "I seek refuge in Allah from being among the ignorant".

The present-tense verb in the above verse (يَأْمُرُكُمْ) *y-a'mur-u-kum* '3.sg.m-command-ind.-you' is in the indicative mood as it is not preceded by a subjunctivizing or jussive particle. The indicative mood of this verb is marked by a visible short inflectional vowel suffix [-u], which is called *ḍamma* and appears in the Arabic script as (◌ُ). However, Abu ʿAmr's recitation of this Qur'anic verse involved (يَأْمُرْكُمْ) *y-a'mur-kum* '3.sg.m-command-you' (with *sukuun* instead of the apparent indicative short vowel suffix *ḍamma* [-u]) [41]. Recall that *sukuun* (◌ْ) in the Arabic script is used to mark jussive mood. The *sukuun* technically indicates zero short inflectional vowel suffix; thus, the corresponding jussive marking in the English transliteration is simply indicated by deleting the final short indicative (or subjunctive) vowel suffix (i.e., the absence of any final short inflectional vowel suffix). Put differently, the indicative inflectional suffix of the present-tense verb in Abu ʿAmr's recitation is deleted, which indicates a jussive mood, although the verb is not preceded by any jussive particle.

Deleting the short indicative vowel suffix from a present-tense verb in a non-jussive context amounts to jussivizing a present-tense verb without a jussive-inducing particle, which forms a clear violation to Arabic syntactic rules in this respect. It has been argued by some syntacticians that the indicative mood marking (*ḍamma* [-u]) in Abu ʿAmr's recitation was dropped and replaced by *sukuun* (zero short vowel suffix) for phonological factors—related to pronunciation heaviness and/or ease of articulation [7]. In other words, the deletion of this short inflectional vowel suffix is viewed as a phonological simplification strategy employed to avoid consecutive short vowels. To articulate the indicative marker *ḍamma* [-u] amid multiple short inflectional vowels sounds heavy [4]. However, this phonological simplification through deleting an inflectional vowel suffix is a controversial issue. Some scholars reject it completely especially that it eliminates a core verbal mood marking [42].

Other scholars have also held that the indicative mood marker (*ḍamma* [-u]) was deleted in the recitation of Abu ʿAmr of (يَأۡمُرۡكُمۡ) *y-aʾmur-kum* as a stylistic choice following the Tamimi dialect. Deleting the *ḍamma* [-u] marker is a recognized dialectal feature among Banu Tamim that is attested not only with indicative present-tense verbs but also with nominative forms. This indeed explains Muslimah Ibn Muḥarib's recitation of the following Qurʾanic verse with *sukuun* (zero inflectional vowel), instead of the expected nominative case marker *ḍamma* [-u], on the [t] in (بُعُولَتُهُنَّ):

وَٱلۡمُطَلَّقَٰتُ يَتَرَبَّصۡنَ بِأَنفُسِهِنَّ ثَلَٰثَةَ قُرُوءٖ ۚ وَلَا يَحِلُّ لَهُنَّ أَن يَكۡتُمۡنَ مَا خَلَقَ (26) ٱللَّهُ فِىٓ أَرۡحَامِهِنَّ إِن كُنَّ يُؤۡمِنَّ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱلۡيَوۡمِ ٱلۡءَاخِرِ ۚ وَبُعُولَتُهُنَّ أَحَقُّ بِرَدِّهِنَّ فِى [Al-Baqarah: 228] (... ذَٰلِكَ إِنۡ أَرَادُوٓاْ إِصۡلَٰحٗاۚ)

Wa-l-muṭallaqat-u yatarabbaṣna bi-anfusihinna thalathata quru', wa la yaḥillu lahunna an yaktumna ma khalaqa Allahu fi arḥamihinna in kunna yu'minna billahi wa-l-yawmi al-akhir, wa buʿulat-u-hunna aḥaqqu bi-raddihinna fi dhalika in aradu iṣlaḥa, …

Translation: 'Divorced women remain in waiting for three periods, and it is not lawful for them to conceal what Allah has created in their wombs if they believe in Allah and the Last Day. And their husbands have more right to take them back during that period if they want reconciliation. …'.

