# Structural Modifications in Predicative Constructions in Arabic Sentences: Advancement and Delay through Girgani Systems Theory

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## Abstract

*Arabic sentence construction is intrinsically built upon two pivotal elements: the predicate and the subject. These elements manifest as the nominal subject and predicate in nominal sentences, and as the verb alongside the actor or its equivalent in verbal sentences. Typically, a predefined sequence governs these components; however, this sequence can be modified for enhanced rhetorical effect. Such modifications, detailed by Abdul Qahir al-Jurjani, involve various adjustments like advancements and delays. These are not merely stylistic choices but are carefully implemented to preserve clarity and structural integrity, avoiding the need for rote memorization of sentence structure. By deviating from the conventional order, speakers can unveil deeper semantic layers and achieve specific lexical effects. This paper will explore these rhetorical strategies through a contemporary linguistic lens.*

## Introduction

It is a foundational aspect of Arabic linguistics that a sentence is composed of two core elements: the predicate and the subject. In nominal sentences, these are represented by the nominal subject and predicate, and in verbal sentences by the actor (or its substitute) and the verb. Each component plays a critical role in the sentence's structure. However, the standard order of these elements can be altered, through what are known as modifications, including advancements, delays, omissions, and interpolations, provided that such changes do not introduce ambiguity or compromise the sentence's clarity and coherence.

These grammatical modifications are employed to reveal underlying semantic nuances that the standard syntactic arrangement might obscure and to achieve specific lexical effects that enhance the communicative purpose of the sentence.

This paper delves into whether the structure of Arabic sentences adheres to a rigid system or whether it exhibits flexibility, allowing for such deviations to fulfill semantic and communicative goals. Further, it examines the reasons behind the selection of specific words over their synonyms, and the implications of their placement within the sentence structure, whether advanced or delayed. This exploration is anchored in the broader linguistic system that prioritizes meaning and the strategic positioning of sentence components to either foreground or background certain elements

*Advancement and Delay:*

Contemporary scholars have intricately defined the rhetorical styles of advancement and delay. One scholar describes it as "Advancing a part of the speech by virtue of eloquence, which by general rule should be delayed according to the basic grammar rules[2]," while another characterizes it as "A change to the basic

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[2] Izz al-Din Ali al-Sayyid, Prophetic Narration from the Rhetorical Perspective, Muhammadia Printing House in Azharia, at Dar al-Kutub, 1973, p. 134.

structure or a deviation from the norm that endows the sentence with a degree of freedom and elegance, albeit this freedom is not without limits."[3]

These definitions crucially illuminate the essence of these styles: a sentence, whether nominal or verbal, adheres to a certain structured format. Advancement and delay represent a modification of this structure, a deviation by relocating a word from its conventional placement, thereby granting it a type of conditional freedom to occupy positions not originally assigned to it.

This freedom is carefully regulated to prevent confusion and to avoid introducing unacceptable errors. Linguistic norms and rules articulate this stylistic maneuver as: "Shifting a term from its original position to a preceding position to achieve a rhetorical effect intended by the speaker."

Advancement and delay are integral to the Arabic language, providing speakers and writers with the flexibility to reposition elements within a sentence to enhance rhetorical impact or to meet specific communicative needs, always tightly linked to the underlying meaning. This strategic repositioning is not arbitrary but purposeful, and it stands as a cornerstone in the study of meanings within Arabic rhetoric. This study involves the meticulous construction of sentences, the crafting of phrases, and the coordination of expressions to uncover rhetorical depths and aesthetic nuances.

In the realm of rhetoric and elocution, it is recognized that the meaning and impact of a sentence transcend the simple aggregation of its words' meanings; rather, they emerge from the deliberate arrangement and composition of these words according to linguistic rules and the audience's expectations.

The structure of the sentence, its formulation, and the strategic placement of its components are pivotal, as meaning is derived exclusively from this orchestration of words and phrases. Each linguistic construction adheres to its own system and order, with each term's placement meticulously considered.

Ensuring that each word occupies its precise position within the sentence and maintaining the overall coherence of the discourse are paramount for achieving eloquence and expressiveness. The misplacement of words, whether by advancement or delay, can significantly alter the intended meaning or diminish their aesthetic appeal and charm.

