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HOW TO DEAL WITH CONTRADICTORY CHAPTERS IN SĪBAWAYH’S KITĀB?

Compound numerals from “eleven” to “nineteen”
(chapters 314, 336 and 412 of the Kitab)

by

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Introduction*

My article is quite far from Emilio’s personal and academic centres of interest. However, I learned from him that one should not judge from one’s first impression, and this is what this article is about: entering the inner logic of the Kitāb instead of imposing one’s logic to it.

Reading the Kitāb of Sībawayh (d. ca 180/796) is not an easy task for many centuries have passed since it was first taught and its logic is not always obvious at first glance. And if one believes later historiographers, many later grammarians already described it as a book of an insurmountable difficulty, just like al-Mubarrad (d. 285/898) who refused to teach it because it was as impossible a task as crossing the sea on the back of a horse1.

I would like in this paper to focus on one particular issue, on which Sībawayh seems to hesitate and even contradict himself. To put it in a nutshell, the problematic issue at stake here is the status of –ʾashara (“–teen”, masc) and –ʾash(i)rata (“–teen”, fem.) in the compound numerals from “eleven” to “nineteen”: Is it syntactically similar to a muḏāf ʾilayh as in the compound

* I am really glad to contribute to this Festschrift offered to Emilio Platti, and I would like the following article to be a tribute to him, his enlightening personality and his commitment to my education, both spiritual and intellectual (jean.druel@dominicains.fr).

Ma’dî–karibin, or to a tâ’ marbûtah as in the proper name Ħalḥatu, or to the compensatory nîn in ithnâni and muslimâna?

This issue is dealt with in three chapters of the Kitâb, chapters 314, 336 and 412, and contradictory solutions seem to be proposed by Sibawayh. A detailed reading shows that these contradictions can be solved and that there even seem to be textual markers on which the reader can rely in order to avoid misunderstandings.

More deeply, it is both the status of the text and the logic at stake in it that is questioned here².

I. Compound numerals in chapter 314

Chapter 314 (Kitâb II, 45–51) is devoted to compound substantives in general, and Sibawayh explores the different syntactic schemes that could explain their specific behaviour, as well as the special case of the compound numerals from eleven to nineteen. Sibawayh knows two different kinds of coalescence that involves two nouns: the ’idâfah and the “two things that are made one noun” (shay’âni ju’ilâ sman wâhidan). These two kinds of nominal coalescence will be called by the later grammarians tarkîb ’idâfiyy and tarkîb mazjiyy³.

In this chapter — as well as in the whole Kitâb in general — Sibawayh is not presenting a prescriptive vision of grammar, but his interpretation of what is found in the language of the Arabs, as well as the divergent interpretations of other grammarians. Thus, in more than one case, he quotes a few variants and gives an interpretation for each, either his own interpretation or others’, and it is not immediately clear which interpretation he endorses. A good example is the proper name Ma’dî–karib that was heard by him in the independent case as Ma’dî–karibu, Ma’dî–karib, and Ma’dî–karibin; another example is a substantive referring to a small flee, that was heard as follows: al-khâzi–bâzi, al-khîzbâzu, al-khâzi–bâ’u, al-khâza–bâza, khâzu–bâzin, and al-khâza–bâzu. In all these cases, Sibawayh presents a few grammatical interpretations, either within the frame of the ’idâfah (the later tarkîb ’idâfiyy) or within the frame of the “two things that are made one noun” (the

². The topic of this article is part of my doctoral research project on the syntax of numerals in Arabic, which I prepare at the Radboud University in Nijmegen under the supervision of Professor Kees Versteegh.

³. There are other kinds of coalescence but they do not relate to our topic. See BAALBAKI, “Coalescence as a grammatical tool in Sibawayhi’s Kitâb”, Arabic grammar and linguistics, ed. Y. Suleiman (London, and New York: Routledge, 2003) 94; The legacy of the Kitâb, 229–230.
later *tarkib mazjiyy). And at the end of the chapter, it is not obvious what interpretation he prefers, if any.

Reading this chapter of the *Kitāb*, one can try to classify the compounds into the following semantic categories: i. proper names, like Ḥadra–mawt, Baʿla–bakk, Rāma–hurmuz, Māra–Sarjis, Maʿdi–karib or ’Amra–wayh; ii. compounds whose origin (ʿaṣl) is a conjoined construction (ʿaṭf), like khamsata–ʾashara, ḥayṣa–baysa; iii. compounds whose origin is an ʿidāfah construction, like ḥādiya–ʾashara or thālitha–ʾashara; iv. compound nouns in the vocative, like yā bna–ʾammin; v. adverbs (ẓurūf) and circumstantial accusatives (ḥāl), like ḥīna–ʾidhin, yawma–yawma, ṣabāha–masāʿa; vi. proper names of the verbs (ʿasmāʾ fīʾl), like hay–ḥāt or hayyā–hal; and vii. substantives, like ’ayda–mūz, ’anta–rīs, khāzi–bāz, khīzbāz or khāzi–bā’.

Once the semantic category to which a compound belongs has been identified, the grammarians have to interpret its syntactic behaviour. Once more, there seem to be a limited numeral of patterns according to which compound nouns behave syntactically: Either 1. they behave like an ʿidāfah, or 2. they behave like a “one word compound”. In ʿidāfah-like compounds, the first term is a muḍāf and the second one is a muḍāf ʿilayh. Things are not so simple for the “one word compounds”, since there are many possible patterns to explain their behaviour: 2a. some compounds behave as a whole like a diptote proper name ending with a tāʿ marbūṭah, of the type of Ṭalḥah; 2b. some behave like khamsata–ʾashara, which seems to form here a category of its own; 2c. some behave like a mere onomatopoeia, of the type of ghāquin, which is a useful category because it includes everything that is out of pattern; 2d. some behave like the proper name of the verb (ism fīʾl), of the type of jayri; 2e. some behave like a quadriliteral, of the type of sirbāl, qāšīʿāʾ or nāfiqāʾ, 2f. some behave like invariable nouns, as in ’ayna; and lastly, 2g. some behave like a masculine external plural or a dual, bearing a compensatory niʿn, of the type of muslimāna and iḥnāni. More details on this last pattern will be given later.