In the above verse, the noun (بُعُولَتُهُنَّ) *buʿulat-u-hunna* 'husband.3.pl.m-nom.-them. f' Is conjoined with the subject of the sentence (ٱلۡمُطَلَّقَٰتُ) *l-muṭallaqat-u* 'the-divorced.3.pl.f-nom.' using the conjunction (وَ) *wa* 'and'. This means that both conjoined nouns are inflected for the nominative case, as demonstrated by the short inflectional case marker *ḍamma* [-u]. However, Muslimah Ibn Muḥarib's recitation of the above verse involved (بُعُولَتُهُنَّ) *buʿulat-hunna* (with *sukuun*/zero case marker) for phonological simplification and to avoid consecutive short inflectional vowels. This means that the nominative case short vowel suffix is deleted in this recitation. What further asserts that deleting the *ḍamma* [-u] case marker on nominative forms is a recognized dialectal feature among Banu Tamim comes from a parallel instance found in Abu Zayd's documented/transmitted recitation of the Quranic verse given below. The noun (رُسُلُنَا) *rusul-u-na* 'messenger.3.pl.m-nom.-us' in this verse functions as a subject, so it inflects for the nominative case as shown by the short vowel suffix [-u]. However, Abu Zayd's recitation of this verse involved (رُسُلُنَا) *rusul-na* (with *sukuun*/zero inflection on [l]) [43], which means that he deleted the nominative case marker in his recitation.

Az-Zukhruf: 80] (27) أَمۡ يَحۡسَبُونَ أَنَّا لَا نَسۡمَعُ سِرَّهُمۡ وَنَجۡوَىٰهُمۚ بَلَىٰ وَرُسُلُنَا لَدَيۡهِمۡ يَكۡتُبُونَ)

Am yaḥsabuna anna la nasmaʿu sirrahum wa-najwahum Bala wa-rusuluna ladayhim yaktubun

Translation: 'Or do they think that We do not hear their secrets and their private conversations. Yes [We do], and Our messengers are with them recording'.

Applying *sukuun* (zero inflection) to a nominative form involves deleting the short inflectional vowel suffix (i.e., the nominative case marking *ḍamma* [-u]) from inflected nouns to avoid articulating multiple short inflectional vowels in succession [4]. It feels difficult to articulate the *ḍamma* [-u] amid multiple short inflectional vowels; successive short inflectional vowels are usually frowned upon [42]. Indeed, this linguistic behavior is documented among some Arab speakers who were not meticulous with respect to retaining and articulating inflectional case endings in their speech. Those Arab speakers lived in the Ḥijazi and Najdi regions [7], to which many Qurʾanic reciters belonged, and in the Tamimi tribe, whose dialect widely employed the deletion of nominative case endings as a form of phonological simplification [3]. This linguistic behavior, deleting inflectional endings, is also extended to indicative and subjunctive present-tense verbal forms, which led to the emergence of prescriptively ill-formed structures and/or the apparent exclusion of certain subjunctivizing particles.

In the canonical transmitted recitation of the Qurʾanic verse given below, the present-tense verb appears in the subjunctive form (يُتِمَّ) *yu-timm-a* '3.sg.m-complete-sub.'. This is the standard usage that meets Arabic syntactic rules, according to the Basran approach, in which (أن) *ʾan* 'to' is a subjunctivizing particle that requires the following verb to be in the subjunctive mood [16]. The subjunctive mood of the verb is marked by the final short inflectional vowel suffix [-a], which is called *fatḥa* and appears in the Arabic script as (◌َ).

وَٱلۡوَٰلِدَٰتُ يُرۡضِعۡنَ أَوۡلَٰدَهُنَّ حَوۡلَيۡنِ كَامِلَيۡنِۖ لِمَنۡ أَرَادَ أَن يُتِمَّ ٱلرَّضَاعَةَۚ) ...) (28) [Al-Baqarah: 233]

Wa-l-walidatu yurḍiʿna awladahunna ḥawlayni kamilayni li-man arada an yu-timm-a ar-raḍaʿah, …

Translation: 'Mothers may breastfeed their children two complete years for whoever wishes to complete the nursing/breastfeeding [period] … '.

