

Particles of Meaning and Structure and their Significance in the Noble Qur'an and Arabic Texts

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Abstract

This research addresses the particles of meaning and structure (huruf al-ma'ani wa al-mabani) in Arabic texts and the Noble Qur'an, examining their meanings in Qur'anic verses and Arabic poetry. Each particle of meaning in the Arabic language carries a specific significance within texts, sentences, and Qur'anic verses. As for the particles of structure, they play a role in the composition and formation of words. Particles of meaning are particularly notable for the semantic and interpretive weight they carry in Arabic texts, words, and sentences. Various scholarly works have focused on studying and explaining these particles, and the researcher has drawn from these sources to clarify their implications and guide textual interpretation. The importance of this study lies in highlighting the role of particles in the Arabic language, especially in sentence parsing (i'rab) and the interpretation of words. The research also elucidates the meanings and purposes of Arabic texts and the Qur'an. These particles greatly influence grammatical functions they may indicate nominative, accusative, jussive, or genitive cases which, in turn, leads to shifts in sentence meaning and interpretation. Moreover, the study emphasizes their significance in phonetics, since a particle is fundamentally a sound used in the construction of words. Particles also serve to connect phrases and clauses in both prose and poetry, thereby influencing semantic direction and interpretation. Words and sentences are composed of these particles, as language is a system of sounds through which each person expresses their intentions. The particle is the fundamental phonetic unit of the word. Words are formed from these phonetic units, sentences from words, and phrases from sentences. Therefore, the particle forms the foundation of language structure. Hence, studying particles, explaining them, detailing their functions, and clarifying their meanings and connotations in words and sentences is of critical importance. This study of particles and their implications aligns with the broader interest in Arabic language, especially in the context of the Qur'an. It contributes to Arabic linguistic and Qur'anic scholarship and enriches various fields such as grammar, morphology, rhetoric, literature, criticism, and prosody. Additionally, it reveals the beauty of the Arabic language and its distinctive phonetic, semantic, and rhetorical characteristics.

Keywords: Letters, Meanings, Structures, Significance, Texts

Introduction

This research delves into the study of particles of meaning (ḥurūf al-ma'ānī) and structure (ḥurūf al-mabānī), as well as understanding their meanings and usages in the speech of Allah Almighty and in the speech of the Arabs, is essential. It involves examining the views and opinions of scholars of the Arabic language, and highlighting the significance of this vast heritage, which requires dedicated attention and collection.

Al-Māliqī devoted a specific chapter to each individual particle, organizing each section of his book with meticulous arrangement according to the types of particles. There are single-letter particles such as qāf (ق), fā' (ف), ghayn (غ), mīm (م), and hamza (ء), among others. There are also two-letter particles such as min (من), 'an (عَنْ), and fī (فِي). He explained these particles in terms of their meanings and usages within Arabic prose, poetry, and verses of the Qur'an.

This research delves into the study of particles and their semantic implications, and clarifies the types of particles those of meaning and those of structure while also benefiting from prior studies and research in this rich field of Arabic linguistics and its uses and connotations. Numerous books and studies have addressed particles of meaning and structure, explaining their meanings and functions in Arabic texts and the Qur'an. These studies highlight the importance of such particles in connecting sentences, structures, and expressions in both Arabic prose and poetry, as well as in the Qur'an. They show how particles can change the meaning and implication of sentences and expressions, adding layers of meaning to Arabic texts. This strengthens and enriches the semantic depth of a text. Therefore, the study of particles of meaning and structure represents a true contribution to Arabic linguistic research and studies, due to its importance in tracing the functions of these particles within sentence contexts and understanding their meanings.

Research Problem

The research problem can be summarized as follows:

The study of Arabic particles specifically regarding their meanings and implications in Arabic texts, particularly the Qur'an has not received a comprehensive and thorough analysis that reflects the significance of their functions within these texts and their effect in adding meaning and implications in Arabic texts.