Ideally, one should be able to assign one syntactic behaviour (frames 1 to 2g) to one given semantic category of compounds (from i to vii). But things are not this simple and not all grammarians agree on how to interpret the syntactic behaviour of compound nouns. For example, some grammarians will interpret the proper name Maʿdi–karib (category i) in the frame of an ʿidāfah (frame 1), whereas others will interpret it in the frame of a diptote proper name ending with a tāʿ marbūṭah (frame 2a).

1.1. The ʿidāfah-like compounds

As for the compounds that behave like an ʿidāfah (frame 1), things are rather simple (*Kitāb* ii, 46.10–18). The first term is declinable (muʿrāb) and
is annexed to the second term which is indefinite. Both \textit{Ma‘di–karbin} and \textit{Ma‘di–kariba} (category \textit{i}) can be interpreted in this frame: Here, the first term ends with a root semivowel, explaining why the declension does not show, and as far as the second term is concerned, if it ends with a \textit{tanwīn}, it must be interpreted as a fully declinable noun (mutamakkin)^4, and if it ends with a single \textit{fathāh}, it has to be interpreted as a proper name — and as such a non fully declinable noun (ghayr mutamakkin) — to which the first term is \textit{muḍāf}. The declension of \textit{Ma‘di–karib} would either be \textit{Ma‘di–karibin}, \textit{Ma‘di–kariba}, \textit{Ma‘di–kariba}, or \textit{Ma‘di–kariba}.

1.2. The “two things that are made one noun”

As for the “two things that are made one noun” (frames 2a to 2g), things are not so simple, and Sībawayh presents many possible cases in this chapter (Kitāb ii, 46.18 till the end of the chapter, 51.10). The common features to these compounds are: As a whole, the compound has the same status (\textit{bi-manzilah}) as one single noun; this new noun is not fully declinable (ghayr mutamakkin, it does not take the syntactic \textit{tanwīn at-tamkin}). On the other hand, these compounds behave variably concerning declension (\textit{‘irāb}): Some are declinable (diptote declension, because they are ghayr mutamakkinah); and some are invariable (mabniyyah) and end in a vowel or in a \textit{tanwīn} (which is not the \textit{tanwīn at-tamkin}). For example, the proper name \textit{Ma‘di–karib} (category \textit{i}) has also been heard by Sībawayh in the independent case pronounced \textit{Ma‘di–karibu}. In this case, it can be interpreted as “one single noun”, declinable and diptote, and not any more as a \textit{muḍāf} and a \textit{muḍāf ilayh}. Compound nouns “that are made one noun” are ghayr mutamakkinah because, being compounds, they are “heavy”, or in other words, it would be too heavy to add the \textit{tanwīn at-tamkin} to a noun to which a first noun has already be annexed (Kitāb ii, 47.13). Here, the declension of \textit{Ma‘di–karib} in all three cases would be \textit{Ma‘di–karibu}, \textit{Ma‘di–kariba}, \textit{Ma‘di–kariba} (frame 2a).

1.2.1. Proper names

In the case of some proper names (Kitāb ii, 46.18–47.7), Sībawayh, quoting Yūnus (b. Habīb, d. 183/799–800), analytically interprets their coalescence type as the addition of a \textit{tā’ marbūṭah}^5 to the noun (frame 2a), forming

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4. The account of \textit{tamakkun} and \textit{’adam tamakkun} in BAAALBAKI, The legacy of the Kitāb, p. 113 and 118–119, is maybe not as clear as that of CHAIRET, “Hiffa, fiqal et tamakkun: régime d’incidence et classes de mots”, Langues et littératures du Monde arabe 1: “Linguistique arabe et sémitique 1”, 216–217, who insists more on its gradient nature in the Kitāb.

5. The \textit{tā’ marbūṭah} is referred to by Sībawayh as \textit{hā’ at-ta’īnīth} or simply as \textit{hā’}. 

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with it a new single noun. If the noun is a proper name (‘alam) it becomes a diptote, as is Ṭalḥah and any proper name ending with a tā’ marbūṭah, masculine or feminine6. Sibawayh simply says that the second term of the compound is “a ‘word’ like the feminine ĥā’” (kalimah ka-hā’ at-ta’nīth). In other words, Ma’dī–karibu is “like” Ṭalḥatu, or to be more precise, Ma’dī– is “like” Ṭalḥa– and –karibu is “like” –tu. This term to term morphological analogy between a compound proper name and a proper name ending with a tā’ marbūṭah can be represented as follows: Ma’dī–karib–u // ™ ala–tu, or to be more precise, Ma’dī– is “like” ™ ala– and –karibu is “like” –tu. This term to term morphological analogy between a compound proper name and a proper name ending with a tā’ marbūṭah-like tarkīb mazjiyy.

1.2.2. Compound numerals

In the case of the compound numerals (Kitāb 2, 47.7–19), cardinals and ordinals, the semantic frame in which to interpret them is different: Compound cardinals are originally ‘af-constructions (category ii), like khamsata–’ashara originating from khamsatun wa–’asharatun; whereas compound ordinals are originally ‘idāfah-constructions (category iii), like khāmis–’ashara originating from khāmisu khamsata–’ashara). However, both cardinals and ordinals are syntactically interpreted alike (frame 2b), explicitly for the sake of consistency (Kitāb 2, 47.10–11): These compounds are syntactically “one single noun” and as such not fully declinable (ghayr mutamakkin). On the other hand, Sibawayh is not very explicit here about the declension of these compounds. He only says that compound numerals do not take the tanwīn because they have already been provided with a second term.

