

### Abstract

The language and style of the Qur'an have attracted a large amount of work by Western scholars. Yet there are two neglected areas: *balāgha* in Arabic (rhetoric), and certain aspects of Qur'anic style. This chapter sheds some light on both. *Balāgha* was developed to understand the finest aspects of Qur'anic Arabic. It is important in Arabic education, even in secondary schools, but not in the Western tradition of teaching Arabic. *ʿIlm al-maʿānī* (the study of meanings) is the most neglected part of *balāgha*. A summary is given here of its main topics, which may help to remedy some serious misunderstandings of the language and effect of the Qur'an. Whereas Western works on style have largely concentrated on figurative language, *jinās*, *sajʿ*, etc., other aspects of style are discussed that are more informative of the way the Qur'an presents its message and makes it effective.

### Keywords

iʿjāz, balāgha, rhetoric, maʿānī, stylistic features, Arabic, grammatical norms

## Chapter 20

# Rhetorical Devices and Stylistic Features of Qur'anic Grammar

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The language and style of the Qur'an have attracted a large amount of work by Western scholars of the Qur'an, as will be seen from the works cited in this chapter. However one important branch of traditional Arabic Qur'anic Studies has been largely neglected, that is *balāgha* in Arabic (normally translated as 'rhetoric'). There are also certain aspects of Qur'anic style which have not been given sufficient attention. *Balāgha* and these particular stylistic features of the Qur'an are fundamental aspects of its language and are interrelated in their functions. Understanding how they work is essential to appreciation of the Qur'an. In this short chapter there is only room for an overview of the subject. We will deal first with *balāgha* and then with these stylistic features.

### RHETORIC (*BALĀGHA*)

In the Arabic tradition, the study of *balāgha* was started and developed to understand and appreciate the finer qualities of the Qur'anic language which made it so effective to Arabs, both Muslims and non-Muslims. Al-Suyūfī (d. 909/1515) explained that all Arabic and Islamic studies stemmed from the Qur'an, and were started and developed to serve the Qur'an (Al-Suyūfī, *al-Itqān*, 2:350–5). Phonetics started in order to enable people to articulate the Qur'an accurately, and grammar to provide a basic level to read and understand the text. The study of *balāgha* functions at a higher, more aesthetic level.

## IMPORTANCE OF *BALĀGHA*

This crucial role of *balāgha* can be understood from the following statement made by a leading figure in grammar, *tafsīr* (Qur'anic exegesis) and *balāgha*, al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1143):

As al-Jāhīz stated in his book *Naẓm al-Qur'ān*, the discipline of *tafsīr* contains subtlety of language and secrets that are not easily obtained and not everyone should engage in it. A jurist, even if he excels all his peers in giving fatwas and rules; a theologian, even if he excels everyone in the craft of *kalām* (speculative theology); a man who learns stories and accounts, even if he knows more of this than Ibn al-Qarriyya; a preacher, even if he is better than al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī in preaching; a grammarian, even if he is more knowledgeable than al-Sībawayhi; a philologist, even if he has digested much knowledge: none of these would engage in seeking to discover the truth of *tafsīr*, except a man who has excelled in two disciplines particular to [the study of the] Qur'ān: *'ilm al-ma'ānī* ('the science of meanings') and *'ilm al-bayān* ('the science of eloquence'). Such a man returns time and again to go into these subjects, exerts effort to unearth their secrets, is driven to seek them by zeal to know the subtlety of the Qur'ān, God's conclusive argument, and is eager to discover the miracle of the Prophet.

(Al-Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, 1:15–16)

The importance of *balāgha* in appreciating aspects of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* (the inimitability of the language of the Qur'an) can be seen most prominently in the works of the eminent scholar of *balāgha*, 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078). Its importance for *tafsīr* in general is universally recognized in Arabic by such commentators as al-Zamakhsharī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), and by eminent literary scholars such as al-Jāhīz (d. 255/868 or 869),

but the pre-eminent scholar of *balāgha* is al-Jurjānī, particularly in his great work *Dala' il al-i'jāz*.

## LACK OF *BALĀGHA* STUDIES IN ENGLISH COMPARED WITH GRAMMAR

Whereas *balāgha* is studied as a separate subject from grammar in Arabic secondary schools, the crucial importance of *balāgha* for *tafsīr* and the appreciation of the Qur'an in the Arab-Islamic tradition does not appear to have been given a proper place in the schooling of Arabists in universities in the UK with which I am familiar. However, there has long been a plethora of grammar texts available to first-language English-speaking undergraduates in Arabic, including W. Wright et al. (1859) which was a translation from the German, with additions and corrections, of P. C. Caspari's *Grammar of the Arabic Language* in 1854. G. W. Thatcher's *Arabic Grammar of the Written Language* was published in 1911, D. Cowan's *Introduction to Modern Literary Arabic* was in 1958 and Haywood and Nahmad's *New Arabic Grammar of the Written Language* in 1962. These were the textbooks used for the BA and beyond. Understandably the time available for students who had to learn the language from scratch and study the literature, religion, history and so on did not leave time to study *balāgha*. The BA and MA curricula in British universities, apart from SOAS, even now do not include *balāgha*.

## THEODOR NÖLDEKE

The neglect of the study of Arabic *balāgha* appears to have had a clear effect on the appreciation of the style of the Qur'an. An obvious example of this can be seen in the work of

even such a great scholar of the Qur'an as Theodor Nöldeke, who remains a towering figure in Qur'anic Studies, starting with his book *Geshichte des Qorans*, published in 1860.

Although I confine my discussion mostly to the English tradition with which I am familiar, I will make reference here to the works of Theodor Nöldeke (d. 1930) as his main work has now been translated into English and Arabic.

