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ARABIC DAMIR AND GAYO PRONOUNS: A CONTRASTIVE STUDY FOR NAHW PEDAGOGY

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Abstract

This study aims to compare Arabic and Gayo pronominal systems and derive implications for teaching *naḥw* to Gayo speakers learning Arabic as a third language after Indonesian. Arabic *ḍamīr* encode person, number, and gender simultaneously, whereas Gayo marks neither gender nor the dual. Using a qualitative contrastive design, data from reference grammars of Modern Standard Arabic and Gayo were analysed through description, selection, comparison, and prediction, guided by Prator's hierarchy of difficulty and the Linguistic Proximity Model. The results reveal five contrastive patterns: 1) coalescence of the Gayo inclusive–exclusive distinction into *naḥnu*; 2) overdifferentiation of the dual, which Gayo lacks; 3) a split of gender-neutral pronouns into masculine and feminine forms; 4) reinterpretation of honorific address; and 5) positive correspondence in bound possessives, person prefixes, and predicate–subject order. Gender and the dual are predicted to pose the greatest difficulty; hence, a three-language contrastive sequence for teaching *ḍamīr* is proposed.

Keywords: ḍamīr*; contrastive analysis; Gayo language;* naḥw *instruction; third language acquisition*

INTRODUCTION

The *ḍamīr* (personal pronoun) occupies a central position in Arabic grammar (*naḥw*) because it does more than substitute for a noun: it simultaneously encodes three grammatical features, namely person, number, and gender. These features underpin the network of agreement (*muṭābaqah*) between *fi'l* and *fā'il*, *mubtada'* and *khabar*, and *na't* and *man'ūt*, so an incorrect choice of *ḍamīr* almost inevitably spreads to other constituents of the sentence (al-Ghalāyīnī, 2005; Ryding, 2005). Research on the acquisition of Arabic as a foreign language consistently shows that gender and number are among the most vulnerable areas. Alkohlani (2016) identified 453 gender errors in an 18,152-word written corpus produced by

advanced learners, with noun–adjective agreement accounting for the largest share. Albirini et al. (2013) found that even Arabic heritage speakers performed below monolingual speakers in gender and number agreement, while Tucker et al. (2021) showed that, among native speakers, the processing of verbal gender and verbal number is not fully identical. In Indonesia, similar patterns are visible in errors of *iʿrāb* and in distinguishing *mufrad* from *jamʿ* during reading (Qori, 2024), in phrase-level errors in master's theses (Mubarak et al., 2022), and even in grammatical errors in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah teaching modules, which are dominated by *iḍāfah*, *jār-majrūr*, and *naʿt–manʿūt* structures (Ubaid et al., 2026). These findings indicate that agreement features are not merely a beginner's problem but a persistent difficulty across educational levels.

To anticipate such difficulties, contrastive analysis has long informed the development of Arabic instruction in Indonesia. Nashoih and Darmawan (2019) developed contrastive *naḥw* materials to address Indonesian interference in students' written compositions (*insyāʾ*), Junaidi et al. (2024) designed *qirāʾah* materials based on *iʿrāb* activities, and Lubis et al. (2025) applied transformational theory to uncover the deep and surface structures of Arabic verbal sentences. Nearly all of these studies, however, take Indonesian as the sole point of comparison, as if every Indonesian learner were monolingual. In reality, many learners acquire a regional language first. In the highlands of Central Aceh, Bener Meriah, and Gayo Lues, the first language of most learners is Gayo, a Malayo-Polynesian language spoken by approximately 260,000 people (Eades & Hajek, 2006). Typologically, Gayo has a symmetrical voice system, a productive set of verbal affixes, and a pronominal system that does not mark gender at all (Eades, 2005). Research on the relationship between Gayo and Arabic has so far been limited to sounds and vocabulary. Gayo-speaking students in Takengon mispronounced twelve Arabic phonemes because of differences in the points and manners of articulation, whereas Firdaus and Maulidati (2023) documented 397 Arabic loanwords in Gayo together with the phonological changes they have undergone. Meanwhile, Fauzi (2020) recorded 63 Gayo forms of address (*tutur*) that are bound to the kinship system and to Islamic communicative ethics. Morphosyntactic contrasts, particularly in the pronominal system, have received little attention.

