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The semantic functions of function words and their functional impact on directing qur'anic meaning in exegetical works: a study of al-Taḥrīr Wa Al-Tanwīr — coordinating conjunctions as a model

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to demonstrate the role of coordinating conjunctions and their significant impact on determining Qur'anic meaning. They are not merely links between sentence constituents or between sentences; rather, in addition to their linking function, they carry meanings and semantic nuances that color and shape discourse. For this reason, Arabic scholars of different orientations—including grammarians, rhetoricians, and exegetes—have devoted considerable attention to them. Since the Holy Qur'an represents the highest application of Arabic stylistic expression, exegetes have found in the role and meaning performed by the conjunction in context a rich field for explanation and for demonstrating its effect on Qur'anic meaning. Among the exegetes who distinguished themselves in the field of language and interpretation is Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn Ashur in his work *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*. A close reading of this corpus reveals the extent of Ibn Ashur's attention to the effect of the linguistic particle in directing Qur'anic meaning. It is therefore not an exaggeration to state that the semantic role performed by the particle in *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr* deserves independent study because of its great importance, including the topic of coordination through its recognized particles. Accordingly, this research, entitled "The Semantic Functions of Function Words and Their Functional Impact on Directing Qur'anic Meaning in Exegetical Works: A Study of *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr* — Coordinating Conjunctions as a Model," seeks to highlight the importance and role of these particles within the linguistic context, particularly in the Holy Qur'an, focusing on what the author of *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr* presented, given the linguistic, grammatical, exegetical, and methodological richness of his work.

Keywords: coordination; semantics; exegesis; meaning; context; function; rhetorical purpose.

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Qur'an is the foundation of linguistic study in Arabic, just as it is the constitution of Islamic law. It represents the Arabic rhetorical miracle, in which the expressive potentialities inherent in Arabic words and structures may be discerned. Arabic is therefore honored to take everything contained in this Book as decisive evidence for constructing its styles and studying the functions of its discourse, as well as the highest standard of eloquence. Classical grammarians and rhetoricians devoted considerable attention to studying the Qur'an and often made it the basis of their linguistic investigations. Some of them reached conclusions that can stand alongside the most recent contemporary linguistic theories. Among the linguistic phenomena treated by the Qur'an in its mode of expression is coordination, particularly coordination by conjunctions ('aṭf al-nasaq). Its occurrence made it an important aspect of the study of Arabic syntax, because good linkage between meanings through particles is one of the foundations of coherent composition.

This applied study seeks to highlight the value acquired by coordination in Qur'anic expression by presenting one of the analytical linguistic studies devoted to this topic, undertaken by one of the prominent Arab linguists representing the heritage-oriented approach: Shaykh Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn Ashur, author of *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*. Accordingly, the study examines the numerous coordinating conjunctions found in Arabic in terms of their meanings, patterns, and constraints, according to the analyses Ibn Ashur developed in his interpretation of Qur'anic verses containing coordination in its various forms. Before presenting this analytical study, however, a brief theoretical discussion is necessary to define coordination in Arabic in terms of its lexical and terminological meaning and to identify its categories according to grammarians.

1. THE CONCEPT OF COORDINATION IN ARABIC

1.1 The Lexical Meaning of the Word "'Aṭf". A survey of Arabic dictionaries in their treatment of the word "'aṭf" reveals three semantic groups:

- A. The first group: bending, inclining, turning, folding, twisting, deviation, turning aside, curvature, swerving, returning, and related meanings.
- B. The second group: kindness, tenderness, affection, compassion, mercy, pity, and sympathy. (Hamidah, 1999, pp. 14–15).
- C. The third group: carrying and turning back/charging.

What can be inferred from these three groups is that they revolve around a general meaning of inclination and bending toward a direction. This inclination may be physical, as in the first group, or metaphorical and abstract, arising from social feeling or instinctive behavior, as in the second

group. The meanings of carrying and charging in combat found in the third group also intersect semantically with the notion of turning and inclination. It should not be assumed that there is complete synonymy among the meanings of the words belonging to these three groups, or between them and the root ‘-ṭ-f. These meanings intersect only within a common semantic field, after which each acquires its own specialized field outside that area of semantic overlap. (Hamidah, 1999, p. 15).

