

DIPTOTES BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE: A GRAMMATICAL STUDY

AN IN-DEPTH STUDY OF CAUSES, TYPES, AND USAGES

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Abstract: This article examines one of the most important and challenging topics in Arabic grammar for students: diptotes, that is, nouns that do not take tanwīn and decline in only two cases. The article explains the nature, categories, and grammatical causes behind this restriction, and illustrates them with examples taken from linguistic usage. The study relies on prominent grammatical sources and employs a descriptive-analytical methodology. The findings indicate that correctly understanding the characteristics of diptotes helps determine the appropriate case endings and prevents many common errors among learners.

Keywords: grammar, morphology, i'rāb, tanwīn, nominative, genitive, accusative, foreign nouns, adjective, exception, cause ('illah), plural, pattern.

The chapter of diptotes is considered one of the important chapters in Arabic grammar. As Dr. Iḥsān al-Naṣṣ stated: “The study of diptotes is among the grammatical topics that speakers and writers find great difficulty in understanding, grasping its rules, and knowing its causes,”¹ because it includes precise rules that every learner of the Arabic language needs. Many students make mistakes in this chapter due to the multiplicity of its causes and the diversity of its types, as well as the presence of exceptional cases that deviate from the general rule. The importance of this topic is evident in its frequent occurrence in the Holy Qur'an, the Prophetic traditions, and Arabic poetry. Therefore, knowledge of it helps learners achieve correct grammatical inflection and an accurate understanding of texts. This research aims to explain the concept of diptotes in a clear manner, clarify their types and causes, and present applied examples that help students consolidate the rule and use it correctly.

Definition and Characteristics: Diptotes are defined as inflected nouns that do not accept tanwīn and whose genitive case is marked by a fathāh instead of a kasrah. They are not marked with kasrah nor do they accept tanwīn except in cases of necessity or in certain specific situations that will be explained later. The concept of diptotes is also connected to understanding the meaning of ṣarf, which grammarians-linguists have defined as “turning something away from its original form,” while according to al-Khalīl, ṣarf is defined as tanwīn. There are two opinions regarding the term diptotes. The first opinion defines it as a noun that does not accept tanwīn, while the second defines it as a noun that accepts neither tanwīn nor kasrah. The first opinion appears in the verses of ألفتة ابن مالك:

الصرف تنوينٌ أتى مُبيناً،
”مَعْنَى بِهِ يَكُونُ الْأَسْمُ أَمْكِنَا”²

¹ مجلة مجمع اللغة العربية بدمشق - المجلد (٨٠) الجزء (٣) رأي في تيسير مبحث الممنوع من الصرف د. إحسان النص ٧٣١ ص

² متن ألفتة ابن مالك ٦٤٩ بيت ٦٧٢ هجري دار عمار ٢

Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Ṣāliḥ al-‘Uthaymīn explained this verse in شرح الألفية, stating: “Ṣarf, according to grammarians, is tanwīn. Tanwīn does not occur with verbs or particles; rather, it is one of the markers of nouns.”³

He further clarifies that tanwīn indicates the strength and firmness of the noun, stating: “Tanwīn indicates complete nounhood; therefore, a noun that does not decline is deficient in firmness.”⁴ Based on this principle, he explains the reality of diptotes, stating: “When a noun is prevented from tanwīn due to one cause or two causes, it is said to be a diptote, meaning it is prevented from this marker and thus becomes weak in firmness.”

From the words of Shaykh Ibn al-‘Uthaymīn, may Allah have mercy on him, in شرح ألفية ابن مالك, it is understood that tanwīn is the foundation of the chapter of diptotes. When a noun is prevented from tanwīn, it is not a fully realized noun; rather, it is weak in firmness, and for this reason it is marked with fatḥah instead of kasrah. This is the reason cited by grammarians when explaining diptotes. Among the characteristics of diptotes are:

- 1) Non-acceptance of tanwīn, as it is prevented from tanwīn, which indicates the completeness of nounhood and firmness within nominal status. Example: رأيتُ أحمدَ – أحمدُ – مررتُ بأحمدَ (It is not said: أحمدُ).
- 2) Being marked with fatḥah instead of kasrah in the genitive case. Example: مررتُ بمساجدَ جميلةٍ
- 3) Returning to kasrah when annexed or when preceded by (ال). Example with (ال): ذهبْتُ إلى (ال) مررتُ بمساجدِ المدينة الجديدة Example with annexation: مررتُ بمساجدِ المدينة الجديدة
- 4) Some diptotes are based on transmitted usage (samā’ī), while others are analogical (qiyāsī). Some of their types have been transmitted from Arabic usage by hearing rather than analogy, while others follow fixed grammatical rules. Samā’ī examples: عُمر، زُحل، أفضل، أحمر، مساجد Qiyāsī examples: قُرَح

(Analogy is a grammatical principle in Arabic whereby one word is measured against another according to an established Arabic pattern, whereas samā’ī forms are those reported from Arabic usage, whether in speech, poetry, or ḥadīth, even if they are few and lack an analogical basis), and other characteristics...

