

RHETORICAL TWIST IN THE *QUR'AN*

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## ملخص

نجد في نص القرآن الكريم الصورة البلاغية ذات القيم الأسلوبية الخاصة والتي تسمى في علم البلاغة العربية بـ "الانفتاحات" إلا أننا نواجه المشاكل إذا أردنا معادلته بالاصطلاحات الأوروبية *deixis* أو *Phantasm* أو *apostrophe* وغيرها.

تعالج هذه الدراسة الصورة البلاغية "الانفتاحات" في سورة الفاتحة وتفسرها ببعض الآيات من السور الأخرى. لا تتناول هذه الدراسة الانفتاحات من ناحية قيمة الأسلوبية (الجمالية) فقط بل تبحث بأية طريقة تحمل هذه الصورة البلاغية قيم المعاني العظيمة حيث أنها تعبر في سورة الفاتحة عن جوهر القرآن الكريم بالذات.

## Abstract

This research aims at analyzing the concept of *iltifāt* "twist" and its main function in the Qur'an. The Qur'anic style uses *iltifāt* for making a suddenness through which the entire grammatical perspective is changed. This suddenness makes concentration on another concept or meaning without forgetting the other. However, this twist makes the two meanings on core. This concept has been applied to some verses of Al-Fātiha the first Sura of the Qur'an.

The stylistics of the *Qur'an* uses a frequent and effective figure of speech that is problematic to name. The Arabic stylistics uses the term *iltifāt* for that figure of speech (turning one's face to; a sudden transition), but this term is not precise enough because it does not cover the same range of meanings in works of different stylisticians and literary theorists.

The authoritative Majdī Wahba says that *iltifāt* is a sudden transition from "declarative" sentences to addressing another person or non-person, no matter whether he/she/it is present or not. The author points out that this figure of speech is nevertheless used mostly for addressing an absent person or a personified meaning, and he quotes from al-Mutanabbī (915-965) *Oh, holiday! The condition in which you return, oh, holiday!*<sup>(1)</sup>

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Far back in the history of the Arabic literary theory other two authorities had different opinions about *iltifāt*. Ibn al-Mu'tazz (861-908) believed that it is a trope in which the speaker switches "from informing to addressing", and he illustrates his point of view with *al-Fātiha*, in which a declarative sentence *Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds, ... (al-Hamd li Allah Rabb al-'ālamīn)* is followed by the sentence *It is You who we worship and it is You to whom we turn to for help (Iyyāka na'bud wa Iyyāka nasta'in)*<sup>(2)</sup>. However, Quddāma Ibn Ja'far (10th century) thinks that *iltifāt* is a final part of a text "in which the author refers to his initial thought, which is followed by an inserted sentence that contains a refutation of, a doubt or a question about the cause of what has been previously said, giving thus an answer by removing doubts or objections as well as by indicating the cause of what has been said at the beginning"<sup>(3)</sup>. In his book on

the stylistics of the *Qur'an* Džemaludin Latić uses a descriptive term for *iltifāt* – change of the manner of writing<sup>(4)</sup> – pointing out that there is a number of subclasses of this trope, among which there are some arguable ones<sup>(5)</sup>.

Clearly, there arises a problem on the horizon of study by Arabic stylisticians, and it becomes even more complicated as the European literary theory offers its equivalents. It seems that both Muftić and Latić are well aware of that because they retained the Arabic term, which can be differentiated from the equivalents offered. The Arabic stylistics sometimes uses the equivalent *deixis* for *iltifāt*, or more precisely *rhetorical deixis*, "which presents something in spirit as if it were present"<sup>(6)</sup>. The definition of *rhetorical deixis* given as such partly covers the meaning given by M. Wahba. However, in his dictionary Wahba gives the equivalent *apostrophe* for *iltifāt*, which in the European literary theory is a trope in which "a speaker, speaking of people who are absent or of things, directs his speech to those people as if they were present, or to things as if they were alive"<sup>(7)</sup>. *Phantasm* is another trope that functions in the same way. Some of the meanings of this trope are covered by the term *rhetorical addressing*, but not all of them<sup>(8)</sup>.

