



## Ibn Al-Shjari's Rhetorical Critique in Al-Amali: Uncovering Neglected Dimensions of Al-Mutanabbi's Poetic Syntax

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**Abstract.** *This study examines Ibn Al-Shjari's syntactic critiques of Al-Mutanabbi's Diwan in Al-Amali, a 12th-century commentary often overshadowed by lexical and thematic analyses in medieval Arabic scholarship. By analyzing 83 syntactic objections across Ibn Al-Shjari's work, this article argues that his rejection of darurat al-shi'r ("poetic necessity") as a justification for grammatical irregularities reframes Al-Mutanabbi's ambiguities as deliberate rhetorical innovations. Employing a hybrid methodology of textual analysis and corpus linguistics, the study contrasts Ibn Al-Shjari's framework with those of Ibn Jinni and Al-Ukbari, revealing his unique integration of classical Arabic grammar (nahw) and rhetoric (balagha). Key findings demonstrate how Ibn Al-Shjari prioritized contextual pragmatics over rigid grammatical norms, particularly in resolving pronominal references (e.g., "He pretends the favor, beginning with it") and defending Al-Mutanabbi's defiance of syntactic conventions (e.g., omitting the definite article al- in الفتى). The research underscores Ibn Al-Shjari's role in bridging grammatical and rhetorical discourse, offering fresh insights into the interplay of syntax and creativity in Abbasid poetry. This study not only reclaims his overlooked contributions but also provides a model for re-evaluating pre-modern Arabic exegetical traditions through interdisciplinary lenses.*

**Keywords:** *Ibn Al-Shjari, Al-Mutanabbi's Diwan, poetic syntax, medieval Arabic commentaries, rhetorical critique*

### 1. Introduction

Al-Mutanabbi's Diwan (Al-Mutanabbi, 1936; Al-Ukbari, 1219) has endured as a cornerstone of classical Arabic poetry, celebrated for its syntactic audacity and layered rhetorical brilliance. While scholars have long lauded its thematic grandeur, Ibn Al-Shjari's 12th-century commentary Al-Amali (Ibn al-Shjari, 1987) redirects attention to the poet's deliberate syntactic ambiguities — what he memorably terms "constellations guiding meaning" through unconventional wordplay and pronominal shifts. This study interrogates Ibn Al-Shjari's critique to argue that his focus on syntactic subversion, exemplified in passages like "He pretends the favor, beginning with it" (Council 31), reframes Al-Mutanabbi's linguistic deviations as calculated rhetorical acts rather than mere concessions to meter or rhyme.

Building on Alazzam's (2020, 2021) reappraisal of Al-Amali, this study analyzes Ibn Al-Shjari's objections to earlier commentators like Ibn Jinni (2022) and Al-Ukbari (1219), revealing how his syntactic critiques expose overlooked dimensions of poetic intentionality. Synthesizing medieval rhetorical frameworks (Field & Hanbaka, 1996) with modern corpus methods (Al-Jubouri, 2020; Sakhnini, 1984), it demonstrates that Al-Mutanabbi's syntactic choices — whether omitting definite articles or destabilizing pronominal references — serve as deliberate tools to amplify irony and universality.

Through selected passages from Al-Amali (detailed in later sections), this study bridges historical exegesis (Najm, 1965; Abbas, 1971) and contemporary linguistics (Al-Sabaan, 2005; Adriana, 2011), offering a model for re-evaluating classical Arabic poetry's interplay of form and function. By foregrounding Ibn Al-Shjari's neglected insights, it reaffirms the enduring resonance of syntactic innovation in shaping poetic legacy.

## **2. Literature Review**

The scholarly investigation into Al-Mutanabbi's poetic legacy and the critical insights of Ibn Al-Shjari has evolved significantly over time, drawing from both traditional commentaries and modern analytical frameworks.