This gap matters because Gayo learners in fact acquire Arabic as a third language (L3), with Gayo as their first language (L1) and Indonesian as the second language (L2) of schooling. Research on L3 acquisition shows that both previously acquired languages may serve as sources of transfer. The Typological Primacy Model predicts wholesale transfer from the language that is structurally closest to the L3 (Rothman, 2015), whereas the Linguistic Proximity Model holds that transfer proceeds property by property from whichever language shares a given property with the target (Westergaard, 2021; Westergaard et al., 2017). A systematic review by Puig-Mayenco et al. (2020) demonstrates that the source of transfer is not

determined solely by the order of acquisition, and Al-Thubaiti (2024) found that proficiency predicted the accuracy of Arabic verbal gender agreement more strongly than L1 background. From the feature reassembly perspective, the learner's main task is not simply to memorise new forms but to reconfigure grammatical features into morphological exponents that differ from those of the languages already acquired (Lardiere, 2009). Pedagogically, form-focused instruction has been shown to have a large effect on second language acquisition (Kang et al., 2019), and pedagogical translanguaging, the planned use of learners' entire linguistic repertoire, can enhance cross-linguistic morphological awareness (Leonet et al., 2020). In university-level Arabic instruction, Buchori et al. (2025) reported that translanguaging supported students' comprehension, participation, and self-confidence, although it risked fostering reliance on the first language. Integrating local wisdom into foreign language teaching is likewise regarded as a strategic means of sustaining learners' identity (Albantani & Madkur, 2018).

In short, researchers have focused on gender and number errors in Arabic as a second language, on Arabic–Indonesian contrastive analysis, and on Gayo–Arabic contact at the phonological and lexical levels. There have been very limited studies, however, comparing the Arabic *ḍamīr* system with the Gayo pronominal system, and none has positioned Gayo speakers as L3 learners for whom Indonesian is an intermediate language. Yet the *ḍamīr* is the node of agreement that determines the accuracy of an Arabic sentence as a whole. Therefore, this study intends to map the contrasts between the Arabic and Gayo pronominal systems systematically and to translate them into a design for *naḥw* instruction that is sensitive to learners' first language. Specifically, the objectives of this study are (1) to describe the Arabic *ḍamīr* system and the Gayo pronominal system in terms of person, number, gender, honorifics, and morphological status; (2) to identify their similarities and differences and classify the predicted levels of difficulty, taking Indonesian into account as the learners' L2; and (3) to formulate implications for teaching *naḥw* to Gayo speakers. The novelty of the study lies in its three-language (Gayo–Indonesian–Arabic) contrastive mapping at the level of individual properties, which enables teachers to distinguish properties likely to be facilitated by the first language from those that require explicit instruction.

METHOD

This study adopted a qualitative approach with a synchronic contrastive design (*al-taḥlīl al-taqābulī*), that is, a comparison of two linguistic systems at the same level in order to identify similarities and differences likely to affect learning (Brown, 2014). It is a library-based study because its data consist of documented grammatical descriptions and example sentences rather than learner production. Consequently, the outcomes of the analysis are hypothetical predictions of difficulty that need to be tested through error analysis in subsequent research. The unit of

analysis is the personal pronoun paradigm, including free and bound forms and their syntactic role in agreement. Indonesian was included as a third language of comparison because it is both the learners' L2 and the language of instruction for Arabic in madrasahs and universities in the Gayo region.

Arabic data were drawn from the description of *ḍamīr* in a reference grammar of Modern Standard Arabic(Ryding, 2005) and from the classical *naḥw* text *Jāmi' al-Durūs al-'Arabiyyah* (al-Ghalāyīnī, 2005). Gayo data were drawn from *A Grammar of Gayo* (Eades, 2005), the only comprehensive descriptive grammar of the language, which is based on a corpus of natural speech and elicitation in the Bukit dialect of Central Aceh; this was supplemented by the phonetic description of Eades and Hajek (2006) and by Fauzi's (2020) inventory of Gayo forms of address. The population of data comprised all personal pronoun forms in these sources, and the sample consisted of the complete Arabic paradigms of *ḍamīr munfaṣil* and *muttaṣil*, the Gayo free pronouns, clitics, and person affixes, and Gayo example sentences accompanied by interlinear glosses. Examples were selected purposively according to three criteria: they contained a pronoun or person marker, came from the Bukit dialect, and were accompanied by a translation in the original source. The research instrument was a contrastive analysis sheet covering eight dimensions: person, clusivity, number, gender, honorifics, morphological status (free or bound), syntactic position, and involvement in agreement.

