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The Method of Praise and Blame Through Inflectional Marking

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Abstract

Meanings are laid out along the road, as al-Jāhiz puts it, and they are known to people insofar as they are meanings conceived in the mind and apprehended by reason. What differs among people is the way they express these meanings through the arrangement of words that signify them. Since words are limited in number, it is therefore necessary to consider other ways and means of expressing meanings. In Arabic, a single meaning can be generated through different methods. Praise and blame constitute one of the methods of generating meanings, and it is a method that can scarcely be perceived except through careful reflection and contemplation. Had the inflectional marking not departed from the grammatical position in which it had been arranged, in relation to what precedes and follows it, neither praise nor blame would have been understood. This article is entitled "The Method of Praise and Blame Through Inflectional Marking" and is based on a problem formulated through the following questions: How can inflectional marking generate meanings? Does every inflectional marking generate a meaning, or is this matter restricted to a particular grammatical domain? The article identifies the principal principles governing this method, with the aim of demonstrating that Arabic is rich in its styles, subtle in its meanings, and diverse in its methods. This particular method is characterized by brevity and is apprehended through the context and situation.

Keywords: meaning transformation, praise, blame, inflectional marking, methods, generation of meanings.

01. Introduction



The Arabs spoke spontaneously and expressed themselves according to the natural disposition with which they had been created. This was the disposition of the human soul in its innate state, provided that its original tongue had not been mixed, in any form, with other languages and that it had remained pure and untainted by the linguistic distortions of the other civilizations that had arrived, bordered upon, or neighbored it. The foundation of this natural disposition was an elevated appreciation of modes of expression and an ingenuity in devising meanings, together with an implicit awareness of the rules governing speech and its organization.

The combination of these two virtues enabled the Arabs to elevate their language to a level rarely matched and scarcely equaled or paralleled. Hence, the styles and constructions they left behind, together with the rules and principles embodied in them, became the subject of studies that continue to generate research to this day, while scholars continue to contemplate them and seek from them what they seek. This, indeed, is among the greatest and most compelling proofs and evidences that what the Arabs uttered was firmly woven, exquisitely structured, and of great value. The excellence of its organization and expression points to the strength of its meanings, the multiplicity of its denotations, and their branching into numerous directions, so that its shade may be sought from every side.

The Qur'an is the miraculous word of God in wording, meaning, sound, and style. It has attained a degree of precision and perfection unmatched by any other book in the world. Scholars have devoted themselves to perfecting its recitation and interpreting it, as well as investigating its meanings, which continue to emerge in every age. Thus, God speaks the truth when He says: **"Say, 'If the sea were ink for the Words of my Lord, the sea would be exhausted before the Words of my Lord were exhausted, even if We brought the like of it as additional supply'"**[al-Kahf: 109]. It is an inexhaustible source; its wonders never cease, scholars never have enough of it, and readers never tire of it. Meanings are manifested in it through diverse methods and different styles, allowing it to accompany the ages as their circumstances change through its ever-renewed meanings.

It challenged all the inhabitants of the earth to produce anything like it, to match its exquisite composition, or to emulate its accomplishment, even if they were to come together and unite, with some supporting and assisting others. Yet far, far beyond their reach was what they sought. **"Say, 'If mankind and jinn were to come together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce its like, even if they were to support one another'"**[al-Isrā': 88]. This is a clear and explicit challenge that extends its authority over every direction toward which thought may proceed or which the mind may conceive as a possible aspect of the challenge. Thus, all attempts undertaken out of self-conceit were unsuccessful; indeed, they ended in utter failure and brought humiliation and disgrace upon their proponents.

In this study, I will discuss the style of praise and blame, which is among the styles employed by the Arabs in their forms of address and speech. The Qur'an also employed it, following their established usage and modes of expression, but elevated it beautifully by refining, developing, varying, and enriching it. It is, indeed, one of the subtle styles in which meanings become increasingly precise and delicate, continuously renewed, and encompassing of the object of blame or praise, leaving it no possibility of escaping from or dissociating itself from that characterization. It is an exquisite style in which those well

versed in Arabic and familiar with the Arabs' modes of expression and the purposes they sought through such constructions and indications compete, particularly those meanings concealed beneath the force of inflectional markings.

02. Definition of Praise and Blame

Praise and blame are opposites and constitute among the common purposes of speech among people, both in ancient and modern times, particularly in poetry, where praise and blame are among the poetic purposes in which poets have excelled throughout the succession of ages and generations. Blame and praise can be recognized by examining the expressions that indicate them and the words that diminish the status of the object of blame or elevate that of the object of praise. At times, however, both may remain hidden from the understanding and can only be apprehended through reflection and contemplation.

Praise is "the opposite of invective, and it is favorable commendation; *madḥah* is the noun of praise, and its plural forms are *madā'ih* and *madḥ*. One says: *madḥtuhu* and *imtaḍaḥtuhu*" (al-Farāhīdī, 2003, p. 126). It consists in mentioning a person's merits, either through explicit expressions or through expressions that convey the meaning of praise, such as: *nī'ma al-rajul* ("what an excellent man") and *ḥabdhā al-'ilm* ("how excellent knowledge is"). It is the opposite of invective.