Types of Diptotes: Nouns that are prevented from declension are divided into two main categories: the first is prevented from declension due to one cause, the second is prevented from declension due to two causes (the cause meaning the grammatical reason).

First: Diptotes Due to One Cause: Nouns ending with the shortened feminine alif. Example: ذكرى Nouns ending with the extended feminine alif (on the condition that the alif and the hamzah are additional to the original root of the word; this is recognized when they occur after three letters or more). Example: أسماء، أصدقاء، صحراء، حمراء، سوداء Nouns occurring in the plural of ultimate forms (all broken plurals whose first letter and third letter are vowelled with fatḥah, whose third letter is an alif, and which are followed by two letters; that is, those occurring on the patterns mafā’il, mafā’il, fawā’il, or fawā’il). Example: مفاتيح، كتاتيب، قوافل، دنائير، مصابيح

5. وَكُنْ لِجَمْعٍ مُشَبِّهٍ مُشَبِّهٌ (مَفَاعِلًا) — أَوْ (الْمَفَاعِيلِ) يَمْنَعُ كَافِلًا

Second: Diptotes Due to Two Causes: The first type is the proper noun (properness), which is prevented from declension in seven cases; the second type is the adjective

³ متن ألفية ابن مالك ٦٤٩ بيت ٦٧٢ هجري دار عمار

⁴ شرح الألفية لابن مالك تحقيق - محمد بن صالح العثيمين، ص 66

⁵ شرح الألفية لابن مالك تحقيق - محمد بن صالح العثيمين، الطبعة السادسة ٢٠١٩ م - ١٤٤٠ هـ جمهورية مصر العربية - القاهرة 66 ص

(descriptiveness), which is prevented from declension in three cases.

What pertains to proper nouns (properness) is as follows: Properness and femininity, whether feminine in both form and meaning, such as:

It is said: "... عن عائشة رضي الله عنها" (the noun is marked with kasrah instead of fathah because it is a diptote, and the preventing cause is properness and femininity), or feminine in form but not in meaning, such as:

طلحة، حمزة، معاوية، عنترة.

Properness and foreign origin ('ujmah) (on the condition that the word consists of more than three letters), such as:

إبراهيم، إسماعيل، إسحاق، فرعون، قارون.

All the names of the prophets are diptotes due to properness and foreign origin, except seven, which are declinable:

محمد، صالح، شعيب، هود، لوط، نوح، شيث.

Likewise, the names of the angels are diptotes, except:

Properness and deviation ('adl) (from the pattern أُخْر), such as:

عُمر، قُرْح. Umar is deviated from 'Āmir.

وَالْعَلَمُ أَمْنَعُ صَرْفُهُ إِنْ عُدِلًا⁶

كَ (فَعَل) التَّوَكُّيدِ أَوْ كَ (تُعَلَّ)

Properness and the addition of alif and nūn, such as:

(whether the proper noun refers to a person or to something else). The criterion for determining that the alif and nūn are additional is that they are preceded by three letters or more.

كَذَاكَ حَاوِي زَائِدِي (فَعَلَانَا)⁷

كَ (عَطْفَان) وَكَ (أَصْبَهَانَا)

Properness and verb pattern, such as:

أحمد، يزيد.

One does not say: مررتُ بيزيدٍ, but rather: مررتُ بيزيدَ, because it is a diptote due to properness and verb pattern.

كَذَاكَ ذُو وَزْنٍ يَخْصُ الْفَعْلَا⁸

أَوْ غَالِبِ كَ (أَحْمَدِ) وَ (يَعْلَى)

Properness and blended composition (that is, two words that are blended until they become a single word), such as: بوسعيد، حضرموت.