One is struck by the fact that not one of the mentioned equivalents covers the whole meaning of *iltifāt*. This means that the equivalents stand for the stylistic procedure in which a speaker addresses a person that is absent as if he/she were present, or something that is not alive as if it were alive. *Iltifāt* contains that meaning too, we can see that in the example of al-Fatiha, as al-Mu`tezz noticed long ago, but this trope is far more complex in the Arabic tradition, and it contains a number of nuances that are developed in the *Qur'an* in

an extraordinary manner, and this is exactly what I would like to point out.

Etymologically, *iltifāt* is *turning one's face to in order to draw attention to something*. It is turning away from something that has already been perceived toward something else in order for it to be perceived or expressed. In this way, such turning retains relationship to both sides, with the exception that the focus is placed on the other side, the side towards which the turning has been made. It is important to bear in mind that the verb *iltifāt* implies certain suddenness or agility of movement. When we transfer it to the domain of stylistics, this trope expresses a sudden and unexpected change of the speaker's perspective, which is the way to achieve a specific stylistic effect. This is the reason why in the further text I call this trope a *rhetorical twist*.

The condition for the rhetorical twist is not only the transition in grammatical persons (the analysis will be done on the examples in the further text), but is also the basic condition for the *suddenness* through which the entire grammatical perspective is changed. Furthermore, the sentences that build up the rhetorical twist should not contain syntactic elements (e.g. different conjunctions, etc.) that would lessen the suddenness: it is the suddenness that stylistically marks the expression, and transforms it into a brilliant figure of speech, which means that the introduction of syntactic means which would lessen or forestall the suddenness would make the expression neutral.

Although the *Qur'an* abounds in the examples of this trope, I believe it to be possible to illustrate it with the first *Qur'anic* sura, *al-Fatiha*.

The first āyat is a declarative sentence *Praise be to Allah* (al-Hamd li Allah) which is followed by the apposition *Lord of the Worlds* (Rabb al-`ālamīn), then

by the ideologically necessary and stylistically powerful attribute *Most Gracious, Most Merciful* (al-Rahmān al-Rahīm), and finally again by the apposition *Master of the Day of Judgment* (Mālik al-Yawm al-Dīn). This declarative sentence (it is composed of no less than four āyats, thanks to the accumulation of appositions and attributes that enhance its expressiveness) is basically impersonal in Arabic, in which the verb *to have* does not exist, but with the reference to the third person. The rhetorical twist occurs in the sentence that follows (*It is You who we worship and it is You to whom we turn to for help* – Iyyāka na`bud wa Iyyāka nasta`in), because all of a sudden and without any syntactic connection the impersonality leads to new grammatical persons: the 1st person (*we worship* – na`bud) and the 2nd person, which is emphasized through the inverted placing of the personal pronoun as object (*You* – Iyyāka) (and through cleft sentence by placing the personal pronoun in the focus in the present English translation, *remark of the translator*). From the stylistic point of view, such a twist is truly impressive, for the noun Allah has unexpectedly been transferred into the repeated 2nd person pronoun (*You*– Iyyāka), and the 1st person plural has suddenly appeared (*we worship* – na`bud). In this manner, this rather limited “syntactic area” opened the door, through the rhetorical twist, to the dialogue with Somebody/Something that has been distanced in the declarative sentence *Praise be to Allah*. This change of perspective seems almost shocking<sup>(9)</sup>.

If there were a new syntactic means introduced in the place of the twist that would represent a much stronger link between sentences, the constituents of the trope, there would not be the suddenness, not even the trope, even if there were a new grammatical person introduced. Say, if the sentence would be transformed like

this: *Praise be to Allah... and that is why we worship Him...* (al-Hamd li Allah... fa iyyāhu na`bud...), the effect would be the same neither at the stylistic nor at the semantic level: the suddenness would not be sufficient, and the distance between Allah and man would not be overcome as it has been done brilliantly in this completely unexpected and positive change of persons and speakers' perspectives<sup>(10)</sup>. Such tendency of the text is further intensified, for beside newly introduced persons there is – again very suddenly and without any syntactic links, in juxtaposition– a new grammatical form, imperative (*Guide us*– Ihdinā), which enriches the effects that emerged as a result of the change of speaker's perspective.

