Forum

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Metapragmatic conventions and integrative context: Introducing Sībawayhian pragmatics

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to shed light on theories of discourse meaning from the Arabic, namely Sībawayhian, linguistics tradition, that are novel in the contemporary pragmatics space and prompts us to rethink and reshape the Anglo-American, namely Gricean and post-Gricean, lens through which current theories are predominantly defined. The Arabic linguistics tradition was founded by Sībawayhi more than ten centuries ago, yet it is severely underrepresented and underresearched in modern (Western) linguistics. Sībawayhi posited a discourse-oriented, pragmatics-centric, and intuition-driven model of language and communication, providing unique insights into how intentions and conventions figure in meaning representation. Despite his monumental contribution, Sībawayhian theory has hitherto been missing from the present-day field of pragmatics. Instead, pragmatics as a line of study is usually attributed to Grice and subsequent post-Gricean developments, where theory construction has been limited to intra-theoretical analyses and falls short of cross-cultural epistemological perspectives. Many of these analyses are as such reinventions of what can be found in Sībawayhian and post-Sībawayhian pragmatics. And there are many more components of Arabic pragmatic thought that remain to be (re)discovered, with the potential to further current thinking in pragmatics and open a new orientation of contemporary pragmatic study. In this paper, I attempt to address all of the above by closely examining selected sections of Sībawayhi's monumental *al-Kitāb*. I particularly introduce two main conceptions Sībawayhi relies on in his theory of meaning – metapragmatic conventions ($conventions_{mp}$) and integrative context ($context_{i}$) – and investigate their role in shaping major areas of pragmatic theorization, namely syntax, discourse compositionality, and inference.

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1 Introduction

The Arabic linguistics tradition (AL) is one of the great traditions in the history of linguistics, yet it is also one that has remained largely under-researched in the Western linguistic literature. While traces of linguistic speculation can be found among various cultures of the Near East such as Akkadian, Old Egyptian, Syriac, and Hebrew, the main linguistics tradition was that of Arabic (Versteegh 1997: 1). Starting in the 7th century, its growth and advancement spans centuries of intellectual activity, and covers a wide range of specialties including lexicology, syntax, morphology, phonology, phonetics, semantics, historical linguistics, evolutionary linguistics, the philosophy of language, and especially pragmatics. Its formative stages center on ʿAmr b. ʿUthmān Sībawayhi (d. 796), an 8th century Arabic[1] linguist, and his famous work *al-Kitāb* "The Book." He is often deemed the founding father of AL, to the extent that most later works in AL either constitute a commentary, extension or reiteration of the grounds he laid out in his *Kitāb* (Versteegh 1997: 39). With his method of analysis primarily being empirical and descriptive, and his object of analysis being *kalām* "discourse" as an intention-driven, yet intuitive, sociocultural activity, Sībawayhi founded a pragmatics-centric, pragmatics-first model of language, meaning and communication. As such, AL represents a foundationally pragmatic tradition specifically underpinned by Sībawayhian pragmatics, which was then taken further in two landmark post-Sībawayhian trends led by ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 1078) and Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) in the 11th and 13th centuries respectively.[2]

Given that the time period at hand coincides with the medieval period in Western history, a cultural relativist approach must be adopted so as to not impose this frame of reference, along with the negative culture-specific overtones that come with it, onto AL. In ethnology and social anthropology, cultural relativism refers to the oppositive tendency of ethnocentrism, and represents the effort to counter and overcome it. It promotes that "any part of a culture (such as an idea, a thing, or a behavior pattern) must be viewed in its proper cultural context rather than from the viewpoint of the observer's culture" (Ferraro 2008: 16). In other words, it is the

1 "Arabic" here does not imply Arabic descent, but simply that it is the object of study and in this case also the metalanguage used for theorization and analysis. Otherwise, Sībawayhi was of Persian origin (see Carter 2004).

2 The works of these scholars will not be discussed at length given the limited scope of this paper and the primary focus being Sībawayhi.

"method whereby social and cultural phenomena are perceived and described in terms of scientific detachment as, ideally, from the perspective of participants in or adherents of a given culture" (Bidney 1968: 543). When it comes to language use, this perspective could be about how members of a speech community use their own language, or–on a metatheoretical level as in this case–about how theorists within that speech community perceive and describe the language use of those members. Bearing this in mind, AL was the product of an era historians commonly refer to as the Golden Age of the Arabo-Islamic sciences, when numerous great thinkers made significant strides in original scientific, technological, and literary production (Turner 1995).[3] The significance of this monumental intellectual effort can be put into perspective by considering the many ways in which it went on to influence the European Renaissance. While this has been acknowledged with regard to science-related areas like mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and even the scientific method (e.g. Al-Khalili 2010: 476–77, 630; Saliba 2007; Swerdlow 1996), the contributions of language-focused areas like linguistics, literature and philology still remain to be fully uncovered. According to Bohas et al. (1990: xi), the very limited amount of space dedicated to AL in the main histories of linguistics is significantly out of proportion to its real importance and centuries-long contributions.

It is only with the development of contemporary Western linguistics that parallels with AL-theoretic philosophies, models and applications are starting to come to light (see e.g. Abu Deeb 1979; Ali 2000; Buburuzan 1993; Marogy 2010; Moutaouakil 1990; Mustafa 2018; Owens 1984). As Owens (1988: 1) contends, "one reason Arabic theory has gone unappreciated for so long is that nothing like it existed in the West at the time of its 'discovery' by Europeans in the 19th century, when the European orientalist tradition was formed," and that it is only with the rise of the Saussurean movement in the 20th century that a better perspective has become possible. Subsequent Gricean and post-Gricean pragmatics over the past few decades (Bach and Harnish 1979; Elder and Jaszczolt 2024; Grice 1957, 1969, 1989; Jaszczolt 2005, 2015; Levinson 2000; Recanati 2010; Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995) has made this possible even more so considering the centrality of pragmatic theory in AL. For this reason, it is possible to identify many contributions from AL that have been reinvented, rather than newly developed as is often presumed, in the Western literature. To give just one example, pragmatics is standardly deemed a "Gricean" conception (see e.g. Leech 1983; Sperber and Wilson 2009; Korta and Perry 2020; Davis 2024) despite the wealth of comparable pragmatic ideas, theories, and debates conceived by theorists in AL prior. Besides flagging some of these reiterations, my goal in this introductory paper is to illustrate that AL still has much to offer in advancing current theoretical paradigms in the field of contemporary pragmatics and opening new avenues for

3 See Sluglett and Currie (2014: 18–19) for a detailed historical and cartographic perspective.

cross-cultural metatheoretical research in linguistics overall. On a broader scale, this paper is a response to the ethnocentric bias that spans across much of modern linguistic/pragmatic theorization, from the object of study to the sociocultural assumptions that communicative principles are based upon to the scientific metalanguage that theorists use in their proposals.