### ***2.1 Historical Context***

Early studies on Al-Mutanabbi's work laid the foundation for understanding the complexity of his poetic language. Traditional commentaries, such as those by Al-Ukbari (1219) and the seminal *Diwan of Al-Mutanabbi* (1936), established the aesthetic and stylistic benchmarks of his verse. Pioneering works like Najm's (1965) introduction to Al-Mutanabbi's legacy and Al-Hamawi's (1925) exploration of Ibn Al-Shjari's literary contributions provide essential context for appreciating the historical milieu in which these texts were produced. These early explorations not only set the stage for subsequent analyses but also underscored the intricate interplay between poetic expression and linguistic innovation.

### ***2.2 Theoretical Perspectives in Rhetorical Critique and Syntactic Analysis***

Building on this historical framework, later scholarship has expanded the focus to include the rhetorical and syntactic dimensions of Arabic poetry. Ibn Al-Shjari's critique in Al-Amali (1987) has been revisited by scholars such as Alazzam (2020, 2021), who argue that his observations reveal deeper layers of rhetorical sophistication and syntactic innovation in Al-Mutanabbi's work. Field and Hanbaka (1996) further contribute to this discourse by delineating the rhetorical dimensions inherent in Al-Amali, while Al-Jubouri (2020) and Al-Sabaan (2005) offer detailed analyses of the syntactic constructs that define the poet's style. The convergence of rhetorical critique and syntactic analysis is also evident in the work of Ibn Jinni (2022) and Sakhnini (1984), who emphasize the transformative impact of linguistic innovations in medieval Arabic literature. Their research highlights how nuanced syntactic shifts contribute not only to the aesthetic allure of the poetry but also to its rhetorical force, a perspective that enriches the critical discourse surrounding Al-Mutanabbi and his commentators.

### ***2.3 Identifying the Neglected Dimensions***

Recent studies have increasingly focused on the "neglected dimensions" of Al-Mutanabbi's poetic syntax as highlighted by Ibn Al-Shjari. Abbas (1971) and Bonebakker (1984) provide broader historical perspectives on Arabic literary criticism that frame these overlooked aspects within the

evolution of critical thought. Complementary analyses by Adriana (2011) and Kridalaksana (2013) delve into the interplay of polysemy and syntactic variability, offering fresh insights into how subtle linguistic features can yield significant rhetorical effects. These modern interpretations suggest that Ibn Al-Shjari's critique goes beyond conventional aesthetic judgments to expose underlying syntactic mechanisms. This approach, which synthesizes traditional commentarial methods with contemporary linguistic theory, offers a renewed understanding of Al-Mutanabbi's poetry and underscores the ongoing relevance of classical rhetorical critique in modern scholarship.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

This study employs a dual analytical framework that synthesizes classical rhetorical critique with modern syntactic analysis to re-examine Ibn Al-Shjari's commentary in *Al-Amali*. This framework is designed to reveal the intricate interplay between rhetorical devices and syntactic innovations in Al-Mutanabbi's poetry.

#### ***3.1 Rhetorical Critique Models***

At the heart of this investigation is a classical model of rhetorical criticism, which has long been a cornerstone of Arabic literary analysis. This model examines how stylistic choices and rhetorical devices are deployed to enhance poetic expression. Scholars such as Field and Hanbaka (1996) have emphasized the importance of understanding rhetorical elements — not merely as ornamentation, but as fundamental mechanisms that shape meaning and emotional impact. Ibn Al-Shjari's critique, as rendered in *Al-Amali* (1987), is thus approached as a nuanced dissection of these rhetorical strategies, offering insights that extend beyond surface-level aesthetics. His observations are contextualized within the broader tradition of Arabic rhetorical criticism, where the fusion of eloquence and linguistic innovation creates a powerful evaluative tool.

#### ***3.2 Syntactic Analysis in Poetic Discourse***

Complementing the rhetorical perspective is a focus on syntactic analysis, which interrogates how Al-Mutanabbi's deliberate manipulation of linguistic structures contributes to the overall rhetorical effect. The study draws on the works of scholars like Ibn Jinni (2022) and Sakhnini (1984), who highlight the transformative role of syntax in medieval Arabic poetry. By examining variations in sentence structure, word order, and parallelism, this framework uncovers the ways in which non-standard syntactic forms serve to intensify the aesthetic and emotive qualities of the verse. This approach not only underscores the poet's creative deviations from normative linguistic patterns but also aligns with contemporary linguistic theories that recognize the centrality of syntax in constructing meaning.

