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DERIVED NOMINAL CATEGORIES IN CLASSICAL ARABIC GRAMMAR

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`**Abstract:** This article presents a comprehensive linguistic analysis of four derived nominal categories in Classical Arabic morphology: sifat mushabbaha (the assimilated adjective), ism tafḍīl (the elative or comparative/superlative noun), ism zamān-makān (the noun of time and place), and ism ālat (the noun of instrument). These categories are among the most productive and pedagogically significant derivational patterns in the Arabic verbal-nominal system, yet they remain insufficiently systematized in contemporary Arabic language teaching methodologies. The study employs descriptive, comparative-typological, and text-analytical methods to examine the morphological structure, semantic functions, and syntactic behaviour of each category. Drawing on classical grammatical sources — including Sībawayhi's al-Kitāb, Ibn Mālik's Alfiyya, and Ibn ʿAqīl's commentary — as well as modern Arabic linguistics scholarship, the article demonstrates that these four nominal derivatives form a coherent subsystem within Arabic ṣarf (morphology) that encodes qualitative assessment, degree comparison, spatiotemporal reference, and instrumental meaning. The findings have direct implications for Arabic pedagogy: explicit instruction in these patterns significantly enhances learners' lexical productive capacity and reading comprehension of classical texts. The article is intended for students of Arabic linguistics, philologists, and Orientalists.

Keywords: sifat mushabbaha, ism tafḍīl, elative, ism zamān-makān, ism ālat, Arabic morphology, ṣarf, derived nouns, triconsonantal root, Arabic grammar, nominal derivation, Classical Arabic.

Introduction. Classical Arabic morphology (ʿilm al-ṣarf) is built upon one of the most systematic derivational architectures in the world's linguistic inventory. At its core lies the triconsonantal root (al-jidhr al-thulāthī), a set of three consonants encoding a basic semantic field from which dozens of words — nouns, verbs, adjectives, and verbal nouns — can be generated by imposing specific vowel patterns (awzān, sing. wazn) onto the root skeleton. This derivational productivity is what allows Classical Arabic to be simultaneously economical in its root inventory and extraordinarily rich in its lexical output.

Among the most pedagogically significant — yet frequently insufficiently taught — derivational categories are four nominal formations: (1) the sifat mushabbaha (الصِّفَة المُشَبَّهَة), traditionally rendered as the "assimilated adjective" or "stative adjective"; (2) the ism tafḍīl (اسْمُ التَّفْضِيل), the "noun of preference" encoding comparative and superlative degree; (3) the ism zamān-makān (اسْمُ الزَّمَانِ وَالمَكَان), the "noun of time and place" indicating the locus or moment of an action; and (4) the ism ālat (اسْمُ الآلَة), the "noun of instrument" denoting the tool or means by which an action is performed. These four

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categories occupy a shared conceptual space: they are all derived from verbs, they all carry specific formal patterns, and together they exhaust much of the semantic territory between pure verbal and pure nominal expression in Arabic.

The present study has a threefold aim: first, to provide a precise morphological description of each of the four categories; second, to examine their syntactic distribution and semantic scope with reference to classical and modern textual sources; and third, to reflect on their implications for Arabic language pedagogy, particularly for non-native learners in Central Asian and Eastern European academic contexts. The research questions guiding this study are: (i) What formal patterns characterize each nominal category, and to what extent are these patterns predictable from the root-and-pattern morphology of Arabic? (ii) How do the four categories interact semantically and syntactically within the classical Arabic sentence? (iii) What are the principal pedagogical challenges associated with teaching these categories, and how might they be addressed?

Methods**.** The study adopts a multi-method qualitative approach. The primary method is descriptive morphological analysis, through which the formal patterns of each nominal category are identified, tabulated, and exemplified with attested classical forms. A secondary comparative-typological method is employed to relate Arabic nominal derivation to analogous phenomena in related Semitic languages (Hebrew, Aramaic) and, where instructive, to contrast it with Indo-European adjectival systems in order to highlight the structural distinctiveness of the Arabic approach.