The explicit reason why the ordinals are treated like the cardinals, although their origin are different (‘af and ‘idāfah) is that both are “unspecified” and can apply to any other thing” (‘idh kāna [ḥādiya–’ashara] muwāfiqan la-hu [khamsata–’ashara] fi ’anna-hu mubhamun yaqa’u ’alā kulli shay’īn; Kitāb 2, 47.11), which is exactly the definition given by Sībawayh for

6. This fits the canonical theory of the mawāni’ aṣ-sarf which states that whenever two factors are combined in one noun it becomes diptotic. Among the factors are for instance: the addition of the tā’ marbūṭah, being a proper name, being feminine, being a foreign noun… The first explicit mention of this theory is probably found in IBN AS-SARRĀJ, ‘Uṣūl 2, 80–93.

7. BAALBAKI, The legacy of the Kitāb, p. 229, translates mubham by “undefined”, whereas TROUPEAU, Lexique-index du Kitāb de Sibawayhi (Paris: Klincksieck, 1976), p. 42, translates it by “imprécisé”. I prefer “unspecified” because in most cases these nouns are in need of another noun that “specifies” them (yumayyiz, yufassir); they do not need to be “defined”.
al-`asmā’ al-mubhamah (Kitāb II, 38.17). This explanation is extremely interesting, because numerals are otherwise not explicitly listed by Sībawayh with the “unspecified nouns” and are therefore not included in the reflection on their grammatical possibilities and limits.

Since nothing is said by Sībawayh concerning the syntactic behaviour of compound numerals (frame 2b), and since they come just after the category of the proper names ending with a tā’ marbūṭah (frame 2a), one could infer that they also behave according to the tā’ marbūṭah-like tarkīb mazjiyy. However, nothing is said here. There are other nouns that Sībawayh compares to compound numerals, in terms of syntactic behaviour (frame 2b): the adverbal phrase ḥayyās–bayṣa “confusion” (category v) (Kitāb II, 47.14) as well as two tribe names quoted later in the chapter, ‘Ayādī–Sabā, and Qālī–Qalā, (category i) and the adverbial phrase bādī–badā “first” (category v) (Kitāb II, 50.1). He also mentions that not all Arabs nor poets pronounce these nouns the same way, indicating different underlying grammatical interpretations (Kitāb II, 50.1–11). Lastly, Sībawayh clearly disagrees with Yūnūs who interprets the adverbial phrase kaffah–kaffah (category v; Kitāb II, 49.22) in the frame of compound numerals (frame 2b; kaffata–kaffata), whereas he prefers to interpret it in the frame of an ‘idāfah (frame 1; kaffatu–kaffatin or kaffatu–kaffata depending on the declension of the second term).

Since in all these cases khamsata–‘ashara is always the reference used by Sībawayh to interpret these compounds, it can be considered to be a syntactic frame of its own (frame 2b), different from the tā’ marbūṭah-like tarkīb mazjiyy (frame 2a). But this is a tentative supposition that needs more investigation.

1.2.3. Other compounds

Among the other syntactic patterns used by Sībawayh (Kitāb II, 47.19–51.4) to interpret the compound nouns, are onomatopoeia (‘aṣwāt; frame 2c), the proper names of the verbs (‘asmā́ ’i’l; frame 2d), quadrilaterals (frame 2e), and invariable nouns (frame 2f). We will not discuss these patterns here, since they are not relevant to the interpretation of the compound numerals.

More generally, the issue at stake is the choice between the two types of interpretation, the tarkīb ‘idāfīyy (frame 1) versus the tarkīb mazjiyy (frames 2a–g): Some grammarians chose to limit the tarkīb mazjiyy to adverbial and state complements (ẓarf and ḥāl, category v), and analyze other

compounds (proper and common nouns, categories i and vii) as *tarkīb ʾidāfīyy* (*Kitāb* ii, 49.12–16). This is the position of Yūnus and “some Arabs”. Sībawayh does not take position in this issue, all the more that his interpretation for the compound numerals does not fit this usage: Numerals are neither *zarf* nor *ḥāl*, and yet, Sībawayh interprets them as *tarkīb mazjiyy*, and not as *tarkīb ʾidāfīyy*.

1.2.4. The special case of “twelve”

At the very end of this chapter (*Kitāb* ii, 51.4–9), Sībawayh quotes al-Khalīl’s (b. Aḥmad, d. at the latest 175/791–2) interpretation of the compound cardinal ʾithn–ʾashara (category ii). According to Sībawayh, al-Khalīl develops an analogy between the compensatory ʾnūn in *muslimūna* and the *tarkīb mazjiyy* of ʾithn–ʾashara. This analogy (frame 2g) can be graphically represented as follows: ʾithn–ʾashar–a // *muslim–n–a*, where ʾashara– has the same status (bi-manzilah) as the compensatory ʾnūn (–n– in *muslim–n–a*). As was the case for the tāʾ *marbūṭah*, this compensatory ʾnūn is added to the noun. Both analogies are parallel, the tāʾ *marbūṭah*-like *tarkīb mazjiyy* (frame 2a) and the compensatory ʾnūn-like *tarkīb mazjiyy* (frame 2g). However, their behaviour is quite different, since the declension is added after the part that is similar to a tāʾ *marbūṭah*, but before the part that is similar to the compensatory ʾnūn.

As is now clear, Sībawayh presents here no perfect solution, completely consistent, that would account for the construction of all compound numerals, cardinals (category ii) and ordinals (category iii). This lack of consistency is due to the peculiar behaviour of ʾithn–ʾashara which alone is internally modified by the declension, as well as the fact that in other compound numerals, both parts are mabniyyah on a *fatḥah*, at all cases.