In his pioneering study, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, Theodor Nöldeke 'discussed in detail the 'Stylistische und syntaktische Eigentümlichkeiten der Sprache des Korans' (1910: 5–23) thereby collecting together everything that had occurred to him in this respect during his protracted and intensive study of the Holy Book of the Muslims' (Paret 1983a: 205). Nöldeke mentions, at the beginning of his article (Nöldeke 1910: 13–14), examples of what is known in *balāgha* as *iltifāt*. *Iltifāt* is a stylistic feature, involving a shift or departure from what is normally expected. There are countless examples of it in both the Qur'an and Arabic literature. It is a very old feature of Arabic usage, and is still used in modern Arabic (El-Sakkout 1970: 115, 141). However, Nöldeke seems to have been unfamiliar with it (as has been observed, he does not mention the term *iltifāt* in discussing the examples he cites) and appeared to view them from a purely formal, grammatical point of view, according to which he considered the feature as bad grammar.

Unlike Nöldeke, Arab critics, rhetoricians, and exegetes have long appreciated the rhetorical purpose of the grammatical shift. *Iltifāt* is discussed in *balāgha* books in Arabic. According to the rules of *balāgha*, *iltifāt* must be used for specific reasons, otherwise it is *mumtāni* ('inadmissible'). *Balāgha* is divided by al-Sakkākī (d. 626/1229) into three sciences: *'ilm al-ma'ānī* ('the science of meanings'), *'ilm al-bayān* ('the science of eloquence'), and *'ilm al-badī* ('the science of embellishment'). Of these the most neglected and sorely needed by Western scholars is *'ilm al-ma'ānī* (Al-Sakkākī, *al-Iḍāḥ*, title page).

Regrettably A. F. von Mehren, who translated into German a major text on *balāgha*, in 1853 (*Die Rhetorik der Araber*), seven years before Nöldeke's *Geschichte des Qorans* (1860), completely skipped the part on *‘ilm al-ma‘ānī*. Otherwise probably Nöldeke would not have made his comments on *iltifāt* and the other features which he considered as ‘unusual and not beautiful’ (Nöldeke 1910: 13) in the Qur’an, comments which were handed down to generations of students afterwards, so that for example Rudi Paret refers to such features without questioning Nöldeke’s opinion (Paret 1983a).

## SCHOLARS IN ENGLISH

Significantly, Montgomery Watt and Richard Bell’s *Introduction to the Qur’ān* (Watt and Bell 1997: 69–82), which is mainly a student textbook, mentions nothing about *balāgha*. Bell’s discussions of the text of the Qur’an in his translation (Bell 1937) and his commentary (Bell 1991) would also have been likely places to discuss *balāgha* and its importance to understanding the Qur’an, but he does not mention it at all. Nor did Watt in his *Companion* to Arberry’s translation (Watt 1967). Regrettably too, in his extensive, generally good article on the Qur’an in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition, Alford T. Welch did not mention *balāgha* in his discussion of the style of the Qur’an either. Nor does Rosalind Ward Gwynne in her *Logic, Rhetoric and Legal Reasoning in the Qur’ān* (Gwynne 2004) discuss *balāgha*. The bibliographies of such important works on the Qur’an as *Discovering the Qur’ān* by Neal Robinson (Robinson 1996: 224–53) and *How to Read the Qur’an* by Carl Ernst (2011) show no mention of *balāgha* books. In two major collections of articles (Bijlefeld 1974 and Turner 2001: 89–115) on the Qur’an, *balāgha* is not mentioned apart from my own article on *iltifāt* in Colin Turner’s book. Angelika Neuwirth, in her discussion on ‘Rhetoric and the Qur’ān’ in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān* (Neuwirth, *EQ* 4:461–76) does not touch on *‘ilm al-ma‘ānī* nor is there any mention of this in her article on ‘Form and Structure of the Qur’ān’ in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Rippin, *EI Second Edition* 2:245–66). Even as late as 2006, the ‘Tools of the Scholarly Study of the Qur’ān’ listed by Andrew Rippin in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān* (Rippin, *EI Second Edition* 5:294–300) include ‘The Text of the Qur’ān’, ‘Concordances’, ‘Dictionaries’, ‘Grammar’, ‘Thematic Indices’, ‘Commentaries’,

‘Approaches to the Qur’ān’ and ‘Bibliographical Aids’—a very useful guide for students but it does not include *balāgha*.

*Qur’ānic Studies* by John Wansbrough (Wansbrough 1977: 227ff.) was the most likely work to refer to *balāgha* sources. He concentrated instead on *Majāz al-Qur’ān* by Abū ‘Ubayda (d. 210/825) (Abu ‘Ubayda, *Majāz*, 1:8), but the word *majāz* as used in Abū ‘Ubayda’s work does not mean ‘figurative language’ as normally understood in *balāgha*, as Wansbrough acknowledged. Abū ‘Ubayda explains some Qur’anic statements by giving basic information. Thus in *wa-sal al-qaryata* (‘ask the town’, Q. 12:82) he said that its *majāz* is *wa-sal ahl al-qarya* (‘ask the people of the town’). No Arab would need such an explanation. Abū ‘Ubayda also feels it necessary to explain the statement of God in the plural of majesty, ‘We have created [everything] (*khalaqnāhu*) in due measure’ (Q. 54:49), by saying, ‘the Creator is only God, who is one’ (*Majāz*, 1:9). Wansbrough’s bibliography mentions *Kitāb al-Badī‘* (Al-Mu‘tazz, *Kitāb al-Badī‘*, ed. Kratchkovsky, 1935), but *badī‘* means ‘embellishment’. Embellishment attracted the attention of English scholars as seen in references to *jinās* (‘homonymy’) and *ṭibāq* (‘antonymy’ or ‘contrast’) (Arberry 1965: 63, n. 5; 68, n. 45; 66, n. 31; 69, n. 52). Wansbrough’s bibliography also mentions al-Jurjānī’s *Dalā’il al-i’jāz* and *Asrār al-balāgha* (‘Secrets of Rhetoric’), and there are detailed discussions in his work on *majāz* and *bayān* (Wansbrough 1977: 227–41), so he was clearly aware of the import of the subject, but al-Jurjānī’s name does not appear in the Index, nor does von Mehren’s (see above) and, like Nöldeke, he does not mention *‘ilm al-ma‘ānī*.