Textual analysis constitutes the third methodological strand: examples are drawn from three corpora — the Qurʾān (as the canonical reference point for Classical Arabic usage), the pre-Islamic muʿallaqāt poetry, and the prose of the Abbasid period (eighth to thirteenth centuries CE), particularly from al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ. This tripartite corpus provides both diachronic depth and stylistic breadth. Classical grammatical authorities — Sībawayhi (d. c. 796 CE), al-Mubarrad (d. 898 CE), Ibn Mālik (d. 1274 CE), and Ibn ʿAqīl (d. 1367 CE) — serve as the primary theoretical framework; their analyses are cross-referenced with twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship by Wright (1898), Fischer (2002), and Ryding (2005).

Results. Sifat Mushabbaha — The Assimilated (Stative) Adjective. The sifat mushabbaha (الصِّفَة المُشَبَّهَة) is a deverbal adjective derived primarily from intransitive verbs (al-fiʿl al-lāzim) to denote a permanent or inherent quality of a person or thing — as opposed to the active participle (ism fāʿil), which typically conveys a temporary or transient state. The term mushabbaha ("assimilated" or "likened") reflects the medieval grammarians' observation that these adjectives behave syntactically like active participles but encode stative, non-dynamic meaning.

The sifat mushabbaha is attested in numerous formal patterns; however, the most productive and frequently cited in the classical grammatical tradition are those listed in the table below. The pattern most closely associated with colour and physical defect adjectives is fa'lāʾ (fem.) / ʾafʿal (masc.), while psychological and characterological qualities tend to appear in patterns such as faʿīl or faʿl.

Pattern (wazn)	Arabic example	Root	Meaning	Domain
فعيل	karīm (كَرِيم)	ك ر م	noble, generous	Character
فعيل	ṭawīl (طَوِيل)	ط و ل	tall, long	Physical

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فَعْلٌ	ṣaʿb (صَعْب)	ص ع ب	difficult	Abstract
فَعَلٌ	ḥasan (حَسَن)	ح س ن	beautiful, good	Aesthetic
أَفْعَلُ/فَعْلَاءُ	ʾaḥmar / ḥamrāʾ	ح م ر	red (m./f.)	Colour
فَعْلَانُ/ فَعْلَ	ʿaṭshān (عَطْشَان)	ع ط ش	thirsty (m./f.)	Bodily state
فُعَال/فِعَال	shujāʿ (شُجَاع)	ش ج ع	brave	Character

A structurally important sub-class of the sifat mushabbaha is the colour-and-defect (ʾalwān wa-ʿuyūb) adjective, which follows the diptotic pattern ʾafʿal (masculine) / faʿlāʾ (feminine) — for example, ʾabyaḍ / bayḍāʾ ("white"), ʾaswad / sawdāʾ ("black"), ʾaʿwar / ʿawrāʾ ("one-eyed"). These forms do not take tanwīn (nunation) and follow diptotic declension rules, making them a notable morphosyntactic exception that learners must master separately.

Syntactically, the sifat mushabbaha governs its complement (maʿmūl) in a variety of ways: the complement may appear in the nominative (marfūʿ), accusative (manṣūb), or genitive (majrūr) case depending on whether it functions as a subject, specification (tamyīz), or genitive complement. This syntactic flexibility is what earned the sifat mushabbaha its "assimilated" label: it mimics the government patterns of the active participle while encoding stative, rather than dynamic, meaning.

Ism Tafḍīl — The Elative (Comparative and Superlative). The ism tafḍīl (اسْمُ التَّفْضِيل) — literally "the noun of preference" — is the Arabic elative form encoding both comparative ("more X") and superlative ("most X", "the X-est") meanings depending on its syntactic context. It is invariably formed on the pattern ʾafʿal (أَفْعَل), which is the same pattern as the masculine colour-and-defect adjective — a formal overlap that the classical grammarians noted and carefully distinguished semantically.

Positive adjective	Root	Ism tafḍīl	Comparative meaning
كبير (big)	ك ب ر	ʾakbar (أَكْبَر)	bigger / the biggest
حَسَنٌ (good)	ح س ن	ʾaḥsan (أَحْسَن)	better / the best
صَغِيرٌ (small)	ص غ ر	ʾaṣghar (أَصْغَر)	smaller / the smallest
عَلِمٌ (learned)	ع ل م	ʾaʿlam (أَعْلَم)	more learned / most learned
قَرِيبٌ (near)	ق ر ب	ʾaqrab (أَقْرَب)	nearer / nearest

The ism tafḍīl exhibits systematic restrictions. It cannot be directly formed from: (i) quadriliteral roots; (ii) roots whose derived adjective already follows the ʾafʿal / faʿlāʾ pattern (i.e. colour and defect adjectives); (iii) roots containing a geminate or a hamzated third radical in the relevant position;

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or (iv) verbs denoting colour or physical defect. In such cases, Arabic resorts to a periphrastic construction using a dummy elative such as ʾashad or ʾakbar followed by a verbal noun (maṣdar) in the accusative of specification (tamyīz): e.g., ʾashad ḥumratan ("redder").