1.2.5. Special issues in chapter 314

Sībawayh mentions two problematic expressions (*Kitāb* ii, 47.17–19) that are however widespread in the language. The first one is *al-khamsata–ʾashara*, i.e., the addition of the article to the compound cardinals (is this also true of ordinals?) Sībawayh argues that there are indeed other expressions in the language which he considers exceptions and on which no further analogy can be built, such as the expressions *iḍrib ʾayyuhum ʾafḍalu* and *al-ʾāna*,

9. In chapter 2, (*Kitāb* i, 3.17–18; 22–23) Sībawayh defines this ʾnūn, which he calls ʾnūn al-ʾithnayni wa-l-jam ʾaṣṣa, as follows: wa-takīnū z-zāʾidatu th-thāniyyatu ʾnūnan kaʾannahā ʾiwaḍun li-nūn muḥa min al-ḥarakatī wa-t-tanwīnī. “The second appendix is a ʾnūn, as if it were a compensation for what has been forbidden [to bear] a vowel or a *tanwīn*.”
whose pertinence here is not straightforward. However, these two expressions were dealt with before, in chapter 222 (Kitāb 1, 350–352).

The second problematic expression is the genitive annexion of a cardinal compound numeral (is this also true of ordinals?), like khamsata–‘asharu-ka “your fifteen”, Sībawayh does not tolerate it syntactically, and qualifies it as “bad use” (lughah radi‘ah), without giving any further explanation at this point. This issue is dealt with again at the end of chapter 314, where Sībawayh quotes al-Khalīl’s interpretation of the special case of twelve (Kitāb 2, 51.6–7). Here, the interdiction to annex the compound numeral fits the compensatory nūn-like tarkīb maziyy analytical pattern used for twelve, since, according to al-Khalīl, the nūn should be suppressed before the genitive annexion, as in muslimū l-madīnati “the Muslims of the city”. The only difference with the regular rule is that in the case of ithnā–‘ashara, if the nūn is suppressed (i.e., if –‘ashara is suppressed), then a confusion can happen (“your twelve” would become identical to “your two”), and this is the reason why “twelve” cannot be annexed (and possibly other compound numerals as well).

1.3. Findings in chapter 314

In order to proceed systematically and carefully I propose to summarize here the findings and consequences concerning the compound numerals that we can draw from the reading of this chapter 314 of the Kitāb:

(314a) Sībawayh considers that the compound cardinals are semantically ‘ātif-constructions (category ii) (Kitāb 2, 47.8–9).

(314b) He considers that the compound ordinals are semantically ‘idāfah-constructions (category iii) (Kitāb 2, 47.9–10).

(314c) Sībawayh nevertheless interprets both cardinal and ordinal compound numerals in the same syntactic frame: “the two things that are made one noun” (the later tarkīb maziyy) (Kitāb 2, 47.8) and this, for the sake of consistency, justifying his choice by saying that both are ‘asmā’ mubhamah (“unspecified nouns”; Kitāb 2, 47.10–11).

(314d) Like all compounds “that are made one noun” (frames 2a–g), compound numerals are not fully declinable (ghayr mutamakkin): They do not take the tanwīn of tamkīn (Kitāb 2, 47.12). The explanation quoted from Yūnus at the beginning of the chapter is stated here anew by Sībawayh: since the second term of the compound is already added (zā‘idah) to the first term, a tanwīn cannot be added to it (Kitāb 2, 47.12), it would be too heavy.

10. See BAALBAKI, The legacy of the Kitāb, pp. 157–158, for al-Mubarrad’s commentary on this point elliptically dealt with in the Kitāb.
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1.4. Open issues in chapter 314

Among other questions that raised my interest in this chapter are the following: Sibawayh says (Kitâb II, 51.4) that al-Khalîl “claimed” (za‘ama) that “twelve” is not syntactically similar to “fifteen”. And then, Sibawayh quotes al-Khalîl’s analysis without opposing any argument. Rather, he seems to adopt al-Khalîl’s interpretation. Even more, he writes a few pages earlier that he trusts al-Khalîl only (Kitâb II, 49.21). The question is: What is exactly meant by the verb za‘ama? In his lexicon of the Kitâb’s terminology, Troupeau\footnote{TROUPEAU, *Lexique-index…*, p. 104.} translates it as “prétendre”, which supposes in French that what follows is not agreed on, or at least doubted. On the other hand, Kazimirski\footnote{KAZIMIRSKI, *Dictionnaire arabe-français…*, (Boulac: Imprimerie vice-royale égyptienne, 1875), vol. II, p. 417.} is less univocal and translates it as “énoncer une opinion (vraie ou fausse)” and adds “s’emploie le plus souvent quand on rapporte les paroles des autres sans vouloir en garantir la vérité”. This implies then that Sibawayh does not want to take position. In this chapter 314, the verb za‘ama is used nine times, among which three times apply to al-Khalîl (Kitâb II, 48.22; 49.2; 51.4). In the same chapter, al-Khalîl is quoted three more times, where Sibawayh uses the verb

(314e) According to Sibawayh, al-Khalîl has “claimed” (za‘ama) that ithnā–’ashara is different from all other compound numerals, since it is modified by declension (Kitâb II, 51.4–6). Al-Khalîl interprets ithnā–’ashara in the frame of a tarkīb mazjīyy, where the second term would have the same status (bi-manzilah) as the compensatory nūn (Kitâb II, 51.6). We will call this interpretation the compensatory nūn-like tarkīb mazjīyy (frame 2g). Sibawayh does not express here his own view explicitly.

(314f) Sibawayh dislikes a common usage among the Arabs, the addition of the definite article to compound numerals (al-khamsata–’ashara), but he admits that there are other exceptions in the language where linguistic use prevails (Kitâb II, 47.17–18).