Particles of Meaning and Structure and Their Implications

The hamzah (ء) and alif (ا) share the same basic meaning, and the alif is essentially the hamzah. It appears in thirteen contexts in the speech of the Arabs. Among these contexts: the alif may act as a limiter preventing annexation (iḍāfa), may be used to lengthen a short vowel (fatḥa), or serve as a marker of femininity (al-Māliqī, 1971). The hamzah, when standing alone, also has thirteen different uses. These include: facilitating pronunciation at the beginning of a word starting with a consonant; functioning as an interrogative particle; or indicating equivalence (taswīyah).

The letter ḥā' (ح) does not occur independently in Arabic speech. However, it does appear in compound forms, such as in ḥāshā (حاشي) and ḥattā (حتى). For example, in the poem by Imru' al-Qays:

فبيننا نعاج يرتعين خميلةً *** كمشي العذاري في الملاء المهذب

"While the ewes grazed in a soft meadow,
Like the graceful stride of maidens in fine robes" (al-Ṭibā', 1980; Ibn Manẓūr, 2000).

In this line, the word "fabaynā" ("while") is of note: the alif prevents annexation (iḍāfa) of the word bayn ("between") to na'āj ("ewes"), which leads to the noun being in the nominative case. The hamzah can also function as a replacement letter in three forms:

1. As a substitute for alif
2. As a substitute for wāw
3. As a substitute for yā'

The hamzah may appear as a standalone or a compound particle. In its standalone form, it has several roles. One of them is transposition, meaning it converts a verb from a trilateral to a quadrilateral root. For example, in ashkala al-amr (أشكل الأمر) ("the matter became complicated"), the hamzah is added solely for transposition, making the verb quadrilateral, in the af'ala form (أفعل).

As for the compound form, an example is "ajal" (أجل), which has one primary usage: it is used as a response in both declarative and imperative contexts, carrying the same meaning as "na'am" (نعم) (yes). The grammarian al-Akhfash regarded "ajal" as preferable to "na'am" in declarative contexts. The preposition "ilā" (إلى), indicating a limit or endpoint, appears in the verse: (ثُمَّ أَتَمُوا الصِّيَامَ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ) "Then complete the fast until the night" (Surah al-Baqarah, 187).

In this context, what follows "ilā" is not considered part of what precedes it if the two elements are not of the same kind. However, if they are of the same kind, what follows "ilā" is included in what precedes it. For example: (اشْتَرَيْتُ الْغَنَمَ إِلَى آخِرِهَا) "I bought the sheep until the last one" (Ibn 'Uṣfūr, 1971). Among the meanings of particles is that "ilā" (إلى) can sometimes carry the meaning of "fī" (في – in), as in the verse by al-Nābigha:

فلا تتركني بالوعيد كأنني *** إلى الناس مطلي به القار أجربُ

"Do not leave me to threats, as if
**Among the people I am smeared with pitch, a leper."
(Ibn al-Ḍabbāb, 1985)

Here, "ilā al-nās" means "among the people", i.e., "fī al-nās" (during people). The qār refers to pitch or tar, which was used to coat camels afflicted with mange (Ibn Manẓūr, 2000, under the root (قير). Another particle is "aw" (أو), the verb after it is in the accusative case due to the implied "an" (أن), giving it the meaning of "unless" (illā an) (al-Māliqī, 1971). For example, 'Urwah ibn al-Ward said:

فبسر في بلاد الله وإلتمس الغنى *** تعيش ذا يسارٍ أو تموت فتعذرا

"So travel through God's lands and seek wealth,
**You may live in ease, or die and be excused."
(Ḍanāwī, 1996)

The phrase "aw tamūt" (أو تموت) (or die) is significant: the verb "tamūt" is in the accusative case due to the implied "an" (أن), making it grammatically dependent. The grammarian al-

Rummānī (d. 384 AH) (Ma'ānī al-ḥurūf) stated that the verb after "aw" is in the accusative case due to the implied "an" when it carries the meaning of "ḥattā" (حتى – until).