الْعَلَمُ أَمْنَعُ صَرْفُهُ مُرَكَّبًا تَرْكِيْبَ مَرْجِ نَحْو: (مَعْدِيْكِرِيَا)⁹

Note: An exception to the rule of blended composition is the proper noun ending with *ويه*, such as: سيبويه. It remains in one fixed form, namely being built on kasrah, and when tanwīn is added, it indicates indefiniteness rather than definiteness, as in: مررتُ بسيبويه وسيبويه.

What pertains to descriptiveness is as follows: Descriptiveness and the addition of alif and nūn, such as: غضبان، جوعان، كسلان، حيران.

¹⁰ وَزَائِدَا (فَعَلَان) فِي وَصْفِ سَلْمٍ مِنْ أَنْ يُرَى بِنَاءِ تَأْنِيْثٍ خُتْمِ

⁶ متن ألفية ابن مالك ٦٥٨ بيت ٦٧٢ هجري دار عمار

⁷ نفس الكتاب 670 بيت

⁸ متن ألفية ابن مالك باب ما لا ينصرف ٦٥٨ بيت ٦٦٨ هجري دار عمار

⁹ نفس الكتاب 662 بيت

¹⁰ نفس الكتاب 651 بيت

Descriptiveness and deviation, such as: أَمْرٌ، ثَلَاثٌ، رُبَاعٌ، أَخْرٌ. One says: سافرت المعلمات ونساءً، which eliminates repetition; instead of saying جاء الطلاب اثنين اثنين، one says جاء الطلاب مثني. ¹¹ مَنَعٌ عَدَلٌ مَعَ وَصْفٍ مُعْتَبَرٍ فِي لَفْظٍ (مَثْنِي، وَثَلَاثٌ، وَأَخْرٌ).

Descriptiveness and verb pattern, on the condition that it is not feminized with tā' marbūṭah; if it is feminized, it becomes declinable, such as: (أرمل / أرملة).
Examples: colors (أزرق، أصفر، أحمر)، comparison (أكثر، أفضل، أجمل)، physical defects (أعرج، أعمش، أيرص).
¹² وَوَصَفْتُ أَصْلِي وَوَزُنْتُ (أَفْعَلًا) مَمْنُوعٌ تَأْنِيثٌ بِنَاءٍ (أَشْهَلًا).

Examples of diptotes can be observed as follows:

First: Evidence from the Mu'allaqāt, from the Mu'allaqah of Imru' al-Qays:

¹³ قِفَا نَبْكَ مِنْ ذِكْرِي حَبِيبٍ وَمَنْزِلٌ — the evidence word is ذِكْرِي، and the reason for non-declension is that it is a noun ending with the shortened feminine alif.

Second: Evidence from the poetry of Ka'b ibn Zuhayr:

¹⁴ باننت سعاد فقلبي اليوم مقبول — the evidence word is سعاد، and the reason for non-declension is that it is a feminine proper noun.

Third: Evidence from the poetry of Abū al-'Iyāl:

¹⁵ أبلغ معاوية بن سخر آية يهوي إليه بها البريد الأجل — the evidence word is معاوية، and the reason for non-declension is that it is a proper noun feminine in form.

Fourth: Evidence from the poetry of Ḥassān ibn Thābit in praise of the Prophet ﷺ:

¹⁶ وأحسن منك لم تر قط عيني وأجمل منك لم تلد النساء — the evidence words are أجمل / أحسن، and the reason for non-declension is that they are descriptive adjectives on the af'al pattern.

In conclusion, the chapter of diptotes is not a dry issue as some learners may assume; rather, it is a living grammatical rule that appears in the Qur'an, ḥadīth, poetry, and prose, making it an integral part of everyday linguistic usage. Many of the words we hear every day are in fact diptotes, passing before our eyes without notice. These familiar words carry a subtle grammatical feature that causes a slight difference in inflection. The beauty of this chapter lies in its practical nature: once a student understands it, they begin to recognize it everywhere and experience the precision and elegance of the language.

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¹¹ نفس الكتاب 656 بيت

¹² نفس الكتاب 652 بيت

¹³ الديوان «العصر الجاهلي» امرؤ القيس «قفا نبك من ذكري حبيب ومنزل»

¹⁴ ال أبو العيال: أبلغ معاوية بن سخر آية يهوي إليه بها البريد الأجل

¹⁵ د. عبد العزيز علي سفر، الممنوع من الصرف في اللغة العربية، صفحة 147

¹⁶ الديوان «المخضرمون» حسان ابن ثابت «وأحسن منك لم تر قط عيني»

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