However, one documented recitation of the above verse involves non-canonical (irregular) mood assignment. In this recitation, the present-tense verb is read as if it were

in the jussive form (يُتِمّ) *yu-tim* as demonstrated by the deletion of the subjunctive short vowel suffix [43]. Specifically, the verb is read without the expected subjunctive short vowel suffix, as if it were jussivized, despite the absence of any jussive mood assigner. Recall that the absence of a final short inflectional vowel suffix signals jussive mood. This reading is considered non-canonical by Basran syntacticians because it contradicts the standard syntactic rules governing present-tense verbs. They attribute this documented/transmitted reading to either a transmission error or influence of a rare Arabic dialect [44].

In fact, most syntacticians consider jussivizing the present-tense verb by the subjunctive particle (أن) *ʾan* 'to' as irregular usage, likely arising due to metrical-poetic need or phonological pause [30,44]. For example, al-Farra' maintains that while the jussive following(أن) *ʾan* 'to' is possible, it remains irregular and marginal in Arab speech [45].

Nevertheless, some Kufan syntacticians argue that (أن) *ʾan* 'to' can function as a jussive particle in certain Arabic dialects in Najd (e.g., the Banu Tamim and the Banu Ṣabaḥ clan of Ḍabba tribe), as demonstrated in poetic evidence and Qur'anic recitations [7,46,49]. In other words, this non-canonical usage was documented by Kufan syntacticians as an authentic, but rare, dialectal variant. This amounts to saying that the jussive usage of an already subjunctivized verb following (أن) *ʾan* 'to' (i.e., deleting the subjunctive short vowel suffix) cannot be dismissed as a mere metrical-poetic exception motivated by phonological considerations.

Our goal here is not to debate the causes behind deleting such inflectional suffixes (whether it is true *sukuun* or apocope), but rather to investigate the issue from the perspective of syntactic optimality. These linguistic usages, from a syntactic perspective, constitute a violation of the syntactic rule that requires the present-tense verb be in the indicative mood unless preceded by a subjunctivizing or jussive particle. Although such violations might be allowed in poetry under the constraint of metrical-poetic need [50], their existence in non-poetic speech, namely, Qur'anic recitations, confirms that they do not only stem from metrical-poetic need. Rather, they represent actual linguistic usages that were rejected by prescriptive syntacticians simply because of violating syntactic optimality.

The majority of syntacticians support syntactic optimality, as they base their judgment on established prescriptive rules and reanalyze non-canonical examples accordingly. For example, the aforementioned non-canonical deletion of

indicative and subjunctive inflectional suffixes in non-jussive constructions were reinterpreted as instances of *sukuun* due to poetic need or phonological pause, rather than bona fide jussivization. The Kufan approach, however, suggests another version of linguistic optimality, namely, communicative optimality. For example, Kufan syntacticians assert that the subjunctivizing particle (أن) *ʾan* 'to' can assign jussive mood in certain Arabic dialects. Even if this usage does not conform to prescriptive rules, it represents a well-formed usage within some dialects, which supports the conjecture that such non-prescriptive usages reflect the diversity of usage patterns in Classical Arabic.

While prescriptive syntacticians rejected such constructions for violating strict syntactic rules, the numerous non-prescriptive examples found in the corpus affirm their existence as natural, fully accepted forms. The occurrence of such linguistic usages in prose undermines the explanatory power of earlier syntacticians' justifications. Therefore, a more coherent justification for the existence of these examples in both poetic and non-poetic Arabic is needed.

A caveat is noted, however. We are here not trying to evaluate whether these justifications are valid or weak. Rather, we propose that rejecting the attested non-prescriptive linguistic usage itself is dubious; It should be acknowledged as a genuine linguistic usage, especially that some Arabic sources confirm that such usages exist in actual speech and thus represent a dialectal feature of some Arab tribes [51].

A historical perspective might offer a reasonable explanation for such non-prescriptive linguistic usages: Arabic, like other Semitic languages (e.g., Hebrew and Syriac), was gradually moving toward abandoning overt final inflectional vowel suffixes (case and mood markers) and adopting instead abstract (covert/invisible) invariable inflectional ending. Hebrew, for example, has completely dispensed with such endings except for a few fossilized remnants, and Syriac has eliminated them entirely. It seems that Arabic, too, was moving toward such inflectional simplification but this process was interrupted due to the Quran's preservation of inflectional endings [40]. In other words, it can be said that the language did not continue on that trajectory because the Qurʾan was revealed in fully inflected form.

