



INSTANCES OF THE RHETORICAL INIMITABILITY OF THE NOBLE QUR'AN

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Abstract. This article analyses, from the point of view of the science of Qur'anic studies, the inimitability of the eloquence and the rhetoric of the Noble Qur'an, the miraculous force of the effect of each of its words and sentences, and the incapacity of humankind before this speech in respect of style. The study discloses, through precise examples of verses and their exegetical and rhetorical commentaries, the impossibility of replacing the Qur'anic wordings, the phenomenon of their immediate effect upon the heart as the spirit acts upon the body, and the fact that each word has been chosen as lighter in pronunciation and more beautiful in its phonetic quality than its alternatives. The research possesses an important theoretical and methodological significance within the directions of the sciences of the Qur'an known as the inimitability of the Qur'an and rhetorical exegesis. It enriches the classical traditions of exegesis and the rules of rhetoric with contemporary methods of textual analysis and forestalls the danger of a superficial and incorrect interpretation of the original meaning of the verses. Furthermore, in a contemporary age in which the generation of text by artificial intelligence and digital communication have developed, the investigation of the mastery of Qur'anic word-usage establishes upon a scholarly foundation the absolute superiority of the divine speech over any algorithmic or human text. Ten verses of the Noble Qur'an are analysed in respect of their rhetorical inimitability.

Keywords: Noble Qur'an, Qur'anic studies, inimitability of the Qur'an, inimitability of eloquence, rhetoric, wording and meaning, phonetic lightness, mastery of word-usage, rhetorical exegesis, textual analysis.

INTRODUCTION

The Noble Qur'an is the divine book sent down by God Most High to the Prophet Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, for the guidance of humankind. It is the principal source of the creed, the worship, the morals and the rules of life of the

Muslims, and by its very essence it differs fundamentally from the speech of man. That the Qur'an is divine is manifested clearly in its inimitability, which is openly proclaimed in the verses of challenge (Qur'an 2:23; 10:38; 11:13; 17:88). In those verses men and jinn are summoned to bring a single speech resembling the Qur'an, yet none has been able to do so.

The inimitability of the Qur'an is one of the important directions of the science of Qur'anic studies, and the science of inimitability has for centuries occupied the attention of many scholars. In this field al-Rummānī (d. 384/994) composed «al-Nukat fī i'jāz al-Qur'ān» (al-Rummānī, 1976:232), al-Khaṭṭābī (d. 388/998) «Bayān i'jāz al-Qur'ān» (al-Khaṭṭābī, 1976:72), al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) «I'jāz al-Qur'ān» (al-Bāqillānī, 1997:314) and 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078) «Dalā'il al-i'jāz» (al-Jurjānī, 1992:684). Afterwards these questions were generalized within the system of the sciences of the Qur'an in such fundamental works as «al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān» of al-Zarkashī (d. 794/1392) (al-Zarkashī, 1957:IV/1232) and «al-Itqān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān» of al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) (al-Suyūṭī, 1974:IV/1459).

It has not hitherto been possible to embrace completely all the aspects of the inimitability of the Qur'an. Its effect resembles that of the spirit within the body: its existence and its force are evident to all, yet its essence cannot be fully perceived by knowledge. That the human being, far from being able to bring a single word equal to its speech, is incapable even of apprehending it completely, is one of the simplest manifestations of the inimitability of the Qur'an.

The distinctive quality of the wordings of the Qur'an is that each word is so placed in its own position that no other word can be put in its stead. There are several reasons for this: precision of meaning, suitability to the context, the harmony between the verses and others besides. One of them is a reason pertaining to the wording, namely that the pronunciation of each word employed in the verses is lighter and more sonorous than that of any word that might come in its place. The present article is devoted to the analysis of precisely this aspect from the point of view of Qur'anic studies.