Among the Arabs’ uses of ‘aṭf in the sense represented by the first group is the poetry of Ḥumayd ibn Thawr al-Hilali, as well as Labid’s use of the term in his Mu‘allaqah. Examples of the second group include the poetry of Abu al-Nashnash al-Nahshali, while the third group is represented by the poetry of Yashamah ibn Khuzn al-Nahshali.

The root ‘-ṭ-f occurs in the Holy Qur’an in only one place, in the divine verse: “turning his side so as to lead [people] astray from the way of Allah” (Qur’an, Al-Hajj, 22:9). Ibn Abbas reportedly said that it refers to al-Nadr ibn al-Harith, who twisted his neck out of arrogance and pride. Al-Farra interpreted it as turning away from remembrance, while Mujahid and Qatadah interpreted it as twisting his neck in disbelief. Al-Mubarrad understood al-‘aṭf as that which bends from the neck, whereas al-Mufaddal understood it as the side. Thus, two tendencies emerge in interpreting the term in this verse: one relates it to the first semantic group and the other to the second. (Hamidah, 1999, pp. 16–17).

2. This discussion demonstrates that the semantic field of the word ‘aṭf revolves around bending, inclination, and returning. This is the meaning intended by early grammarians when they selected ‘aṭf as a technical term for this chapter. When it is said, for example, “the wāw is a coordinating conjunction” in the sentence “Zayd came and ‘Amr,” this means that the wāw connects ‘Amr to Zayd, assigning to ‘Amr the same semantic and grammatical ruling assigned to Zayd: the semantic ruling is the attribution of coming to him, and the grammatical ruling resulting from that attribution is nominative marking. Thus, coordination means bringing the second element into correspondence with the first in grammatical and syntactic ruling. (Hamidah, 1999, p. 16).

1.2 The Lexical Meaning of the Word “Nasaq”

The word nasaqa is used in the sense of arranging or ordering. The term al-nasaq, with a sukun on the sīn, denotes the arranged order, while al-nasaq, with a faṭḥah, is the verbal noun associated with being arranged; the latter is the term commonly used in grammatical works for this chapter. Arabic dictionaries give the following meanings for nasaq:

- Order, regularity, and good composition: Ibn Manzur states in *Lisan al-‘Arab* that al-nasaq of anything is that which follows one general orderly method; nasaqa al-shay’a means “he arranged it evenly.” (Ibn Manzur, n.d., p. 86).

- Al-Zamakhshari states in *Asas al-Balagha* that pearls and similar things are *nasaq* and *manzuq* when discourse follows an orderly pattern. (Al-Zamakhshari, 1998, p. 266).
- Evenness: in *Lisan al-‘Arab*, *thaghr nasaq* refers to teeth that are even.
- Coordination: *al-nasaq* means coordinating with the first element, with the same verb applying to both; *nasaqtu al-kalam* means “I coordinated one part of speech with another.”
- Succession and continuity: the expression “coordinate the pilgrimage and the lesser pilgrimage” means to follow one upon the other. (Al-Zamakhshari, 1998, p. 266).

1.3 Syntactic Definition of Coordination (‘*Aṭf al-Nasaq*). Arab grammarians constructed the discussion of ‘*aṭf al-nasaq* on the basis that it is one of the five categories of dependent elements. This approach primarily relies on a purely formal indicator, namely agreement in grammatical case marking. Consequently, ten particles with different meanings were grouped under one chapter merely because the element following each particle agrees in case marking with the element preceding it. When grammarians sought to formulate a restrictive definition of ‘*aṭf al-nasaq*, they necessarily included reference to dependency and then sought to exclude the other four dependent categories. (Hamidah, 1999, p. 24).