The field of pragmatics, as we tend to know it, is rooted in a monolingual and monocultural framework largely derived from philosophical speculation surrounding a particular variety of mainstream English in Anglo-American culture. Grice's (1975a, 1975b) classic theory of conversation; Austin (1962) and Searle's (1969) speech act theory; Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model; Leech's (1983) politeness maxims; and Searle's (1975) rules of indirectness have all been criticized for being anglocentric (see Kádár and Haugh 2013; Lim 1994; Wierzbicka 2009). As such, the foundational paradigms of pragmatic research do not reflect the intralingual variation of different regions and communities, nor that of postcolonial, multilingual societies, let alone the interlingual variation among people of different cultural backgrounds (see Wierzbicka 2003). The subfield of "intercultural pragmatics" in more recent decades has taken up these issues head-on (see Kecskes 2014). That said, theory construction in pragmatics mostly relies on philosophers of language in the Western tradition, with little to no concern for the contribution of linguistic theories and applications found in non-Western traditions. When the latter traditions are discussed in the Western literature, it commonly involves imposing one's own categories and frameworks on other people's cultural concepts with an inevitably distorting if not excluding effect. A relevant example of this is the Arabic linguistic science of *naḥw* founded by Sībawayhi – which is commonly translated as "grammar" and who is often referred to as a "grammarian" (e.g. Carter 1990, 2006; Owens 1988; Suleiman 1999; Versteegh 1989) – yet *naḥw* in fact denotes "the way people speak" and bears pragmatic particularities I will clarify over the course of this paper. And Sībawayhi, in his *Kitāb*, was the first to undertake a complete description and analysis of Arabic language use at all three levels of syntax, morphology, and phonology within a broad empirical-pragmatic paradigm.

To date, there is only one substantial work (Marogy 2010) that attempts to explore some of the original thoughts and theories posited by Sībawayhi, though it is still mostly limited to a historical scope. In this paper, I bring this discussion to the arena of contemporary pragmatics, investigating core elements of Sībawayhian pragmatics and appealing to the relevance and applicability of said elements in discourse modeling especially with respect to Gricean/post-Gricean paradigms. I start by considering Sībawayhi's method of pragmatic analysis and his philosophy of language. I then discuss his theory of meaning where certain "metapragmatic conventions" (conventions$_{mp}$) are treated as shared intuitions about discourse-behavioral norms; afforded an explanatory role in syntax, inference-making and

compositionality; and deemed a source of "integrative context" ($context_i$). All translations cited are my own. Finally, I conclude by summarizing my findings and considering trajectories for future research.

2 The Sībawayhian model of discourse meaning

Communicative intention is an essential part of defining discourse meaning in Sībawayhian pragmatics. In Sībawayhi's *Kitāb*, the term *maʿnā* "meaning, intention" is sometimes employed to denote the speaker's intended meaning as recognized by the addressee within a purposeful communicative context; although the most common term by far used to refer to such meaning is simply the verb *arāda* "to intend, want, wish" with close to 1,400 occurrences (Carter 1980: 25; see also Carter 2004: 69–71). While this would appear to place Sībawayhi in the intentionalist camp, it simultaneously hints at his analysis of meaning as a type of social behavior driven by interpersonal factors where a sense of conventionality plays a major role. In a nutshell, intentionalism is the idea that "communicative acts are, essentially, things we do by acting with certain intentions," whereas conventionalism is the view that "communicative acts are, essentially, things we do by behaving in conformity to conventions" (Harris 2016: 175). That said, the intentionalist/conventionalist divide in the Western context is a divide between primarily pragmatically driven versus grammatically driven accounts of meaning and communication. But as I will explain shortly, the sense of conventionality that Sībawayhi supports is a metapragmatic one, hence key to uniting intentions and conventions without relegating either to a secondary role.

Sībawayhi's method of analysis in his *Kitāb* is primarily descriptive and empirical, based on real data obtained from the Arabic speech community (see also ʿAbd al-Laṭīf 1982: 39; Marogy 2010: 29). The purpose of language, for Sībawayhi, was "essentially ethical and pragmatic, namely, for the speaker to satisfy the listener's expectations by accurately conveying the speaker's intention (*murād* 'what is meant'), and it was linguistically irrelevant whether the utterances were true or false and even less so that they should be structurally complete or free of formal defects" (Carter 2006: 186). His object of analysis accordingly constitutes *kalām* "discourse," concrete utterances rather than abstract sentences. He views it in terms of a social, communicative, intentional activity involving particular contexts, particular interlocutors, particular conversational goals, as well as shared beliefs, expectations and metadiscursive intuitions, all of which contributes to how discourse meaning is processed, or frequently inferred, by the pertinent interlocutors. Even though he doesn't offer a formal definition of *kalām* per se, the understanding just described

can be gathered from various statements Sībawayhi makes,[4] to be illustrated shortly. In taking this approach, Sībawayhi is able to account for discourse meaning in a way that is not contingent on any notion of "semantic conventions" (conventions$_s$) representing abstract sentences à la Gricean/post-Gricean pragmatics, but on a sense of "metapragmatic conventions" (convention$_{mp}$) that capture interlocutors' intuitive judgements *about* discourse use and contribute a vital source of information in defining successful communication. Sībawayhi's theory of communication thus falls at the intersect of pragmatics and syntax (see Marogy 2010: Ch. 2), but one that is pragmatics-centric and one that pioneers the concept of "metapragmatic conventionality" in defining syntax itself.

In contrast, much of Gricean and post-Gricean discussions takes truth-conditional semantics as its basis and concerns how much pragmatics contributes to the content of truth-bearing sentences (see Jaszczolt 2012, 2023 for an overview). This is because Gricean pragmatics represents a contextualist extension of the long-standing Fregean tradition of truth-conditional semantics. Frege (1892), the founder of modern logic, assumed that judgments, beliefs, and assertations aim at truth, and that a truth-centric analysis is key to understanding thought and language. He treated sentences as denoting truth-values, i.e. conditions in the world which make sentences or statements true. Given this historical backdrop, the idea of conventions in Gricean and post-Gricean theories of meaning is heavily rooted in the logical form of sentences.

For Sībawayhi, discourse meaning represents a communicative event that occurs in the process of social interaction and is shaped by the metadiscursive habits of the pertinent speech community. In his view, every utterance in theory is a unit of discourse initiated by the speaker directing a *nidā* "vocative expression" at their audience:

> The first part of every utterance is always a vocative, unless you leave it out if there is no need for it, as in when the addressee is facing you; otherwise, it forms the first part of every utterance, allowing you to draw in the addressee. That said, since it occurs quite frequently and comes first in every instance, they [Arabic speakers] elide it to make things easy (*Kitāb* II: 208).