In a nutshell, rigid syntactic rules couldn't always constrain linguistic usages. However, the absence of one element of syntactic optimality does not render the linguistic usage incorrect. Rather, such a linguistic usage should be viewed as a less-optimal variant compared to the prescriptive usage

that fully complies with syntactic rules. Thus, it should be classified as an authentic linguistic remnant or an optional alternative form that enriches the language system [22]. This reflects the broader observation that many creative linguistic usages diverge from the rigid syntactic system [6], and even dominant forms may fade over time [52].

Summary of Deviation Type 3:

Deviation: Deletion of Indicative/Subjunctive Short Vowel Suffixes [-u]/[-a] in indicative/subjunctive environments

- Rule Violated: Non-jussive moods must show the overt short suffixes [-u] or [-a]
- Examples: *y-a'mur-kum* instead of *y-a'mur-u-kum*; *an yu-tim* instead of *an yu-timm-a*
- Traditional explanation: Phonological simplification; influence of Tamimi and Ḥijāzi dialects
- Alternative view: inflectional erosion during a transitional phase in Arabic
- Optimality interpretation: syntactic mood preservation is sacrificed in favor of phonological and communicative motivations

Interim Summary: Diachronic Perspective

- Primarily dialectal, but with diachronic implications: reflect diachronic shift toward loss of inflection (Sections 5.2 and 5.3).

While the Retention of the final long vowel in jussive constructions as well as deletion of Indicative/Subjunctive Short Vowel Suffixes [-u]/[-a] in indicative/subjunctive environments are both documented in the speech of some Arabic dialects, it might be also taken as an instance of inflectional simplification, a tendency attested in other Semitic languages such as Hebrew and Syriac. Specifically, these two types of deviation sound compatible with a historical trajectory toward loss of overt inflection (similar to other Semitic languages). This suggests an early diachronic shift in Arabic that was blocked due to Quranic standardization [40].

5.4. Non-Canonical Assignment of Subjunctive Marking to a Syntactically Jussive Verb

Finally, non-canonical subjunctive marking in jussive contexts is the fourth deviation pattern identified in the corpus.

Arabic syntactic rules dictate that both the Protasis (i.e., the verb of the Conditional clause) and the Apodosis (i.e., the verb of the main/result clause) of a conditional sentence introduced by a jussive conditional particle must appear in the jussive mood, which is morphologically marked by *sukuun* (ْ), provided that both the protasis and the apodosis are present-tense verbs in both form and meaning [32]. However, Ibn Hisham cites several examples that flout this rule [16]. Consider the following:

وَمَن يُهَاجِرْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ يَجِدْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُرَاغَمًا كَثِيرًا وَسَعَةً ۚ وَمَن (29)
يَخْرُجْ مِن بَيْتِهِ مُهَاجِرًا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ يُدْرِكْهُ الْمَوْتُ فَقَدْ وَقَعَ أَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ ۗ
(وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَّحِيمًا) [An-Nisa': 100]

Wa man yuhajir fi sabili Allahi yajid fi al-arḍi muraghaman kathiran wa Sa'ah, wa man ya-khruj min baytihi muhajiran ila Allahi wa Rasulihi thumma yu-drik-hu al-mawtu fa-qad waqa'a ajruhu 'ala Allahi; wa kana Allahu Ghafuran Raḥiman

Translation: 'And whoever emigrates for the cause of Allah will find on the earth many [alternative] locations and abundance. And whoever leaves his home emigrating to Allah and His Messenger and then death overtakes him – his reward has already become incumbent upon Allah. And Allah is ever Forgiving and Merciful'.