As for blame, *al-Ṣiḥāḥ* states: "Blame is the opposite of praise. He blamed him, from the pattern *radda*, so he is blameworthy. *Al-dhimām* means protection, and *ahl al-dhimmah* refers to the people bound by a covenant. Abū 'Ubaydah said: *al-dhimmah* means security, as in the saying of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him: 'The least among them may grant protection under their covenant.' *Adhammahu* means that he granted him protection; *adhammahu* also means that he found him blameworthy; and *adhamma al-rajul* means that he did something for which he is liable to be blamed" (al-Rāzī, 1986, p. 94). Each of the two is therefore the opposite of the other. Blame may be expressed through explicit words such as *sā'a* ("how bad") and *lā ḥabdhā* ("how undesirable"), and it may be direct and explicit, or conveyed through allusion, suggestion, and indirect reference. An example is al-Mutanabbī's poem concerning Kāfūr al-Ikhshīdī (al-Ṭawīl):

I departed, and how many mourned me with the eyes of a gazelle,
and how many mourned me with the eyes of a lion.

No woman adorned with a beautiful earring in her place
was more distressed than the lord of the unsheathed sword.

Had what afflicted me been a veiled beloved,
I would have excused it, but it was a turbaned beloved.

He cast his arrow and guarded himself against my arrow, while beyond what he guarded against there was a love that broke my hand, my bow, and my arrows. (al-Mutanabbī, 1983, p. 459)

These are two clear styles that are understood with complete ease. This is the direct type. The other is the subtle type, which can only be apprehended through reflection and contemplation. It resembles indirect

reference in its subtlety, but differs from it in that it is understood through grammatical inflection, whereby its indicative verb is implicit, along with the praised or blameworthy attribute. This type of blame is therefore more subtle in its apprehension than other forms because of its hidden nature.

The changes that occur in the structure of speech may extend in multiple directions while meanings converge within them. One who is not skilled in extracting and transforming meanings may therefore assume that there is no connection among them. Yet when one examines them carefully and engages in deeper reflection, one attains, discovers, appreciates, and approves, and realizes that what was dispersed has been brought together and what was separated has become united. If meanings are generated through diverse methods and varied ways, they may be generated through advancement and postponement, through addition and omission, and through sound, relying on the distinctive properties of letters. These methods clearly differ from one another and vary in length and brevity, beauty and ugliness. Praise or blame may therefore be subtle or manifest and evident. The latter involves expressions such as *amdaḥ* ("I praise") and *adhum* ("I blame") and other expressions carrying their meanings. The former includes presenting praise in the form of blame and vice versa, or generating blame or praise by changing the inflectional marking. The latter is the subject and focus of our study.

ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī states: "Words remain attached to their meanings until inflectional marking is what opens them, and purposes remain concealed within them until it is what extracts them. It is the criterion by which the deficiency or superiority of speech becomes apparent only when it is presented to it, and the measure by which what is sound cannot be distinguished from what is defective until reference is made to it. None denies this except one who denies his own perception or deceives himself concerning realities. If this is so, then I wonder what excuse there can be for one who treats it lightly and shows no interest in it, who does not draw from its source and take it from its origin, who is content with deficiency when perfection lies within reach, and chooses loss when the path to profit is available" (al-Jurjānī, 1992, p. 28).

Among the statements made in this regard is: "Inflection is a branch of meaning." This is illustrated by the statement attributed to the daughter of Abū al-Aswad al-Duʿalī when she was walking with her father. She said, "How beautiful the sky is!" He replied, "Its stars," using the nominative case to understand her statement as a question. She said, "That is not what I meant; rather, I intended an exclamation." He then said to her, "Say: *mā ajmala al-samāʾa* ('How beautiful the sky is!')." This constitutes a fundamental distinction between Arabic and other languages. It has also been reported by some modern scholars that "the Arabic text is understood first and then read correctly, that is, with the proper grammatical inflection. Regardless of how proficient a reader may be in grammar, they cannot read an Arabic text correctly at first sight unless they have first apprehended the intended meaning, particularly when the inflectional marks or vocalization are absent. This differs from what happens with, for example, a French text, which can be read correctly even by someone who has no prior knowledge of its meaning. The French text is therefore read and then understood. From this perspective, it can be said that Arabic remains primarily an oral language" (al-Naḥḥās, 2000, p. 7).