As such, communication is regarded as more of an interpersonal *event* than an act, whereby the speaker does not only produce an utterance but also invites the addressee to get involved and/or reciprocate in the discourse. The above passage already indicates the view that deriving meaningful information in communicative events often involves recovering some inferred content, a recovery that relies on the

4 Attempts to produce such a definition and delimit the parameters of *kalām* were taken up by post-Sībawayhian linguists such as Ibn Jinnī, Jurjānī, Zamakhsharī, and ʿAkbarī (see al-Ḥandūd 2004: 23–24).

recognition of certain sociocultural norms of discursive behavior guided by the intuitions shared by members of a certain speech community. In short, this recognition is enabled by conventions$_{mp}$. In what follows, I discuss how such conventions$_{mp}$ inform Sībawayhi's theory of meaning with respect to syntax, additional pragmatic extensions of syntactic constructs, as well as complex inferences that transcend said extensions.

3 Conventions$_{mp}$ vis-à-vis syntactic constructs and extensions

Native speakers' intuitions and judgements play a major role in Sībawayhi's view of communication. He does not fail time and again to stress that in order for one to know how communication works in Arabic, one must treat its linguistic components "as Arabs treat them, place them where they place them… and intend the meanings they intend to mean through them" (*Kitāb* I: 330–331). That is to say, defining what an utterance is and what meaning it conveys has a basis in pragmatically-grounded conventions, namely in metapragmatic ones concerning how interlocutors of a particular speech community use their language in their society and culture, and on the judgements those interlocutors make and the intuitions they have about the relevance and appropriateness of that usage.

And it is on this basis that Sībawayhi proposes the property of *istiqāma* "rightness" as a condition for utterances to count as utterances proper, i.e. as communicatively successful units of discourse. The Arabic term *istiqāma* denotes the quality of being "right," "sound," "proper"; and for Sībawayhi, it specifically concerns a type of intuition-driven "pragmatic" rightness so to speak. As Marogy (2010: 49, 74) explains, his view that utterances proper bear the property of *istiqāma* is to say that they convey the intended meaning "rightly" and successfully, as in they "should be meaningful to the listener and should successfully convey the intended information." What Sībawayhi is attempting to delineate here in differentiating between utterances and "right" utterances is the respective difference between the content a speaker verbalizes and the content encompassing further pragmatic additions which may be necessary to render said content communicatively evaluable on the basis of some intuitive sense of communicative value. Note that this kind of differentiation may appear to be somewhat akin to that made between uttered sentences and propositions in Gricean pragmatics; however, such a comparison would not be entirely justifiable given that the notion of sentences as abstract entities and propositions as truth-evaluable content does not figure in the analysis of meaning in Sībawayhian pragmatics.

Broadly speaking, Sībawayhi's *istiqāma* "can putatively be defined as a pragmatic principle that encompasses other pragmatic principles" such as "corrigibility," "politeness," "intelligibility," but in particular, "informativeness" and "communicative viability" (75).[5] It is a principle that reflects a "functionalist" take on syntax in the sense that pragmatics is the more basic study where syntax is construed as conventions of pragmatic functions (see Baker 2015). That said, Sībawayhi's theory of syntax must be differentiated from what Leech calls (1983: 152) "communicative grammar" pertaining to how formal linguistic features relate to their various pragmatic utilizations. Sībawayhi, on the other hand, takes this further by positing that such features don't just relate to pragmatics but *are* fundamentally pragmatic in the intention-recognition mechanism of communication, giving us, in essence, a *metapragmatic* theory of syntax.

To illustrate this, let us first consider Sībawayhi's classification of discourse with respect to the principle of *istiqāma*:

> This chapter concerns *istiqāma* 'rightness' and wrongness with respect to utterances. An utterance may be 'right' and well-formed; 'wrong'; 'right' and false; 'right' and ill-formed; or wrong and false. An example of a 'right' and well-formed utterance is you saying: 'I visited you yesterday and I will visit you tomorrow.' A 'wrong' utterance involves contradicting the first part of your utterance with the latter part, like you saying: 'I visited you tomorrow and I will visit you yesterday.' An example of a 'right' and false utterance is like you saying: 'I carried the mountain,' 'I drank the water of the ocean,' etc. A 'right' and ill-formed utterance involves placing a word in a place that isn't its place, like you saying: 'had I Zayd seen,' 'so that may visit you Zayd,' etc. And a wrong and false utterance is you saying: 'I will drink the water of the ocean yesterday' (*Kitāb* I: 25–26).

Here, Sībawayhi distinguishes between a "right" and well-formed utterance, and a "right" and ill-formed utterance, indicating that *istiqāma* "rightness," that is, the property that renders utterances meaningful and communicative, is a matter of pragmatics. In other words, what makes utterances meaningful and communicative is not a matter of "grammatical rightness," but a matter of "pragmatic rightness." And this "pragmatic rightness" consists in a plausible degree of corrigibility or recoverability on part of the audience in the course of communicative events. As Sībawayhi points out, if a speaker utters a grammatically ill-formed sentence like "had I Zayd seen" or "so that may visit you Zayd," it is still possible for the addressee to reconstruct the intended syntax and intuitively recover the meanings "I had seen Zayd" or "so that Zayd may visit you." These utterances consequently qualify as

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5 The principle of *istiqāma* "rightness" was later substituted with that of *fā'ida* "informativeness" in post-Sībawayhian theories and deemed a more appropriate description of the core concept Sībawayhi had in mind (see Marogy 2010: 53). Since my discussion concerns Sībawayhi's original theory, I will not elaborate on this.

"right," as utterances proper, for communication in these cases is typically still successful. Linguistic communication for Sībawayhi thus includes "corrigible" utterances, utterances that the audience is still able to find intelligible and interpret successfully and correctly as intended by the speaker. Communicative utterances in his view "are not limited to grammatically well-formed and ill-formed, but extends further to cover a kind of ill-formed utterances that are sanctioned as corrigible" (Marogy 2010: 78). That is to say, the basis for such a conception of utterances is not grammatical well-formedness per se, but the intuitive ability of interlocutors to reconstruct and recover said well-formedness when communicating. I would further argue though that the corrigibility in question is not necessarily a sufficient condition for what Sībawayhi construes as a "right" utterance, given that he also deems the idea of "semantic" well-formedness crucial to this construal. He gives the following examples of "wrong" utterances: (i) "I visited you tomorrow and I will visit you yesterday"; and (ii) "I will drink the water of the ocean yesterday." Even though (i) and (ii) are both grammatically well-formed, he doesn't qualify them as "right" since they are semantically ill-formed in the sense that they don't communicate any meaning that the audience would be able to successfully recover.

The important point to note here is that Sībawayhi's basis for defining utterances in terms of *istiqāma* "rightness" ultimately lies in their intelligibility or communicability, whereby he takes into account how speakers' intuitions about language use in their society and culture interact with and modulate the syntactic constructs of utterances. Sībawayhi supports this argument by appealing to the fact that language use is a social behavior bound by certain expectations, particularly expectations for interlocutors to be informative. He explains, "Don't you see that if you were to say 'ʿAbdullāh is there,' it would be fine to be silent thereafter, and it would constitute a 'right' utterance…" (*Kitāb* II: 88).