Among the grammatical definitions of ‘*aṭf al-nasaq* are:

- Al-Rummani: “a dependent element that follows the first according to the principle of sharing.” (Al-Rummani, 1969, p. 39).
- Ibn al-Hajib: “a dependent element intended in relation to its governing element, with one of the ten particles intervening between it and its governing element.” (Al-Radi al-Astarabadi, 1996, vol. 1, p. 331).
- Ibn Asfur: “making a noun dependent upon a noun, a verb upon a verb, or a sentence upon a sentence, provided that one of the particles designated for this purpose intervenes between them.” (Ibn Asfur, n.d., vol. 1, p. 229).
- Ibn Malik, in his *Alfiyyah*: “a dependent element introduced by a particle,” and in *Al-Tashil*: “that which is made dependent through one of its particles.” (Ibn Malik, n.d., p. 184).
- Al-Radi: “a dependent element with one of the ten particles intervening between it and its governing element.” (Al-Radi al-Astarabadi, 1996, vol. 1, p. 318).
- Ibn Aqil: “the dependent element with one of the particles that we shall mention intervening between it and its governing element.” (Ibn Aqil, 2009, vol. 3, p. 165).

2. TYPES AND RULES OF COORDINATION ACCORDING TO GRAMMARIANS
Coordination is divided by grammarians into three categories, as Ibn Hisham al-Ansari explains in Al-Mughni:

2.1 Coordination According to Form (‘Aṭf ‘ala al-Lafz)

This is the basic type, as in “Zayd is neither standing nor sitting,” with the second element in the genitive. Its condition is that the governing element can grammatically govern the coordinated element. Thus, in “No woman or Zayd came to me,” only the nominative is permissible, as coordination follows the syntactic position because the preposition *min* is redundant and does not govern definite nouns. In some constructions, coordination according to form and according to syntactic position are both prevented; the correct analysis is then to posit an implicit subject. (Ibn Hisham al-Ansari, 1985, vol. 2, p. 134).

2.2 Coordination According to Syntactic Position (‘Aṭf ‘ala al-Maḥall)

This is illustrated by “Zayd is not standing nor sitting,” where the second element is accusative. According to the authoritative view, this type has three conditions: first, the relevant form must be possible in correct Arabic; second, the syntactic position must be one that would have existed by original construction; and third, there must be an explicit or recoverable element requiring that syntactic position. These conditions generate a number of detailed grammatical disputes among Basran and Kufan grammarians. (Ibn Hisham al-Ansari, 1985, vol. 2, pp. 134–135).

2.3 Coordination Based on Supposition (‘Aṭf ‘ala al-Tawahhum)

This occurs when the coordinated element is assigned the grammatical case that would have resulted if an assumed governing element had actually been present. An example is “Zayd is neither standing nor sitting,” with the second element in the genitive, on the supposition that the preposition *bā’* occurs before the predicate. The condition for permitting this type is that the supposed governing element could in fact have occurred. Its acceptability is strengthened when such usage is frequent in Arabic poetry and speech. This phenomenon may occur with genitive, jussive, nominative, accusative, and verbal constructions. (Ibn Hisham al-Ansari, 1985, vol. 2, pp. 135–137).

2.4 Coordination of a Declarative Expression with an Imperative Expression, and Vice Versa
Ibn Hisham states in Al-Mughni that this type is disputed among rhetoricians and grammarians. Rhetoricians generally reject it, as do some grammarians, whereas al-Saffar and others permit it, citing Qur’anic examples such as the command to “give glad tidings” following the mention of those who believe and perform righteous deeds. Ibn Hisham discusses these arguments at length

and evaluates the syntactic and semantic explanations proposed for them. (Ibn Hisham al-Ansari, 1985, vol. 2, pp. 142–144).

2.5 Coordination of a Nominal Sentence with a Verbal Sentence, and Vice Versa
Three positions are reported in Al-Mughni: unrestricted permissibility; complete prohibition; and permissibility specifically with wāw. Ibn Hisham discusses the evidence for each position and concludes that some of the arguments require distinguishing coordination from resumption and from circumstantial constructions. He also discusses Qur'anic examples and the positions of al-Razi and other scholars concerning them. (Ibn Hisham al-Ansari, 1985, vol. 2, pp. 145–146).