This is because the movement of a word from one position to another inherently modifies its meaning. Such changes are never made haphazardly but are grounded in well-established rhetorical principles and objectives, dictated by the speaker's intent to emphasize certain elements while downplaying others.

The Qur'anic system is distinguished by its precision in choosing words and their placement. If a word is placed before another, it serves a linguistic and rhetorical purpose that enhances the overall context.

From this perspective, and following Imam Abdul Qaher al-Jurjani's focus on grammatical meaning, he elaborated extensively on the concepts of advancement and delay. He begins his discussion by stating, "This topic is abundant with benefits, full of beauties, allows wide manipulation, and reaches far-reaching goals. It continually reveals novel beauties, leading to subtleties. You continually find poetry that pleases your ear and delights in its placement. Then you look and find the reason it pleased and delighted you was because something was advanced, and a term was moved from one place to another." [4]

If we carefully examine the parts of a sentence, particularly the part that is advanced over the others, we find it to be the most important part. It is advanced because it is the most significant and the focus of the speaker's attention and concern. Attention and concern are the foundation of all advancements, and the

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[3] Matloub Ahmad, Rhetorical Research, Dar al-Fikr for Publishing and Distribution, First Edition, 1987, p. 41.

[4] Dalail al-Ijaz by al-Jurjani, p. 94.

prioritization of some words over others, considering the conditions at that moment, are all for rhetorical reasons and semantic purposes intended by the speaker.

However, our contemplation must extend further to understand the reason for this prioritization and to identify the motives behind the attention. Jurjani cautioned against merely attributing advancements to care and attention without exploring the reasons behind them. He says, "It has occurred to people's minds that it is sufficient to say: It was advanced due to care, and because its mention was more important, without stating where that care came from, and why it was more important.

Because of their assumption, they have belittled the matter of advancement and delay in their minds, and they have trivialized the issue, so much so that you see most of them consider following it and examining it as an imposition. And you have not seen a belief more detrimental to its holder than this and similar ones."[5]

He also criticizes grammarians who find nothing in the issue of advancement and delay other than care and attention, and who divide speech into useful and not useful categories. He says, "Know that it is a mistake to divide the matter of advancing something and delaying it into two parts, making it useful in some speech and not useful in others, and sometimes attributing it to care and other times to giving leeway to the poet and the writer to extend his rhymes, and for that his rhythm.

It is far-fetched that there should be in the sentence's structure something that indicates at one time and not at another. So, whenever it is established in advancing the object, for example, over the verb in much of the speech, that it is distinguished by a benefit that is not with the delay, it must be that this is the case in everything and all situations. And the way of those who make advancing and not advancing the same, to claim that it is thus in all situations, but rather to make it intermediate and claim that it is for the benefit in some of it, and for manipulation in the expression without meaning in some, it is something that one should be discouraged from saying."[6]

Al-Jurjani articulates two distinct approaches or styles to the rhetorical concepts of advancement and delay in Arabic sentence structure:

*The First Approach: Advancement with the Intent of Delaying*

This approach involves advancing a part of the sentence while maintaining its grammatical role as if it were in its original position. Here, the advancement does not extract the element from its grammatical category nor does it transform its foundational role.

For example, advancing the adverbial news before the subject as in "In the house, a man resides," or advancing the object before the subject alone, as demonstrated in two scenarios:

A.      **Advancing the Predicate over the Subject**: For instance, in the phrase "Departing is Zaid," where "Departing" remains a nominative predicate even though it is advanced.[7]

B.      **Advancing the Object over the Subject**: An example can be seen in "Zaid was struck by Abdullah." Although it is not the original structure, the advancement and delay are based on the degree of emphasis and attention. For instance, "The prince was given by Zaid," where "the prince," although an object, is advanced because the focus on the prince is more pronounced. Conversely, if one were to say, "Zaid gave the prince," it would be aesthetically pleasing. However, stating "The prince gave Zaid" with the object advanced undeservedly and the subject delayed when it should have been advanced, would not

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[5] Ibid., p. 95.

[6] Ibid., p. 97.

[7] See: Ibid., p. 94.

be appropriate because the object is advanced without a compelling concern that justifies such an arrangement[8].