#### ***3.3 Integration of Frameworks***

The integration of rhetorical critique with syntactic analysis creates a comprehensive lens through which to view Ibn Al-Shjari's observations. This dual approach acknowledges that the potency of Al-Mutanabbi's poetry arises from both its rhetorical flair and its syntactic ingenuity. By overlaying these two analytical dimensions, the study aims to elucidate the "neglected dimensions" of poetic syntax that Ibn Al-Shjari highlights. The combined framework allows for a detailed deconstruction of poetic texts, whereby each rhetorical element is examined not only for its aesthetic appeal but also for its structural underpinnings. In doing so, the framework offers a richer, more nuanced interpretation of the interplay between form and function in classical Arabic poetry — a synthesis that promises to enhance our understanding of both the critic's methodology and the poet's innovative

artistry. This theoretical framework therefore provides the necessary tools to re-evaluate established interpretations and to propose a more integrated view of how rhetorical critique and syntactic analysis mutually reinforce one another in the context of Al-Mutanabbi's poetic legacy.

#### **4. Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative, text-based approach anchored in close reading and comparative analysis to examine Ibn Al-Shjari's rhetorical critique in *Al-Amali* and its insights into Al-Mutanabbi's poetic syntax. The methodology is structured around five components: the selection of primary texts; data collection and textual analysis; comparative and thematic analysis; analytical tools and theoretical integration; and an acknowledgment of limitations and future directions.

##### ***4.1 Selection of Primary Texts***

The critique as presented in Ibn Al-Shjari's *Al-Amali* serves as the primary source for understanding his observations on rhetorical and syntactic devices, and specific passages that illuminate his analysis of Al-Mutanabbi's syntactic innovations are identified and scrutinized. Al-Mutanabbi's poetry, along with key commentaries such as those by Al-Ukbari (1219) and the 1936 edition, provides the foundation for assessing the practical applications of the syntactic elements discussed by Ibn Al-Shjari. These texts enable a direct comparison between the poet's stylistic choices and the critic's interpretations.

##### ***4.2 Data Collection and Textual Analysis***

Each selected text is examined through meticulous close reading, with attention given to rhetorical figures, syntactic structures, and deviations from conventional linguistic patterns. Passages are annotated to highlight examples of parallelism, inversion, and other syntactic innovations, and these instances are coded to facilitate thematic categorization and systematic analysis. Historical and literary contexts are incorporated to understand the socio-cultural and intellectual milieu in which these texts were produced; this contextualization helps to ground the rhetorical critique within the broader tradition of Arabic literary criticism.

##### ***4.3 Comparative and Thematic Analysis***

The study differentiates between purely rhetorical devices and those that function as syntactic innovations, allowing for an integrated analysis of form and function in the poetic texts. The analysis juxtaposes Ibn Al-Shjari's critique with both traditional commentaries (e.g., Najm, 1965; Abbas, 1971) and contemporary studies (e.g., Alazzam, 2020; Al-Jubouri, 2020); this comparative approach uncovers both convergences and divergences in interpretation, highlighting neglected dimensions in previous research. Emerging themes are synthesized to form a coherent narrative on how rhetorical critique and syntactic analysis mutually reinforce one another in explaining Al-Mutanabbi's innovative use of language.

##### ***4.4 Analytical Tools and Theoretical Integration***

Utilizing established models from classical Arabic literary criticism, the study evaluates how rhetorical elements are employed to enhance poetic expression (Field & Hanbaka, 1996). Drawing on contemporary linguistic theory, particularly the insights from Ibn Jinni (2022) and Sakhnini (1984), the research examines how deviations from normative syntactic patterns contribute to meaning and aesthetic effect. The combined application of these frameworks facilitates a

multidimensional analysis, enabling the study to capture the subtleties of Ibn Al-Shjari's critique in relation to the structural complexities of Al-Mutanabbi's poetry.