Early grammarians differed in their interpretation of the meanings of some poetic verses when they differed over the grammatical inflection of those examples. In the Qur'anic verse: **"Alif-Lām-Mīm. That is the Book, there is no doubt in it, guidance for the God-conscious"**[al-Baqarah: 1–2], the word *hudā* ("guidance") may be read in the nominative or accusative case. Whoever reads it in the accusative is required to pause at the prepositional phrase *fīhi* ("in it"), whereas whoever reads it in the nominative is required to pause at the word *rayb* ("doubt") and posit a predicate for it. The meaning in either case is that the Qur'an is free from doubt from every possible direction through which doubt might be imagined to enter. The entire category of doubt is negated with respect to the Noble Qur'an. Since this is so, it provides guidance to the God-conscious, and in it is guidance for the God-conscious. Both grammatical possibilities are therefore valid within the verse.

Praise and blame have their expressions through which they are articulated and their styles upon which they are constructed. They are achieved through several means and styles, some based on analogy, some transmitted through usage, and others extracted through examination and reflection and apprehended through subtle perception and careful contemplation. The Arabs established verbs and patterns for blame and praise and made them forms into which they poured their meanings. They then introduced into these forms what elevated them to the levels of eloquence and the ranks of rhetorical excellence.

How subtle praise and blame become when their instruments are light, their components few, their effects concealed, and their traces barely perceptible! This is the style of praise and blame employed by the Qur'an in a manner that reveals a subtle rhetorical feature and displays an exquisite device: it makes a change in inflectional marking allude to it, the effect of the governing element point toward it, and its departure from what preceded it, to which it had been subordinate, disclose it. It is like a spark of fire on a pitch-black night. Distinguishing that word from what precedes it and from what follows it is strong evidence and a profound sign, as well as a supreme indication, that the meaning has changed and that the intended purpose has emerged and become distinct. Thus, the meaning is generated through the most concise of means, becoming subtle and precise despite remaining integrated with what precedes or follows it. The contemplative reader who examines those words arranged alongside it finds that they are closely related to one another, as though they originated from a single source and ultimately share the same destination.

03. Arab Conventions for Distinguishing the Forms of Meanings

It was customary among the Arabs, as part of their established linguistic practice, that whenever they wished to distinguish something from another thing resembling or accompanying it, they surrounded it with care and accorded it special attention. They would give it precedence in mention, depart from what was customary, establish a rule for it, even if implicitly, and assign it a position through which its subtleties would become apparent and its status would be elevated by the shortest possible means, without excessive and tedious speech or scant and feeble expression. Alternatively, they would provide indications for it and raise banners for it with lightness and subtlety, describing it and restricting it in ways

that distinguished it from others, until it became visible to the eyes, accessible to understanding, and an object toward which minds hastened in order to apprehend what was subtle and pleasing in it.

At times, they would break the speech at one point and then resume it, making the resumed element different in grammatical treatment from the element from which it had been resumed. They would thus make it rest upon an assumed or implicit question, or upon something else, as is the case with the grammatical construction of disjunction in the adjective and the appositive. Sibawayh states: "Yūnus claimed that some of the Arabs say: *al-nāzilūna bi-kulli mu'tarakin wa-al-ṭayyibīn* [those who descend upon every battlefield and the good], which is like *wa-al-ṣābirīn* [and the patient ones]. Among the Arabs are those who say: *al-ẓā'inūna wa-al-qā'ilīn* [those who depart and those who say]. Its accusative case is like that of *al-ṭayyibīn*, except that this constitutes insult and blame for them, just as *al-ṭayyibīn* constitutes praise and glorification of them" (Sibawayh, 1988, p. 65).

Among the examples of this is the following poem by al-Khirniq bint Badr (al-Sarī'):

May my people, who are
the poison of their enemies and the scourge of the tribes, never perish.

Those who descend upon every battlefield,
and the noble ones who fasten the straps of their saddles.

Those who strike wherever an encampment has settled,
and those who thrust with spear-bearing arms.

Those who mix their silver with their gold,
and their wealthy among them with their poor. (al-Khirniq bint Badr, 1990, pp. 43–45)

These verses were composed in praise of these people, whose strength had prevailed over their enemy and who had acquired honor, pride, and invulnerability. They acquired distinction through the poet's enumeration of their qualities. He described them as the poison of their enemies and a scourge to others: they descend upon every battlefield, fearing neither combat nor battle, and they do not flee on the day of the charge or turn their backs, despite being good and noble people. This is among the most emphatic forms of description, for the combination of strength with nobility of lineage and ancestry is something in which men take pride.

An example involving blame is found in the poetry of al-Nābighah:

By my life, and my life is no small matter to me,
the clansmen have indeed spoken falsely against me.

The clansmen of 'Awf; I seek no others
but the faces of monkeys seeking to wrestle.

The phrase "faces of monkeys" is placed in the accusative as an appositive to "the clansmen of 'Awf" in principle, just as "the clansmen of 'Awf" was made an appositive to "the clansmen". The first appositive was introduced to clarify the preceding expression, which had appeared ambiguous. The second appositive, however, was treated as a detached construction, thereby producing another meaning that

explicitly conveys blame in both wording and meaning. It was therefore placed in the accusative in order to distinguish it from what preceded it, since the preceding expression contains nothing indicating either praise or blame. Employing it in this manner and according to this pattern, which differs from the convention generally followed by Arab grammarians, is grounded in refined linguistic taste. The meaning produced by this departure from familiar stylistic patterns is itself founded upon taste and conforms to the rules of Arabic morphology, syntax, and semantics. In Arabic, the inflectional marking changes, and the meaning consequently changes.