*The Second Approach: Advancement without the Intent of Delaying*

This style applies when two nouns could each potentially be the subject or the predicate.[9] The arrangement can vary: at times one is advanced over the other, and at other times the positions are reversed, thereby altering their grammatical roles and inflections. Here are examples to illustrate this approach:

A. **Equality of Subject and Predicate in Definition**: In cases like "Khaled the scholar" or "The scholar is Khaled," where either "Khaled" or "the scholar" could be the subject, depending on their position. The advancement of "Khaled" in the first example makes him the subject, whereas delaying him in the second example changes his grammatical role to that of the predicate.

B. **Advancement in the Context of Engagement**: In phrases such as "I struck Zaid" and "Zaid, I struck him," the advancement of "Zaid" changes its grammatical case from object in the first sentence to subject in the second, where the verb engages with the pronoun of Zaid and the verbal sentence serves as the predicate of the subject.

Abdul Qahir al-Jurjani elucidated several types of distinctions in the use of advancement and delay, highlighting the significance of each in the construction of sentences, formulation of phrases, and coordination of expressions.[10]

This involves a thorough examination of structures to expose the rhetorical subtleties and aesthetic qualities inherent in them.

*Questioning Using the Interrogation Particle (Hamza):*

The linguistic structure necessitates that the speaker be aware of the implications of constructions and realize what the formulation and context demand in terms of arranging the parts of speech according to the required meaning. Al-Jurjani observes that if you say, "Is it Zaid you strike?" it implies in your speech a denial that Zaid is likely to be struck or would dare to be. He addresses the issue of questioning with the hamza from the perspective that questioning with a past verb aims to affirm or deny the action's occurrence, and questioning a noun confirms whether it acted or not.

He asserts that there is an inherent rule and a robust methodology that governs the linguistic process through the concepts of advancement and delay, fitting the structure of speech. He states, "It is not permissible for the structure of speech and the arrangement of its parts in questioning to imply a meaning that does not exist in the statement because questioning is seeking information, and seeking information is a request to the interlocutor to inform you.

Therefore, it is impossible for the situation to differ between advancing and delaying the noun in questioning, so that the meaning if you say, 'Did Zaid stand?' differs from if you say, 'Did stand Zaid?' Then, this distinction does not exist in the statement, and your saying, 'Zaid stood' and 'Stood Zaid' are

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[8] See: Al-Muqtasid in Explaining Al-Iidah by al-Jurjani: 1/285, and see: Dalail al-Ijaz by al-Jurjani, p. 95.

[9] Dalail al-Ijaz by al-Jurjani, p. 94.

[10] See: Ibid., p. 94.

equivalent; this is because it leads to using it in a manner that does not allow for an answer, and you ascertain the meaning in a way that there is no phrase to confirm it for you in that manner."[11]

This implies that the meaning of introducing the interrogation particle into a sentence is to request information regarding the meaning of that sentence, aiming to confirm or deny it. For instance, if you say, "Is Zaid departing?" you are asking to be told, "Yes, he is departing," or "No, he is not departing." Given this, it is impossible for the sentence to serve as an inquiry about the meaning in one way and not as a statement about it in the same manner when the interrogation particle is removed. [12]

Thus, al-Jurjani aims to unify the meanings and significance of advancement in both statements and inquiries. In his view, questioning is a request for information, and he believes that the meaning of an interrogative sentence varies depending on whether the verb is past or present. Each interrogative sentence carries significance and meaning that changes according to the verb used.

In terms of questioning patterns with verbs as he sees it:

*The Present Verb:*

Al-Jurjani posits that advancing the present verb depends on two factors: the current or future context. If the verb's meaning is currently occurring, you might say, "Do you do?" or "Are you doing?" similar to the construction with the past verb. The questioning here is to affirm the verb in the question "Do you do?" and for the actor in "Are you the one doing?" to confirm or deny the actor.[13]

This emphasizes that "this requires that the verb be actually present because advancing the noun necessitates a resemblance to what was implied in the past, where it is affirmed whether it is an actor assigned to the verb or not."[14]

An example of affirming the actor is telling a man who desires and oppresses, "Do you come to the weak and usurp his property?" An example of denying the actor is found in the verse, "*Do they divide the mercy of your Lord? We have apportioned their livelihood in the life of this world, and we have raised some of them above others in degrees that they might take some others in mockery. And the mercy of your Lord is better than what they amass*" (Al-Zukhruf 43:31-32).