Communication on this view is an event driven by the speaker's obligation to be informative, and the audience's expectation for the speaker to be informative; and whether this informativeness is fulfilled or not depends on conversational cues, particularly that of "silence." In other words, "right" utterances, utterances that bear some communicative value, are those that can be rightly followed by silence, in that the speaker need not immediately utter anything further to the addressee – and the addressee is not waiting for the speaker to do so – in order for the speaker to have conveyed something meaningful to the addressee. This is not to say that the addressee would not want to ask for further clarification in an ongoing conversation, but that the utterance comprises a minimal discourse unit that, when cognitively processed, conveys a self-contained, complete thought (al-Makhzūmī 1966: 82–83; Mubārak 1973: 98). Silence as such is "employed as a formal marker of the recognizability of the speaker's communicative intention and the end of every utterance" (Marogy 2010: 52). That is, communication is heavily reliant on interlocutors' judgements and intuitions, such

that they intuitively delimit utterances as grammatically/semantically well-formed and, as I will show shortly, pragmatically relevant in the meanings they convey. It is thus possible to describe Sībawayhi's conception of utterances proper as metapragmatic functions that satisfy expectations or basic rules of cooperative and purposeful behavior in the social activity of discourse, particularly those for the speaker to keep speaking until they produce a discourse unit that the addressee would find communicatively viable, at which point the addressee would be able to successfully recover the speaker's intention. This functionality and its metapragmatic premise underpin Sībawayhi's theory of syntax as follows.

According to Sībawayhi, the *musnad* "subject" and the *musnad ilayhi* "predicate" are two co-dependent syntactic units that are indispensable to the utterance itself and the utterers in the act of uttering. He elaborates:

> This chapter concerns the *musnad* 'subject' and the *musnad ilayhi* 'predicate.' They cannot exist without one another, and the utterer cannot do with them. An example of that comprises the topic and its comment, as in if you were to say: 'Abdullāh is your brother' or 'This is your brother.' Another example comprises 'Abdullāh goes' because the action has to have an agent, just as the topic in the first example has to have its counterpart [the comment] (*Kitāb* I: 23).

> If you said: 'This is ʿAbdullāh leaving,' 'These are your people leaving,' 'That is ʿAbdullāh going,' 'This is ʿAbdullāh [who is] well-known' – then 'this' (for instance) constitutes a topic that is assigned a comment that follows, namely ʿAbdullāh. And it cannot possibly become an utterance until it [the topic] has been assigned a comment, or vice versa; for the topic is the *musnad* 'subject' and the comment is the *musnad ilayhi* 'predicate.' It [the topic] thus operates on what comes thereafter [the comment] just as… the action operates on what comes thereafter [the agent][6] (*Kitāb* II: 78).

An utterance for Sībawayhi has to bear, or has to be conceived of as bearing, some intuitively identifiable syntactic predication, involving for instance a topic and a comment in the case of nominal utterances, or an action and an agent in the case of verbal utterances. The Arabic terms used for topic and comment, *mubtadaʾ* and *khabar*, are technically defined as the entity that is being informed about and the entity that informs something about the former entity, respectively (Ḥasan 1975: 502). In contemporary Western terms, they represent a prototypical topic-comment distinction, underpinned by pragmatic functionality as pertains to the aboutness of the topic and the informativeness of the comment, how they relate to one another in discourse, as well as how they reflect aspects like the speaker's assumptions about the addressee's state of knowledge at the time of the utterance, the representation of discourse referents in the addressee's mind, etc. (cf. van Oosten 1986; Davis 2024; Lambrecht 1994; Reinhart 1981). As for the action and agent, i.e. *fiʿl* and *fāʿil*,

6 Arabic language use prototypically involves a verb-initial pattern (see Abdul-Raof 2001: 6).

distinction, it is underpinned by what is now commonly referred to as semantic relations or roles (cf. Fillmore 1968).

But more important, Sībawayhi's conception of this is based on the metapragmatic premise discussed earlier, namely that there are intuitively-recognizable, social expectations of informativeness in communicative behavior that determine what constitutes an utterance in the first place. For instance, the point of bringing up a topic, Sībawayhi explains, is to mention a relevant comment, and so the latter is something that "the addressee waits for and expects" and something that the speaker "must mention to the addressee." He continues, "If you start speaking by bringing up a topic, you are obliged to mention what follows; this is a must, or else the utterance will become faulty and that would be unacceptable on your part" (*Kitāb* II: 389).

This clarifies that, for Sībawayhi, the nature and role of syntactic constructs are a matter of conventions$_{mp}$, determined by some metadiscursive expectation or rule that people are assumed to intuitively follow when they cooperate in a conversation. One may call this a conversational maxim for acceptable, good, polite behavior in communicative situations dictating that interlocutors are to "not fall silent before being informative" or that they are to, simply put, "be informative," in keeping with their socioethical responsibilities (see Marogy 2010: 65). Alternatively, one may call it a cognitive heuristic of *satisficing*, a combination of sufficing and satisfying that requires interlocutors to make a "good enough" decision in communicative events and meet some minimum requirement or acceptability threshold of informativeness (see Simon 1957: 207). Alternatively still again, and to be more precise, what we have here is a metapragmatic principle that explains the language system in terms of those who shape and use it, that is, not in terms of conventions$_{s}$, but in terms of conventions$_{mp}$ consolidated by frequent exposure to the norms of discourse use in the pertinent society and culture.

This is especially evident in Sībawayhi's frequent reference to the sociocultural norms of discursive behavior among Arabic speakers, and to their "frequent usage" of Arabic in particular ways. Arabic is a high-context language with a high rate of indirect communication among its speakers such that reconstructing unuttered information forms an important part of the interpretive process (see Ting-Toomey 1999); and this is a key aspect of Arabic discourse culture that Sībawayhi accounts for. For instance, he dedicates a chapter to how Arabic speakers elide the action (verb) due to how frequently it occurs in their utterance compositions, going on to say:

> That is when you say 'This, not your allegations' to mean '*I do* not *believe* your allegations'… The speaker didn't actually mention '*I do* not *believe* your allegations' due to how frequently they [Arabic speakers] use it [the action/verb],[7] and due to the fact that it can be readily inferred from the addressee's observation of the situation that the speaker is rejecting his allegation… Another example is when they say 'Anything but this' or 'Anything but an insult against a free

7 My translation had to account for the fact that verbs in Arabic contain inflectional subject markers.

> individual' to mean '*Commit* anything but *do* not *commit* an insult against a free individual.' Again, it [the action] was elided due to how frequently they use it (*Kitāb* I: 280–281).

