

## The Position of "Al-Mufid" Among Sarf Books

**Musaev Islomxon Khodi o'g'li**

*Arabic language teacher at Alfraganus University*

**Abstract.** This article is dedicated to examining the position of Mahmud ibn Umar az-Zamakhshari's book *Al-Mufid fi at-Tasrif* in the history of Arabic morphology (*sarf*). The work is concise and covers the fundamental topics of *sarf*, written in a simplified style for students. However, unlike Zamakhshari's other works, it did not gain widespread recognition and has survived in very few copies. This study analyzes the book's structure, methodology, and significance in the field of *sarf* based on its only known manuscript. Additionally, it provides a detailed description of the manuscript, its errors, and the methodology used for preparing the text for scholarly publication.

**Key words:** Zamakhshari, *Al-Mufid fi at-Tasrif*, Arabic morphology, Arabic grammar, manuscript analysis, *tasrif*, linguistic studies, critical edition.

### Introduction

Zamakhshari named his book *Al-Mufid fi at-Tasrif*, a title that clearly reflects its subject matter. This work is concise and covers the fundamental topics of *sarf* (morphology). The author presents these topics in a brief and straightforward manner, avoiding unnecessary details.

The book does not delve deeply into complex *sarf* issues, and despite being the author of *Al-Kashshaf*, Zamakhshari cites the Quran only once in this work. Additionally, it does not include poetic examples, Arabic proverbs, or famous expressions. There is not even a separate introduction explaining the purpose and content of the book.

However, the title itself reveals its objective: Zamakhshari wrote this work to simplify *sarf* for students and make it easier to memorize. In this regard, he followed the tradition of concise *sarf* manuals, similar to:

- *Al-Maluki fi at-Tasrif* by Ibn Jinni,
- *Nuzhat at-Tarf* by Maydani,
- *Al-Miftah fi as-Sarf* by Jurjani.

Furthermore, *Al-Mufid fi at-Tasrif* is known to be Zamakhshari's only work on *sarf*. Therefore, it is likely that he wrote this book as his sole specialized contribution to the field of morphology.

This book is dedicated to the conjugation (formation) of verbs and the study of nouns related to verbs. It covers the following topics:

- Three-root-letter verbs
- Four-root-letter verbs
- Augmented three-root-letter and four-root-letter verbs
- Morphological scale (*mīzān aṣ-ṣarfī*)
- Transitive and intransitive verbs

- Three-consonant and four-consonant verbs (*muḍā‘af*)
- Some morphological rules related to the letter "Hamza"

Additionally, the author categorizes verbs into five main types:

1. **Past tense verb** (*māḍī*)
2. **Present tense verb** (*muḍāri‘*)
3. **Imperative verb** (*amr*)
4. **Verbs of wonder** (*ta‘ajjub verbs - "Af‘al at-ta‘ajjub"*)

In this book, the author provides a detailed explanation of how past, present, and imperative verbs are formed, how they change in the active and passive voice, and how they connect to pronouns. However, since verbs of wonder have an invariable form, their conjugation is not given much attention. Nevertheless, the author clearly and simply explains how these verbs are formed and the conditions they follow.

Furthermore, the book also examines nouns related to verbs, including:

- Masdar (verbal noun)
- Active participle (*ism al-fā‘il*)
- Passive participle (*ism al-maf‘ūl*)
- Comparative and superlative noun (*ism at-tafḍīl*)
- Mīmī verbal noun (*masdar mīmī*)
- Nouns of time and place

With these topics, the book reaches its conclusion.

### **Style (Methodology)**

In this book, Zamakhshari follows a nearly consistent method, especially in the conjugation of verbs. He first defines the verb, provides examples, and then explains its different types. He classifies verbs into the following categories:

- Verb in the active voice (*mabnī lil-fā‘il*)
- Verb in the passive voice (*mabnī lil-maf‘ūl*)

Afterward, he explains how pronouns can be attached to verbs in the active voice. Then, he categorizes verbs into three main types:

1. Regular verbs (*ṣaḥīḥ*)
2. Weak verbs (*mu‘tal*)
3. Doubled verbs (*muḍā‘af*)

Examples for each of these categories are provided, and their conjugation follows this sequence:

- The verb is first connected to third-person pronouns (*he, they, she*).
- Then, it is conjugated with second-person pronouns (*you, you all, you - feminine*).
- Finally, it is linked to first-person pronouns (*I, we*).

Zamakhshari consistently follows this method when explaining past tense, present tense, and imperative verbs.

Additionally, he divides weak verbs into three types:

1. Verbs with a weak initial letter (*miṣāl*)
2. Verbs with a weak middle letter (*ajwaf*)

### 3. Verbs with a weak final letter (*nāqiṣ*)

However, he does not use the term *miṣāl* in the section on present tense verbs in the active voice (*muḍāri‘ mabnī lil-fā‘il*), although he does use the terms *ajwaf* and *nāqiṣ*. Similarly, he does not mention the name *miṣāl* when explaining how pronouns attach to past tense verbs in the active voice.

## Methodology

Zamakhshari begins verb classification with three-letter verbs, followed by their augmented forms or four-letter verb structures.

### Approach to Nouns Derived from Verbs

Zamakhshari discusses the *masdar* (verbal noun), *ism al-fā‘il* (active participle), and *ism al-maf‘ūl* (passive participle) in a similar manner. He first explains how these nouns are derived from three-letter verbs and then classifies their other forms.