The data were analysed in the four stages of contrastive analysis: description, selection, comparison, and prediction. In the description stage, the pronominal system of each language was presented using the same categories; in the selection stage, properties relevant to *naḥw* instruction were chosen; in the comparison stage, each property was compared across Arabic, Gayo, and Indonesian; and in the prediction stage, the differences were classified using Prator's hierarchy of difficulty as summarised by Brown (2014), ranging from transfer (level 0), coalescence (level 1), underdifferentiation (level 2), reinterpretation (level 3), and overdifferentiation (level 4) to split (level 5). These predictions were then re-examined through the Linguistic Proximity Model by determining whether each Arabic property was supported by one, both, or neither of the learners' previously acquired languages (Westergaard et al., 2017). Trustworthiness was ensured through source triangulation, by checking every example against its original gloss, and by confronting the predictions with the error patterns reported in previous empirical studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are presented in four parts: the Arabic *ḍamīr* paradigm, the Gayo pronominal system, the contrastive mapping with its predicted levels of difficulty, and the implications for *naḥw* instruction. A final part discusses these findings in relation to previous research.

The Ḍamīr *Paradigm in Arabic*

Arabic classifies *ḍamīr* by form into *ḍamīr munfaṣil* (free), *ḍamīr muttaṣil* (bound), and *ḍamīr mustatir* (covert within the verb). Semantically, each *ḍamīr* encodes three persons (*mutakallim*, *mukhāṭab*, *ghā'ib*), three numbers (*mufrad*, *muthannā*, *jam'*), and two genders (*mudhakkar*, *mu'annath*). Gender is distinguished only in the second and third persons, while the first person is gender-neutral. The combination of these features yields fourteen cells, traditionally memorised as the fourteen *ḍamīr*, which are nevertheless filled by only twelve forms of *ḍamīr munfaṣil marfū'*, because the second- and third-person duals do not distinguish gender ((al-Ghalāyīnī, 2005; Ryding, 2005). Table 1 presents this paradigm together with the corresponding *ḍamīr muttaṣil* attached to nouns.

Table 1 The Paradigm of *Ḍamīr Munfaṣil Marfū'* and Noun-Attached *Ḍamīr Muttaṣil*

Person	Number	Gender	*Munfaṣil marfū'*	*Muttaṣil*	Example (*bayt* + *ḍamīr*)
I	Singular	Neutral	أَنَا	ـِي	بَيْتِي
I	Dual/plural	Neutral	نَحْنُ	ـنَا	بَيْتُنَا
II	Singular	Masculine	أَنْتَ	ـكَ	بَيْتُكَ
II	Singular	Feminine	أَنْتِ	ـكِ	بَيْتُكِ
II	Dual	M/F	أَنْتُمَا	ـكُمَا	بَيْتُكُمَا
II	Plural	Masculine	أَنْتُمْ	ـكُمْ	بَيْتُكُمْ
II	Plural	Feminine	أَنْتُنَّ	ـكُنَّ	بَيْتُكُنَّ
III	Singular	Masculine	هُوَ	ـهُ	بَيْتُهُ
III	Singular	Feminine	هِيَ	ـهَا	بَيْتُهَا
III	Dual	M/F	هُمَا	ـهُمَا	بَيْتُهُمَا
III	Plural	Masculine	هُمْ	ـهُمْ	بَيْتُهُمْ
III	Plural	Feminine	هُنَّ	ـهُنَّ	بَيْتُهُنَّ

Source: adapted from al-Ghalāyīnī (2005) and Ryding (2005).

The paradigm does not end with free pronouns. The same features are obligatorily realised on verbs through subject suffixes in the *fi'l māḍī* (*katab-tu*, *katab-ta*, *katab-ti*, *katab-tumā*, *katab-ū*, *katab-at*) and prefixes in the *fi'l muḍāri'* (*a-ktubu*, *na-ktubu*, *ta-ktubu*, *ya-ktubu*). As a result, a form such as *taktubu* is ambiguous between the referents *anta* 'you (masculine)' and *hiya* 'she', and can be resolved only through context. Agreement is also asymmetrical: a verb preceding a plural subject remains singular yet must agree in gender, as in ذَهَبَ الطُّلَّابُ and ذَهَبَتِ الطَّالِبَاتُ,

whereas a verb following its subject agrees fully (Azaz, 2023). In addition, plurals of non-human nouns are referred to by the feminine singular *ḍamīr hiya*. The *ḍamīr* in Arabic is therefore the node of an agreement network that extends to verbs, adjectives, and coreferential pronouns.