Sībawayhi postulates in a similar chapter on elision that Arabic speakers do so "for the sake of lightening the load" when communicating and "due to sufficing on the basis that the addressee knows what the speaker means" (*Kitāb* II: 345).[8] This reiterates that Sībawayhi's conception of what qualifies as discourse meaning is not just inherently pragmatic, but routinely open to pragmatic processing. For this reason, the concept of at least two or more *kalima*s[9] "discourse units" constituting an instance of *kalām* "discourse" in the Sībawayhian tradition presupposes the idea that a *kalima* may be directly uttered or indirectly inferred (see Shirbīnī, *Nūr al-sajiyya*: 18–19; see also Ḥasan 1975: 16). And this inference,[10] as in the examples above, may be recovered by the audience given their intuitions about sociocultural norms of discourse use, as captured by conventions$_{mp}$, in conjunction with other contextual cues like the speaker's attitude toward the audience in that circumstance. What is important to stress here is that Sībawayhi, in exemplifying pragmatic additions to the syntactic constructs of utterances, does not appear to be describing a bottom-up process. Recall that Sībawayhi propounds a metapragmatic theory of syntax rooted in the principle of *istiqāma*, a "pragmatic rightness" to do with intuitively-recognizable "informativeness" or "communicative viability." Let's take another look at the examples he gives above:

(1a) *kulla* *shay-in* *wa-lā* *shatīmat-a* *ḥurr-in*
every-Acc thing-Gen and-not insult-Acc free-Gen
"Anything but an insult against a free individual."

(1b) *i'ti* *kulla* *shay-in* *wa-lā* *tartakib*
bring.2Sing.Masc every-Acc thing-Gen and-not commit.2Sing.Masc
shatīmat-a *ḥurr-in*
insult-Acc free-Gen
"*Commit* anything but *do* not *commit* an insult against a free individual."

It is true that the expansion in (1b) seems to involve filling some syntactic "slot" to do with an action, namely to "commit," in order to render (1a) a "right" utterance, a meaningful and communicative utterance. Case endings in Arabic may support this

8 My translation had to account for the fact that verbs in Arabic contain inflectional subject markers.
9 *Kalima* in Arabic is in the singular grammatical form, *kalimatān*/*kalimatayn* in the dual, and *kalimāt* in the plural. For simplicity's sake, I use *kalima* in my present discussion regardless of the numerical context.
10 The concept of an "inference" here does not necessarily mainly refer to consciously derived interpretations; instead, unless specified, they may include automatically derived default interpretations.

further since, for example, the accusative case of the constituents in (1a) points to the nominative case of some unuttered constituents. Nevertheless, (1b) does not, as far as Sībawayhi is concerned, represent a bottom-up process such that the expansion in (1b) is triggered by constructs in (1a) itself. Instead, Sībawayhi's construal of the expansion in (1b) depicts an inherently top-down process, one that is not generated by virtue of syntax per se, but by virtue of the fact that the interlocutors in question normatively and frequently *use* syntax in a certain way in the process of communication in their society and culture, and that those interlocutors intuitively recognize that fact in the given communicative event. So, on a general level, Arabic interlocutors share the belief that communicating indirectly is expected and preferred; and on a particular level, they share knowledge of sociocultural norms of discourse use, including how syntactic constituents are employed (where they are placed, whether they are elided, in which cases this applies, etc.) as well as the motivations speakers have for making those decisions. It is on this basis that the addressee's interpretation of (1a) – i.e. their recognition of the expansion in (1b) as the speaker's intended meaning – ultimately depends. In other words, Sībawayhi here, once again, appeals to conventions$_{mp}$ in that (1b) is a pragmatic broadening of (1a) on the basis of an inherently pragmatic, namely metadiscursive, source of information. Again, this ties back to my earlier discussion on Sībawayhi's view of language as a social activity where syntax affords a meta-pragmatic functionality founded upon shared beliefs, culture-specific norms of discursive behavior, and intuitions.

The bottom line is that, in Sībawayhian pragmatics, whether we are talking about what syntax itself entails or what syntactic information is filled in pragmatically developed utterances, the foundation rests on conventions$_{mp}$, covering the syntactic usages speakers intuitively judge to be appropriate and relevant, and intuitively identify within their society and culture. With that said, it must be emphasized that Sībawayhi's model of meaning is one where discourse compositionality consists in the main meaning intended by the speaker and ideally recovered by the addressee; and this meaning often involves complex inferences that are independent of uttered constructs or extensions of said constructs.

4 Conventions$_{mp}$ vis-à-vis compositionality and inference

In the following passage, Sībawayhi reiterates that for interlocutors to be able to successfully interpret one another's discursive behavior, they have to recognize one another's intentions. "If you saw a man firing an arrow at a target and said 'The

target, by God!', you would mean: 'It is going to hit the target!'; and if you heard the arrow hitting the target, and said 'The target, by God!,' you would mean 'It hit the target!'" (*Kitāb* I: 257).

He notes that the speaker may utter 'The target, by God!' in two different circumstances, first when they see an arrow being fired at a target and second when they hear the arrow hitting the target; and even if those circumstances are seconds apart, the meaning of the utterance has to be taken in the sense intended by the speaker in the relevant circumstance. That circumstance is not just limited to information about the event(s) or individual(s) that are a part of the immediate environment, but may also include information from the knowledge speakers have gained about the world around them through their senses and experiences. This already indicates a conception of context that integrates multiple sources of information, which I will address further shortly, and a compositionality that centralizes what the speaker truly or mainly intends to mean when communicating. Sībawayhi here makes a distinction between what he refers to as what is "said," i.e. the content the speaker verbalizes, and what is actually "meant," i.e. that content when it is pragmatically developed or enriched such as "It is going to hit the target!" or "It hit the target!" But more important, Sībawayhi in other instances acknowledges that there are scenarios when the intended meaning of an utterance goes far beyond mere pragmatic additions to the syntactic construct. Consider the following example he gives.

> If you said: 'A Tamīmī in one instance and a Qaysī in another?'[11] – that is, if you saw a man who was acting fickle and said this to him as if to say 'Do you transform into a Tamīmī in one instance and a Qaysī in another?' then you are in this circumstance confirming that he is of this nature, as he is in this circumstance acting fickle as far as you are concerned. You[12] are not asking him to clarify or tell you something you don't know; rather, you are rebuking him by making this utterance (*Kitāb* I: 343).

(2a) *a-tamīmīy-an marrat-an wa-qaysīyan ukh`rā*
Q-tamīmī-Acc once-Acc and-qaysī-Acc another
"A Tamīmī in one instance and a Qaysī in another?"

11 Tamīmī and Qaysī are the adjectival forms of the Arab tribes Tamīm and Qays, where the Arabic suffix *-ī* has a similar function to the English suffix *-ish* in *British*. Sībawayhi's analysis of utterance meaning here appeals to the longstanding intratribal loyalty and intertribal rivalry among Arabs dating back to the pre-Islamic era, and the fact that breaking this social expectation would reflect negatively on one's character and cause for one to be criticized (see Almaney 1981).