(314g) Sibawayh rejects another common usage, the annexion of a compound numeral to a pronoun (*khamsata–’asharu-ka*), and gives no explanation at this point (Kitâb II, 47.19). Later in the chapter, he quotes al-Khalîl who rejects the annexion of ithnā–’ashara. According to Sibawayh, the reason given by al-Khalîl is that, since –’ashara is similar to the compensatory nūn, it should be deleted before the annexion, just like it is deleted in muslimūn before the annexion. But in the case of ithnā–’ashara, the deletion of –’ashara would create a confusion between ithnā[–’ashara] and ithnā[-ni] (Kitâb II, 51.4–8).
qāla “he said” (Kitāb II, 49.8; 49.21; 50.13). How can the verb za`ama be used in the restrictive meaning of “to pretend” when it is used every other time to quote al-Khalīl’s opinion, he who was the only one trusted by Sibawayh? Then, what is Sibawayh’s opinion concerning the grammatical analysis of “twelve”? Why would not he want to take position in this chapter? Or does this mean that he adopts al-Khalīl’s opinion, when no reservation is expressed?

One may be surprised to see how imprecise Sibawayh is in this presentation of the compound numerals. After saying that they are compound nouns, which implies that they have the status (bi-manzilah) of one single noun, and are not fully declinable (ghayr mutamakkinah), he does not go any further concerning their syntactic behaviour: Why are they indeclinable? What is the status of the second part of the compound? Since the paragraph concerning the compound numerals — except “twelve” — comes just after the tā’ marbūtah-like syntactic interpretation (frame 2a) for proper names, should we infer that this suggests the same kind of interpretation for the compound numerals? Or should the compound numerals stand for a separate syntactic frame of compound nouns (frame 2b)? According to Sibawayh, al-Khalīl “pretended” that, unlike in khamsata–`ashara, –`ashara in ithnā–`ashara is syntactically similar to the compensatory nūn in muslimūna (Kitāb II, 51.4–6). So what should –`ashara in khamsata–`ashara and the other compound numerals be compared to, according to Sibawayh?

Another question lies in the frame used to describe the syntactic behaviour of compound nouns. If the compound numerals — except “twelve”, if we follow al-Khalīl — really stand for a frame of their own, what are the other words that Sibawayh classifies in this frame? He mentions a few, like ḥayṣa–bayṣa (Kitāb II, 47.14), `Ayādī–Sabā, Qālī–Qalā, and bādī–badā (Kitāb II, 50.1). Are there other nouns? What characterizes them?

II. Compound numerals in chapter 336

Chapter 336 is very short (Kitāb II, 84.1–16) and is concerned with the specific issue of adjectival derivation, i.e., forming an adjective from a noun. This gentilic adjective was later called nisbah, but Sibawayh confusingly calls it `idāfah: He even uses the terms `idāfah (for the gentilic adjective) and the terms muḍāf and muḍāf `ilayh (genitive annexion) in the same chapter.

2.1. The annexion of a compound noun

Although it is not obvious from the beginning of the chapter, Sibawayh clearly says at the end of this chapter that he is considering proper names only. So Ithnā–`ashara and Khamsata–`ashara are here considered as proper names, which I capitalize in transliteration for the sake of clarity.
According to al-Khalīl, the general rule is that in order to form the gentilic adjective, the first part of the compound should be deleted, just like the ending tā’ marbūṭah should be deleted before adding the suffix –iyy– (Kitāb II, 84.2), as in Ma’diyyun and Khamsiyyun (Kitāb II, 84.4). This is very consistent with Sibawayh’s tā’ marbūṭah-like tarkib mazjiyy interpretation (frame 2a) for proper names (Kitāb II, chapter 314: 46.18–47.7). So it is no surprise that this second part of the compound be deleted, just like the tā’ marbūṭah. It should hence be noticed that here, Khamsata–¨ashara, as a proper name, is explicitly assigned to the frame of the compounds that behave like  Ṭalḥah. This point was unclear in chapter 314, where the syntactic status of the second term of the compound numerals had not been clearly decided. However, this does not mean that it also applies to khamsata–¨ashara as a numeral.

Lastly, there are compound nouns that have been made “one noun” but whose pattern is not shared by the single [noun] (mā lā yakūnū ʾalā mithālīḥi l-wāḥidu) (Kitāb II, 84.6–9). This is the case of a compound noun like ʾAyādī–Sabā, because it has eight “letters”; or shaqhra–baghra “tumour”, because of its pattern which is not found in any single word. In this case, always according to al-Khalīl, these compounds are treated like a muḍāf and its muḍāf ʾilayḥ in order to build their gentilic adjective (ʾiḍāfah): The second part is simply erased, just like the muḍāf ʾilayḥ.

As usual, some expressions do not fit the general picture and Arabs have also been reported uttering exceptional forms such as ʿHaḍramiyy and ʿAbdariyy, respectively built on ʿHaḍra–mawt (a compound noun) and ʿAbdu d-dārī (a muḍāf and its muḍāf ʾilayḥ). On the particular issue of the gentilic adjectives built on a muḍāf and its muḍāf ʾilayḥ, see chapter 337 (Kitāb II, 84–85).

2.2. The gentilic adjective of Ithnā–¨ashara

Then comes the case of Ithnā–¨ashara, as a proper name, whose gentilic adjective is Thanawiyy (or Ithniyy). In this case, says Sibawayh, still quoting al-Khalīl, –¨ashara has been interpreted as the compensatory nūn (frame 2g) whereas it was interpreted as a tā’ marbūṭah in Khamsata–¨ashara (frame 2a) (Kitāb II, 84.14–15). It is clear that these gentilic adjectives only apply to the case when Ithnā–¨ashara, Khamsata–¨ashara and other numerals are proper names, otherwise it is not correct to build a gentilic adjective on them (Kitāb II, 84.15–16).

2.3. Findings in chapter 336

The conclusions that we can draw from this chapter concerning the grammar of numerals are the following:
According to al-Khalîl, as quoted by Sîbawayh, –‘ashara is interpreted as the compensatory nūn in the proper name Ithnâ–‘ashara (frame 2g) and as a tā’ marbūṭah in the proper name Khamsata–‘ashara (frame 2a) (Kitâb II, 84.14–15).

Always according to al-Khalîl, as quoted by Sîbawayh, no gentilic adjective can be built on a compound numeral (in order to avoid the confusion with the non compound numeral, since the second part of the compound should be erased when a gentilic adjective is formed from it) (Kitâb II, 84.15–16).