The Gayo Pronominal System

In Gayo, pronouns form a subclass of nouns (Eades, 2005). Gayo nouns are not inflected for number or definiteness, and gender is not marked anywhere in the grammar. The principal free pronouns are *aku* (first person singular), *kite* (first person plural inclusive), *kami* (first person plural exclusive), *ko* (second person familiar), *kam* (second person polite or plural), and *we* (third person). There are also bound forms: the possessive enclitics *=ku*, *=mu*, and *=e* attached to nouns, the non-subject enclitics *=e* and *=ko* on verbs, and the portmanteau prefixes *ku-*, *kami-*, and *kite-*, which replace the undergoer-orientation prefix *i-* when the actor is first person (Eades, 2005, p. 12). Table 2 summarises the paradigm, and examples (1)–(6) illustrate its use.

Table 2 The Gayo Personal Pronoun System (Bukit Dialect)

Person/number	Free form	Possessive clitic (on nouns)	Marker on verbs	Notes
1st singular	*aku*	*=ku*	*ku-* (actor, undergoer orientation)	Gender-neutral
1st plural inclusive	*kite*	–	*kite-*	Includes the addressee
1st plural exclusive	*kami*	–	*kami-*	Excludes the addressee
2nd familiar	*ko*	*=mu*	*=ko* (non-subject)	To close peers or younger interlocutors
2nd polite/plural	*kam*	–	–	To respected interlocutors; plurality reinforced with *bewen* 'all'
3rd singular	*we*	*=e*	*=e* (actor/non-subject)	Gender-neutral; no dual
3rd plural	*pakea*	–	–	Gender-neutral; plurality also expressed analytically

Source: adapted from Eades (2005, pp. 9–16, 203–207) and Fauzi (2020). A dash (–) indicates that the form is not specified in the sources used.

(1) *R[em]alan we.*
INTR-walk 3
'S/he is walking.' (Eades, 2005, p. 8)

(2) *Mangan penan kite.*
AO:eat cake 1PL.INCL
'We are eating cakes.' (Eades, 2005, p. 9)

(3) *Mu-tuh gelas=ku.*
INTR-fall glass=1.POSS
'My glass fell.' (Eades, 2005, p. 11)

(4) *Nge ku-osah sen=mu.*
already UO.1-give money=2.POSS
'I gave you some money.' (lit. 'I gave your money') (Eades, 2005, p. 16)

(5) *I-tos=e wu.*
UO-make=3.N.SUBJ fish.trap
'S/he made a fish trap.' (Eades, 2005, p. 14)

(6) *Sahan le si n-dere-n=ko?*
who FOC REL AO-hit-CAUS=2.N.SUBJ
'Who struck you?' (Eades, 2005, p. 33)

Gloss abbreviations follow Eades (2005): 1, 2, 3 = person; PL = plural; INCL = inclusive; POSS = possessive; N.SUBJ = non-subject; UO = undergoer orientation; AO = actor orientation; INTR = intransitive; CAUS = causative; REL = relativiser; FOC = focus.

Example (1) shows that *we* refers to a third person without distinguishing male from female; the translation *'He is walking'* in the original source merely reflects the translator's choice. Example (2) shows *kite* including the addressee, while examples (3) and (4) show possessive enclitics following the noun, a pattern parallel to *baytī* and *baytuka* in Arabic. Example (4) also shows the prefix *ku-* marking a first-person actor on the verb, and examples (5) and (6) show the enclitics *=e* and *=ko* referring to non-subject arguments. Equally important, the canonical order of the Gayo clause is predicate–subject, while the subject may be fronted for discourse emphasis, as in *We r[em]alan* 's/he is walking' (Eades, 2005, p. 8). This pattern parallels the pairing of *jumlah fi'liyyah* and *jumlah ismiyyah* in Arabic. Plurality is not marked morphologically but can be expressed analytically through the quantifier *bewen* 'all', as in *Bewen=e be-bulang* 'Everyone is wearing a hat' (Eades, 2005, p. 11). Gayo also has no dual category.