12 Sībawayhi switches to the third person here but is still referring to the reader, so I have left it in the second person for a smoother translation.

(2b) *a-taḥūl-u* *tamīmīy-an* *marrat-an* *wa-qaysīyan* *ukh`rā*
Q-transform.Nom tamīmī-Acc once-Acc and-qaysī-Acc another
"Do you transform into a Tamīmī in one instance and a Qaysī in another?"

(2c) "You are so fickle! Shame on you!"

Here, Sībawayhi distinguishes between the content actually uttered by the speaker, or what is "said," as presented in (2a); what involves a pragmatic development or enrichment of that content, or what is "as if to say," as presented in (2b); and what is an independent pragmatic content that actually corresponds to what the speaker intended to mean, as represented in (2c).

Similar distinctions are restated in Gricean/post-Gricean pragmatics (e.g. Grice 1989; Levinson 2000; Recanati 1987) in the Western tradition with respect to the "what is said" versus "what is implicated" divide. However, there are some key differences. In Gricean/post-Gricean theory, "what is said" corresponds to the minimum necessary logical content needed to specify the truth conditions of the sentence, whereas "what is implicated" is simply everything that doesn't correspond as such (see Clark 1996). While the uttered or "said" content here is defined on the basis of convention$_{s}$, it is in Sībawayhian theory a matter of conventions$_{mp}$. It follows that the category of "implicatures" does not apply in the latter. Instead, these meanings would simply come under what is "meant" if they correspond to the speaker's intended goal of communication.

As Sībawayhi explains:

> Another example of what [Arabic speakers] say is: 'Welcome!'… If you saw a man going somewhere or seeking something, and you said to him: 'Welcome!' and meant 'You made it! You hit the mark,' then here they [Arabic speakers] elided the action due to their frequent usage of it, so it is as if it ['Welcome!'] has come to stand in place of 'May your country welcome you!', just as 'Caution!' stands in place of 'Be careful!' (*Kitāb* I, 295).

(3a) *marḥab-an*
welcome-Acc
"Welcome!"

(3b) *raḥuba-t* *bilād-u-ka*
welcome-3Sing.Fem country-Nom-your.Masc
"May your country welcome you!"

(3c) *adrak-ta* *dhālika* *wa-aṣab-ta*
got-you.2Sing.Masc that and-hit-you.2Sing.Masc
"You made it! You hit the mark!"

Again, Sībawayhi differentiates between what is "said," (3a); what is "as if to stand in place of what is 'said'" (3b); and what is "meant" as intended by the speaker, (3c). In other words, he identifies two levels of pragmatic processing that can be said to operate on (2a) and (3a). However, his construal of the pragmatically developed content of (2b) and (3b) as what is "as if to say" or what is "as if to stand in place of" is already indicative of his view that they don't correspond to the actual meanings of the utterances (2a) and (3a). It seems that he simply mentions (2b) and (3b) to support his theory of syntax, in that utterances per se involve some underlying syntactic connections that interlocutors make and intuitively recognize. Otherwise, it is the second level of pragmatic processing, namely (2c) and (3c), that he takes to be the content the speaker intended to mean by uttering (2a) and (3a) in those respective circumstances.

For example, regarding (2c), Sībawayhi explains that the speaker's intention here is not to ask something, but to affirm something, namely that the addressee is acting fickle, and to rebuke the addressee for that. Utterance meaning is thereby framed as a goal-oriented social activity rather than a syntax-primary unit of discourse. It appeals to the fact that language use involves speakers doing things with what they utter under the circumstances of discourse, and that speakers in communicative events are driven by the motivation to affect the audience in some way. In speech-act theoretic terms, all utterances perform specific speech acts via the specific communicative force of the utterance, and these utterances involve: the locution (the linguistic form of the utterance); the illocution (the act intended to be performed by the speaker in uttering the locution); and the perlocution (the effect the speaker's illocution has on the addressee). Sībawayhi, in (2), illustrates that the speaker can use the same locution to carry out a wide range of illocutions in different circumstances, signifying that illocutions can be direct or indirect speech acts; that is to say, illocutions may or may not correspond to the linguistic basis of the locution. In particular, he takes (2a) to exhibit the interrogative grammatical mood, i.e. one that apparently conveys a question on part of the speaker, yet in the specific circumstance at hand, the speaker utters (2a) with the intention to indirectly rebuke the addressee for being fickle. In his view, then, what an utterance means is to essentially know what illocution it is used to perform. And to say that this illocution does not always directly correspond to the linguistic form of the locution, is to say that the meaning a speaker intends to convey need not be dependent on the syntactic constraints of the utterance they utter. Instead, the speaker's intended meaning can go far beyond local, sub-locutionary pragmatic expansions, and consist of complex pragmatic inferences that the speaker intends for the addressee to recover such as (2c). In short, what determines the meaning of (2a) is what the speaker *intends to do with* (2a).

So, while Sībawayhi does posit that utterances consist of certain metapragmatically-grounded, syntactic constructs, he holds that utterance meaning

can transcend pragmatic additions to those constructs. He conceives of utterance meaning then as what is mainly intended by the speaker and ideally recovered by the addressee where compositionality is sought for speech acts rather than syntactic units. As illustrated above, he simply refers to this as what is "meant" – whether that be a case of pragmatic additions as in the arrow/target example, or whether that be a case of independent, complex inferences as in (2) and (3) – and doesn't make a distinction between what may be "literally" or "non-literally" meant. Instead, compositionality is understood as something dynamic and interactive, involving multi-layered contextual information from inferences about the immediate situation of discourse to world knowledge (as noted at the beginning of this section) to assumptions about one's society and culture. These assumptions are a matter of conventions$_{mp}$ in that they comprise *intra-discursive* factors to do with how language users of a particular speech community normatively use their language; and these assumptions also cover *extra-discursive* factors those language users find socioculturally identifiable (e.g. collective identity, history, physical behavior), which could be theoretically categorized as simply pragmatic conventions, or conventions$_{p}$, to be discussed shortly.

Basing discourse compositionality on main intended meanings, not making a literal/non-literal distinction in defining meaning, and highlighting the interactivity of meaning-making involving sociocultural presumptions, are all theoretical elements that are reiterated in Jaszczolt's (2005, 2015) post-Gricean Default Semantics (DS) in the Western tradition. Otherwise, the general view in Gricean and post-Gricean models promotes a compositionality that is driven by sentence structure – such that the sentence-bound "literal" meaning of an utterance is primary with respect to pragmatic "non-literal" contributions – with little to no exposition on the role of culture (see Everett 2023). That said, while the DS-theoretic view does give equal importance to "linguistic" and "sociocultural" sources of meaning (see Jaszczolt 2005: 11–12, 2015: 748–750), it still stops short of acknowledging the role of the latter in shaping the former, and as such, doesn't distinguish between *intra-discursive* and *extra-discursive* assumptions about society and culture.