The poet says:

To the noble king and the son of the valiant,
and the lion of the army in the crowded battlefield,
and the man of sound judgment when affairs become obscure,
with the sword that rings and the bridles.

"It is permissible to coordinate one predicate with another, just as some descriptions may be coordinated with others, as is the case here. Ibn al-Humām said: '*The lion of the army*' consists of two descriptions of the king, and they have been coordinated with the first description, namely '*the noble*.' Al-Farrā' cited this in *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān*, and the author of *al-Kashshāf* also cited it for this purpose" (al-Baghdādī, 1997, p. 451).

Thus, there is both convergence and divergence between description and praise. Praise consists in mentioning the qualities, characteristics, and actions of the person praised. Description may be of the same kind, but not every description constitutes praise, whereas every praise is a description. This distinction, however, is neither universal nor consistently applicable. Accordingly, physical descriptions, such as colors, may suggest praise, while at other times they may carry no indication leading to praise. For example, if we describe a man as white in complexion, this does not necessarily mean that his complexion signifies beauty or attractiveness.

As for Ibn al-Anbārī, he included this example in his *al-Inṣāf* and cited it as an instance of praise, stating: "*Dhā al-ra'y* is placed in the accusative as praise" (al-Anbārī, 2003, p. 384). Praising a person for soundness and correctness of judgment goes further in praise than merely describing him. The two considerations relied upon in distinguishing between them are:

- **Context and situation.** Among the examples and pieces of evidence supporting this approach is the Qur'anic verse: "**so that you may believe in Allah and His Messenger, support him, honor him, and glorify Him morning and evening**" [al-Faḥ: 9]. The term *ta'zīr* has two meanings: glorification and honoring, and disciplining. These are opposites. The latter meaning was employed by jurists in their rulings concerning the prescribed legal punishments, where they made it a punishment below the level of the prescribed punishment: "Our scholars differed concerning *ta'zīr*. Some of them said: it should not reach the lowest of the prescribed punishments, forty lashes. Others said that *ta'zīr* may reach seventy-five lashes, which is less than the prescribed punishment for a free person. Others said that it may exceed this. The best position we have found concerning this, and

Allah knows best, is that *ta'zīr* is left to the authority of the ruler according to the gravity or minor nature of the offense and according to what he considers the person being punished capable of bearing, within the range below eighty lashes" (Abū Yūsuf, n.d., p. 182).

The context of the verse indicates that *ta'zīr* and honoring are directed toward the Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him. Both meanings are appropriate to the person of the Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him. Interpreting *ta'zīr* here as glorification and veneration is determined by the accompanying word *tawqīr* ("honoring"), which excludes the second meaning mentioned above, namely disciplining and restraining. Had it carried that meaning, it would have resulted in the combination of two opposites. Nothing therefore remains except to interpret it according to the meaning established here. This is irrespective of the numerous verses concerning the obligation to obey the Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him, and the fact that glorification in the sense of *tasbīḥ* is directed to Allah, Glorified and Exalted. This constitutes an instance of combination, differentiation, and division.

Al-Akḥṭal says:

To a man whose gifts never expose us to reproach,
whom Allah has granted victory; may victory bring him joy.

The one who plunges into the depths while his fortune is auspicious,
the caliph of Allah, through whom rain is sought.

The expressions *al-khā'id* ("the one who plunges"), *al-maymūn* ("the fortunate"), and *khalīfat Allāh* ("the caliph of Allah") are placed in the accusative as praise and elevation. The context preceding this verse is one of praise. What follows it must therefore either continue according to the same pattern and context or adopt another method among the recognized methods of composing and arranging meanings. Poets, however, resort to another method that is subtler and more precise than the other methods. One observes harmony among the meanings, while the new meaning arising from the same context carries semantic force that makes it emerge in a form different from what precedes and follows it in terms of its grammatical agreement with the surrounding expressions. It is precisely this departure that serves as the basis for devising subtle and precise meanings.

A similar example is the following verse by another poet:

Indeed, Qays ibn 'Aylān has carried
its war against one independent in adversity and war,
its brother, when it was enraged, who soothed it
in every circumstance, whether gentle or difficult.

The expression "its brother" is placed in the accusative as praise. Had this not been the case, it would have been in the genitive as an appositive to "one independent."

Among the noble Prophetic traditions is the following report: "Abū Umāmah reported that when the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, had finished eating, or when his dining table was removed, he would say: 'Praise be to Allah, abundant, good, and blessed praise, not one that is disavowed, nor

one that is bid farewell, nor one for which our Lord is deemed unnecessary” (Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, 2001, pp. 500–501).