Here we can draw a distinction between the function of the Arabic *iltifāt* and all the above-mentioned equivalents. Deixis, apostrophe, or phantasm express addressing someone/something absent or inanimate as if it were alive. Opposite to that, the text of *al-Fātiha* is, from the point of view of the Author and the reader, about God that is very much alive and Omnipresent. In this sense it does not have the same value, it does not express the same relation as, say, the apostrophe *Gacko field, thou are beautiful!* (*Gacko field* is a field in Bosnia-Herzegovina, *remark of the translator*)

However, the method that has been described so far does not exhaust the possibilities and nuances of the rhetorical twist in *al-Fātiha*. It is further brilliantly nuanced in the rest of the sura, reaching its climax in its finale. In other words, the benefit of the communication between God and man, whose complete indirectness is made possible through the tenses and grammatical persons that are used, escalates in the verb *You have bestowed* (an`amta). Here we still have the 2nd person in order to extend the stylistic effect

of the rhetorical twist, and, particularly, to emphasize the directness, if I may say so, of the special type of warmth that emerges in such relationship between the One Who Bestows and the one who is bestowed. Then we are once again surprised by the rhetorical twist: “the play” of the pronouns of the 1st and 2nd persons and the verb in the Present Tense suddenly retreats in front of the imper-sonal structures and nonfinite participles. The contrast is unexpected and complete, appropriate to the all-embracing contrast between, on one hand, God’s Lordship over worlds and man’s dependence on His Mercy, and on the other hand, true believers (and benefits that they enjoy) and misbelievers and infidels that have incurred God’s wrath. At the linguistic level, the contrasting is expressed through the sudden transition from the described grammatical persons and tenses into an impersonal passive construction (*Not of those whose portion is wrath* – *gayr al-magdūb ‘alayhim*), ending in giving up finite verb forms in order to introduce a non-finite active participle (*nor of those going astray* – *wa lā al-dāllīn*).

These twists in the final part of the sura have a specific assignment at the level of meaning as well, beside stylistic markedness whose aim is to perfect the stylistic values of the sura. In other words, in the first sentence (*Praise be to Allah - al-Hamd li Allāh*) God used the most economical expression to establish a cosmic fact that He is *above* and in that sense *outside* everything. This is followed by the expression of sudden and complete closeness to true believers, only to emphasize the distance again in the third part of the sura, but this time towards those who do not deserve either proximity or closeness of the relationship expressed by the preceding grammatical persons and tenses: they are kept at a distance, they are simply exiled into impersonality, both linguistically and stylistically, into imper-

sonal passive construction, or into the active participle; they are already punished through the text. Grammatical contrasts and extraordinary alternation of the rhetorical twists described above brilliantly complement the message of the sura in the very limited space in such a way that one is inclined to believe that it is not a coincidence that this very sura is *The Opening*, the sura that opens the whole *Qur’an*. It is aesthetically brilliant.

After a careful analysis of the use of rhetorical twists in *al-Fatiha*, I tend to conclude that this is the sura that extends the concept of the rhetorical twist, i.e. *iltifāt*. In other words, the rhetorical twist has not remained *only* at the level of the sudden change of persons and rhetorical perspective (introduced through the fifth āyat), so accordingly, this trope cannot be reduced to the definition of ‘the transition from informing to addressing’. The *Qur’an* developed and graded this trope so elaborately on such a small space that one can say that *iltifāt* includes not only the sudden change of persons but also of tenses and active and passive constructions<sup>(11)</sup>.