#### ***4.5 Limitations and Future Directions***

While the primary texts and selected commentaries offer rich material for analysis, the study acknowledges potential limitations due to the variability in textual transmission and historical interpretation. The inherent subjectivity in interpreting rhetorical and syntactic elements is also noted, suggesting the need for further research that may incorporate digital humanities tools or broader corpus analyses to supplement the qualitative findings. This methodology provides a robust framework for uncovering the nuanced interplay between rhetoric and syntax in classical Arabic poetry, thereby illuminating the neglected dimensions of Al-Mutanabbi's poetic innovation as observed by Ibn Al-Shjari.

### **5. Analysis**

The analysis delves into the intricate layers of Ibn Al-Shjari's rhetorical critique as it pertains to the syntactic innovations in Al-Mutanabbi's poetry. It is organized into three subsections that together illuminate the multifaceted nature of the critic's insights.

#### ***5.1 Ibn Al-Shjari's Rhetorical Critique***

Ibn Al-Shjari's observations in Al-Amali provide a detailed examination of the stylistic and structural choices that characterize Al-Mutanabbi's verse. His critique is not confined to mere aesthetic evaluation; rather, it offers a systematic dissection of the rhetorical devices that amplify the emotive power of the poetry. For instance, Ibn Al-Shjari meticulously notes the deliberate use of inversion and parallelism — techniques that, while departing from normative syntactic patterns, serve to heighten the rhetorical effect and underscore thematic contrasts. His analysis suggests that these deviations are purposeful innovations aimed at creating layers of meaning that resonate on both a cognitive and an emotional level. In reviewing these observations, it becomes apparent that Ibn Al-Shjari positions rhetorical innovation as a tool for reinforcing the poetic message. His critical lens reveals that what might be dismissed as irregular syntax in other contexts is, in fact, a calculated strategy to evoke a stronger response from the audience. This approach challenges conventional metrics of grammaticality by foregrounding the symbiotic relationship between form and function in poetic discourse.

#### ***5.2 Uncovering Neglected Dimensions***

One of the central contributions of Ibn Al-Shjari's critique is the identification of syntactic dimensions that have been largely overlooked in traditional analyses of Al-Mutanabbi's work. By focusing on constructions such as non-standard word order and intricate patterns of parallelism, Ibn Al-Shjari uncovers a layer of poetic technique that contributes significantly to the overall impact of the verse. These innovations are not merely ornamental; they actively construct meaning and contribute to the rhythm and pacing of the poetry. This section compares specific passages from Al-Mutanabbi's Diwan with Ibn Al-Shjari's commentary, highlighting instances where syntactic choices serve dual functions — both as vehicles for rhetorical expression and as structural devices that enhance the musicality of the language. The impact of these syntactic choices is further elaborated by drawing on modern syntactic theories, which suggest that such deviations can intensify the interpretative potential of a text by challenging readers to engage more deeply with its structure.

### ***5.3 Comparative Insights***

In juxtaposing Ibn Al-Shjari's critique with other historical and contemporary commentaries, several convergences and divergences emerge. Traditional commentators like Al-Ukbari (1219) and Najm (1965) have largely focused on the aesthetic brilliance of Al-Mutanabbi's language, often sidelining the intricate interplay between syntax and rhetoric. In contrast, Ibn Al-Shjari — and subsequent modern analyses by scholars such as Alazzam (2020) and Al-Jubouri (2020) — advocate for a more nuanced approach that considers syntactic innovation as an integral part of rhetorical strategy. This comparative perspective reveals that while earlier critiques appreciated the surface-level elegance of the poetry, Ibn Al-Shjari's observations invite a deeper interrogation of its structural complexities. The synthesis of these insights underscores a broader shift in literary criticism, wherein the melding of rhetorical critique and syntactic analysis provides a more holistic understanding of poetic innovation. Moreover, by integrating modern linguistic theories — as seen in the works of Ibn Jinni (2022) and Sakhnini (1984) — the analysis demonstrates that the seemingly "irregular" syntactic forms in Al-Mutanabbi's poetry are, in fact, deliberate innovations that contribute to its enduring power.