The expression **“our Lord”** (*rabbanā*) admits numerous grammatical possibilities:

- It may be in the nominative as the predicate of an omitted subject, that is, “He is our Lord.”
- It may be in the nominative as a subject whose predicate precedes it.
- It may be in the accusative as praise.
- It may be in the accusative as an expression of specification.
- It may be in the accusative with an implied verb meaning “I mean.”
- It may be in the accusative as a vocative, with the vocative particle omitted.

It may also be in the genitive as an appositive to the pronoun in “from it” or to the noun in the expression “Praise be to Allah” (Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, n.d., p. 581).

What concerns us among these possibilities is the reading that indicates praise. This is a sound grammatical interpretation containing a subtle rhetorical point. When the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, finishes eating and praising and extolling Allah, that would be sufficient in itself. Yet he concludes with the expression **“our Lord”** so that it comes as an expression following praise and gratitude. Wherever it is interpreted in this way, it admits a sound grammatical explanation appropriate to the context. There is no objection to the multiplicity of grammatical possibilities and the harmonious meanings that result from them. This gives the Prophetic tradition a high degree of eloquence, something that may not be attainable by every speaker. When grammatical possibilities multiply and the meanings associated with them likewise multiply, this facilitates understanding for people and allows for variation in interpretation, thereby expanding the range of meanings.

Allah, the Exalted, says: **“He who created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six days, then established Himself upon the Throne, the Most Merciful; so ask one well informed about Him”** [al-Furqān: 59]. The word *al-Raḥmān* (“the Most Merciful”) admits several grammatical possibilities. Among the possible readings through which praise becomes apparent is that it be placed in the accusative. The speech would then end with the word *al-‘arsh* (“the Throne”), after which a new sentence would begin either with a subject or with the predicate of an implied subject. What favors the accusative reading is the preceding discourse. The relative pronoun here is ambiguous and is understood through what precedes it and what follows it. It is as though the statement were made deliberately ambiguous and advanced in order to create anticipation and arouse interest

. The word *al-Raḥmān* is then introduced with its various grammatical possibilities according to the recognized analyses involving apposition, initiation of a sentence, specification, and the positing of an implied question to establish a new sentence. Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Qaysī states: “It occupies the nominative position on the basis of an implied subject, the estimation being *huwa al-Raḥmān* [He is the Most Merciful]. It has also been said that *al-Raḥmān* is the subject and *fas’al* [so ask] is its predicate. It

has also been said that it is an appositive to the implied pronoun in *istawā*. The genitive is also permissible as an appositive to *al-ḥayy*. The accusative is permissible as praise, while *khābīran* is in the accusative governed by *fas'al* and is an adjective for an omitted noun, as though the statement were: 'So ask about Him a knowledgeable person'" (Makkī ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Qaysī, 1985, p. 523).

All these grammatical possibilities, and the different meanings that arise from them, make the meaning of praise the highest in rank and the closest to manifestation and prominence. The context here is one of praise, exaltation, and glorification. If we compare this verse with the statement of Allah, the Exalted: **"Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, the Most Merciful; they have no power to address Him"** [al-Naba': 37], the difference between them is clear. In the verse from *al-Naba'*, the accusative as praise is not valid because, although the context can accommodate the meaning of glorification, it is a context concerned with the explanation of generosity and recompense. Allah, Glorified and Exalted, is worthy of this because He is the Owner of the heavens, the earth, and all that lies between them, and He is the Provider and Bestower. In the verse from *al-Furqān*, by contrast, the creation of the heavens and the earth is mentioned, whereas in the verse from *al-Naba'*, ownership is mentioned. It is therefore necessary to mention meanings appropriate to each context. Thus, the expression *al-Raḥmān* appears between the creation of the heavens and the earth and the request to ask about Him, and this is more appropriate to the act of creation.

Al-Zamakhsharī, discussing the accusative reading in Allah's statement, **"May the hands of Abū Lahab perish, and perish he! His wealth and what he earned will not avail him. He will burn in a Fire of blazing flame, and his wife, the carrier of firewood, will have a rope of palm fiber around her neck"** [al-Masad: 1–5], states: **"I prefer this reading"** (al-Zamakhsharī, 1987, p. 815). Perhaps the secret behind his preference for this reading lies in its correspondence with the intended meaning. Umm Jamīl, daughter of Ḥarb and sister of Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb, the paternal aunt of Mu'āwiyah, may Allah be pleased with him, harbored an intense and deeply rooted hostility toward the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, just as her husband Abū Lahab did. This hostility arose from the heart of a woman who, by nature, would ordinarily be expected to possess tenderness of feeling, gentleness, affection, and mercy, for she had been innately disposed toward these qualities. Yet hatred blinded her insight, and she was like her husband, or even more extreme in her hostility, as the saying goes, "birds of a feather flock together." Such hatred manifests itself in reality in different forms and appearances. It may take the form of overt actions that cause harm, or it may be concealed and harmful without appearing directly. Hence, the verse admits two possible interpretations. Two explanations have been given for the meaning of "the carrier of firewood":

01. She used to carry bundles of firewood, thorns, and prickly plants and scatter them along the path of the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, at night so that he would be harmed by them without seeing her. Ibn Hishām states in his *Sīrah*: "Allah, the Exalted, called her 'the carrier of firewood' because, as I have been informed, she used to carry thorns and place them on the path of the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, wherever he would pass" (Ibn Hishām, 1955, p. 355).