## A Critical Perspective on Zamakhshari’s Methodology

However, it is worth noting that *Al-Mufīd fī at-Tasrīf* does not follow a clear and consistent principle of section division. Unlike his work *Al-Mufasssal*, where chapters and sections are arranged systematically, this book lacks an obvious structure.

- The book does not include section or chapter titles at the beginning.
- The rules regarding three-letter verbs are explained without a distinct heading.
- There is inconsistency in how verb types are categorized:
  - The **present tense verb** (*muḍāri‘*) is presented as a separate section (*faṣl*).
  - The **imperative verb** (*amr*) is introduced as a chapter (*bāb*).
  - The **past tense verb** (*māḍī*) is neither classified as a section nor a chapter.

This lack of structural consistency and precise organization indicates that the book does not maintain a fully systematic and coherent arrangement.

## Second Section: Research Characteristics

### Manuscript Description

To my knowledge, there is only one existing copy of this book. It is preserved at the Juma Al-Majid Center for Manuscripts in the United Arab Emirates under the catalog number **256267**. This copy is a photographic reproduction of the original manuscript, which was housed in the **Mar’ashi Public Library** in Qom, Iran, with the catalog number **4047**. The manuscript bears the stamp of "Ayatollah Al-Uzma Mar’ashi Najafi Public Library" on its cover, as well as at the beginning and end of the text.

The manuscript consists of **ten folios**, with **two pages per folio**. Each page contains approximately **25 lines**, with each line comprising **8–13 words**.

Written in **Naskh script**, the manuscript’s handwriting is clear and legible. The grammatical diacritics in morphological examples are meticulously provided. The copyist, who transcribed and owned the manuscript, appears to have had a keen interest in knowledge, particularly in *Tasrīf* (morphology), as evidenced by his careful attention to applying grammatical markings correctly. However, minor errors are present, likely due to the copyist’s oversight or haste.

Some sections of the manuscript show **damage** along the dividing lines between pages. As a result, the last line of the preceding page and the first line of the following page have occasionally become **intermixed**. Nevertheless, the manuscript is **well-preserved** and possesses independent scholarly value, eliminating the need for additional copies.

Most importantly, this manuscript was transcribed **very close to the author’s lifetime**, as the copyist recorded that he completed it in **653 AH (1255 CE)**.

## Additional Notes on the Manuscript

At the top of the first page of the manuscript, several **poetic verses** are inscribed. The **title of the book** appears on the **last page**, but the author's name is not mentioned there. However, on the **second page**, both the **full title of the book** and the **author's name** are explicitly recorded. Additionally, this page contains the **name of the book's owner** and the **scribe who copied the manuscript**. The text reads as follows:

*"Al-Mufid fi at-Tasrif" – this book was written by the renowned scholar, exegete, and distinguished polymath, the pride of Khwarazm, Imam Mahmud ibn Umar az-Zamakhshari. Furthermore, the scribe included a personal supplication, seeking Allah's forgiveness, stating:*

*"Whoever relies on Allah, He will suffice him. This book was copied by the owner and compiler of this collection, Abu Muhammad Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Abdullah. He asks Allah to forgive his sins and conceal his faults."*

## Research Methodology

1. I transcribed the **original manuscript** while preserving the original **page numbers**, which I indicated in **square brackets** ([ ]).
2. I noted **errors, distortions, or alterations** present in the manuscript. Any **extra letters** mistakenly added in the manuscript were enclosed in **square brackets** ([ ]) and explained in **footnotes**.
3. Any **missing words** or those necessary for **logical coherence** were placed in **square brackets** ([ ]) and explained in the **footnotes**. However, if a missing portion consisted of only **one word**, I did not use brackets but recorded it only in the footnotes to **maintain the natural structure of the text**.
4. **Qur'anic verses** were written according to the **Uthmani script standards**.
5. **Headings and section titles** used by Zamakhshari were redefined based on their **meaning** and placed in **square brackets** ([ ]). However, since these are **editorial additions**, I did not mark them in the **footnotes**.
6. Lexical terms mentioned by the author were **verified** against **reliable dictionaries** and **morphological grammar sources**.
7. I inserted **punctuation marks** to enhance clarity and readability.
8. **Spelling errors** were corrected in accordance with **modern orthographic conventions**.
9. **Examples and morphological patterns (wazn)** were carefully transcribed with **accurate diacritical markings** to ensure correct pronunciation.

## Conclusion

This research is dedicated to analyzing the significance of **"Al-Mufid fi at-Tasrif"** by Mahmud ibn Umar az-Zamakhshari in the history of Arabic morphology (sarf). Throughout the study, the structure, methodology, and scholarly importance of the book were thoroughly examined.

Zamakhshari wrote this work to simplify the study of morphology for students. The book is concise and presents the classification of verbs, their formation, and various grammatical structures without unnecessary details. However, unlike his other works, it did not gain widespread recognition, possibly due to the scarcity or loss of its copies.

The manuscript study revealed that the only known copy was transcribed in 653 AH, making it a significant academic source. During the research, the text was preserved in its original form while necessary grammatical and stylistic corrections were made. Additionally, certain inconsistencies and structural gaps within the book were identified and clarified from a scholarly perspective.

Overall, **"Al-Mufid fi at-Tasrif"** is a valuable and historic work in the field of Arabic morphology. Publishing and making it accessible to researchers is a crucial step in advancing Arabic linguistics.

This effort not only highlights Zamakhshari's contribution to morphology but also enriches the study of Arabic grammar.

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