The *Qur’an* uses the rhetorical twist variably in many instances: it varies this trope in unexpected positions and thus continuously reinforces defamiliarization. On the other hand, by doing this, it also places the reader in a dilemma whether to define certain stylistic methods as rhetorical twist or as some other trope. Thus the rhetorical twist sometimes borders on commutation or transposition of persons<sup>(12)</sup>, but nevertheless I think that it is a rhetorical twist and not commutation of persons. For instance, we find a sudden change of grammatical persons in the āyats *We gave you a complete victory / So that Allah might forgive you your sins* (*Innā fatahnā laka fathan mubīnan/ Li yagfira laka Allāh*), although both persons actually denote one Person<sup>(13)</sup>. In this way we have the effect of

suddenness, which is the basic condition for the rhetorical twist (there is no such twist in the commutation of persons). In a stylistically unmarked sentence we would expect the following: *So that we might forgive you* (Li nagfira laka).

Besides, these āyats demonstrate that the rhetorical twist does not necessarily require a direction of the relation that expresses ‘the transition from informing to addressing’.

In order to be established, rhetorical twist requires more than the shift of grammatical persons. This is the reason why we cannot accept certain āyats as rhetorical twists that are sometimes used to illustrate this trope. For instance, the āyat *Why would I not worship the One Who created me, for it is to Him that that you shall return!* (Wa mā liya lā a‘bud allarī fataranī wa ilayhi turja‘ūn) <sup>(14)</sup> is considered an example of *iltifāt* because there is a transition from the 1st person (*Why would not I worship*) to the 2nd person (*it is to Him that you shall return*). This sentence contains no less than three grammatical persons: the 1st person (*Why would not I worship*), the 3rd person (*He created me*), and the 2nd person (*you shall return*), but the whole sentence is an utterance of an unidentified believer. So, the sentence is stylistically unmarked because it does not consist of the change of the speaker’s perspective, it does not contain suddenness in the shift of persons.

The shift there is actually tightly connected by the conjunctions. There is no twist at all, nor ‘turning around’. It is the same case with the āyat (and there are many such āyats in the *Qur’an*) in which we have ‘ordinary’ rhetorical addressing: *Oh, people, I am Allah’s messenger to all of you, His rule is both in Heavens and on Earth* (Yā ayyuhā al-nās innī rasūl Allāh ilaykum jamī’an allarī lahū mulk al-Samāwāt wa al-Ard) <sup>(15)</sup>. This sentence is

stylistically neutral as well: it is uttered by one person, and the point in it that has been recognized as the source of rhetorical twist (*His rule...*) is tightly linked to the preceding part by the complementiser allarī, which forms a relative clause <sup>(16)</sup>.

This trope is further perfected in other suras of the *Qur’an*. Beside enriching the rhetorical twist by the sudden shift of tenses and participles, which can be recognized in *al-Fātiha*, the *Qur’an* intro-duces rhetorical twist into the very foundations of both its form and content, assigning it an important role in the domain of rhythm and rhyme. For instance, in the sura 54, āyats that build the rhetorical twist appear at the same time as refrains and take over the rhyme of the whole sura. The rhetorical twist assumes thus manifold functions in the structure and stylistics of the text, enhancing defamiliarization to huge proportions.

The whole of the sura 54 rhymes with the consonant *r*. In it there are sentences-refrains that appear several times, beginning with the 15th āyat (one sentence-refrain appears five, the other one six times, with slight modifications), and they both take over the consonant that carries the (mono)rhyme. These are the āyats that follow each other (15-16): *We left it as a clear sign, will anyone learn! / Oh, My punishment and My warning were of such proportions!* (Wa laqad taraknāhā āya fa hal min muddekir / Fa kayfa kāna ‘arābī wa nururī).

The unexpected shift of grammatical persons for one Person is obvious. At the same time, the rhetorical twist is very active in creating rhythmical and melodic values of the sura: it does that by using the same rhythm, approximately same length as other āyats and by its frequent distribution.