02. Figurative Expression and Euphemistic Allusion

The expression is to be understood figuratively and as a euphemistic allusion. The Arabs used euphemisms for many things and for various purposes, including protecting the person being described and preserving the purity of the tongue from uttering words that might wound people's feelings. What they outwardly express is not necessarily what is intended; rather, the intended meaning is what is concealed, because the more something is hidden, the more minds persist in seeking it and the more they take pleasure in investigating it. Such an expression is more penetrating and more powerful in affecting the psyche than an explicit one. One example of the Arabs' use of euphemism in referring to a particular attribute is found in their proverbial expression: "More indiscriminate than a night wood-gatherer: for whoever gathers wood at night collects everything he needs and everything he does not need, and therefore does not know what he has gathered" (Al-Maydani, p. 261).

A "night wood-gatherer" is also used to refer to one who spreads tales and engages in tale-bearing. Whoever behaves in this manner, like someone gathering wood at night, carries wood and other things with it; he carries whatever his hands have collected without knowing what he has gathered. The same applies to the tale-bearer, who may carry something worthless while imagining that he has acquired something precious. 'Abd al-Razzaq states in his exegesis: "She gathered words as one gathers wood, going about spreading tales" ('Abd al-Razzaq, 2001, p. 473). The mention of "the good" here supports the first interpretation and functions much like qualification in the domain of metaphor. However, when the Arabs use a particular word from among words that have synonyms, they employ it within specific contexts and particular situations. Usage thus provides evidence concerning the choice among such words, even when their meanings are identical.

It is as though the word "jīd," since it was used in the context of beauty and grace, made it impossible for Umm Jamil, the wife of Abu Lahab, to be literally a carrier of firewood, because this was not regarded as women's work. Therefore, those who held that the expression involves figurative language, that is, euphemistic allusion, offered an interpretation more appropriate to the meaning, since carrying news, rumors, and tales is closer to women's social activity than to men's. Consider Abu Lahab: he could have harmed the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, more through physical action than through verbal abuse, and therefore God Almighty mentioned his "hands" rather than other means of causing harm.

By contrast, when God mentioned Umm Jamil, He associated her with her husband, which indicates their shared hatred of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him. He then singled her out for something appropriate to her femininity and to what she had been naturally disposed toward, in accordance with her innate nature and her capacity to perform an action suitable and appropriate to her. Thus, He mentioned carrying firewood, even though the environment of the Arabian Peninsula is understood to have been a barren and arid desert where such a task would have been difficult even for men, let alone women. The word "jīd" was mentioned in the context of censure: how could the neck associated with the beauty and grace bestowed upon a woman be that of a carrier of firewood? Such an image is degrading to her and contrary to her natural constitution and innate disposition.

Exegetes have differed concerning this verse. Some adopted a particular interpretation and marshalled evidence and supporting examples in order to strengthen and defend it. Al-Alusi states: "Consider carefully and do not overlook the fact that, in all the possible interpretations, He did not say 'in her neck,' although the neck is conventionally mentioned with shackles and similar things involving humiliation, as in the verse, 'in whose necks are chains,' whereas the *jīd* is associated with jewelry" (Al-Alusi, 1994, p. 264). What reinforces the interpretation of the accusative as an expression of censure is the meaning of "carrier of firewood," which was intended to refer to tale-bearing. Understanding the expression literally may conflict with the social reality of the Arabs at that time, for they would not leave their women to engage freely in such activities, particularly when they belonged to noble families.

Moreover, it is more consistent with the woman's natural disposition that she would inflict harm through speech and verbal action rather than through carrying firewood, lighting fires, and placing thorns in the road. This is closer to her natural disposition and more appropriate to the weakness with which she was created, as the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, stated: "Ibn 'Umar reported that the Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, said: 'O women, give charity and give abundantly, for I have seen that you constitute the majority of the inhabitants of Hell because of frequent cursing and ingratitude toward your spouses. I have not seen anyone with deficient reason and religion who is more capable of overcoming a man of understanding than you.' She asked, 'O Messenger of God, what is the deficiency in reason and religion?' He said, 'As for the deficiency in reason and religion, the testimony of two women is equivalent to the testimony of one man; this is the deficiency in reason. And she remains for nights without praying and breaks her fast during Ramadan; this is the deficiency in religion'" (Ahmad ibn Hanbal, 2001, p. 246).