Al-Khalîl also said that if this compound numeral refers to a proper name, there is no problem to erase the second part of the compound and build a gentilic adjective (Kitâb II, 84.13).

Open issues in chapter 336

An interesting issue that would need more investigation is that nowhere in this chapter does Sîbawayh express his own view. We have seen in the previous chapters that he is quite precise in quoting his sources and distinguishing between his own views and others’. In this chapter, he never says if he agrees or not. Everything seems to be attributed to his master al-Khalîl exclusively, and with no restriction.

One of the issues that remained open at the end of chapter 314 was the interpretation of the second part of the compound numerals: Is it syntactically similar to the compensatory nūn in muslimûna (frame 2g), as is the case for ithnâ–‘ashara, according to al-Khalîl, quoted by Sîbawayh, or to a tā’ marbūṭah, as in ටalḥah (frame 2a)? In this chapter, it seems that al-Khalîl has partially answered the question: He considers that, in the proper names, –‘ashara in Khamsata–‘ashara is syntactically similar to a tā’ marbūṭah, and to the compensatory nūn in Ithnâ–‘ashara.

III. Compound numerals in chapter 412

I would like now to focus on chapter 412 (Kitâb II, 176–177), which is the first one to be explicitly devoted to numerals, and which is immediately followed by three other chapters also explicitly concerned with numerals. In chapter 412, Sîbawayh considers the series from “three” to “nineteen”. It is extremely striking that Sîbawayh does not quote any other grammarian, nor poet, unlike in the other chapters that we read so far. He clearly speaks here out of his own authority, and the imperative i’lam ʿanna… “know that…” is probably the best marker for this. For example, in chapter 336 (Kitâb II, 84.1–16) where it seemed that Sîbawayh was not giving his own point of view, this imperative was nowhere to be found indeed. Even more striking is the fact
that he quotes neither a poet nor a single verse of poetry. This chapter, which concerns the morphology and the grammatical class of the numerals between “three” and “nineteen”, is thus very special for our study.

3.1. “Eleven” in the masculine

For “eleven”, the numeral applying to masculine nouns is ‘ahada–’ashara. Sibawayh says a bit obscurely that there is no ‘alif in –’ashara (laysat fi ‘ashara ‘alifun) and that this is a “one-noun” compound, ḥarfuni ju‘ilā sman wāḥidan ḍammū ‘ahada ‘īlā ‘ashara (Kitāb II, 176.20–21). In this construction, ‘ahada– is said to have the same pattern (binā) as in the expression ‘ahadun wa-‘ishrūna ‘āman (Kitāb II, 176.22), whereas –’ashara does not have the same binā as when it was referring to “ten” (Kitāb II, 176.22–23): Its binā has changed from fa‘alah (in ‘asharah, “ten” masc) to fa‘l (in –’ashara, “–teen” masc.)

3.2. “Eleven” in the feminine

If “eleven” applies to a feminine noun, the numeral spells ‘īdā–’ashirata in the dialect (lughah) of Tamīm, or ‘īdā–’ashrata in the dialect of Hijāz (henceforth –’ash(i)rata; Kitāb II, 176.23–24). The analysis for the two parts of this feminine compound noun, ‘īdā– and –’ash(i)rata, is the same as for the masculine ‘ahada– and –’ashara: ‘īdā– has not changed its situation (ḥāl) if compared to its situation in the expression ‘īdā wa-‘ishrūna sanatan whereas –’ash(i)rata (“–teen” fem.) has (Kitāb II, 177.2–3).

In the end, we have the following patterns: “Ten” (masc.) is ‘asharatun, pattern: fa‘alah; “ten” (fem.) is ‘ashrun, pattern: fa‘l; “–teen” (masc.) is –’ashara, pattern: –fa‘al; “–teen” (fem.) is –’ash(i)rata, pattern: –fa‘(i)lah.

In other words, the pattern of “ten” in the masculine changes from fa‘alah to –fa‘al and, in the feminine, from fa‘l to –fa‘(i)lah when used in compound numerals from “eleven” to “nineteen”.

3.3. “Twelve” in the masculine

For “twelve”, the numeral applying to masculine nouns is ithnā–’ashara in the independent case and ithnay–’ashara in the dependent and oblique cases (Kitāb II, 177.4). As was the case for ‘ahada–’ashara and ‘īdā–’ash(i)rata, the first part of the compound has not changed its situation (ḥāl) if compared to its usage when alone, except that its compensatory nūn in ithnā-nī has been

13. This ‘alif probably refers to the pausal form –ā. The pausal form of ‘ahada–’ashara is ‘ahada–‘ashar, not ‘ahada–‘asharā.
deleted. This, because –’ashara has the same status (bi-manzilah) as this deleted compensatory nūn (frame 2g) (Kitāb ی، 177.5). As for the first part of the compound, ithnā–, it bears the declension, which is not the case in khamsata– in the compound khamsata–’ashara (Kitāb ی، 177.5–6).

Sībawayh refers here to his chapter entitled “The declinable and the non-declinable” (mā yanṣarīfu wa-lā yanṣarīfu; Kitāb ی، chap. 285–315, 1–56). In this chapter — or rather group of chapters — he deals only once with the elision of the compensatory nūn (Kitāb ی، 18.11), saying that in the case of the dependent and oblique plural muslimātīn, the tā’ resembles (’ashbahat) the yā’ in the plural muslimīna and in the dual rajulaynī, whereas the tanwīn in muslimātīn has the same status (bi-manzilah) as the (compensatory) nūn in muslimīna. Thus, muslimā–t–in is to be analyzed like muslim–ī–na and rajula–y–ni. The consequence of this for the numeral “twelve” is that ithnā–’ashara should be analyzed ithn–ā–’ashara like ithn–ā–ni: The invariable term –’ashara stands here for the ending –ni, or to put it in other words, it has the same status (bi-manzilah) as the compensatory nūn. Of course, the same goes for ithnay–’ashara which is to be analyzed ithna–y–’ashara.