2.6 Coordination of Two Objects Governed by Two Governing Elements
Ibn Hisham explains that coordination involving the objects of a single governing element is unanimously accepted, whereas coordination involving the objects of more than two governing elements is generally rejected. Coordination between the objects of two governing elements is disputed, especially when one of the governing elements is a preposition. He presents the positions of Ibn Malik, al-Farisi, al-Akhfash, Sibawayh, al-Mubarrad, Ibn al-Sarraj, and others, together with Qur'anic evidence whose apparent syntax may conflict with some of these positions. (Ibn Hisham al-Ansari, 1985, vol. 2, pp. 146–147).

3. THE EFFECT OF PARTICLES AND THEIR SEMANTIC FUNCTIONS ON MEANING: A TAFSIR-ORIENTED STUDY OF AL-TAHIR IBN ASHUR

A particle has a prominent effect in determining meaning. It is not merely a link between sentence constituents or between sentences; rather, in addition to its linking function, it carries meanings and semantic nuances that shape discourse. Grammarians therefore studied particles from both semantic and formal perspectives.

One indication of their interest in the role played by these particles is the fact that they devoted specialized works to them, beginning with al-Khalil's Ma'ani al-Huruf, if the attribution of that work to him is correct, followed by works by al-Rummani, al-Muradi, al-Harawi, and Ibn Hisham in Mughnī al-Labīb, more than half of which is devoted to the meanings of particles. Since the Holy Qur'an is the highest practical manifestation of Arabic style, exegetes found in the role and meaning performed by the particle in context a field for explanation and for clarifying its impact on Qur'anic meaning. These efforts subsequently gave rise to numerous modern studies, some general and others specialized, devoted to the meanings and functions of such particles. (Al-Zahrani, 2009, p. 325).

All of this indicates the importance of the particle for understanding the Holy Qur'an and the role of exegetes in uncovering its functions. The science of particles developed within Qur'anic exegesis; grammarians then received and developed it through their linguistic knowledge, after which it returned to exegesis in a more mature form. The specialized works that emerged subsequently contributed to its development and consolidation. (Al-Zahrani, 2009, pp. 327–328). The richness of the studies presented by Muhammad al-Tahir Ibn Ashur in *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr* regarding coordinating particles and coordination in general is therefore unsurprising. It is not an exaggeration to state that the semantic role performed by the particle in *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr* warrants independent study because of its considerable importance. (Al-Zahrani, 2009, p. 328). The present study therefore seeks to highlight the importance and role of these particles in linguistic context, particularly in the Holy Qur'an, focusing on Ibn Ashur's treatment because of the linguistic, grammatical, exegetical, and methodological richness of his commentary. The choice to focus specifically on coordination in Ibn Ashur is justified by the fact that coordination represents an important aspect of syntactic context, perhaps one of its most significant aspects, because it involves multiple particles, patterns, and relationships between coordinated elements, and because it may recur within a single sentence through one or more particles. This makes coordination a broad field for exegetes concerned with contextual coherence and its value in determining the meaning of Qur'anic verses and their rhetorical dimension. (Al-Zahrani, 2009, p. 563).

3.1 General Methodological Observations on Ibn Ashur's Treatment of Coordination
Ibn Ashur frequently favors coordination in places where coordination could be interpreted in other ways. A striking feature of his approach is that he often chooses coordination because he gives precedence to conjunction and connection over separation, in order to preserve harmony among the expressions, verses, and surahs of the Qur'an. This may lead him to prefer coordination in places where resumption might appear more immediately plausible, such as his interpretation of the verse: "Allah is not shy of the truth" (Qur'an, Al-Ahzab, 33:53). He maintains that "and Allah is not shy of the truth" is coordinated with "and that would annoy the Prophet," despite the difference between the two sentence types. He nevertheless acknowledges that treating the wāw as resumptive is possible. (Al-Zahrani, 2009, p. 564).