A woman, in accordance with her natural disposition, is therefore more likely to resort to harm through speech and the tongue. In terms of physical strength, she is weaker and unlike a man; therefore, military struggle was not required of her. "The male is not like the female," and this is not a defect for which the daughters of Eve should be blamed. Rather, it is the natural disposition with which God created them. Our purpose here is merely to demonstrate, through comparison, examination, and reflection, that the apparent meaning of the verses does not correspond to the actual nature and innate disposition of women. Likewise, Arab society at that time would not have accepted a free woman engaging in activities that would bring harm upon herself, her husband, her family, her relatives, and her clan, such as gathering firewood and throwing it in the path of the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, or setting fires in his path, particularly if she belonged to a family of lineage, honor, distinction, and high social standing.

Among the reasons advanced in support of this interpretation is what Al-Tha'labi states in his exegesis of the verse: "The reason for likening tale-bearing to firewood is that firewood is used to kindle and ignite a fire, and so is tale-bearing. Aktham ibn Sayfi said to his sons: 'Beware of tale-bearing, for it is a consuming fire, and a tale-bearer can accomplish in an hour what a magician accomplishes in a month'" (Al-Tha'labi, 2002, p. 327). Had the matter been intended literally, it would have imposed considerable hardship upon Umm Jamil. This demonstrates that the expression is figurative and that such an interpretation is more appropriate. "The second reason is that firewood becomes fire, and fire is a cause

of separation; the same applies to tale-bearing" (Al-Tha'labi, 2002, p. 328). Accordingly, scholars of rhetoric have classified this verse as an instance of figurative language and metaphor. A poetic example is found in the poet's statement:

"Indeed, the Banū al-Adram are carriers of firewood;
they are the tale-bearers in times of favor and anger."

The expression "carriers of firewood" refers to those who engage in tale-bearing, and this is confirmed by the poet's statement, "they are the tale-bearers ...," since those who spread tales are closely associated with tale-bearing. Among the evidence demonstrating the use of "jīd" in connection with beauty and grace is the following passage by Imru' al-Qays in a love poem:

She turns away and reveals a smooth cheek,
while guarding it with a gaze
like that of a wild gazelle of Wajrah with its young;
and a neck like the neck of a gazelle, neither coarse nor unbeautiful,
when she raises it, nor left unadorned.

The word "jīd" is thus used where beauty and grace are being mentioned. Accordingly, it is a mark of rhetorical excellence and eloquence to employ words in contexts appropriate to them. In a context such as this, the use of "neck" or "throat" would be inappropriate because it would primarily detract from the beauty of the meaning and render the words stylistically incongruous with one another. When words convey one meaning and belong to the category of synonymy, it is usage that distinguishes among them and determines their relative appropriateness. Al-Suhayli states: "How beautiful is the jewelry of the beautiful woman's jīd ... Had he said 'her neck,' it would have been poor speech." He further explains in *Al-Rawd al-Unuf* that this constitutes a form of irony, as in the expression "Give them tidings of a painful punishment," meaning that she has no jīd upon which jewelry can be placed, even if this were the jewelry she possessed. He adds that she was called "his woman" rather than "his wife" as an expression of disparagement (Al-Suhayli, 1967–1970, p. 420).

Let us consider the verse of the Qur'an: "But those firmly grounded in knowledge among them, and the believers, believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you; and those who establish prayer, give zakāh, and believe in God and the Last Day, to them We shall give a great reward" (Qur'an 4:162). This verse occurs in the context of discussing Jesus, son of Mary, the claim by the Children of Israel that they crucified him, God's raising of him to Himself, and their disagreement over his killing, with the Children of Israel divided into two groups. God, Glorified and Exalted, then makes an exception for those firmly grounded in knowledge among the People of the Book and the believers who believed in:

- the Noble Qur'an;
- the previous scriptures;
- establishing prayer;

- giving zakāh;
- believing in God; and
- believing in the Last Day.

We observe that the accusative reading in the expression “those who establish prayer” occurs with either the genitive or the accusative. The sound masculine plural has the same morphological ending in both the accusative and genitive cases. The expression occurs between a nominative element and a genitive or accusative element. It is preceded by an element that may be nominative, accusative, or genitive, with the nearest elements being the accusative or genitive, while what follows it is nominative. Here, therefore, it is necessary to examine both what precedes the word and what follows it in terms of grammatical inflection.

- What follows it is nominative, coordinated with what precedes it, namely “the believers,” since several groups are enumerated:
 - those firmly grounded in knowledge among the People of the Book;
 - those who believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you;
 - those who establish prayer;
 - those who give zakāh;
 - those who believe in God; and
 - those who believe in the Last Day.

Whoever considers what follows it as nominative maintains that the original grammatical status of “those who establish prayer” is nominative. Whoever considers what precedes it may likewise regard it as nominative, even though it is relatively distant from that element. The meaning, however, does not support the accusative; rather, it supports the nominative. The meaning is: the believers believe in what was revealed to him and what was revealed before him, establish prayer, give zakāh, and so forth, because, as can be seen, the grammatical position of what precedes these elements is nominative. Whoever considers the immediately preceding element, on the other hand, may regard it as genitive through coordination with what precedes it, since that element is genitive; yet the meaning does not remain coherent under this interpretation. From the perspective of syntax and grammatical inflection, therefore, the issue can be examined from both directions. In this regard, “the Arabs use the accusative to express praise and blame when speech becomes lengthy through a sequence of descriptions of the same thing” (Al-Razi, 1420 AH, p. 219). When a long sequence of descriptions is applied to one referent, the speaker may depart from the established grammatical pattern, breaking the sequence either to prevent monotony or to achieve a subtle rhetorical effect that becomes more conspicuous than the surrounding elements.