Syntactically, the ism tafḍīl functions differently depending on whether it is definite or indefinite, and whether it is followed by a genitive complement or a clause introduced by min ("than"). When indefinite and followed by min, it expresses simple comparison: ʾAnā ʾakbaru minka ("I am older than you"). When definite and followed by a genitive plural, it encodes the superlative: al-rajulu al-ʾakbaru ("the eldest man") or al-ʾakbaru min al-rijāl ("the greatest of men").

Ism Zamān-Makān — The Noun of Time and Place. The ism zamān-makān (اسْمُ الزَّمَانِ وَالمَكَان) is a deverbal noun that denotes either the time at which or the place in which the action described by the verb characteristically occurs. Despite their semantic difference — time vs. place — classical Arabic grammar treats these two derivational categories under a unified morphological heading because they share the same formal patterns. This economy of form is a hallmark of the Arabic root-and-pattern system: a single morphological template serves multiple semantic functions, with contextual disambiguation supplying the appropriate reading.

Morphological Patterns. From Form I (the base) triliteral verbs, ism zamān-makān is formed on two principal patterns: mafʿal (مَفْعَل) and mafʿil (مَفْعِل). The distribution between the two is determined by the vowel of the second radical (ʿayn al-fiʿl) in the imperfect (mudāriʿ) tense: if the imperfect vowel is fatḥa or ḍamma, the pattern is mafʿal; if it is kasra, the pattern is mafʿil.

Verb (Form I)	Imperfect vowel	Pattern	Ism zamān-makān	Meaning
كتب (to write)	u → yaktub	مَفْعَلٌ	maktab (مَكْتَب)	desk / office
جلس (to sit)	i → yajlis	مَفْعِلٌ	majlis (مَجْلِس)	council / sitting place
طلع (to rise)	u → yaṭluʿ	مَفْعَلٌ	maṭlaʿ (مَطْلَع)	rising point / dawn
وضع (to place)	a → yaḍaʿ	مَفْعِلٌ	mawḍiʿ (مَوْضِع)	place / position
ضرب (to strike)	i → yaḍrib	مَفْعِلٌ	maḍrib (مَضْرِب)	striking place

From augmented (mazīd) verb stems (Forms II–X), the ism zamān-makān follows the active participle pattern of the corresponding form, prefixed with mu-. For example, from Form II darrasa ("to teach"), the ism zamān-makān / ism mafʿūl overlap yields mudarras ("taught" or "place of teaching"); from Form IV ʾakrama ("to honour"), the place-form is mukram. In augmented forms, contextual disambiguation and lexical convention typically determine whether a given mufa"al / mufāʿal form is read as a passive participle, a place noun, or a time noun.

Semantic Ambiguity and Disambiguation. A significant finding of the textual analysis is that ism zamān-makān forms are frequently polysemous in the classical corpus: the same form may denote time, place, or even a verbal noun (maṣdar mīmī). For instance, mawlid (مَوْلِد) means both "the place of

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birth" and "the time of birth" (birthday), while maktab (مَكْتَب) has been lexicalised to mean "office" or "desk" rather than the verbal act of writing. This semantic drift illustrates how ism zamān-makān forms undergo lexicalisation over time, gradually losing their compositional transparency and acquiring conventionalised meanings that must be learned as lexical items.

Ism Ālat — The Noun of Instrument. The ism ālat (اسْمُ الآلَة) is a deverbal noun denoting the instrument or tool by means of which the action of the base verb is typically performed. It is derived exclusively from Form I (base form) transitive verbs, and it appears in three primary patterns in Classical Arabic: mifʿal (مِفْعَل), mifʿāl (مِفْعَال), and mifʿala (مِفْعَلَة). All three patterns are characterised by an initial mīm with kasra (mi-), which distinguishes them formally from ism zamān-makān (where the mīm carries fatḥa, ma-) — a distinction that is morphologically transparent and pedagogically useful as a mnemonic marker.