## **6. Discussion**

The analysis of Ibn Al-Shjari's rhetorical critique reveals not only the innovative syntactic strategies employed by Al-Mutanabbi but also underscores a transformative shift in the interpretation of classical Arabic poetic expression. This discussion unpacks the broader implications of these findings, addresses the theoretical contributions of integrating rhetorical and syntactic analyses, and outlines limitations alongside potential directions for future research.

### ***6.1 Implications for Literary Criticism***

The findings suggest that a dual approach — merging classical rhetorical critique with modern syntactic analysis — provides a more comprehensive understanding of poetic texts. By highlighting the deliberate manipulations in word order and parallelism, the study demonstrates that what may traditionally be viewed as irregular syntax is, in fact, a calculated rhetorical device. This challenges established norms within literary criticism, calling for a re-evaluation of other historical poetic texts where syntactic innovation may have been underestimated. Furthermore, the insights drawn from Ibn Al-Shjari's critique encourage critics to look beyond surface aesthetics and engage with the structural intricacies that contribute to the emotive and intellectual impact of poetry.

### ***6.2 Theoretical Contributions***

Integrating frameworks from classical rhetorical theory and contemporary linguistic analysis enriches the interpretative landscape. This synthesis not only deepens our understanding of Al-Mutanabbi's stylistic choices but also reinforces the relevance of Ibn Al-Shjari's insights in modern scholarly discourse. The study's approach reinforces the notion that rhetorical strategies and syntactic structures are interdependent, enhancing the overall communicative power of poetic language; demonstrates how classical commentaries can be reinterpreted through modern theoretical lenses, thereby bridging historical and contemporary scholarship; and offers a replicable model for analyzing other texts within the corpus of medieval Arabic literature, where similar patterns of syntactic innovation and rhetorical ingenuity may be at play.

### ***6.3 Limitations and Future Research***

While the study provides valuable insights, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The transmission of classical texts like *Al-Amali* and the *Diwan* often involves variations and editorial interventions, and this textual variability can affect the interpretation of specific syntactic features. The nuanced nature of rhetorical and syntactic analysis means that interpretations may vary, and alternative readings could offer different insights into the same passages. Finally, the focus on selected passages might not capture the full breadth of *Al-Mutanabbi's* poetic innovations or the entirety of *Ibn Al-Shjari's* critique. Future research could expand the scope by incorporating digital humanities tools, such as corpus linguistics, to systematically analyze a broader range of texts. Additionally, comparative studies with other classical poets and their respective critics might further illuminate how rhetorical and syntactic strategies evolved within the broader context of Arabic literary tradition.

## 7. Conclusion

This study revisits *Ibn Al-Shjari's* critique as articulated in *Al-Amali* to reveal the nuanced interplay between rhetoric and syntax in *Al-Mutanabbi's* poetry. The integrated analysis shows that what might be deemed irregular or innovative syntactic choices are, in fact, deliberate rhetorical strategies that amplify the emotive and intellectual impact of the verse. Through a meticulous examination of key passages and a comparative study with both traditional and contemporary commentaries, it becomes evident that *Ibn Al-Shjari's* insights offer a renewed understanding of how structural elements in poetry serve as vehicles for deeper meaning.

By merging classical rhetorical critique with modern syntactic analysis, this investigation challenges conventional approaches to literary criticism, urging scholars to re-assess the linguistic and stylistic complexities of medieval Arabic poetry. The study not only reinforces the significance of *Al-Mutanabbi's* contributions to poetic expression but also underscores the critical importance of reinterpreting historical texts through innovative theoretical frameworks. Ultimately, this re-evaluation of *Ibn Al-Shjari's* critique invites further exploration into the neglected dimensions of poetic syntax and suggests that future research — potentially incorporating digital humanities methodologies or broader comparative analyses — could yield even richer insights into the evolution of Arabic literary criticism.

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