The verb (يَخْرُجْ) *ya-khruj* '3.sg.m-leave.juss.' in the above verse represents the Protasis as it occurs in the Conditional clause of a conditional sentence introduced by the jussive conditional particle (مَن) *man* 'who', hence appearing in the jussive mood as demonstrated by the *sukuun* (i.e., absence of any short inflectional vowel suffix). Similarly, the verb (يُدْرِكْهُ) *yu-drik-hu* '3.sg.m-overtake.juss. -him' appears in the jussive mood as it is conjoined to the verb (يَخْرُجْ) *ya-khruj* by the conjunction (ثُمَّ) *thumma* 'then'. Recall that the jussive inflection with such type of verbs is characterized by the absence of a final short inflectional vowel suffix (see example 3 above). However, in one documented/transmitted recitation attributed to al-Ḥasan for the above verse, the co-ordinated present-tense verb appears in the subjunctive mood as (يُدْرِكَهُ) *yu-drik-a-hu* '3.sg.m-overtake-sub.-him' [16]. In this recitation, the jussive marking of the verb (يُدْرِكْهُ) *yu-drik-hu* '3.sg.m-overtake.juss.-him' is substituted with the subjunctive marking (i.e., the short subjunctive vowel suffix [-a]) despite the absence of any subjunctivizing particle, which constitutes a clear violation of established syntactic rules.

Although the Kufan syntacticians endorsed this subjunctive marking of the jussive present-tense verb, the Basran syntacticians did not confirm the subjunctive form for such instances due to their rarity. Regardless of the syntacticity of such structures, we argue here that the jussive form (يُدْرِكْهُ) *yu-drik-hu* '3.sg.m-overtake.juss.-him' is syntactically superior to the subjunctive (يُدْرِكَهُ) *yu-drik-a-hu* '3.sg.m-overtake-sub.-him' because the coordination/conjunction here is with an overt verb (يَخْرُجْ) *ya-khruj* '3.sg.m-leave.juss.' that is governed by a jussive operator. However, this does not mean that the subjunctive form should be ignored completely; it should be acknowledged at least from a communicative optimality perspective.

Another example of non-canonical assignment of subjunctive marking to syntactically jussive verb cited by Ibn Hisham is demonstrated by the transmitted recitation by some early Qur'anic reciters of the following verse [16]:

(أَلَمْ نَشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ) (30) [Ash-Sharḥ: 1]

Alam na-shraḥ laka ṣadrak

Translation: 'Did We not expand for you your chest?'

In the above verse, the present-tense verb (نَشْرَحْ) *na-shraḥ* 'we-expand. juss.' occurs in the jussive mood as it is governed by the jussive particle (لَمْ) *lam*; the jussive marking is indicated by the null vowel (i.e., absence of any short inflectional vowel suffix) on the verb. This realization of the present-tense verb represents the canonical usage that complies with the established prescriptive syntactic rules.

A variant recitation of this verse, however, involves the subjunctive version of the verb: (نَشْرَحَ) *na-shraḥ-a* 'we-expand-subj.' [16]. In this recitation, the verb is read with a final subjunctive *fatḥa* [-a] vowel suffix, instead of the expected *sukuun* (null short inflectional vowel) marking, despite the absence of any subjunctivizing particle in the structure. This indeed represents deviation from prescriptive syntactic rules.

Table 5 below involves optimality evaluation of the two recitations:

Table 5. Evaluation of the Two Recitations.

No.	Recitation Pattern	Rule of the Jussive Present-Tense Verb		
		Jussive Particle	Present-Tense Verb	Jussive Marker
1.	(أَلَمْ نَشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ) ʾa-lam na-shraḥ laka ṣadraka - (with *sukuun*/zero inflection)	✓	✓	✓
2.	(أَلَمْ نَشْرَحَ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ) ʾa-lam nashraḥ-a laka ṣadraka - (with *fatḥa* [-a])	✓	✓	✗

The above table demonstrates that both recitations achieve communicative optimality because they are both transmitted and attested in the Qur'anic recitational tradition. The recitation that involves the subjunctive present-tense verb following (لَمْ) *lam* violates prescriptive syntactic rules. It thus fails to meet the criterion of syntactic optimality. It violates a core component of the syntactic rules governing jussive present-tense verbs: it nullifies the jussive particle (لَمْ) *lam* of its conventional syntactic function and instead assigns it the syntactic role of a subjunctivizing particle. However, this recitation still achieves communicative optimality; it represents an alternative, non-standard form of the prescriptive structure. By contrast, the recitation that involves the jussive present-tense verb following (لَمْ) *lam* achieves both syntactic optimality and communicative optimality, because it fully conforms to the established syntactic rules of Classical Arabic. As a result, it ranks highest in the hierarchy of optimality.