Al-Māliqī mentioned that some scholars held that "aw" could mean "illā an" (إِلَّا أَنْ) (except that), "ilā an" (إِلَى أَنْ) (until), or "kay" (كَأَنَّ) (so that). However, he argued that this is incorrect and that the meaning "illā an" is the necessary and consistent one in all cases. The meanings "ilā an" and "kay" are not universally applicable in every context (al-Māliqī, 1971).

Nonetheless, the closest interpretation in many instances may be "ilā an" (إِلَى أَنْ) (until), as it fits the meaning well in 'Urwah's verse. It also fits perfectly in the verse by Imru' al-Qays:

فَقُلْتُ لَهُ لَا تَبْكِ عَيْنَكَ إِنَّمَا *** نَحَاوُلُ مُلْكًا أَوْ نَمُوتُ فَنَعْذِرَا

"So I said to him: Do not weep, for we are only
**Striving for a kingdom, or we die and be excused."
(al-Ṭibā', 1980)

The Letter Bā' (ب)

One of the meanings of the letter bā' is "cause" or "reason" (al-Māliqī, 1971), as in the verse:
(فَأَهْلَكْنَاهُمْ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ): "So We destroyed them because of their sins."
(Surah al-Anfāl, 54).

And likewise in: (فَأَخَذَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ) "So Allah seized them because of their sins."
(Surah Āl 'Imrān: 11). In both instances, the bā' indicates causation—it was because of their sins that they were punished. The poet said:

أَلَا إِنِّي شَرِبْتُ أَسْوَدَ حَالِكَا *** أَلَا بِجَلِي مِنَ الشَّرْبِ أَلَا بِجَل

"Indeed, I drank a dark black (drink),
And indeed, Isn't it enough to drink?, Isn't it enough?."
(al-A'lam, 1900)

The word "balā" (بَلَى) is used as a positive response to a negative statement. For example, if someone says: زَيْدٌ مَا قَامَ زَيْدٌ "Zayd did not stand." You would reply:

"Balā" (بَلَى), meaning "Yes, he did."

"Balā" also conveys affirmation and confirmation (al-Māliqī, 1971), as in: أَلَمْ يَأْتِكُمْ نَذِيرٌ * قَالُوا: بَلَى (

"Did no warner come to you?" They will say: Yes." (Surah al-Mulk, 8–9)

The Letter Tā' (ت)

The letter tā' does not appear independently in Arabic speech. One of its usages is as a substitute for the root consonant "fā" (ف) in certain word patterns. For instance:

- 'iddatin (عِدَّة) from the root wa'ada (وَعَدَ)
- zinnatin (زِينَة) from the root wazana (وَزَنَ) (al-Māliqī, 1971)

The Letter Jīm (ج)

The letter jīm does not appear alone in Arabic but is found in compound expressions, such as "ajal" (أَجَلَ), which means "yes" in response to a question.

For example, if someone asks:

"Did Zayd stand?" You could answer: "ajal," meaning "Yes." This usage functions similarly to "na'am" (نعم).

The Letter Khā' (خ)

The letter khā' does not occur independently in Arabic; it only appears in compound forms such as "mā khala" (ما خلا). In this construction, it takes the noun following it in the accusative case, as in: "Qāma al-qawmu mā khala Zaydan" قام القوم ما خلا زيداً.

"The people stood, except Zayd. Here, khala acts as an exception particle that takes the noun following it in the accusative case. However, it can also appear with the noun in the genitive case: "Qāma al-qawmu khala Zaydin" قام القوم خلا زيدٍ.