The most distinctive dimension of Gayo person reference is honorific. The choice between *ko* and *kam* is governed by age and social relationship, and in many situations pronouns are avoided altogether in favour of kinship terms such as *ama* 'father', *ine* 'mother', and *abang* 'elder brother'. Fauzi (2020) recorded 63 forms of address in Gayo *tutur*, grouped into *tutur atas*, *tutur sejajar*, and *tutur renah*, and emphasised that addressing an interlocutor directly by name is considered improper because it violates the value of self-esteem (*mukemel*). In other words, the social feature of honorifics is far more salient in Gayo than the grammatical features of gender and number. As the learners' L2, Indonesian displays a configuration similar to Gayo in many respects: an inclusive–exclusive distinction (*kita–kami*), an honorific distinction (*kamu–Anda* and the address terms *Bapak/Ibu*), the clitics *-ku*,

-mu, *-nya*, and the proclitics *ku-*/*kau-* on verbs, with neither gender nor dual. The main difference lies in word order: the basic Indonesian clause is subject–predicate, whereas the basic Gayo clause is predicate–subject.

Contrastive Mapping and Predicted Levels of Difficulty

The comparison of the three systems yielded seven contrastive properties, summarised in Table 3. The last two columns show the classification of difficulty according to Prator's hierarchy and indicate whether each Arabic property is supported by the learners' L1 or L2, following the logic of the Linguistic Proximity Model.

Table 3 Contrastive Mapping of Arabic, Gayo, and Indonesian Pronominal Systems with Predicted Difficulty

Property	Arabic (L3)	Gayo (L1)	Indonesian (L2)	Type (Prator level)	L1/L2 support and prediction
Clusivity of 1st person plural	*naḥnu*, *-nā* (no distinction)	*kite* vs. *kami*	*kita* vs. *kami*	Coalescence (1)	Supported by L1 and L2; easy
Dual number	Obligatory: *antumā*, *humā*, *-kumā*, *-humā*; dual verbs and adjectives	Absent; lexical only	Absent; lexical only	Overdifferen-tiation (4)	No support; difficult: avoidance or substitution with plural
Gender in 2nd and 3rd person	*anta/anti*, *antum/antunna*, *huwa/hiya*, *hum/hunna*; *-ka/-ki*, *-hu/-hā*	*ko*, *kam*, *we*, *=mu*, *=e* neutral	*kamu*, *dia*, *-mu*, *-nya* neutral	Split (5)	No support; most difficult: masculine overgeneralisation
Honorifics	No pronominal T/V distinction; respect expressed lexically (*ustādh*)	*ko* vs. *kam*; kinship terms	*kamu* vs. *Anda*; *Bapak/Ibu*	Reinterpretation (3)	L1 and L2 invite misinterpretation: *antum* for one addressee, reluctance to use *anta*
Possessive clitics on nouns	N + *-ī/-ka/-hu*	N + *=ku/=mu/=e*	N + *-ku/-mu/-nya*	Transfer (0) in position; split in gender	Supported by L1 and L2 for position and function
Person marking on verbs	Obligatory: *a-/na-/ta-/ya-*; *-tu/-ta/-ti/-ū*	Prefixes *ku-/kami-/kite-* (voice-related)	Proclitics *ku-/kau-*	Partial overdifferen-tiation (4)	Conceptual bridge; subject–verb agreement remains difficult
Predicate–subject order	VS (*jumlah fi'liyyah*) and SV (*jumlah ismiyyah*)	Canonical P–S; S may be fronted	Canonical S–P	Transfer (0) from L1	L1 facilitative, L2 potentially interfering; agreement asymmetry remains difficult

Source: author's analysis based on Table 1, Table 2, and the hierarchy of difficulty in Brown (2014).

Coalescence of Clusivity: Kite *and* Kami *Become* Naḥnu

Both Gayo and Indonesian distinguish an inclusive 'we' that includes the addressee from an exclusive 'we' that does not, whereas Arabic merges the two into *naḥnu* and the clitic *-nā*. In Prator's hierarchy, this two-to-one pattern constitutes coalescence (level 1), which is relatively easy because learners need only disregard a distinction they already command (Brown, 2014). Any difficulty is more likely to be receptive: when translating *naḥnu* in a text, learners must decide from context whether its meaning is inclusive or exclusive. Since both previously acquired languages provide the same support, this property is predicted to be acquired the fastest.