## EUROPEAN CLASSICAL SOURCES

The following statement by Roland Meynet seems to indicate the general picture of Arabic studies in Europe and how important it was to read the works of Arab scholars:

In Algiers I at first studied Arabic grammar in Arabic with manuals written by Arab authors. At the University of Aix-en-Provence I had to resume the study but with grammars by western scholars. I could then see that our grammatical categories, inherited from the Greek and Latin tradition were much less effective than those that had been worked out by the Arabic grammarians, from within their own language (Meynet 2012: 7).

Some attention has been given to *balāgha* more recently. In the second edition of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, there is an article on *balāgha* by Schade and von Grünebaum, surveying Arab scholarship but with references listed mainly to German scholars. On *al-ma‘ānī wa’l-bayān* the *Encyclopaedia* has an article by Bonebakker and Reinert, which surveys some mainly classical Arab works on the subject in an attempt to provide ‘a few practical hints by way of introduction to the vast and little-known literature on the *ma‘ānī* and the *bayān*’. They are still confused by the term *ma‘ānī* and find both terms awkward (Bonebakker and Reinert, ‘al-Ma‘ānī wa’l-Bayān’).

Kees Versteegh, in the index of his *Encyclopaedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, refers to scattered short mentions of *balāgha* and gives one reference to *‘ilm al-ma‘ānī* (Versteegh 2009: 51). The *Oxford Handbook of Arabic Linguistics* (Owens 2013), chapter 8 on ‘Arabic Linguistic Tradition II: Pragmatics’ (Larchier 2013: 188–212) has a section (8.2.2.) on *‘ilm al-ma‘ānī*.

## RECENT ARAB WRITING ON *BALĀGHA* IN ENGLISH

This is all very useful but nevertheless, the applied study of Qur’an *balāgha* in English has until recently been left to scholars of the Qur’an trained in the Arabic-Islamic tradition, such as:

- Abdel Haleem, Muhammad A. S.,
  - *Understanding the Qur'ān: Themes and Style*. London: IB Tauris, 2010;
  - 'Grammatical Shift for Rhetorical Purposes: *Ittifāt* and Related Features in the Qur'ān', *BSOAS* 55/3 (1992), 407–32;
  - 'Arabic of the Qur'ān: Grammar and Style'. In C. Versteegh (general ed.), *Encyclopedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics* vol. 4 (Q–Z), Qur'ān, pp. 21–32. Leiden: Brill, 2009.
- Abdul Raof, Hussain,
  - *Arabic Rhetoric: A Pragmatic Analysis*. London and New York: Routledge, 2006;
  - *Exploring The Qur'ān*. Dundee: Al-Maktoum Institute Academic Press, 2003.
- Mustansir Mir, who brought to light in English Farahi, Hamiduddin, *Jamharat-al-Balāghah* ('Manual of Quranic Rhetoric') written in Urdu.
- Mir, Mustansir, *Coherence in the Qur'ān*. Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1986.
- Ḥātim, Bāsil, *Arabic Rhetoric: The Pragmatics of Deviation from Linguistic Norms*. Munich: Lincom Europa, 2010.
- Ibrahim, Abd al-Rahim, *The Literary Structure of the Qur'ānic Verse*. Birmingham: Qur'ānic Arabic Foundation, 2005.
- Mahmoud M. Ayoub. 'Literary Exegesis of the Qur'ān: The Case of al-Sharīf al-Raḍī'. In Issa J. Boullata (Ed.) *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān*, pp. 292–309. London: Curzon, 2000.

## ISSUES DISCUSSED UNDER *‘ILM AL-MA ‘ĀNĪ*

As already indicated, according to traditional categorizations of Arabic rhetoric, *balāgha* comprises three branches, *‘ilm al-ma ‘ānī* (‘the science of meanings’), *‘ilm al bayān* (‘the science of eloquence’) and *‘ilm al-badī* (‘the science of embellishment’). *Bayān* deals mainly with factual and figurative language, including simile, metaphor, and *kināya* (‘metonymy’). *Badī* attracted Western Arabist writers in English with such verbal features as alliteration, assonance, and *jinās* (‘homonymy’). These features do not seem far different from those in the rhetorical traditions of European languages. It is, therefore, *‘ilm al-ma ‘ānī* that is particularly needed (Baalbaki 1983: 7–23).