"The people stood, except for Zayd." When preceded by "mā", the accusative case becomes more common and widespread among the Arabs: "Qāma al-qawmu mā khala Zaydan"

In this construction, "mā" is considered masdariyyah (a particle that transforms the clause into a verbal noun), so the phrase would be understood as: "...except the act of leaving out Zayd." This view is supported by Abū 'Amr al-Jarmī, who held that "mā" here is masdariyyah. However, others argue that "mā" is zā'idah (an emphatic or extra particle), and in that case, the following noun would be in the genitive case. Al-Murādī stated that "khala" in this construction must be a verb, because a masdariyyah "mā" cannot be followed by a preposition only by a verb. (al-Māliqī, 1971)

The Letter Dhāl (ذ)

The letter dhāl does not occur independently but is found in compound forms such as "dhā" (ذا). This functions as a particle, especially when "mā" is prefixed to it to form "mādhā" (ماذا), which is used for interrogation (questioning). The interrogative "mā" also functions on its own to mean "what?" Al-Murādī believed that "dhā" is always a noun. When "mā" (interrogative) is added to it, "dhā" acts as a demonstrative noun. He argued that this compound can be interpreted in two ways:

1. "mā" as an interrogative, and "dhā" as a relative pronoun (like what is it that...), or
2. The whole phrase "mādhā" as a single interrogative noun meaning simply what?

He noted: "Due to this disagreement, I have included 'dhā' here."

The Letter Kāf (ك)

The letter kāf appears in both independent and compound forms in Arabic.

In its independent form, it has two usages:

1. As a non-expletive particle, it serves to express similitude (comparison). For example, in the verse by al-A'shā:

هل تنتهون ؟ ولا ينعي ذوي شطط *** كالطعن يذهب فيه الزيت والفتل

"Will you not desist? And those extreme (in injustice) are not warned,
Like a spear thrust in which oil and thread are consumed."

(al-A'shā, 1987)

Here, "kāf-ṭa'n" (like the thrust): the kāf means "like" or "as". According to Ibn Manẓūr (2000), "shaṭaṭ" means distance, and "dhū shaṭaṭ" refers to someone unjust or far from the truth.

2. In another usage, kāf is an expletive (i.e., its presence or absence does not alter the core meaning), as in the verse: (ليس كمثله شيء) :
 “There is nothing like unto Him.”
 (Surah al-Shūrā:11)

Here, the kāf is redundant, as the meaning would stand with or without it, yet it emphasizes the uniqueness of God by reinforcing the comparison structure.

The Letter Lām (ل)

The letter lām in Arabic is classified into six categories:

1. Non-expletive lām that appear with the noun in the genitive case:
 For example: الثوب لزيد: "al-thawbu li-Zaydin" – “The garment belongs to Zayd.”
 Here, lām functions as a preposition that causes the noun following it to be in the genitive case.
2. Non-expletive lām: the verb after it is in the accusative case due to the implied "an" (أن), with the meaning of "kay" "كي" (so that):
 Example: أحسنت إليك لتشكرني: – “I did good to you so that you may thank me.”
 This implies: "kay tashkuranī" – “in order that you thank me.”
3. Non-expletive lām that causes the verb to be in the jussive mood (i.e., expresses a command or request), as in the verse: (فبذلك فليفرحوا هو خير مما يجمعون)
 “Let them rejoice in that; it is better than what they accumulate.”
 (Surah Yūnus, 62)
4. Non-expletive lām with no grammatical effect, often entering upon the subject of a nominal sentence: Example: (لزيد قائمٌ) “Zayd is certainly standing.”
5. Expletive lām that has grammatical function, as in the verse: (أبلغكم رسالات ربي وأنصح لكم):
 “I convey to you the messages of my Lord and advise you.”
 (Surah al-A'rāf, 62) Here, "لام" "lakum" includes a lām functioning as a preposition, making it a working expletive.
6. Expletive lām with no grammatical function, such as when it precedes 'alla' (علّ), as in:
 (لعلّي أبلغ الأسباب) “That I may reach the means.” (Surah Ghāfir:36)