Regarding the future intent of the present verb: the questioning becomes denial in two forms: The first form involves denying the action itself. Al-Jurjani states, "When you start with the verb, you aim to deny the action itself, asserting that it cannot occur or should not occur.[15]" An example of denying the action and claiming it cannot occur is in the words of Imru' al-Qais:

*"Would he kill me while the distinguished lie beside me,*

*and blue swords sharp as the fangs of serpents?"*

Here, the poet denies someone threatening to kill him, questioning their ability to do so. Another example is, *"Would he approve of you while you persist in what he dislikes?"* and the verse: "*O my people, have you considered: if I*

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[11] Op. cit., pp. 115-116.

[12] See: Ibid., p. 116.

[13] See: Ibid., p. 100.

[14] See: Ibid., p. 105.

[15] Ibid., p. 100.

*am on clear evidence from my Lord and He has granted me mercy from Himself, but it has been obscured to you, should we compel you to accept it while you detest it?" (Hud: 28)*

An example of what should not occur in denying the present action with the verb advanced is telling a man facing danger, "Do you go out at this time? Do you take a path not taken? Do you endanger yourself?[16]" and the saying of Amarah bin Aqeel:

*"Should I forsake visiting Khalid when his coins are scarce?*

*Indeed, then I would be despicable."*

"The matter is such that you direct the denial toward the action. If you start with the noun saying, 'Do you do it?' or 'Is he doing it?' you direct the denial toward the person mentioned and refuse to acknowledge that the action could come from them."[17]

The second form is advancing the actor and the present verb intended for the future, as in "Do you do it?" or "Is he doing it[18]?" Here, the denial is directed toward the person themselves, not the action, as if saying, "Others might prevent me or take action, but not you."

Similarly, Ibn Abi 'Ayyina said: "Leave your threats, for your threats do not harm me, I consider them as insignificant as the buzzing of fly wings." He likens his perception of threats to the inconsequential noise of flies, implying that the threats are ineffectual.[19]

*The Past Verb:*

Al-Jurjani remarks, "Starting with the verb is not like starting with the noun[20]." The past verb is advanced in a questioning format with hamza when there is doubt about the action itself and the need to ascertain whether it occurred.

 For instance, "Did you build the house you intended to build?" or "Did you say the poetry you had in mind?" or "Have you finished the book you were writing?" The verb is advanced because there is doubt about the actions of building, speaking, and completing, and ignorance about whether the action occurred or not.[21]

Advancing the noun in questioning with hamza over the past verb occurs when the doubt is about who the actor is, as you know the action has occurred but not who performed it. For example, "Did you build this house?" when you know the house was built but not by whom, or "Did you say this poetry?" or "Did you write this book?" when you know the poetry was spoken and the book was written.[22]

It is inappropriate to say, "Did you build the house you were supposed to build?" because the builder's identity is already established as "you." Hence, the question should not inquire about the action but rather whether it was completed. Similarly, it is improper to ask, "Did you say the poetry you had in mind?" or

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[16] Ibid., p. 101.

[17] Ibid., p. 101.

[18] See: Op. cit., p. 101.

[19] Ibid., p. 103.

[20] Ibid., p. 98.

[21] See: Ibid., p. 97.

[22] Op. cit., p. 97.

"Have you finished the book you were writing?" when you should not start with the noun if you already know it, but rather with the verb, as the doubt lies therein.[23]

Al-Jurjani also notes that it is inappropriate to ask about something observable right before your eyes, whether it exists or not. For example, "Did you build this house?" while pointing at the house, or, "Did you say this poetry?" following the questioning particle with the subject being inquired about, here being the actor, as the doubt concerns them.[24]

Al-Jurjani notes that it is correct to ask questions like, "Have you ever spoken poetry?" or "Did you see someone today?" However, it would not be appropriate to phrase these questions as, "Did you ever speak poetry?" or "Did you see someone?" because in such cases, inquiring about the actor is meaningless unless the action is specific.