Summary of Deviation Type 4:

- Deviation: Assigning subjunctive mood marker [-a] in environments that require jussive mood

- Rule Violated: Jussive mood requires *sukuun* (null inflection), not *fatḥa* [-a]

- Examples: *yu-drik-a-hu* instead of *yu-drik-hu* (in a jussive conditional sentence); *na-shraḥ-a* instead of *na-shraḥ* (after the jussive particle (لَمْ) *lam*

- Traditional view: Rejected as irregular form; some considered such examples transmission errors

- Alternative view: Dialectal variant documented by Kufan syntacticians; it is considered a linguistic remainder

- Optimality interpretation: Communicative clarity is prioritized over syntactic optimality

6. Conclusions

Arabic sources documented numerous violations of the rigid, prescriptive syntactic rules where canonical inflectional endings were dropped or substituted by other inflectional markers despite the syntactic conditions that necessitate the other way round. **Table 6** below summarizes the four types of deviation analyzed in this study.

Although such linguistic forms are not fully acceptable according to prescriptive syntactic rules, they play a vital role in shaping usage-based theorizing. For example, some scholars validate such non-canonical linguistic forms based on usage rather than conformity with syntactic rules. We argue that such linguistic forms are communicatively- authentic performances and should not be considered dialectal anomalies that are limited to certain speech communities. Rather, they represent optional alternative structures that never gained widespread adoption and thus remained syntactically marginal.

Table 6. Summary for the four deviation types.

	Syntactic Deviation	Description	Mood Affected	Example
1	Substitution of the final long vowel [-ii] with the short *kasra* vowel [-i] in non-jussive constructions	The short vowel [-i] replaces the long vowel [-ii]in non-jussive contexts	Indicative	idha yasrii → idha yasri
2	Retention of the final long vowel in jussive constructions	The jussive marker is not applied	Jussive	La taqfu → la taqfuu
3	Deletion of indicative and subjunctive short inflectional vowel suffixes	Mood suffixes are omitted without syntactic trigger	Indicative/Subjunctive	y-a'mur-u-kum → y-a'mur-kum
4	non-canonical assignment of subjunctive marking to a syntactically jussive verb	The verb appears in subjunctive mood despite the presence of jussive particle	Jussive	lam na-shraḥ → lam na-shraḥ-a

Such non-canonical linguistic usages revive a historical variant of these syntactic structures and confirm that language is not completely governed by rigid, fixed rules, but rather is a network of variables (i.e., dialects) that point toward its historical development and change over time. These changes reveal that such linguistic usages indeed occurred at a certain time [22].

The examples discussed in this study may serve as historical linguistic data that reveals significant facts in the diachronic study of Arabic. For instance, it points to the loss of some inflectional markers in present-tense verbs across different syntactic moods (indicative, subjunctive, jussive). It is proposed in this paper that Arabic might have undergone a historical phase during which the present-tense verb could lose the final mood marker in some contexts even in the presence of particles that trigger such mood-marking, which reflects a transitional morphosyntactic system. In other words, this suggests that in some usage contexts, inflectional markers were reanalyzed in the sense that they no longer function to encode syntactic relations; they have instead become phonological units that do not map to syntactic meaning.

Finally, it remains to be said that, although many linguistic analyses for the various syntactic structures in different Arabic varieties adopt frameworks other than OT, the minimalist framework for example (see, e.g., [53,54], among many others), OT can straightforwardly account for non-standard linguistic usages that deviate from prescriptive syntactic rules. In OT terms, such non-standard usages represent authentic linguistic remainders that can enrich the Arabic syntactic system. Arabic syntactic rules are not inviolable and Arabic syntax is flexible enough to accommodate such usages. It is thus recommended that a usage-based approach that recognizes diachronic and dialectal variation in Classical Arabic be advanced.

Author Contributions

B.A.A.S. and A.A.A. designed the study, collected the data, analyzed and interpreted the data, organized the structure of the paper, wrote the manuscript, and approved the final version to be published. Z.A.D. contributed to the idea and method of the research, substantially contributed to the data collection and analysis, participated in writing the paper, revised the paper for important intellectual content, edited the manuscript ensuring that questions related to the accuracy of the work are appropriately addressed, critically reviewed the paper and approved the final version to be published.

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