The Letter Nūn (ن)

The letter nūn appears in Arabic in both independent and additional (expletive) forms:

- Some forms are part of the structure of a word, such as the nūn of the imperfect tense (nūn al-muḍāra‘ah).
- Other forms are additional, and these have six main contexts, including:
 1. For emphasis (nūn al-tawkīd):
 As in the verse: (لنصدقن ولنكونن من الصالحين):
 “We shall surely give charity and surely be among the righteous.”
 (Surah al-Tawbah, 75)
 2. As a buffer (wiqāyah) to prevent a verb from being affected by a kasrah (i.e., to maintain phonetic balance).
 3. As a form of tanwīn (nunation) – a non-vocalized, extra nūn added after the end of a word once the statement is complete.

This type appears in seven distinct forms, among them:

- Tanwīn al-muqābalah (compensatory nunation).

Example from Imru' al-Qays:

تنوراتها من أذرعاتٍ وأهلها *** بيثرب أدنى دارها نظراً عال

"Its glow was seen from Adhru'āt and its people,
In Yathrib, the nearest of its homes was clearly visible."

(al-Ṭibbā', n.d.) The key term is "Adhru'ātin", which ends with tanwīn.

Adhru'āt is a place in al-Shām (Greater Syria) (Ibn Manẓūr, 2000). This usage of tanwīn is widely cited in early grammatical works.

- Tanwīn al-tamkīn (nunation of declinability/stability) – indicating the word is fully declinable.

Example from Ru'bah ibn al-'Ajjāj:

قائم الأعماق خاوي الخترقن *** مُشْتَبِه الأعلام لَمَاعِ الخفقن

"Dark in depth, hollow and pierced through,
Confusing in its markers, flickering in its flashing."

(Walīm ibn al-Ward, 1980) The significant word here is "al-mukhtariqan", which ends in tanwīn al-ghālī, used in restricted poetic meter and rhyme schemes.

(al-Māliqī, 1971)

"al-Mukhtaraq" (المخترق): Means a split or fissure, and the verb خَرَّ الأرض "khara al-arḍ" refers to splitting the earth for cultivation. (Ibn Manẓūr, 2000).

"al-Khafaq" (الخفق): Means the trembling or fluttering of something. Flags are sometimes called "al-a'lām al-khawāfiq" fluttering banners (Ibn Manẓūr, 2000).

In another verse, the poet says:

تَقُولُ بُنْتِي قَدْ أَتَى أَنَاكَ *** يَا أَبَتَا عَلِكَ أَوْ عَسَاكَ

"My daughter says: 'He has surely come,
O father, perhaps it is you, or maybe it is.'" (Walīm ibn al-Ward, 1980).

The point of interest here is "'asākā(n)" (عساكن) – the nunation (tanwīn) added at the end of 'asākā is for melodic effect (tanwīn al-taranum), often used in poetic rhyme endings. This type of tanwīn occurs in verse endings involving ḥurūf al-iṭlāq – the letters alif, yā', and wāw, which naturally extend vowel length and accept a nasal echo (like nūn), making them suitable for poetic musicality. (al-Māliqī, 1971). Other types of tanwīn include:

- tanwīn al-tankīr – for indefiniteness
 - tanwīn al-iwaḍ – compensatory
 - tanwīn al-taranum – for melodic effect
 - tanwīn al-ḍarūra – used out of poetic necessity
- (al-Māliqī, 1971)

The Letter 'Ayn (ع)

The letter 'ayn does not occur independently in Arabic but appears in compound forms:

- With nūn, as in "'an" (عن)
- With lām and alif, as in "'alā" (على)
- With a doubled lām, as in "'allā" (علّ)

The Letter Fā' (ف)

The letter fā' occurs as a standalone letter and has three usages:

1. As a coordinating conjunction (used for sequencing or causation)
2. As an answer particle that makes the word after it in accusative case through the implicit presence of "an". This applies in eleven contexts, including:
 - Prohibition
 - Command
 - Wish or hope
3. As an expletive letter, meaning its presence or absence does not alter the grammatical function.