For example, "Who said this poetry?" "Who built this house?" "Who came to you today?" "Who permitted you to do what you did?" These questions can specify an individual. General actions like speaking poetry or seeing someone do not warrant such specific inquiries about the actor unless the name is brought forward not necessarily to inquire about the actor, but about the occurrence of the action itself.[25]

Abdul Qahir uses numerous Quranic evidences to clarify this distinction in the positioning of the name and the past verb in a questioning context with hamza. One such instance is in the verse: *"They said, 'Did you do this to our gods, O Abraham?'"* (Al-Anbiya: 62). Abdul Qahir comments on this verse, explaining that the questioners intended to affirm that Abraham was the actor, not merely that the act (breaking the idols) occurred, as the act of breaking is visible and hence there is no need to confirm it.

If the intention had been merely to confirm the act, the response would be 'I did it' or 'I did not do it.'[26] Instead, Abraham's reply attributing the act to 'their biggest one' (as a rhetorical strategy) denies their attempt to attribute the action solely to him, demonstrating that the question was aimed at affirming the actor, not the act.

In cases where the denial particle is used, advancing the name leads to denial of the actor, while advancing the verb implies denial of the action itself. An example is in the verse: "*Did your Lord prefer you with sons and take from among the angels daughters? Indeed, you say a grave thing*" (Al-Isra 40). Another example is, *"Did He choose daughters over sons? How do you judge?"* (Al-Saffat: 154).

Abdul Qahir often enhances Quranic evidence with detailed scrutiny and analysis to clarify ambiguities and elucidate the primary purpose behind his discourse, saying, "This refutes the polytheists and denies their claims leading to this great ignorance. When the name is advanced in such contexts, the denial falls on the action."[27]

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[23] See: Ibid., p. 97.

[24] Ibid., p. 97.

[25] Ibid., p. 98.

[26] See: Ibid., pp. 98-99.

[27] Op. cit., p. 99.

*The Advancement of the Object,*

Regarding the advancement of the object, al-Jurjani believes that "it implies denial in the way of impossibility and prohibition, not that such an action would typically occur in that manner.[28]" For example, if you say, "Zaid, do you beat him?" and you advance the object over the verb, you are denying that Zaid is in a position to be beaten, or that it is presumable for him to be in such a position[29].

There is a semantic benefit to this construction that would not occur if the object were delayed; for example, the verse "*Say, is it other than Allah I should take as a protector, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, who feeds and is not fed? Say, I am commanded to be the first to submit, and not be of the polytheists*" (Al-An'am: 14).

The question in a different arrangement, "Should I take other than Allah as a protector?" carries a meaning of: Is anyone besides Allah in a position to be taken as a protector?[30]

In cases of negation, al-Jurjani sees it as related to the purposes and contexts specific to the recipient and the linguistic context. This appears in his applications on exclusivity, providing examples like, "No one hit Zaid except Amr" and "Amr hit no one but Zaid." In the first example, it clarifies the hitter, stating it was Amr and no one else; in the second, it clarifies the one hit, stating it was Zaid.

Based on this principle, Abdul Qahir explains the advancement of the term of Majesty (Allah's name) in the Quranic verse: "*Among the people, animals, and cattle are various colors. Just so, only those of His servants with knowledge fear Allah. Indeed, Allah is Almighty, Forgiving.*" (Faatir 28).

The advancement of Allah's name serves to clarify who among His servants fear Him, specifically the scholars, as opposed to what the meaning would have been had Allah's name been mentioned later and 'the scholars' advanced to say: "Only the scholars fear Allah." That would invert the meaning, shifting the focus to who is feared—Allah—rather than indicating that fear of Allah is particularly characteristic of the scholars.