Overdifferentiation of Number: The Dual

The dual (*muthannā*) has no grammatical counterpart in either Gayo or Indonesian; both languages express 'two persons' only lexically. In Prator's hierarchy, this is overdifferentiation (level 4): learners must build a new category with no basis in their L1 or L2. The demand is multi-layered because the dual appears not only in the *ḍamīr* (*antumā*, *humā*, *-kumā*, *-humā*) but also in verbs (*katabā*, *yaktubāni*) and adjectives. The predicted error pattern is avoidance of dual forms and their replacement with plural forms, for instance referring to 'father and mother' with hum instead of *humā*. This prediction is consistent with Qori's (2024) finding that errors in distinguishing *mufrad* from *jam'* occur even among intensive-programme learners, which suggests that the dual, being less frequent in the input, will be even more difficult.

The Gender Split: From We *to* Huwa *and* Hiya

The sharpest contrast lies in gender. A single neutral Gayo form, *we*, must be split into *huwa* and *hiya*; *ko* and *kam* must be split into *anta*, *anti*, *antum*, and *antunna*; and the enclitics *=mu* and *=e* must be split into *-ka/-ki* and *-hu/-hā*, respectively. This one-to-many pattern is a split (level 5), the highest level in Prator's hierarchy. The difficulty is compounded in two ways. First, Indonesian, the learners' L2, is also gender-neutral (*dia*, *kamu*, *-nya*, *-mu*), so that, according to the Linguistic Proximity Model, neither previously acquired language can provide facilitative transfer; instead, both converge in supporting a genderless representation (Westergaard et al., 2017). Second, gender in Arabic does not stop at the *ḍamīr* but extends to verbal prefixes (*ya-* and *ta-*), verbal suffixes (*-a* and *-at*), and adjectives. From the perspective of feature reassembly, learners must not only learn new forms but also add the feature [±feminine] to pronominal representations that previously contained only person and honorific information (Lardiere, 2009). The predicted errors are overgeneralisation of masculine forms, for example *huwa* or *-hu* for female referents, and misreading *taktubu* as always referring to the second person.

Reinterpretation of Honorifics: Between Kam *and* Antum

Because honorifics are highly salient in Gayo *tutur*, learners tend to look for an Arabic equivalent of *kam*. Modern Standard Arabic has no T/V distinction in its pronouns; politeness is expressed mainly through lexical means, such as the address terms *ustādh* or *ḥaḍratuka*. This situation constitutes reinterpretation (level 3), in which a category present in the L1 must be assigned a new function in the L3. Two error patterns can be predicted. First, learners may be reluctant to use *anta* when addressing a teacher because they perceive it as equivalent to *ko*, which is considered insufficiently polite. Second, learners may use *antum* to address a single respected person and then fail to align the following verbs and adjectives, resulting in a mixture of singular and plural forms within one sentence. These predictions show that difficulty with the *ḍamīr* is not purely grammatical but also sociopragmatic, as reflected in the values of Gayo *tutur* documented by Fauzi (2020).

Positive Correspondence: Possessive Clitics, Person Prefixes, and Predicate–Subject Order

Not all contrasts are obstacles. First, the pattern of a noun followed by a possessive clitic (*umah=ku* 'my house', *gelas=ku* 'my glass') parallels *baytī* and *kitābuka*, so the position and function of noun-attached *ḍamīr muttaṣil* can be transferred positively (level 0); only the gender split needs to be taught explicitly. Second, the portmanteau prefixes *ku-*, *kami-*, and *kite-* on Gayo verbs show that learners are already familiar with person marking at the beginning of the verb. This familiarity can serve as a conceptual bridge to the prefixes *a-*, *na-*, *ta-*, and *ya-* of the *fi'l muḍāri'*, although the two are not functionally identical, since the Gayo prefixes are tied to voice rather than to subject agreement. Third, the canonical predicate–subject order of Gayo, as in *R[em]alan we*, parallels the verb–subject order of the *jumlah fi'liyyah*, while a fronted subject (*We r[em]alan*) parallels the *jumlah ismiyyah*. Here the L1 and L2 provide different kinds of support: Indonesian, with its subject–predicate order, may cause interference, whereas Gayo may facilitate. This finding supports the view that L3 transfer should be analysed property by property rather than as the wholesale influence of a single language (Westergaard, 2021).