Ibn Ashur also repeatedly uses expressions such as "explanatory resumption" and "formal coordination." By the latter he means the coordination of sentences rather than individual words, where the coordinated and governing sentences do not share the same grammatical ruling. (Ibn Ashur, n.d., vol. 2, p. 207). He employs these expressions where the contextual form suggests resumption but where the semantic relationship between the preceding and following meanings requires

linkage. Thus, he accepts resumption formally while maintaining coordination semantically, describing it as explanatory resumption or formal coordination. (Al-Zahrani, 2009, p. 565).

He also pays close attention to the relationship between the two coordinated sentences, reflecting his broader concern with coherence among Qur'anic sentences, verses, and meanings. For example, in interpreting the verse "And do not wish for that by which Allah has favored some of you over others..." (Qur'an, Al-Nisa', 4:32), he regards the relevant sentence as coordinated with the preceding one and explains the contextual relationship between them.

Another feature of his method is his attention to the type of coordination. He distinguishes, for example, between coordination of one purpose with another and coordination of a purpose with a preparatory statement. In the verse concerning those who remained behind from fighting, he identifies the coordination as "coordination of one purpose with another," intended to move to a classification of the groups of those who stayed behind and the degrees of their excuses. (Ibn Ashur, n.d., vol. 10, p. 287). He also recognizes coordination of a purpose with a preliminary statement, as in the passage concerning Moses and the Children of Israel, where the taking of houses is interpreted as preparation for travel and crossing the sea. (Ibn Ashur, n.d., vol. 11, p. 274).

He further identifies semantic types such as coordination of the specific with the general, as in "And remember what is recited in your houses of the verses of Allah and wisdom" (Qur'an, Al-Ahzab, 33:34). Ibn Ashur explains that "wisdom" is coordinated as a specific element with a general one. (Ibn Ashur, n.d., vol. 22, p. 18).

His interest in classifying these types extends even to verses that may permit more than one interpretation. In "O you who believe, remember Allah with much remembrance and glorify Him morning and evening" (Qur'an, Al-Ahzab, 33:41-42), he explains that if glorification refers to supererogatory prayers, the coordination is one of difference, namely coordination of a general element with another general element; if it refers to saying "Glory be to Allah," it constitutes coordination of the specific with the general. (Ibn Ashur, n.d., vol. 22, p. 48).

The foregoing analysis shows that Ibn Ashur does not readily allow a dependent element to become more prominent than its governing element, which reveals the importance he assigns to the rhetorical dimension of coordination. (Al-Zahrani, 2009, p. 575).

4. AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF COORDINATION THROUGH SELECTED QUR'ANIC MODELS FROM AL-TAHRĪR WA AL-TANWĪR

After presenting Ibn Ashur's methodological observations concerning the various forms of coordination, this section traces the functional purposes derived from context—in other words, the functional purpose fulfilled by coordination according to the different patterns found in the corpus—through selected Qur'anic examples. We begin with the first pattern: coordination of one sentence with another, or of one group of sentences with another. This is the predominant pattern in the selected corpus, particularly in Juz' Tabarak, and it occurs through several particles, most prominently wāw, thumma, fa, aw, and bal.

4.1 Coordination of Sentences

In the verse "And He has power over all things" (Qur'an, Al-Mulk, 67:1), the sentence is coordinated with the opening verse of the surah. The functional purpose of this sentence-level coordination is to convey generalization after specification. This purpose completes the meaning of the preceding relative clause, and the coordination is not merely repetitive or confirmatory. (Ibn Ashur, n.d., vol. 29, p. 11).

In the verse "Whether you conceal your speech or make it public, He surely knows what is in the hearts" (Qur'an, Al-Mulk, 67:13), the coordination between the sentences is "coordination of one purpose with another." The context shifts from one purpose to another in accordance with the situation: the narrative concerning the unbelievers and polytheists in the Hereafter is connected with their statements in worldly life, particularly their statements directed against the Messenger of Allah. They subsequently sought to conceal their words, believing that the Lord of Muhammad would not hear them. The coordinated sentence therefore connects with the preceding sentences that describe the unbelievers' statements and characteristics. (Ibn Ashur, n.d., vol. 29, p. 29).