Under *‘ilm al-ma ‘ānī*, important issues are discussed in the Arabic *balāgha* tradition, for example by al-Ṭībī (d. 743/1342) (Al-Ṭībī, *Kitāb al-Tibyān*), al-Qazwīnī (d. 793/1338) (Al-Qazwīnī, *al-Idāh* 1–130) and, in the last century, by al-Hashimi (d. 1943) (Al-Hashimi, *Jawāhir al-balāgha*, 1–173), starting with *muṭābaqat al-kalām li-muqtaḍā al-ḥāl* (‘conformity of speech to the context of the situation’). This was one of the crucial discoveries of Arab rhetoricians. According to Tammām Ḥassān (Ḥassān 1973: 337, 372), this preceded modern European linguistics by over 1,000 years. Much of what has been criticized about the text of the Qur’an is perfectly appropriate in the context of the situation, as explained in *‘ilm al-ma ‘ānī*. *‘Ilm al-ma ‘ānī* also analyses the different parts of the sentence: the subject, predicate, and complementary parts. In terms of the subject, for instance, there is discussion as to whether it is stated or omitted, and why; whether it is definite or indefinite; its placement in the sentence; whether it is restricted by adjectives or other elements, or not—all in great detail and with purposes and justification. For instance, the definition of the subject by a relative clause can be done for eleven reasons (Hashimi, *Jawāhir*, 130–2). Similarly detailed treatment is given to the predicate and complements. Another full chapter is dedicated to *al-qasr* (‘restricting statements’), followed by a chapter

on *al-faṣl wa 'l-waṣl* ('disjoining and joining' of parts of the sentence using conjunctions like *wa* ('and') and *fa* ('so')). There is a chapter dedicated to *ījāz* ('brevity'), *itnāb* ('expansion') and *musāwā* ('equality').

## DEPARTURE FROM WHAT IS EXPECTED

This all concluded with the crucial subject of *ikhrāj al-kalām 'alā khilāf muqtaḍā al-zāhir* (departure from what is expected). This can apply to the various elements above. *Al-amr* ('command'), for instance, can range, according to the context, from being a mere request to twenty-one other things, such as permission (i.e. in Q. 2:187, '*Eat and drink until the white thread of dawn can be distinguished from the black*'). Likewise, *al-istifhām* ('question') can depart from being a mere question to twenty-four other meanings (Hātim 2010: 151–68). In al-Hashimi, the number of derivations/departures varies slightly (*Jawāhir al-balāgha* 78–9, 93–6). *Ikhrāj/khurūj al-kalām 'alā khilāf muqtaḍā al-zāhir* is a distinguishing mark of Arabic rhetoric and is very common in Qur'anic discourse.

Without sufficient awareness of this, many expressions would appear as wrong or bad grammar or difficult to explain. Nöldeke's reaction to *iltifāt*, mentioned above, is an obvious example. Similar was his reaction to *ḥadhf* ('omission'), which is another feature studied under *'ilm al-ma'ānī* (Rahman 2000: 277–91); referring to Q. 24:10, '*if it were not for God's bounty and mercy towards you, if it were not that God accepts repentance and is wise . . . ! It was a group from among you that concocted the lie*', which omits to state what would have happened, Nöldeke notes that the omission of a 'continuing clause' is strange, and is 'followed by all sorts of strange things' (Nöldeke 1910:19). However, this feature is normal in Arabic and is still used now, even in daily language. A man who has been offended or insulted by someone would say, 'If it were not for the sake of his father . . .', stating the

important consideration but ‘leaving every possibility open’ to people’s imagination. In parsing a sentence like this, Arab students would be expected to say, *li-tadhhab al-nafs fī taqdīrihi kulla madhhab* (‘so that, in assessing it, the mind may go in every possible direction’). Richard Bell, however, comments only: ‘It is an incomplete sentence’ (Bell 1991: 595). Now, as Ibn Malik (d. 672/1273) declares, in his *Alfiyya*: *ḥadhf mā yu ‘lam jā ‘iz*—‘it is permissible to omit what is understood’ (Ibn Malik 1932: 18). ‘Izz al-Dīn b. ‘Abd al-Salām (d. 660/1262), in his book *Majāz al-Qur’ān*, dedicates more than 200 pages (pp. 261–478) just to examples in the Qur’an of the omission of the first part of the *idāfa* construct, the *muḍ’af*. All this goes to show the pressing need for introducing *balāgha*, especially ‘ilm al-*ma’ānī*, into the teaching of Arabic in Western universities.

Having finished with *balāgha* we now move to deal with the second part of this chapter, Stylistic Features.

## STYLISTIC FEATURES

In their useful, well-written book, *[Bell’s] Introduction to the Qur’ān*, under ‘Features of Qur’ānic Style’ (1997: chapter 5), Richard Bell and Montgomery Watt have various sections that deal with ‘Rhymes and Strophes’, ‘Various Didactic Forms’, and ‘The Language of the Qur’ān’. These are useful but the discussion is very brief and they do not deal with many of the important features discussed in this chapter, which are essential to understanding the Qur’an, showing its dynamism, and explaining some of the means by which it achieves its impact in Arabic. Some of these features are:

### Logical Arguments Blended with Emotion

The Qur'an gives arguments for the claims it makes: even the existence of God has to be proved by arguments and so do His unity and care. When asking people to do something or refrain from something, it presents some powerful reasoning to persuade the listener or reader. This stylistic feature is particularly obvious in the discussion on the Resurrection. To the Arabs' arguments against the possibility of the Resurrection it replies:

*<sup>77</sup> Can man not see that We created him from a drop of fluid? Yet—lo and behold!—he disputes openly, <sup>78</sup> producing arguments against Us, forgetting his own creation. He says, 'Who can give life back to bones after they have decayed?' <sup>79</sup> Say, 'He who created them in the first place will give them life again: He has full knowledge of every act of creation. <sup>80</sup> It is He who produces fire for you out of the green tree—lo and behold!—and from this you kindle fire. <sup>81</sup> Is He who created the heavens and earth not able to create the likes of these people? Of course He is! He is the All Knowing Creator: <sup>82</sup>when He wills something to be, His way is to say, "Be"—and it is! <sup>83</sup> So glory be to Him in whose Hand lies control over all things. It is to Him that you will all be brought back.'* (Q. 36:77–83)