3.4. “Twelve” in the feminine

The same analysis is done for the feminine forms of “twelve”, ithnat–ā–’ash(i)rata and ithnata–y–’ash(i)rata. The following alternative forms are also mentioned: thint–ā–’ash(i)rata and thinta–y–’ash(i)rata, so that “twelve” can take eight different forms altogether (Kitāb ی، 177.7–8). The same analysis for the status of both parts of the compound and the ending nūn is also mentioned here (Kitāb ی، 177.8–9).

As for the second part of the compound numerals, (–’ashara, –’ash(i)rata), Sībawayh says that its pattern (binā’) has changed because its situation (ḥāl) has changed, and that it is not rare in the language that a noun changes its binā’ when its ḥāl changes. What is at stake here is that this second part of the compound does not have the same status (bi-manzilah) as a substantive (ism) anymore, as was the case when it meant “ten”, but to the compensatory nūn in ithn–ā–ni. To make his point understood, Sībawayh quotes here other examples where a change of situation (ḥāl), from an ism to an ʾidalāfah (understand: nisbah), goes along with a change of pattern (binā’), from fuʾul to faʾaliyy as in ʾufiq and ʾafaqiyy, and from faʾilha to faʾaliyy as in Zābinah and Zabāniyy (Kitāb ی، 177.11–13).

3.5. “Thirteen” to “nineteen”

Sībawayh explains then that the analysis for the compound numerals “eleven” and “twelve” (frame 2g) is also true of all compound numerals,
from “thirteen” to “nineteen”, both in the masculine and the feminine (Kitāb II, 177.13–18). He also notes here that all numerals from “three” to “nineteen” have different forms in the masculine and the feminine (Kitāb II, 177.18–19).

3.6. Sibawayh’s own interpretation

What is very striking here is that Sībawayh has chosen not to follow al-Khalīl, whose analysis of compound numerals was quoted in the previous chapters. In chapter 314, it was clear that for Sībawayh all compound numerals are “one-word” compounds, and not of the “muḍāf and muḍāf ʾilayh”-type (see finding 314c) but a disagreement could be felt between al-Khalīl and Sībawayh, as to the syntactic status of the second part of the compound numerals, (see finding 336a and al-Khalīl’s different interpretations for –ʾashara in the proper names Ithnā-ʾashara and Khamsata-ʾashara). Not only Sībawayh was evasive on this issue, but he even quoted al-Khalīl without discussing him in chapter 336. Here in chapter 412, Sībawayh is very clear on this point: the second part in all compound numerals is similar to the compensatory nūn in muslimūna (frame 2g), not of the tāʾ marbūṭah in Ṭalḥah (frame 2a) (Kitāb II, 177.13–18).

The difference between Sībawayh and al-Khalīl’s interpretation of the lexical category of the second part of the compound numerals lies in that al-Khalīl interprets –ʾashara and –ʾash(i)rata in the tāʾ marbūṭah-like frame for all compound numerals except ithnā-ʾashara and ithnātāʾ-ash(i)rata, which he interprets in the compensatory nūn-like frame; whereas Sībawayh interprets all compound numerals in the compensatory nūn-like frame.

In other words, there is no separate frame 2b. For Sībawayh, all compound numerals — and a small number of other compounds — behave according to frame 2g. As for the compound numerals used as proper names, we only have al-Khalīl’s interpretation, in chapter 336.

3.7. Findings in chapter 412

The conclusions that we can draw from this chapter concerning the grammar of numerals are the following:

(412a) From “eleven” to “nineteen”, numerals are compound nouns of the shape “n-teen”, “n” representing the numeral from “one” to “nine”. These compound nouns are to be considered as “one noun” (humā ḥarfānī juʿilā sman wāḥidan; Kitāb II, 176.21; 177.2).

(412b) The first part of the compound is a substantive. Its situation (ḥāl) and pattern (bināʾ) are the same whether this numeral is isolated (from “one”
to “nine”) or if it is the first term of the “–teen” compound (from “one–teen” to “nine–teen”) (Kitāb II, 177.13–18).

(412c) The second part of the compound has a different pattern (binā) than the isolated numeral “ten”, both before a masculine and a feminine, supposedly indicating a change of situation (ḥāl) if compared with its isolated form (Kitāb II, 177.11–13).

(412d) For “twelve”, the compensatory nūn of ithnānī “two” is dropped before “–teen”, exactly as for an annexion. Sibawayh explains this by saying that the second term of the compound has the same status (bi-manzilah) as this compensatory nūn (Kitāb II, 177.3–6).

(412e) The analysis for “twelve” is valid for the other compounds “eleven” to “nineteen” (Kitāb II, 177.13–18), both masculine and feminine. The compound makes up one single substantive, where the first part of the compound is the substantive itself, and the second part of the compound is similar to the compensatory nūn in ithn–ā–nī (frame 2g), i.e. not a full right substantive anymore.

(412f) “Twelve” is the only compound numeral to be modified by declension: ithnā–ʻashara (feminine ithnātā–ʻash(i)rata or thintā–ʻash(i)rata) in the independent case and ithnay–ʻashara (feminine ithnayat–ʻash(i)rata or thintay–ʻash(i)rata) in the dependent and oblique cases (Kitāb II, 177.4, 7–8), all other compound numerals bearing an invariable fatḥah on both parts (Kitāb II, chapter 413: 178.7).