Pattern	Verb	Ism ālat form	English equivalent
مِفْعَلٌ	barada (to file)	mibrad (مِبْرَد)	file (tool)
مِفْعَلٌ	qaṭaʿa (to cut)	miqṭaʿ (مِقْطَع)	cutting tool
مِفْعَلٌ	fatāḥa (to open)	miftāḥ (مِفْتَاح)	key
مِفْعَلٌ	qāsa (to measure)	miqyās (مِقْيَاس)	measure / scale
مِفْعَلَةٌ	kaḥḥa (to scrape)	miḥkama (مِحْكَمَة)	scraping tool
مِفْعَلَةٌ	ṭaḥana (to grind)	miṭḥana (مِطْحَنَة)	grinding stone / mill

While the three classical patterns (mifʿal, mifʿāl, mifʿala) remain productive in Modern Standard Arabic, contemporary Arabic has also developed new ism ālat formations to name modern technological instruments, typically borrowing from or calquing European terminology. Forms such as hātif (telephone), ḥāsib (computer), and miṭbāʿa (printer) represent either new coinages on classical patterns or semantic extensions of existing roots. The mifʿāl pattern in particular has proven especially productive for naming newly invented tools — miṭbaʿ (printing press), miṣʿad (elevator, lit. "ascending device") — because its phonological weight (four syllables) lends it a sense of instrumental significance.

Discussion. The four nominal categories examined in this study — sifat mushabbaha, ism tafḍīl, ism zamān-makān, and ism ālat — collectively illustrate the extraordinary derivational efficiency of the Arabic root-and-pattern morphological system. Each category encodes a distinct dimension of meaning (inherent quality, degree of quality, spatiotemporal reference, and instrumentality) through a relatively small inventory of formal patterns. This economy is not accidental: it reflects a deep structural principle of Arabic morphology whereby meaning and form are systematically correlated, allowing speakers and readers to infer probable meaning from morphological shape alone.

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A recurring finding across all four categories is the phenomenon of lexicalisation: forms that are synchronically transparent in their derivational structure have historically undergone semantic shift, acquiring meanings that are no longer fully predictable from root and pattern alone. The ism zamān-makān maktab has become "office"; the ism ālat miftāḥ has generalised from any "opening device" to "key" specifically; and the sifat mushabbaha ḥasan has evolved from a stative adjective meaning "being in a state of beauty" to a widely used masculine proper name. This lexicalisation tendency underscores the importance of corpus-based lexical instruction alongside rule-based morphological teaching.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the most significant implication of this study concerns the sequencing of instruction. The ism tafḍīl, with its single invariant pattern ʾafʿal and its clearly defined syntactic restrictions, is most amenable to early explicit instruction. The ism ālat, with its three formally distinct but semantically unified patterns all sharing the initial mi- marker, constitutes a natural next step. The sifat mushabbaha, with its much larger inventory of patterns and its syntactic complexity (governing complements in three different cases), is best approached after learners have consolidated their understanding of the active participle. The ism zamān-makān, whose disambiguation requires both morphological and contextual knowledge, may be most productively taught through reading comprehension tasks in context rather than through decontextualised pattern drills.

Conclusion

This study has provided a systematic morphological, semantic, and syntactic description of four derived nominal categories in Classical Arabic: sifat mushabbaha, ism tafḍīl, ism zamān-makān, and ism ālat. The analysis has shown that while each category operates according to distinct formal patterns and encodes distinct semantic content, all four share a common derivational logic rooted in the triconsonantal root system and the root-and-pattern architecture that defines Arabic morphology. Together, these categories constitute a coherent subsystem of deverbal nominalization that extends verbal meaning into the domains of quality, comparison, place and time, and instrumentality.

The findings underscore several conclusions of theoretical and pedagogical significance. Theoretically, the Arabic morphological system demonstrates that a small inventory of abstract patterns (awzān) can encode a wide range of conceptual distinctions with high formal regularity. Pedagogically, explicit instruction in these four categories — properly sequenced and grounded in authentic textual examples — equips learners with powerful tools for lexical expansion and text comprehension. Future research should investigate the frequency distribution of these forms across different text genres in the Arabic corpus, examine how these categories are treated in contemporary Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) curricula in Uzbekistan and the broader Central Asian context, and explore the application of computational morphological tools to the automatic identification and disambiguation of these forms in large text corpora.

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