In this passage, the Qur'an provides three logical answers: (1) God has created man before, so He can do it again; (2) He is able to produce things from their opposites, including life from dead bones; (3) He has done even greater work than the creation of man. This logical construct is clothed in strong emotional and dramatic language: rhetorical question (‘*Can man not see . . . ?*’); plural of majesty (‘*We created him . . .*’); exclamation (‘*lo and behold!*’); and paradox (from such a small beginning, ‘*he disputes openly producing arguments against Us, forgetting his own creation*’, followed by a powerful statement, ‘*He Who created them in the first instance*’, removing any possibility that someone else had created them). He is very knowledgeable in all acts of creation, not just of humans. Then follows the beautiful images

of things coming from their opposite, fire from green trees and more exclamation, *'lo and behold!—and from this you kindle fire'*. Then comes the very powerful rhetorical question, *'Is He who created the heavens and earth not able to create the likes of these small creatures?'* The answer comes emphatically, *'Of course He is!'* He is the all-knowing, ultimate creator (intensive form, *khallāq*) of all things. Then comes the dismissal of their conception of how God acts by saying, *'Whenever He wills something to be, His way is to say, "Be", and it is!'* This is all followed by *'glory be to Him in whose Hand lies control over all things'* and a stunning statement to disbelievers, *'it is to Him that you will all be brought back'*, in the passive, and not by their own choice. All this is expressed in a few short lines in Arabic, using compelling, brief, memorable words.

## Affective Sentences (*jumal inshā'iyya*) and Verbal Sentences (*jumal fi'liyya*)

In addition to the more neutral declarative sentence (*khabariyya*, e.g. 'they arrived'), the Qur'an frequently uses affective sentences to persuade and convey its message: commands, prohibitions, and question, which do not give information but initiate a new situation. For instance:

*Say [Prophet], 'Consider those you pray to other than God: show me which part of the earth they created or which share of the heavens they own; bring me a previous scripture or some vestige of divine knowledge—if what you say is true.' Who could be more wrong than a person who calls on those other than God, those who will not answer him till the Day of Resurrection, those who are unaware of his prayers, those who, when all mankind is gathered, will become his enemies and disown his worship? (Q: 46:4–6)*

*If you wish to replace one wife with another, do not take any of her dowry back, even if you have given her a great amount of gold. How could you take it when this is unjust and a blatant sin? How could you take it when you have lain with each other and they have taken a solemn pledge from you? (Q. 4:20–1)*

This explains the frequent occurrence in the Qur'an of the imperative and interrogative, as well as the many persuasive prohibitions, propositions, exhortations, supplications, exclamations, and oaths. In Q. 52:30–43, for instance, there are fifteen rhetorical questions in a row, addressed to the disbelievers, about God, the Prophet, and the Qur'an. The *jumla inshā'iyya* serves to make the Qur'anic discourse dynamic and vibrant, involving the readers or listeners, rather than throwing statements over their heads—a very important consideration in Qur'anic discourse.

In its use of the verbal sentence the Qur'an also utilizes the tense of the verb rhetorically, for example using the past tense normally used for historical accounts also when discussing the afterlife. This is effective in making such momentous events as those in the afterlife (mentioned directly or indirectly on almost every page of the Qur'an) seem as if they are already here, a device common in Qur'anic discourse and techniques of persuasion. This may involve *iltifāt* or shift in tense as, for example, in Q. 20:125–6 and Q. 40:48–50.

## Frequent Use of Descriptive Attributes (*ṣifāt kathīra*)

The use of descriptive attributes is an important means of Qur'anic persuasion and argument, noticeable from the very beginning: 'Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy' (Q. 1:2–3). Because He has such attributes (*ṣifāt*) He is worthy of praise and worship. The path required for believers is the 'straight' one, the one 'whose followers are blessed and not the object of anger' or 'those who are astray' (Q. 1:6–7), so qualified the path is worthy of asking God's guidance to it.

The believers, too, are described in many ways.

*The believers will succeed: those who pray humbly, who shun idle talk, who pay the prescribed alms, who guard their chastity except with their spouses or their slaves—with these they are not to blame, but anyone who seeks more than this is exceeding the limits—who are faithful to their trusts and pledges and who keep up their prayers, will rightly be given Paradise as their own, there to remain. (Q. 23:1–11, see also Q. 70:22–9)*

This is an important feature of Qur’anic rhetoric and style, according to which God is often defined by multiple adjectives, normally in the intensive form, such as *‘alīm*, *qadīr*, *ghafūr*, or *tawwāb*, many of which are referred to as the names of God. Furthermore, the names of God, which are themselves adjectival, are normally accompanied by further attributes describing His acts, such as *khalaqakum* (‘He created you’) or *razaqakum* (‘He provided for you’), used to illustrate God’s power and care towards His creatures, thereby making the point that He is the only one worthy of worship, whereas other deities who do not share these attributes are not worthy of worship. Sometimes the longer suras contain lengthy glorifications of God, taking many pages, so large parts of *Sūrat al-An‘ām* (Q. 6) and *Sūrat al-Nahl* (Q. 16). These attributes and acts are used evidentially since the Qur’an bases its message on evidence, reasoning, and argumentation. This aspect of ‘argumentation’ can be seen to dominate the discourse surrounding other important issues, such as the discussions of the Resurrection in *Sūrat Yasīn* (Q. 36:77–83) and *Sūrat al-Wāqī‘a* (Q. 56:57–74).

## Generalization (*ta‘mīm*)

The Qur’an frequently uses generalization, since it maintains that it is for all people. It classifies people, using such plurals as *al-mu‘minūn* (‘the believers’), *al-muttaqūn* (‘those who are mindful of God’), *al-kāfirūn* (‘the non-believers’), *al-zālimūn* (‘evildoers’) and so

on, and employs conditional sentences with grammatical particles like *man*, *mā*, *ayy*, *haythumā*, *aynamā* ('whoever, whatever, whichever, wherever, whenever'), and also the indefinite noun. This serves to bring in all that are included under the relevant class, which also helps brevity.