Through its difference from its counterparts, the expression stands out and attracts the attention of the mind. This also draws attention to the importance of the entity singled out by this distinctive feature

when it is separated from the rest of its sequence. Abu ‘Ali al-Farisi offers a profound observation in this regard: “When numerous attributes are mentioned in the context of praise or blame, it is preferable that their grammatical inflection differ rather than making all of them follow the grammatical case of their referent, because this is one of the contexts in which elaboration in description and fullness of expression are intended. When the grammatical inflection of the descriptions differs, the intended effect is more complete, because when grammatical inflection differs, speech becomes as though it consisted of different kinds of discourse and various forms of expression; when the grammatical inflection is uniform, it constitutes one single mode and one single sentence” (Al-Razi, 1420 AH, p. 220).

The Noble Qur’an follows this approach in many verses when discussing a single subject. It departs from the established pattern and thereby breaks the sequence of elaboration. Such breaking or interruption occurs in several forms, including the matter of the endings of Qur’anic verses, where we observe that the endings do not adhere to a single letter but vary, thereby preventing the monotony that may affect the reader when confronted with such extended elaboration.

The appropriateness of a word’s position among its counterparts within the sentence is itself the essence of literary beauty and rhetorical eloquence, for meaning is dependent upon such positioning. Indeed, some meanings are apprehended through syntactic arrangement, while others are grasped through reflection and careful consideration. The indications, allusions, and indirect expressions of speech may not become apparent except through contemplation. This occurs frequently in the Noble Qur’an, and earlier scholars devoted exceptional attention to it. Exegetical works were composed on this subject, including *Jāmi‘ Laṭā’if al-Tafsīr* by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Qammāsh and *Laṭā’if al-Ishārāt* by al-Qushayri, among others. For them, meanings therefore constituted the most important object of inquiry, and their competition centered on meanings rather than on words as words. They criticized affected verbosity and artificiality because these represent concern with wording at the expense of meaning. “Attention to the meanings disseminated throughout discourse is the ultimate objective, on the basis that the Arabs were concerned primarily with meanings and refined expressions for their sake.

This principle is well established among scholars of Arabic: wording is merely a means of attaining the intended meaning, while meaning is the objective. This does not apply to every kind of meaning, however, for an individual lexical meaning may be disregarded when the compositional meaning is understood without it” (Al-Shatibi, 1997, p. 138). The extensive disagreement among people, and indeed among scholars, has therefore primarily concerned meanings, as demonstrated by the abundance of Qur’anic commentaries. Books and dictionaries were composed precisely to explain meanings and distinguish their relative values. Had meanings not been the higher and more important objective, there would have been no competition among poets and writers, since words remain inert and their meanings neither emerge nor change until they are combined with other words, through which they acquire new meanings.

Conclusion

The Arabic language is a derivational language, and this characteristic facilitates the generation of words and the development of meanings. There are numerous, diverse, and different ways of generating meanings, each with its own characteristics and techniques. The multiplicity of ways through which meanings can be generated is indicative of the greatness and flexibility of Arabic. Generating meanings or shifting them toward other meanings through grammatical inflection is a concise and remarkable method that reveals the ingenuity and beauty of Arabic. Not every change in grammatical inflection, however, shifts meaning toward blame or praise; rather, this occurs within particular contexts.

The most important findings derived and consolidated from this study may be summarized as follows:

- Shifting meanings toward blame or praise through a change in grammatical inflection is one of the means by which meanings can be developed and multiplied.
- This method is one of the concise approaches that relies on context, situation, and grammatical inflection.
- This type of approach to generating and shifting meanings demonstrates the fluidity and flexibility of Arabic and its ability to create meanings through diverse styles and numerous methods.
- This method is optional rather than obligatory. It represents one of the possible grammatical inflections through which a meaning is highlighted when the context provides grounds for generating that meaning through grammatical inflection.
- This method is generally employed to break the pattern created by the succession of attributes and thereby encourage engagement with reading. When descriptions follow one another continuously, they may produce a sense of monotony and stagnation in the reader, and this effect can only be broken by departing from the familiar pattern.
- It is employed to highlight something that surpasses what precedes or follows it, thereby distinguishing it from the others.
- It is employed to demonstrate that the element marked by the grammatical inflection is more intense and stronger than the others because of the praise or blame associated with it, as in *Sūrat al-Masad*.

These are some of the findings whose fruits emerged through reflection upon and contemplation of the Qur'anic examples and supporting evidence. And God is the One who grants success and guides to the path of righteousness.

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