Similarly, in "Does He who created not know, while He is the Subtle, the All-Aware?" (Qur'an, Al-Mulk, 67:14), the coordination serves to convey a specific piece of information: that God's knowledge encompasses the essence and states of created beings. After rejecting the assumption that God is unaware of what they conceal, the verse informs them that He knows what is subtler and more hidden than their secret speech. (Ibn Ashur, n.d., vol. 29, p. 31).

In "And magnify your Lord" and "purify your garments" (Qur'an, Al-Muddaththir, 74:2–3), the latter sentence is coordinated with the former by means of wāw for the purpose of describing the Lord with attributes of exaltation and perfection. The conjunction encompasses the meaning of divinity and transcendence and directs attention to the obligation of glorifying God through monotheism, which is the first principle of the prophetic mission. (Ibn Ashur, n.d., vol. 29, p. 296).

4.2 The Semantic Function of Thumma (ثُمَّ): Rank-Delay
Among the examples belonging to sentence coordination through thumma is the verse: “Then return your vision twice again” (Qur’an, Al-Mulk, 67:4). The purpose conveyed by thumma here is what is known as rank-delay (al-tarākhī al-rutabī), rather than temporal delay. According to the author of *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, this type of semantic delay occurs between two sentences when the referent reported about in both is the same. The coordinated sentence is more important and more directly relevant to the purpose than the sentence to which it is coordinated, in accordance with contextual requirements. Repeated inspection reinforces certainty that there is no discrepancy in creation. (Ibn Ashur, n.d., vol. 29, p. 19).

The same function occurs in other verses. In “Then into a chain whose length is seventy cubits; then enter it” (Qur’an, Al-Haqqah, 69:31–32), the first occurrence of thumma indicates that the punishment described in the coordinated sentence is more severe than merely taking the person and placing him in chains. The second occurrence indicates an even greater degree of punishment: entering the chain and Hell represents a more severe punishment than the punishments mentioned previously. (Ibn Ashur, n.d., vol. 29, p. 137).

In “Then indeed, upon Us is its explanation” (Qur’an, Al-Qiyamah, 75:19), thumma likewise expresses rank-delay between “upon Us is its collection and its recitation” and “then upon Us is its explanation.” The meaning is that God undertakes the collection of revelation, its recitation by the Prophet from memory, and, beyond that, its explanation to people in his own language. (Ibn Ashur, n.d., vol. 29, p. 350).

4.3 The Semantic Functions of Fa (ف)

The particle *fa* may connect sentences in a way that indicates consequence, immediate sequence, explanation, or a result required by the preceding context. In Ibn Ashur’s interpretation, its function is determined by the semantic relationship between the coordinated clauses and the communicative purpose of the passage. The study therefore treats *fa* as one of the major coordinating particles whose contextual function cannot be reduced to simple temporal succession.

CONCLUSION

The analysis demonstrates that coordinating particles are not merely formal grammatical connectors but active semantic devices that contribute decisively to the construction and direction of Qur’anic meaning. Their functions vary according to context, syntactic structure, rhetorical purpose, and the relationship between coordinated elements. The study of Ibn Ashur’s *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr* shows the depth of his attention to these functions. He frequently distinguishes between coordination and resumption, between formal and semantic coordination, and between different

purposes such as coordination of one purpose with another, coordination of a purpose with a preparatory statement, and coordination of the specific with the general. His analyses demonstrate that the conjunction may establish semantic coherence, strengthen rhetorical emphasis, indicate rank-delay, introduce a new informational purpose, or connect a later statement with an earlier one in a way required by the context. The study consequently confirms the importance of function words in Qur'anic interpretation and the need to examine them within their textual and contextual environments rather than treating them as isolated grammatical forms. The richness of Ibn Ashur's analyses further demonstrates how grammatical, semantic, rhetorical, and exegetical dimensions converge in the interpretation of Qur'anic discourse.

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