Implications for Teaching Naḥw *to Gayo Speakers*

The hierarchy of difficulty above can be translated into an instructional sequence that moves from properties supported by the first language to those requiring feature reassembly. Table 4 presents a five-stage design for teaching the *ḍamīr* that draws on learners' three-language repertoire. The Gayo examples in stages 1–3 are taken from examples (1)–(3), while those in stages 4–5 are illustrative.

Table 4 Proposed Instructional Sequence for Teaching *Ḍamīr* to Gayo Speakers

Stage	*Ḍamīr* focus	Main activity	Example: Gayo → Indonesian → Arabic
1. Bridging positive transfer	Noun-attached *ḍamīr muttaṣil* (1st person)	Comparing possessive clitics across three languages and discovering the N + clitic pattern	*gelas=ku* → *gelasku* → كُوبِي
2. Coalescence	*naḥnu*, *-nā*	Translating sentences with *kite* and *kami* into *naḥnu*, and back, using context	*Mangan penan kite* → *Kita makan kue* → نَحْنُ نَأْكُلُ الْكَعْكَ
3. Gender split	*huwa/hiya*, *anta/anti*, *-hu/-hā*, *-ka/-ki*, prefixes *ya-/ta-*	Paired contrast cards, input enhancement, and referent-selection tasks (male/female)	*R[em]alan we* → *Dia berjalan* → يَمْشِي / تَمْشِي
4. Overdifferen-tiation of the dual	*antumā*, *humā*, *-kumā*, *-humā*; dual verbs	Tasks referring to pairs (father and mother, two students) in short stories about Gayo family life	*ama urum ine* → *ayah dan ibu* → هُمَا يَذْهَبَانِ
5. Reinterpretation of honorifics and agreement	*anta* for a teacher; *antum* for plural only	Role-play addressing teachers and parents; correcting verb–adjective agreement	*kam* (polite) → *Bapak/Anda* → هَلْ أَنْتَ مَشْغُولٌ يَا أُسْتَاذُ؟

Source: author's design based on the contrastive analysis.

The first two stages draw on L1 and L2 support to build learners' confidence while introducing the concept of *ḍamīr muttaṣil* through familiar patterns. The third and fourth stages constitute the core of explicit instruction, because gender and the dual receive no support from either previously acquired language. At these stages, teachers are advised to use paired contrasts (for example, *yamshī*/*tamshī* and *baytuhu*/*baytuhā*), input enhancement, and corrective feedback, in line with meta-analytic evidence that form-focused instruction has a large effect on second language acquisition (Kang et al., 2019). Gayo predicate–subject order can serve as an entry point for explaining that in the *jumlah fi'liyyah* gender information is carried by the verbal prefix, whereas the number asymmetry in verb–subject order should be introduced gradually (Azaz, 2023). The fifth stage addresses the sociopragmatic dimension, namely the awareness that using *anta* to a teacher does not breach politeness in Arabic, where respect is conveyed through address terms and lexical choice.

All stages are designed within a framework of planned pedagogical translanguaging, in which Gayo and Indonesian serve as points of comparison rather than as languages of instruction replacing Arabic (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022). Leonet et al. (2020) showed that deliberately designed cross-linguistic activities increase

morphological awareness, whereas Buchori et al. (2025) cautioned against overreliance on the first language; hence, the use of Gayo and Indonesian should be reduced gradually as proficiency increases. Examples grounded in local wisdom, such as kinship terms and everyday events in Gayo society, also serve to integrate local values into foreign language teaching (Albantani & Madkur, 2018). Arabic loanwords in Gayo (Firdaus & Maulidati, 2023) can be used as bridging vocabulary in *ḍamīr muttaṣil* exercises. For materials developers, the findings of Ubaid et al. (2026) are a reminder that teaching modules must model the language accurately, so examples of the *ḍamīr*, particularly dual and feminine forms, should be validated before use. The *iʿrāb* activities developed by Junaidi et al. (2024) could also be extended to identifying the person, number, and gender features of each *ḍamīr*, while diagnostic instruments should give the greatest weight to gender and dual items, in line with the hierarchy of difficulty.