## Contrast (*taḍādd*)

Contrast is another central feature of Qur'anic style: the Book juxtaposes this world with the next (each occurring exactly 115 times); believers and disbelievers; Paradise and hell. Many other patterns of contrast have been observed: angels and devils; life and death; secrecy and openness, and so on, occurring exactly the same number of times (Nawfal 1976). One of the linguistic habits of the Qur'an is also to contrast two classes of a given thing, and their respective destinies, as a persuasive rhetorical device. Grammatically this contrast is achieved by such devices as '*man . . . wa-man*' ('those who . . . and those who') as, for example, in Q. 4:123–4 ('*anyone who does wrong will be requited for it . . . anyone, male or female, who does good . . . will enter Paradise . . .*') and Q. 92:5–8. Another device is '*ammā . . . wa-ammā*', as in Q. 3:106–7 ('*On the day when some faces brighten and others darken, as for those with darkened faces it will be said . . . and as for those with brightened faces . . .*') and Q. 79:37 and 40. Sometimes the contrasted elements follow each other without any conjunction, which shows the contrast even more powerfully: for example, Q. 89:25–7, '*On that day, no one will punish as He punishes, and no one will bind as He binds. You soul at peace, return to your Lord, well pleased and well pleasing, go in among my servants and into my Garden.*'

## Rhyme and Rhythm (*fāṣila wa-īqā*')

Rhyme at the end of verses is a stylistic feature in the Arabic Qur'an, which has an aesthetic effect. It also gives finality to statements and accords with the general feature of classification and generalization, frequently using the plural endings *-ūn* and *-īn*. The ending of the verse can be an integral part of the sentence (as in sura 1) or a final comment on it (e.g. Q. 4:34–5, ‘. . . God is most high and great (*‘āliyan kabīr*) . . . He is all knowing, all aware (*‘alīman khabīr*)’), but the rhyme is not just for embellishment (Omar 1999: 264–9).

### Dialogue and Direct Speech (*hiwār wa-kalām mubashir*)

The Qur'an frequently uses direct speech to bind each person by what he or she utters rather than in reported speech, and it also often presents itself as a conversation between God and the Prophet, and/or God and humanity, through the device of direct speech and dialogue.

There is striking dialogue between people in hell (e.g. Q. 7:37–9, 40:47–50), there is even dialogue between people and their own organs (eyes, ears, and skins, Q. 41:19–23), which testify against them in the next life: *‘They will say to their skins, “Why did you testify against us?” and their skins will reply, “God, who gave speech to everything, gave us speech . . .”’*.

There is dramatic dialogue between characters in stories like that of Joseph (Yūsuf, Q. 12).

Arabic grammar allows shifts between direct and reported speech within a sentence after such verbs as *qāla* (‘he said’), one aspect of *iltifāt*. The fact that this verb occurs in the Qur'an more than 300 times is some indication of how frequently direct speech and dialogue are used, adding to dynamism and liveliness of the Qur'anic discourse.

### Effective Repetition (*takrār mu'aththir*)

Repetition is an obvious feature of the language of the Qur'an. It may repeat what it considers essential to its message. Thus, the story of Adam and Eve occurs a number of times (Abdel Haleem 2010: 126–60). Material is not just repeated verbatim, but in different suras the

Qur'an employs certain elements at various lengths as suits the context. The deception of Adam and Eve by Satan, swearing that he will use every possible means to mislead their children (e.g. Q. 7:17 and 17:62–4), is repeated to warn and explain why disbelievers behave in the way they do. Similarly, stories of prophets and how they argued with their people, how they suffered, and how God saved the believers in the end, all serve to encourage the Muslims and warn their opponents (Abdel Haleem 2006: 38–57). The lengthy descriptions of Paradise and Hell are used repeatedly, like the frequent mention of God's attributes, to impress the message, relating such descriptions to teachings, to create an impact which could not be achieved by a single mention of the fundamental components. It also has to be kept in mind that the whole of the Qur'an was revealed in stages over a period of more than twenty years, to different audiences in different situations, using oral delivery. Some employment of earlier material was needed to impress the message on these new situations and audiences, especially as that message dealt with matters of faith and practices that sought to break ingrained habits.

### Suspension of Composition Patterns (*ta'liq al-nasaq*)

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in his *Tafsīr* writes about the stylistic habits of the Qur'an (*'ādāt al-kitāb al-'azīz*). He explains why the Qur'an brings together various subjects in the same sura (e.g. Part 9, p. 133; Part 17, p. 86; Part 18, pp. 8–9, 55; Part 20, pp. 83; Part 20, p. 214). The various subjects reinforce each other and are not simply a conglomeration of unrelated material. This feature can be extended to include suspension of composition patterns for rhetorical purposes. At times the Qur'an interrupts the flow of discourse-mode, theme, sentence structure, rhythm, and rhyme and so on for considerations for context-specific purposes more important than maintaining form, before returning to the original discourse. It is in fact a form of *khurūj*, departing from what is expected. For example, in Q. 2:228–37