For Sībawayhi, intra-discursive assumptions, or conventions$_{mp}$, include speakers' intuitions and judgements about the informativeness of linguistic usages with respect to the sociocultural norms of language use that are usually followed in conversation. As discussed in the previous section, Sībawayhi deems this to be the driving force behind the recovery of pragmatic additions to uttered constructs. Now, speakers' intuitive knowledge about what aligns with normative discursive practice in relation to syntax may not seem useful in determining complex inferential meanings that lie beyond syntactic constraints. However, just as Sībawayhi posits that speakers have intuitions about what is normative in discourse, and that complying with this normativity underlies the interpretation of pragmatic

extensions to uttered constructs, he also acknowledges that speakers may in fact go *against* what is normative in discourse given the motivation to do so in the situation of discourse. He alludes to this in his discussion on cases where, as opposed to the usual agent-patient or subject-object order in Arabic, the object/patient is preposed and the subject/agent postponed: "They [Arabic speakers] seem to prepose the part that is most important for them to express, that they are most concerned about expressing, even if both parts are important and of concern to them" (*Kitāb* I: 34).

That is to say, speakers may break certain conventions$_{mp}$, that is, intuitively-recognizable patterns of language use, e.g. via preposing/postposing certain syntactic elements, if that is of primary importance to them in serving their communicative purpose and in ultimately conveying the intended message they have in mind. It is an idea that was later systematically developed by Jurjānī in post-Sībawayhian pragmatics, and described as an utterance "departing from, deviating, violating" the conventions that are ordinarily followed in using language as a form of communication (see Zubir 2000: 70). On this view, a speaker may, given the circumstance and the psychological impact they intend to make on the addressee, want their utterance to have a particular pragmatic function that calls for employing non-prototypical word order, or non-prototypical verbosity, and so on; and this metapragmatic function consists in drawing the attention of the addressee and prompting the recovery of complex or meta-level inferences (see Abdul-Raof 2006: Ch. 4). In other words, these inferences arise from the audience reasoning about why the speaker is justifiably breaking the norms and patterns of language use in that discourse culture; and in this way, the manner in which the speaker uses the language reveals their intention. In sum, on the one hand, we have the meanings of uttered constructs or enrichments of said constructs guided by speakers' intuitions about complying with conventions$_{mp}$; and on the other hand, we have the meanings of independent, complex inferences guided by speakers' intuitions about breaking conventions$_{mp}$.

This represents, what I call, the "Principle of Manner$_{mp}$" in Jurjānī's post-Sībawayhian theory of meaning. In his view, intention-recognition hinges on the recognition of conventional$_{mp}$ patterns, the general style or manner in which speakers devise their discourse in various contexts with respect to social norms and expectations of language use, whether that pertain to how many lexical items are used, the syntactic order in which they are used, the semantic properties they invoke, or otherwise. Here, conventions$_{mp}$ are treated as goal-oriented, metadiscursive strategies that align with automatically processed, shared intuitions (see Jurjānī, *Dalāʾil*: 98, 118–119, 128–129, 410). In comparison to Gricean and post-Gricean proposals, the Principle of Manner$_{mp}$ explains how intentions and conventions work with, rather than against, each together in the meaning-making process, particularly when it comes to complex meta-level inferences. In addition to simplifying and generalizing Grice's (1989) conversational maxims, it enriches post-Gricean

alternatives like the Relevance principle (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995) by affording conventions an explanatory role in the inferential mechanism.

Now, with respect to extra-discursive assumptions, or conventions$_{p}$, that may contribute to compositionality: A major aspect that determines utterance meaning as (2c) in Sībawayhi's analysis of (2a) for instance has to do with the fact that the speaker and addressee share some sociocultural information and have a common "sociocultural identity." In particular, they belong to an Arab society and culture rooted in tribal patriotism and morality, where loyalties and rivalries carried serious political and ethical implications (see Almaney 1981). And so, Sībawayhi's construal of utterance meaning in (2) hinges on the assumptions about society and culture that the interlocutors in question would naturally make, namely that there exist societal norms and expectations of tribal allegiance such that (i) all members of a tribe act as one body, united in the defense of their fellow tribesmen; (ii) when a tribesman commits a crime, the whole tribe shares in that responsibility regardless of the crime; (iii) the actions of a tribesman against a fellow tribesman are contingent on the endorsement of the entire tribe (see Iqbal 1967: 5). The tribal moral ethos thus dictates that the more consistently a member of society complies with such norms and expectations, the more accepted and exemplary that member would be. Conversely, going against these norms and expectations, whereby a member of society shows inconsistency in their allegiance toward their respective tribe, would result in individual and collective shame and consequently call for blame. Based on the above assumptions, if a speaker utters (2a) "A Tamīmī in one instance and a Qaysī in another?" to an addressee in a situation where the addressee is acting fickle, and if the meaning of the utterance, as Sībawayhi postulates, is taken to consist in the inference (2c) "You are so fickle! Shame on you!" – then this inference is one that involves processing a source of information that is sociocultural in nature. The meaning that the speaker intends to communicate here and the meaning that the addressee is to ideally recover is contingent on the common sociocultural identity they share, and the conventions of society and culture they identify with: It is only in knowing Arab tribes and the Arab tribal "moral code of allegiance" so to speak that the addressee can successfully infer that the speaker's reference to inconsistently siding with Tamīm at times and Qays at others – two well-known tribes with a history of rivalry (see Dixon 1971: 83) – is meant to convey a reproach for exhibiting fickle behavior in that communicative circumstance. Overall though, extra-discursive conventional$_{p}$ sources of information appear to ultimately come under conventions$_{mp}$, since speakers' shared intuitions about the manner in which they use linguistic devices must include their intuitive recognition of shared sociocultural concepts that those devices signify.

5 The big picture

At this point, it is worth summarizing some of the core principles behind the pragmatics-centric model of communication advocated by Sībawayhi where conventions$_{mp}$, rather than conventions$_{s}$, form the grounds for defining intended meanings in discourse, and where contextuality and compositionality remain similarly unconstrained by conventional$_{s}$ bounds: Sībawayhi takes a pragmatics-first approach to defining utterance meaning in a number of ways. First, his method of analysis is primarily descriptive and empirical, informed by real data obtained from his (Arabic) speech community as to what speakers intend to mean by what they utter and what audiences recover from those instances in conversation. Second, he underpins his theory by frequent reference to the sociocultural norms of discursive behavior among these speakers, and to how common exposure to, or usage of, these norms are pivotal to defining what it means to "intend to mean" in discourse. Following this line of thought, Sībawayhi defines utterance meaning in terms of *istiqāma*, a type of pragmatic "rightness" representative of uttered expressions that are successfully conveyed by the speaker and recovered by the audience. It is an idea that appeals to the intelligibility or communicability of units of discourse, especially as pertains to conventions$_{mp}$, that is, how interlocutors of a particular speech community use their language in their society and culture in line with their shared intuitions and expectations about said usage.