The Letter Wāw (و)

The letter wāw appears both independently and in compound forms with other letters.

- In its independent form, it functions as a conjunction (coordinating particle), and it is considered the primary conjunction in Arabic due to its frequent usage.
- It can also serve a circumstantial role (ḥāl), as in the line by al-Nābighah:

تبدو كواكبه والشمس طالعة *** نوراً بنورٍ وإظلاماً بإظلام

"His stars appeared while the sun was rising,
Light by light, and darkness by darkness." (Ibn al-Ḍabbāb, 1985).

In this verse, the wāw in "wa al-shamsu ṭāli'ah" implies the meaning of "idh" (إِذْ) (a temporal clause), i.e., "as the sun was rising."

- In compound form, wāw appears in expressions like "wā" and "wī".
- The compound "wā" is exclusively used in lamentation (nida' al-nadb) (وا) ، (وي) ، (وا) ، to express grief or sorrow over the dead or over someone who has suffered misfortune. (al-Māliqī, 1971)

The Letter Yā' (ي)

The letter yā' also appears in both independent and compound forms:

- Independently, it serves several grammatical purposes:
 - As a marker of the imperfect tense in verbs, e.g., (يَقُومُ) "yaqūmu" (he stands).
 - As a diminutive marker (used in forms of taṣghīr).
 - As a feminine marker in the second-person singular imperfect verb, addressing a female. For example, in the verse: (فَانظُرِي مَاذَا تَأْمُرِينَ) "So look (feminine), what are you commanded?" (Surah al-Naml:33)
- In compound form, yā' (يَا) appears in the vocative particle "yā", which is used for calling or drawing attention. (al-Māliqī, 1971)

The Exception Particle (illā - إِلَّا)

The particle "illā" (except) follows a specific grammatical rule when it does not repeat in the sentence:

- The verb (or governing word) preceding it may either:
 - Govern the word after "illā", or
 - Not govern it, depending on the syntactic structure.
- If the verb is fully dedicated (mutafarrigh) to act on the word after "illā", the following noun will be:
 - In the accusative case (manṣūb),

- Even if the governed object is omitted, as in the verse by Ḥudhayfah ibn Anas al-Hudhalī:

نجا سالم، والنفس منه بشدقه *** ولم ينجُ إلا جفن سيف مئزرا

“Sālim survived, and his soul [escaped] through his mouth, And nothing survived but the edge of a sheathed sword.” (al-Sukkarī, 1956)

The meaning here is: “No part was saved [by anything] except the sword’s edge.”

(al-Māliqī, 1971; Ibn ‘Aṣfūr, 1971)

Results of the Study

The study of letters, their meanings, and implications in the context of the Quran opens up new dimensions of understanding and significance, adding depth to their usage in sentences and words. By linking the study of letters with the Quran, researchers uncover additional layers of meaning that enhance the overall comprehension of the sacred text. This approach highlights the importance of the letters, not just as building blocks of words, but as carriers of profound messages that contribute to the richness of the Quranic language.

Moreover, this area of study plays a critical role in encouraging research and scholarship focused on the meanings and implications of letters in both the Quran and Arabic speech. By exploring how letters function in the Quranic discourse, scholars can deepen their understanding of the text’s linguistic beauty and the precision with which divine messages are conveyed.

Some of the most influential and recent works that delve into the meanings and implications of letters in Arabic texts and the Quran include *Mughni al-Labib* by Ibn Hisham, *Al-Jannā al-Dānī* by al-Murādī, and *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf* by al-Māliqī. These books contribute significantly to the field, offering detailed explanations and interpretations of the letters, further enriching the study of Arabic linguistics and Quranic exegesis.

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