there is a long discussion on divorce and the rights of divorced women as well as the financial rights of widows, ending with the suggestion to both parties in these difficult emotional situations not to *'forget to be generous to each other: God sees what you do'* (v. 237). This verse presents encouragement and warning, but the Qur'an adds to this, giving practical advice on steps that people can take to help them obey this teaching. Thus in vv. 238–9 the parties are reminded, *'Take care to do your prayers in the best way and stand before God in devotion. If you are in danger, pray when you are out on foot or riding, when you are safe again, remember God, for He has taught you what you did not know'* before resuming the original theme, the rights of widows and divorced women. The idea behind this interruption and suspension of composition pattern is that undertaking the prayer at pertinent times is likely to reduce bitterness and bring people to a proper frame of mind. This effect of prayer is confirmed in Q. 5:107–8, in which it is recommended that legal testimony should be given after undertaking prayer, in the hope that it will make the witnesses give proper testimony. In my village in the Nile Delta, when two families are in dispute, it is common practice to decide to meet to settle the dispute in the afternoon, but to first go to the mosque together and perform the *'aṣr* prayer, shoulder to shoulder before God, as it is seen to put both parties in a more conciliatory frame of mind. The introduction of these two verses which comprise a more general instruction to perform prayer at difficult times into a section on the specific theme of divorce has been commented on by Richard Bell, who considered it had no connection with the context and seems designed for those on some military expedition (Bell 1991: 1:49). However, the underlying point of these two verses is to stress that even at war, not just in personal disagreement, believers should keep up the prayer so that it might have a beneficial effect on one's behaviour at times that it might be easy to act unjustly. For this reason, when the Qur'an provides a list of the qualities of believers, as in Q. 23:1–10 and in Q. 70:23–34, it puts observing the prayer first: this is the bedrock of Islamic behaviour on

which everything else is built, and if the believers observe the prayer they are more likely to observe everything else. As the Prophet said: ‘The first thing a person will be asked on the Day of Judgement is the prayer. If it is good (*idhā ṣalaḥat*), the rest of his deeds will be affected, and if it is bad, the rest of his deeds will also be affected’ (*Sunan al-Nasā’ī, Ṣalāh* 6; Wensinck 1992: 1–2:134).

In another example of this feature of Qur’anic style, sura 5 starts by urging the believers to fulfil their pledges, including observing the rites of the Ḥajj and refraining from forbidden foods. Then in v. 5 it informs the believers, in answer to a question, that chaste Muslim women are lawful for them, and that so are the chaste women of the People of the Book, provided a dowry is paid and they are taken in marriage, not as lovers or secret mistresses. Then comes the warning: ‘*Whoever disregards the obligations of the faith, his deed will come to nothing and he will be among the losers*’. Following this warning, the composition pattern is interrupted, and the subject of prayer is brought in to heighten its impact. It enables people to obey but in the atmosphere of talking about forbidden foods and forbidding illicit sexual relations it asks the believers, when they stand to do the prayer, first to cleanse themselves, considering the instruction of cleansing as part of perfecting the blessing of God on them (v. 6). Then the sura returns to the original theme of keeping pledges. Thus the original discourse is interrupted and the prayer and purification interjected, as in the previous example, in order to facilitate the believers to obedience to the Qur’anic teachings.

In some other examples the Qur’an seizes a chance to introduce a piece of important teaching by attaching it to another teaching, even by interrupting a pattern. Thus while explaining the fast of Ramadan, during which believers should refrain during daytime from consuming lawful food and drink, they are told that at night it is lawful to eat and drink, and to lie with their spouses: ‘*thus God makes clear his revelation to people so that they be mindful of Him*’ (Q. 2:187). Immediately after this verse comes the rejoinder: ‘*Do not*

*consume your property wrongfully, nor use it to bribe judges so that you may deliberately consume some of other people's property'* (v. 188). This important piece of teaching comes after training the believers to refrain for a whole month from eating what is lawful during daytime and after reminding them of God's leniency during the night. *Wa'kulū wa'shrabū* is followed by *wa-lā ta'kulū amwālakum baynakum bi'l-bāṭil*. Again, Richard Bell sees this verse as quite detached (Bell 1991: 1:39) and other readers may also see it in this way, but the Qur'an has higher objectives and knows where to introduce teachings so that they are more likely to be obeyed.

One final example of this stylistic feature of suspending the flow of discourse for considerations more important than maintaining form is sura 33 (*al-Aḥzāb*) which introduces teachings to do with family relationships, particularly the banning of adoption of children as was practised, divorcing by *zihar*, and later on teachings to do with the Prophet's wives, as the sura tries to restrain the Muslims from practices very much part of Arab life at the time. After v. 8, a full two pages are introduced on the episode of the joint forces that came to invade Medina: *'Believers, remember God's favour to you when mighty armies massed against you . . . from above and below you and your eyes rolled with fear, your hearts rose to your throats . . .'* (vv. 9–10). So, here, God reminds the believers how He saved them in this desperate situation so that they may now listen to the teaching in this sura. Even if it interrupts the original pattern, the importance of reminding the believers of God's favour so that they obey the teaching is more important than the consideration of maintaining formal aspects of the discourse.

## INSTILLING THE DESIRE TO OBEY AND THE FEAR OF DISOBEDIENCE (*TARGHĪB WA-TARHĪB*)

Another important feature of the style of the Qur'an is that it is passionate in presenting its message. It is very keen for people to obey its *hudā* ('guidance'), as can be seen in, for example, Q. 49:7–8, '*God has endeared faith to you and made it beautiful to your hearts. He has made disbelief, mischief and disobedience hateful to you. It is such people who are rightly guided, through God's favour and blessing.*' On the basis of this it uses *targhīb* ('awakening desire to obey') and *tarhīb* ('awakening fear of disobedience'). This involves contrast as mentioned earlier. Al-Shāṭibī (d 790/1388) rightly observed:

When *targhīb* occurs it will be accompanied by *tarhīb* in the subsequent or earlier material or in the same place. Thus when it mentions the people of Paradise it also mentions the people of hell, and vice versa, because mentioning the people of Paradise with their deeds instils hope and mentioning the people of hell with their deeds instils fear. (Al-Shāṭibī, *Muwāfaqāt*, 3:358)

Al-Shāṭibī further observed: 'One of the two may predominate in one place according to the requirement of the context' (*Muwāfaqāt*, 3:360). An obvious example is seen in *Sūrat al-Raḥmān* (Q. 55) which contains 78 verses: vv. 39–45 are dedicated to the guilty, and the rest of the sura to the *muttaqīn* ('the God-conscious'), which is appropriate for a sura that bears the title 'The Merciful'. In contrast to that, *Sūrat al-Qamar* (Q. 54) contains 55 verses, starting (vv. 2–3) with the disbelievers, '*Whenever the disbelievers see a sign, they turn away and say, "Same old sorcery." They reject the truth and follow their own desires.*' Most of the sura after this concentrates on the guilty, with only the last two verses (vv. 54–5) showing the rewards of the *muttaqīn*. These are two stark examples, but the feature can be observed in various degrees throughout the Qur'an.