Sībawayhi is thus able to outline a pragmatics-centric theory of communication where the following principles apply, with (ii) and (iii) being respectively furthered by Jurjānī and Ibn Taymiyya in post-Sībawayhian pragmatics:

(i) the very nature and role of syntactic constructs are metapragmatically determined by some expectation, rule or convention that people are assumed to intuitively follow when they cooperate in a conversation;
(ii) the compliance or non-compliance with these conventions$_{mp}$ give rise of various types of meanings, including those of the inferential type;
(iii) conventions$_{mp}$ count as a source of contextual information, and thus fall under a broad, integrative category of context, i.e. context$_{i}$.

In this way, Sībawayhi puts forth a framework that affords conventions a significant role in the intention-convention interface of communication, and one where conventions are seen through a metadiscursive lens in that they capture speakers' intuitions about normative interpretations and their expectations about how language is normally used. In other words, conventions$_{mp}$ here pertain to patterns in social interaction consolidated by frequent exposure to a cultural norm or expectation of language use, such that the words, constructions, and whatever other

linguistic devices speakers may use in discourse are a conventional$_{mp}$ means for communicative interactions in society. To focus on conventionality$_{mp}$, then, is to focus on the manner in which interlocutors actually practice their language and engage in discourse, looking beyond the scope of what kinds of beliefs and assumption they may hold. That is, depending on the manner in which interlocutors compose their discourse with respect to such conventions$_{mp}$, the meaning of their utterances aligns with whatever they mainly intended to convey, whether that be exactly what is uttered, an enriched version of what is uttered, or an entirely independent inference. Discourse compositionality here is sought for speech acts rather than syntactic units. What this means is that, in Sībawayhian theory, the literal/non-literal divide does not figure in the definition or categorization of discourse meaning, nor does the conventional/non-conventional divide, nor does the context-sensitive/context-free divide. Sībawayhi does not base discourse interpretation on conventions$_{s}$ to which context sometimes contributes, as is the case in Gricean and most post-Gricean models; instead, discourse interpretation in Sībawayhi's model relies on conventions$_{mp}$ integrated within a larger, multifaceted realm of context, a kind of *integrative* context (context$_{i}$). And so, given that the divides in question are commonly adopted across Gricean and post-Gricean pragmatics, the benefits of reevaluating them from the perspective of Sībawayhian pragmatics are many.

For one, the Gricean/post-Gricean reliance on conventions$_{s}$, as either the starting point of defining meaning as a whole (e.g. Grice 1989; Levinson 2000; Recanati 2010; Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995) or the substance of syntactic contributions (e.g. Jaszczolt 2005, 2015) restricts the pathway to examining how conventions might be involved in inference-making. In this paper, I showed that Sībawayhi's model, by framing conventions metapragmatically, markedly simplifies–in that, it disregards–the aforementioned divides in categories of meaning. Consider, for instance, the conventional/non-conventional divide. It appears that while there does seem to be a differentiation between communication that is conventional in the sense that it is more automatically processed and intuitive, and communication that is inferential in the sense that it requires a more effortful, conscious reasoning, that is not to say that conventionality–especially when metapragmatically construed–has no role to play in the latter. In Sībawayhi's model, communication may be enabled by speakers' shared intuitions about when conventions of discourse use are being followed (see Section 3), or by their shared intuitions about when those conventions are being broken to evoke some complex inference (see Section 4). In both cases, there is a place for conventions, but in such a way that conventionality is construed as a metapragmatic matter, representing conventions$_{mp}$. In other words, conventions$_{mp}$ are placed inside, not outside, the fold of context, namely context$_{i}$.

This forms the basis of Ibn Taymiyya's, what I call, "Integrative Contextualist" theory in post-Sībawayhian discussions. In his view, it is a fluid salience based on the idea of conventions$_{mp}$, rather than any "fixed" salience, that underlies interpretations that first comes to mind by default in discourse processing. Note that although the idea of default interpretations as context-dependent salience shows up in the post-Gricean DS-theoretic view (Jaszczolt 2005, 2015), it is construed within more restrictive parameters whereby a "default interpretation" is differentiated from so-called "lexical" defaults just as "context-dependent salience" is differentiated from context-independent contributions (see Jaszczolt 2011). Ibn Taymiyya's view of communication, on the other hand, offers us a more inclusive and unifying metapragmatic take on defaultness and contextuality by, in Sībawayhian spirit, supporting a pragmatics-centric model where even so-called lexically and grammatically based defaults count as "in-context" communicative events shaped by conventions$_{mp}$. And these conventions$_{mp}$ can represent individual speaker-specific, not just collective, metadiscursive habits, all of which count as informational varieties or *sources of context*$_i$ that contribute to the make-up of meaning (see Ibn Taymiyya, *Īmān*: 114; *Fatāwá* VII: 114–115). Ibn Taymiyya further explicitly rejects creating a literal/non-literal divide in discourse classification, and instead defends a composition of meaning that dictated by what is mainly intended by the speaker and expectedly recovered by the audience – including *multi-utterance* discourses that *emerge* over the course of conversation (see *Fatāwá* XX: 239, 406–407, 413). In the end, this doesn't leave any room for the idea of "context-free" meanings, and consequently doesn't support a context-dependent/context-independent divide.

6 Conclusions

Sībawayhian (and post-Sībawayhian) pragmatics in AL distinctly rely on two major conceptions in defining discourse meaning: conventions$_{mp}$, shared intuitions about discourse-behavioral norms; and context$_i$, an all-inclusive, integrative platform of informational varieties. This definition consists in blending intentions and conventions, representing goal-oriented socio-communicative acts, and foregrounding metapragmatic foundations of meaning. It is integral to accounting for both default and inferential modes of communication; to modeling discourse meaning in a way that makes explicit the explanatory role of conventions vis-à-vis intentions; and to presenting an intuitive contextualist$_i$ account of meaning-making.

As such, this discussion opens the door to many metatheoretical inquiries in the field at it stands, and especially leads us to rethink key concepts and classifications in Gricean and post-Gricean discourse models, such as contextualism vis-à-vis conventionalism; linguistic vis-à-vis sociocultural information sources; default vis-

à-vis inferential information processes; and in the greater scheme of things, the boundary between semantics and pragmatics. We are now presented with a fresh perspective that expands the pragmatic source and nature of conventions; promotes a complex typology of contexts; lends support to the interactivity between defaults and inferences; and overall balances out the overemphasis on intentions often found in Gricean/post-Gricean intentionalism. In this way, Sībawayhi's seminal work advances and provides new solutions to current matters of meaning representation while encouraging us to leverage cross-cultural insights from diverse pragmatic traditions. But more important, it presents a distinct orientation of pragmatic theory in its own right, posing a novel alternative to post-Griceanism and supporting the agenda to decolonize contemporary thinking in pragmatics.

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Bionote

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