The actuality of the subject is determined by the following. First, in the circumstances of the present day, in which doubts and disputes exist concerning the divine character of the Qur'an, the establishment of its inimitability by scholarly proofs remains one of the important tasks of Qur'anic studies. Secondly, taking account of every subtlety of the wording in translating and in interpreting the meanings of the Qur'an serves to

raise the quality of translations and commentaries. Thirdly, the study of the principle of using a word in its proper place upon the example of the Qur'an forms in young people a culture of treating the word with responsibility. Fourthly, a profound treatment of the questions of inimitability in the process of teaching the sciences of the Qur'an consolidates the knowledge of students concerning the Qur'an. Upon this basis the aim of the research consists in setting out theoretically, upon the basis of the sources of Qur'anic studies, the properness of the wordings of the Qur'an to their own places in respect of the lightness and the sonority of their pronunciation, and in disclosing its scholarly and practical significance. Descriptive, comparative and analytical methods are employed in the article.

MAIN PART

The rhetorical inimitability of the Qur'an is considered below upon the example of a number of verses. The first is the ninety-first verse of Sūrat Yūsuf:

تَاللّٰهِ لَقَدْ ءَاثَرَكَ اللّٰهُ

«By God, indeed God has preferred you above us» (Qur'ān 12:91; Muhammad Sodiq Muhammad Yusuf, 2025:III/191).

The wording āthara-ka, «he has preferred you», in the verse is easier of pronunciation than the word a'ṭā, «he gave». In the same way the word ātā is lighter of pronunciation than a'ṭā, although the meaning of both is «he brought»; the word āmana, «he believed», is lighter of pronunciation than ṣaddaqa, «he affirmed as true», and if attention be given, the word for faith occurs in the Noble Qur'an more often than the word for affirmation; and the word tatlū, «you recite», is lighter than taqra'u, «you read» (al-Suyūṭī, n.d.:II/256).

This does not, however, mean that the occurrence in certain places of the Noble Qur'an of words difficult of pronunciation is contrary to the rule of rhetoric. In their occurrence also there are instances of wisdom both known and unknown to us. Examples of these are the ninety-sixth verse of Sūrat al-Baqara, huwa bi-muzaḥzihihi, «it will not save him from the punishment»; the twenty-ninth verse of Sūrat al-Nāzi'āt, wa-akhraja ḍuḥāhā, «and He made its daylight bright»; the fourth verse of Sūrat al-Takwīr, wa-idhā al- 'ishāru 'uṭṭilat, «and when the ten-month pregnant camels are left untended»; and the third verse of Sūrat al-Sharḥ, alladhī anqaḍa ḡhṛak, «which weighed down your back».

The occurrence of such words, difficult of pronunciation, is likewise both a scholarly and a practical miracle of the Noble Qur'an. For the letters of the Arabic language, unlike those of other languages, possess the property of acting upon the members of the whole body of the human being. Precisely those words in Arabic that are difficult to pronounce act upon the points of sensation that have ceased to work in a person and possess the property of strengthening his sensitivity, his mental acuity and his discernment. It may be that God Most High, knowing by His eternal knowledge that words of this kind, difficult of pronunciation, strengthen the mind and the discernment, brought them in willing that the minds of His servants should be opened the more they recite the Qur'an. He has indeed set forth in His speech that He has made the memorizing of the Qur'an easy for us, in the seventeenth verse of Sūrat al-Qamar:

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْءَانَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَكِّرٍ

«Indeed We have made the Qur'an easy for remembrance. Is there then any that will remember?» (Qur'an 54:17; Muhammad Sadiq Muhammad Yusuf, 2025:V/655).

Certain contemporary researchers are directing their attention to the question of the effect upon human verbal and cognitive activity of words of complex pronunciation in Arabic proverbs (Tergujeff & Kuronen, 2023:381-400; Tayyara, 2022:799-819). A further reason why no other word can be employed in the place of each word that has come in the verses of the Qur'an is that the purpose intended by each word is fully expressed by that word alone. Thus in the twenty-eighth verse of Sūrat Fāṭir:

إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ

«Among His servants only the learned fear God» (Qur'an 35:28; Muhammad Sadiq Muhammad Yusuf, 2025:V/59-60).