## DISTRIBUTION OF RELATED MATERIAL (*TAWZĪ‘ AL-MĀDDA*)

In the Qur’an it is noticeable that sometimes material dealing with one specific subject may be distributed into different places for different reasons, two examples of which can be mentioned here. The first is its habit of introducing legislation gradually to make it more likely to be obeyed in a society which would otherwise reject a sudden wholesale change. The prohibition of alcohol is the example normally quoted, which was revealed in four stages: first a slightly disparaging remark, contrasting what people make out of dates and grapes, *sakar* (what produces intoxication), with *rizqun hasan* (‘wholesome provision’) (Q. 16:67). Later, when asked about *khamr* (‘wine’) the Prophet was instructed to say, ‘*There is great sin in [it], and some benefit for people: the sin is greater than the benefit*’ (Q. 2:219). Then the Qur’an prohibited people from coming to prayer, which takes place five times a day, while drunk (*sukārā*) (Q. 4:43), and finally banned alcohol completely in Q. 5:90 and condemns it, along with gambling, as ‘*filth of the works of Satan*’. This one theme was introduced over a number of years in different places. This cannot be easily dismissed as repetition. There is no abrogation; the description at every stage is still valid: alcohol is intoxicating, any Muslim who is drunk should not pray and alcohol is banned (Al-Khudari, *Tārīkh al-Tashrī‘*, 5–21).

The second reason for distributing material is that the Qur’an employs teachings already mentioned in different situations for suitable contextual purposes. Thus, prayer is introduced in many places, one of which, already mentioned, is as a prop to secure obedience (Q. 2:238–9) (see ‘Suspension of Composition Patterns for Rhetorical Purposes’). Another example is the Battle of Badr (AH 2) mentioned at length in *Sūrat al-Anfāl* (Q. 8) and then again referred to twice in *Sūrat āl ‘Imrān* (Q. 3:13) to remind the disbelievers who were sure of their

strength that they had a good example in what happened at Badr where their large numbers did not prevent their defeat. In vv. 118–20 it is used again in reverse to encourage the Muslims who were afraid of the disbelievers. Similarly, the Qur'an repeatedly employs stories of earlier prophets to strengthen the Prophet Muḥammad and his followers and warn their opponents, a constant need throughout his life.

## CONCLUSION

It is clear from the foregoing that the Qur'an uses Arabic grammar and *balāgha* together to serve its own purposes. Grammar may follow the normal rule (a process known as *istiṣḥāb al-aṣl*). Considerations of *balāgha*, however, can give priority to *al-'udūl 'an al-aṣl* ('departure from the original norm') or, as the scholars of *balāgha* say, *al-khurūj 'alā muqtaḍā al-zāhir* ('departure from what is normally expected'), but only 'for considerations required by the situation in certain contexts' (Al-Hashimi, *Jawāhir al-balāgha*, 239). As seen for instance in *iltifāt*, *balāgha* overrules grammar. The *balāgha* of the Qur'an is part of the way the Arabs used their language in their literature. To ignore this would be to reduce the universally acknowledged eloquence of the Qur'an to a very basic level of communication. The tools of *balāgha* and the stylistic features explained above, more than just simile, metaphor, and embellishments, are essential to understand the way in which the Qur'an introduces its messages and creates impact.

## FUTURE DEVELOPMENT IN THE STUDY OF

### QUR'ANIC *BALĀGHA*

As we have seen, *balāgha*, especially *‘ilm al-ma‘ānī*, has long been neglected in Qur’anic Studies in English, despite its crucial importance for the study and appreciation of the language and style of the Arabic Qur’an. The impact of the language and style of the Qur’an even on Arabs and Muslims does not seem to have been given sufficient attention.

Understandably, with the exception of very few individuals, Western scholars of the Qur’an in the past did not show interest in its effectiveness; from the beginning the intention was quite the opposite. Qur’anic Studies have come a long way beyond that. It is a welcome development that some attention has been given to *balāgha* in recent years, as we have seen in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (second edition) and more recently Brill’s *Encyclopaedia of Arabic Language and Linguistics*, and the *Oxford Handbook of Arabic Linguistics*. More detailed studies of *balāgha* as applied to the Qur’an have been undertaken by Arab and Muslim scholars of the Qur’an, now in Western universities, who have been trained in the Arabic and Islamic tradition at home. The number of such scholars is on the increase as a result of the global movements in academia. A new trend is also witnessed among Arab and Muslim Ph.D. students in Western universities, many of whom come from departments of Linguistics in their own countries, and it has become a favourite subject for them to study the Qur’an in English translations. This normally involves *balāgha* and all aspects of Qur’anic style. Durham and Leeds Universities have recently witnessed a number of these. This all adds to the new trend towards giving *balāgha* its proper place at the centre of Qur’anic Studies in English. It would be useful to have more Arabic texts on *balāgha* and style translated into English and to have some of this incorporated in the teaching of Arabic and Qur’anic studies in Western universities. This can only add strength to the discipline.

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