3.8. Open issues in chapter 412

In chapter 314 (see finding 314f) Sibawayh disliked the common usage, among the Arabs, to add the definite article to compound numerals, as in (al-khamsata–ʻashara). Why should this be a problem, when one considers with him, in this chapter 412, that the second part of the compound numerals is syntactically similar to the compensatory nūn in muslimānā and ithnānī? There is no difficulty to add the article al- to nouns carrying this compensatory nūn, as in al-muslimāna and al-muslimānī. It is only if the word is defined by the genitive annexation that this nūn falls down as in: muslimū al-madīnati and muslimā al-madīnati. Why should there be a problem to accept expressions like al-khamsata–ʻashar–a and al-khāmisa–ʻashar–a, interpreted like al-muslimū–n–a? The answer to this issue lies in the fact that a similarity between two terms is not a strict equivalence and two similar phenomena do not agree in everything. For example, the compensatory nūn and –ʻashara are comparable but not strictly equivalent. In other words, there is an analogy between them, not an equivalence14.

14. See BAALBAKI, The legacy of the Kitāb, pp. 47–56, for an in-depth account of the different meanings of qiyās “analogy” in the Kitāb, from a mere awareness of a similarity
IV. The art of reading the Kitāb

It is not easy to read Sībawayh’s Kitāb because it is quite different from what we would call a “grammar book”. Behind these issues, there is always a real danger to insert one’s own logic and consistency into the text, and indeed the major risk is to systematize Sībawayh’s thought and to fill the gaps in his presentation. As consistently pointed out and demonstrated by Baalbaki, Sībawayh’s Kitāb is a remarkably coherent opus. However, its coherence is not immediately obvious to the modern reader and this limited study would like to illustrate this fact.

4.1. The status of the text

As for the status of the text itself, it is clear in more than one case that it presents a discussion rather than results. Sībawayh does not always agree with every grammarian he quotes in his Kitāb, and sometimes it is only because a different view is expressed later in the text, with no grammarian quoted, that one understands that here only he expresses his own view. Typically, the expression Iʿlam ʿanna… (“Know that…”) at the beginning of a sentence is the sign that Sībawayh expresses his own view. At least in some chapters, the Kitāb seems to be more a textbook of grammatical argumentation than a textbook of grammar itself.

The case of “twelve” and the interpretation of the second part of the compound numerals is emblematic of this dialectical grammar: In chapter 314, Sībawayh quotes al-Khalīl’s interpretation of ithnā–ʿashara and does not take position himself (findings 314e & g). Later, in chapter 336, Sībawayh quotes again al-Khalīl’s interpretation and still does not express his own position (finding 336a). Only in chapter 412 does he contradict al-Khalīl’s views on the status of –ʿashara in the compound numerals (finding 412e) and states his own interpretation, using the Iʿlam ʿanna… expression and quoting no other grammarian. Can we really think that chapter 412 has the same status as chapters 314 and 336, to mention only these? And how to read other chapters of the Kitāb, if one cannot assume that what is written is Sībawayh’s final position? After reading the three chapters presented here, one can only remember to pay a very acute attention at the authorities quoted and to the expression Iʿlam ʿanna… as a textual marker of Sībawayh’s own position.


4.2. The logic at stake

Si'bawayh’s logic may be puzzling because he tries to do two opposite things at the same time: On the one hand, he proceeds through successive analogies, where “something” of the initial “grammatical strength” is lost in the process; whereas on the other hand he aims at a global consistency of grammatical phenomena. These two logics are incompatible because an analogy is not an equivalence, and since something is lost in the analogy, the resulting grammatical rule does not apply fully to the compared phenomenon and it loses part of its consistency: All the rules that apply to the first element in the analogy do not apply to the second element, and what is lost in the process is not always obvious.

A simple example of this is given in the problem of the addition of the article to the compound numerals: Si'bawayh draws an analogy between compound numerals and duals, assimilating syntactically –'ashara in ithnā–'ashara to the compensatory nūn in ithnāni (finding 412d). This solution accounts for the declension of ithnā– in the middle of the compound. But when it comes to the addition of the definite article al-, it does not work any more: It is correct to say al-ithnāni but Si'bawayh disapproves of the expression al-ithnā–'ashara (finding 314f). What was gained through analogy is lost in terms of consistency. In other words, –'ashara is comparable to the compensatory nūn, but also differs from it in some aspects.

A more technical example lies in the question of the invariability of both parts of all compound numerals, except “twelve”. Normally, the addition of the compensatory nūn does not prevent the noun from receiving the declension, which is added before the nūn. Analogically, this works perfectly with “twelve”, interpreted in the compensatory nūn–like frame: Compare ithn–ā–'ashara with ithn–ā–ni (independent case) and ithn–ay–'ashara with ithn–ay–ni (dependant and oblique cases). But regarding the other compound numerals, this analogy does not work any more because the first part of the compound is always mabniyy on a fathah as in “fifteen”, khamsat–a–'ashara in all three cases (Kitāb 11, chapter 413: 178.7). Here, consistency is lost, and al-Khalīl has a point when he “pretends” that “twelve” does not behave like the other compound numerals (see finding 314e). However, Si'bawayh does his best to interpret all compound numerals in one same compensatory nūn-like analogical frame (see finding 412e), instead of following al-Khalīl who chooses two different frames, namely the tā’ marbūtah-like frame and the compensatory nūn-like frame (see finding 336a). The first solution accounts for the invariable fathah that precedes –'ashara and the second solution accounts for the inner declension. In the end, both solutions are interesting, but none is completely consistent because none can be applied satisfactorily to all compound numerals alike.
To sum the whole process up, –‘ashara is “like” nūn al-ithnayni wa-l-jamī’ (aka, the compensatory nūn) but not everything that applies to nūn al-ithnayni wa-l-jamī’ applies to –‘ashara, and nūn al-ithnayni wa-l-jamī’ itself is “like” the tanwīn, but not everything that applies to the tanwīn applies to nūn al-ithnayni wa-l-jamī’, and what is lost at each step can only be deduced by the reader. In these analogies, Sibawayh presents his own interpretation along with other grammarians’ interpretations, so that sometimes the modern reader has the impression that there are inconsistencies and contradictions in his presentation.

It is only by an acute attention to both the authorities quoted and to the successive analogies that the modern reader can avoid misunderstandings and over interpretations of the text of the Kitāb.

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