The word *yakhshā* in the verse indicates the intended meaning more strongly than the word *yakhāfu*. The meaning of both is «he fears», but the difference between them is that in the fear denoted by *khāshya*, even though the one who fears be strong, his fear arises from the majesty of the one who is feared (al-Rāzī, 1999:I-XXXII), whereas the fear denoted by *khawf* arises from the weakness of the one who fears, even though the one who is feared be not stronger than he. For this reason, since the meaning of the word *khāshya* is the more exalted, it is the word *khāshya* that is always annexed to the name of majesty (al-Zarkashī, n.d.:IV/78). Hence in the twenty-first verse of Sūrat al-Ra'd:

وَالَّذِينَ يَصِلُونَ مَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ يُوصَلَ وَيَخْشَوْنَ رَبَّهُمْ وَيَخَافُونَ سُوءَ الْحِسَابِ

«And those who join that which God has commanded to be joined, and stand in awe of their Lord, and fear an evil reckoning» (Qur'ān 13:21; Muhammad Sadiq Muhammad Yusuf, 2025:III/225).

Besides this, the word qu'ūd in the speech of God Most High indicates its meaning more strongly than the word julūs, although the meaning of both is «sitting»; for qu'ūd always serves the meaning of remaining fixed, and for this reason qu'ūd is most often used in expressing the sitting that is in paradise. The contrary is the case with julūs, which is used in the meaning of sitting for a time (al-Rāzī, 1999:XXIX/333). For this reason in the eleventh verse of Sūrat al-Mujādala the word julūs has expressed the meaning fully:

إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ تَفَسَّحُوا فِي الْمَجَالِسِ

«When it is said to you: make room in the assemblies» (Qur'ān 58:11; Muhammad Sadiq Muhammad Yusuf, 2025:VI/84-87).

In assemblies one does not sit permanently, but sits for a time; for this reason in this place the meaning of the word al-julūs has served (al-Rāzī, 1999:XXIX/333). The word al-sana and the word al-'ām likewise denote a single meaning, that of «year»; yet each of them has a meaning of its own, and if the one is employed where the other has been used, the meaning will not be correct. Thus in the fourteenth verse of Sūrat al-'Ankabūt:

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ فَلَبِثَ فِيهِمْ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ إِلَّا خَمْسِينَ عَامًا فَأَخَذَهُمُ الطُّوفَانُ وَهُمْ ظَالِمُونَ

«And indeed We sent Noah to his people as a messenger, and he remained among them a thousand years save fifty years; then the flood seized them while they were wrongdoers» (Qur'ān 29:14; Muhammad Sadiq Muhammad Yusuf, 2025:IV/401-402).

The reason why, instead of saying «nine hundred and fifty years», it is said «a thousand years, save only fifty years», is that in the Arabic language a toilsome year in which drought has occurred and the harvest has been scanty is called sana, whereas a year in which ease and abundance have prevailed is called 'ām. For this reason the year excepted after the word illā in the verse was said to be 'āman and not sanatan (al-Zarkashī, n.d.:III/386).

If every word in the Noble Qur'an be analysed in this manner, no other word will be found that might be employed in the place of any word. For this reason there exists the golden rule that every word has its own place.

CONCLUSION

One of the principal factors in the disputes and contradictions arising in society at the present day is precisely the insufficiency of the culture of communication. In particular there is every ground for saying that at the root of the increase in the number of family separations in our region lies the weakening of the culture of speech and of the courtesy of intercourse among young people. The study of the rhetoric and the eloquence of the Noble Qur'an exerts an immediate and a profound influence not only upon religious and textual analysis, but also upon the everyday culture of communication of the human being, upon his manner of thought and upon his social relations. One who has studied the science of rhetoric understands that behind each word there lies a distinct meaning and a distinct quality, as in the subtle differences of synonymy between *yakhshā* and *yakhāfu* and between *qu'ūd* and *julūs* adduced above. The greater part of contradictions and misunderstandings arise from the incorrect use of words, from the imprecise expression of a thought, or from a mistaken apprehension of the content of an interlocutor's speech; and the sense of responsibility in the choice of words makes speech precise and free of misunderstanding (al-Jurjānī, 1992:684).

In the profound investigation of these actual questions, which serve to raise the welfare and the spiritual life of people, and in conveying them to the public, the reforms carried out after our country attained independence and the wide possibilities created in the religious and educational field serve as an important foundation. Making effective use of these possibilities, it is both the religious and the civic and social duty of the representatives of the young generation to mobilize the knowledge and the capacity that they are acquiring for the benefit of the people; and this is one of the priority tasks standing at the present day before the specialists of the religious field.

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