Positioning the Findings within Previous Research

The prediction that gender is the most difficult property for Gayo speakers is consistent with empirical findings on the acquisition of Arabic. Alkohlani (2016) showed that gender errors persist among advanced learners, especially when nouns lack a natural gender referent, and Albirini et al. (2013) demonstrated the vulnerability of gender and number agreement even among heritage speakers. Tucker et al. (2021) added that, even among native speakers, gender attraction effects are larger and emerge later than number attraction effects, suggesting a heavier processing load for gender. For Gayo speakers, this load is expected to be heavier still, since none of their previously acquired languages has grammatical gender. Alhawary's (2019) account of the roles of input, transfer, and typology in the acquisition of Arabic reinforces the argument that the feature configurations of previously acquired languages must be taken into account in instructional design.

Nevertheless, the hierarchy of difficulty should not be read as destiny. Al-Thubaiti (2024) found that proficiency was a stronger predictor of verbal gender agreement accuracy than L1 background, so the predictions in this study are best understood as describing difficulties at the beginning and intermediate stages, which adequate input and instruction can overcome. From the perspective of L3 theory, the Typological Primacy Model would predict that learners select one language, either Gayo or Indonesian, as the source of wholesale transfer on the basis of overall structural similarity (Rothman, 2015). The present mapping, however, reveals a mixed pattern: Gayo is closer to Arabic in predicate–subject order, while both languages are equally distant from Arabic in gender and the dual. This pattern fits the Linguistic Proximity Model better (Westergaard, 2021; Westergaard et al., 2017), although, as Puig-Mayenco et al. (2020) caution, claims about the source of transfer require carefully designed empirical studies to be verified.

In the Indonesian context, these findings complement the work of Nashoih and Darmawan (2019), which positioned Indonesian as the main source of interference. For Gayo learners, Indonesian is not the only source of influence; Gayo contributes both facilitative influence (predicate–subject order and possessive clitics) and non-facilitative influence (honorifics). These morphosyntactic findings also complement those at the phonological level, so the influence of Gayo on Arabic is now mapped at two distinct levels. The number errors reported by Qori (2024), the phrase errors in master's theses (Mubarak et al., 2022), and the errors in teaching modules (Ubaid et al., 2026) indicate that agreement difficulties persist when they are not addressed explicitly. The alternation between verb–subject and subject–verb order can be further explained through the framework of deep and surface structure applied by Lubis et al. (2025).

This study has several limitations. First, the data are documentary, so the findings are predictions that have not yet been tested on learners' spoken or written production. Second, the Gayo data are limited to the Bukit dialect as described by Eades (2005), although Gayo comprises several dialects, including Gayo Lues, which differ in vocabulary and in some pronominal forms. Third, the honorific dimension was analysed from secondary sources, so variation in usage among younger speakers has not been mapped. Future research should therefore test these predictions through error analysis of written and spoken corpora produced by Gayo-speaking university and *pesantren* students, compare speakers of different dialects, and evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional sequence in Table 4 through experimental designs.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Arabic *ḍamīr* system and the Gayo pronominal system differ fundamentally in the features they encode. Arabic obligatorily encodes person, number (including the dual), and gender in free pronouns, bound pronouns, and verbs, whereas Gayo encodes person and clusivity, treats honorifics and kinship terms as a salient social dimension, and has neither gender nor dual. The three-language comparison yielded five contrastive patterns: a relatively easy coalescence of clusivity, a sociopragmatic reinterpretation of honorifics, a difficult overdifferentiation of the dual, a gender split that is the most difficult of all, and positive correspondences in possessive clitics, person prefixes, and predicate–subject order that are likely to be facilitative. Because Indonesian, the learners' L2, also lacks gender and the dual, these two properties receive no support from any previously acquired language, whereas predicate–subject order is supported by Gayo rather than by Indonesian.

These findings imply that *naḥw* instruction for Gayo speakers should be sequenced from properties facilitated by the first language towards properties that require feature reassembly, with explicit instruction concentrated on gender and

the dual and with planned translanguaging whose share is reduced gradually. Arabic teachers in madrasahs, *dayah*, and universities in the Gayo region are advised to use three-language contrasts when explaining the *ḍamīr*; materials developers are advised to validate the accuracy of dual and feminine forms in teaching modules; and future researchers are advised to test these predictions through error analysis and instructional experiments involving speakers of various Gayo dialects.

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