This inversion would imply that it's not only scholars who fear Allah; others might also fear Him, but along with Him, they fear others, whereas scholars fear none but Allah.[31]

Regarding the advancement of the object and related constructs with the tool of negation, if one says, "I did not strike Zaid" and "What did I command you" and "Zaid did not come riding," it implies denial of the action concerning the advanced object and affirmation for others. If the negation governs the action, as in "I did not strike Zaid," "I did not command you this," "Zaid did not come riding," it signifies that the denial pertains to the action concerning the mentioned subject without disputing others.[32]

Abdul Qahir also refers to another form of negation, explaining, "You should know that it is correct to say, 'I did not strike Zaid but I honored him,' connecting the negated action with an affirmation of a contrary action. However, it is incorrect to say, 'I did not strike Zaid but I honored him,' if you intended to imply 'This action did not occur but that one did.' Instead, you should say, 'I did not strike Zaid but Amr did,' because the emphasis is on the specific object of the action."[33]

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[28] Ibid., p. 103.

[29] Ibid., p. 103.

[30] See: Ibid., p. 104.

[31] Ibid., p. 251.

[32] Basyouni Abdel Fattah, Rhetorical Studies, Sa'ada Printing Press, Cairo, Egypt, First Edition, 199, p. 75.

[33] Dalail al-Ijaz by al-Jurjani, p. 107.

In contexts involving advancement (such as with 'like' and 'other'), these must be advanced if they metaphorically refer to what they are attributed to, as in Abu al-Tayyib al-Mutanabbi's line:

*"Like you, who turn the rains from their course,*

*And retrieve tears from their places.[34]"*

The Khariji's statement to Hajjaj, "I will mount you on Adham," meaning the shackles, and, "A leader like the prince is carried on Adham and Ashhab," demonstrates the use of 'like' to refer only to what it is attributed to. In the first example, it signifies being capable of stemming sorrows and alleviating hardships, and in the second, it suggests upholding justice and sanctity.[35]

Abdul Qahir elaborates: "The usage of 'like' and 'other' in this manner is ingrained in nature, commonly practiced among all people. When you examine speech, these two nouns are always advanced before the verb in the manner I have described, and this meaning would not be coherent if they were not advanced.

Consider if you said, 'The rains turn from their course like you,' 'Upholds justice and sanctity like you,' 'Is carried on Adham and Ashhab like the prince,' 'More people are deceived by others than by me,' and 'Others eat what is known unjustly[36].' You would see that the speech is inverted from its natural order, altered from its form, the expression deviates from its meaning, and the natural disposition rejects it as unacceptable."

Despite what has been previously mentioned, Abdul Qahir al-Jurjani's study on the topic of advancement and delay is uniquely distinct from earlier studies. Notably, it encompasses twenty-eight pages in "Dalail al-Ijaz" and includes his critique of past scholars who recognized only care and attention in this regard.

The insights from this study emphasize that the advancement or delay of a part of speech in Arabic is not arbitrary; rather, it is a deliberate act necessitated by a rhetorical purpose, artistic motive, or psychological dimension.

## Conclusion

We can summarize the most important findings from our discussion in the following points:

‑ Advancement and delay are fundamental characteristics of the Arabic language, allowing the speaker or writer to strategically position elements of speech to achieve a closely connected rhetorical or communicative purpose. This is not done frivolously or without intended benefit and is considered one of the most crucial studies in the science of meanings within Arabic rhetoric.

‑ The structural arrangement of speech necessitates that the speaker is aware of the implications of constructions and realizes what the formulation and context demand in terms of arranging the parts of speech according to the intended meaning.

‑ The topic of advancement and delay is a significant area that Abdul Qahir explored thoroughly. He noticed that grammarians had only recognized the aspect of care in advancement, prompting him to

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[34] Al-Mutanabbi Abu al-Tayyib, Diwan Al-Mutanabbi, Commentary: Abdul Rahman al-Barqoun, Nizar Mustafa Al-Baz Library, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, First Edition, 2002, Vol. 1/265.

[35] Dalail al-Ijaz by al-Jurjani, p. 115.

[36] Ahmad Jamal al-Amri, Rhetorical Discussions in Light of the Issue of Qur'anic Inimitability: Its Origin and Evolution Until the Seventh Hijri Century, Al-Khanji Library, Cairo, 1990, p. 257.

clarify that the issue is more nuanced than previously perceived and to undertake a detailed study of its various patterns and styles.

Abdul Qahir al-Jurjani's study on the topic of advancement and delay stands out from previous studies and underscores that the manipulation of speech elements through advancement or delay is not random. Instead, it is a deliberate action driven by a rhetorical, artistic, or psychological purpose.

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