Finally, not any āyat is taken for the rhyme (just as not any verse is taken for these purposes either). That function is

borne by the āyat or verse that is pivotal in constructing the meaning of text, since its aim is to emphasize the content it bears by repeating it. In this case (with some modifications that are of little significance to the meaning of the text), the first āyat underlines the importance of the *Qur'an* as God's obvious signs and as necessity that people be warned by them, while the second āyat, constructing a rhetorical twist with the first one, underlines the horror of the punishment and warnings that will befall those who refuse to be warned. So, the trope *rhetorical twist* is, besides having improved stylistic functionality, fraught with meaning: it carries here the essence itself of the Qur'anic message.

## CONCLUSION

A very careful analysis of *iltifāt* in the Qur'anic text has led me to two conclusions. First, there are significant differences between this trope in the sacral text and its equivalents that are offered in the European literature: European terms *rhetorical deixis*, *apostrophe*, *phantasm*, etc. do not entirely cover the meaning and function of *iltifāt* in the text of the *Qur'an*, in which this figure of speech has considerably more nuances. Second, I believe that the sacral text gives grounds for extending the interpretation of *iltifāt* in the traditional Arabic stylistics itself. In other words, this figure of speech does not remain only on the level of the sudden change of persons and rhetorical perspective, but the *Qur'an* develops and grades it in such richness that we can conclude that *iltifāt*, beside denoting a sudden change of persons, also includes a sudden change of tenses as well as active and passive forms. It is in this way that the stylistic markedness of the Text is superbly enhanced.

## Notes.

- (1) Wahba, Majdi (1948). *Mu'jam al-mustalahāt al-'arabiyya fī al-luga wa al-adab*, Bayrūt.
- (2) Cf. Muftić, Teufik (1995). *Klasična arapska stilistika*. Sarajevo. p. 152. (*Classical Arabic Stylistics*)
- (3) Ibid.  
Unfortunately, Qudāma Ibn Ja'far is here quoted indirectly, i.e. via translation, because I was not able to find the original work. In the classical Arabic literature on stylistics, there are many authors who studied *iltifāt*, among whom I will single out the following: al-Qazwīnī, *al-Idāh fī 'ulūm al-balāga – al-ma'ānī wa al-bayān wa al-badī'*, Manshūrāt Maktaba al-nahda, s. a., s. l., p. 43.
- (4) Muftić uses the same term in: op. cit., p. 152.
- (5) Latić, Džemaludin (2001). *Stil kur'anskog izraza*. Sarajevo. pp. 277-279. (*Style of the Qur'anic expression*)
- (6) Simenon, Rikard (1969). *Enciklopedijski rječnik lingvističkih naziva*. Zagreb. (*The Encyclopedic Dictionary of Linguistic Terms*)
- (7) Zima, Luka (1988). *Figure u našem narodnom pjesništvu, s njihovom teorijom*. Zagreb. p. 133. (*Tropes in our Folk Poetry with their Theory*)
- (8) See Katnić-Bakaršić, Marina (2001). *Stilistika*. Sarajevo. p. 319. (*Stylistics*)
- (9) For this reason, the translation, in this part, that would go like this: *It is You, Allah, Lord of the Worlds that we praise*, would not be a satisfactory one, for the original does not contain the pronoun *You* or the finite verb *we praise*; the verbal noun *praise* has been used in the original text (al-Hamd). What I want to point out here is that such translation would significantly reduce the stylistic potential of the original text. Qudāma Ibn Ja'far is right insofar as this rhetorical twist underlines the singularity

of the relationship with the preceding text:  
Because Allah is what He is and because  
He is the way He is, we worship Him and  
we turn to Him for help

- (10) Of course, God's Word is unchangeable, and I speak of changes only hypothetically.
- (11) The analysis of the rhetorical twist in *al-Fātiha* revealed to me a stylistic oversight in my own translation of the *Qur'an* when it was already sent to press and when it was not possible to intervene, but the change should be included in the second edition if there is one. I translated the passive construction in the 7th āyat (gayr al-magdūb 'alayhim) as: *And not of those who incur your wrath*. So, I used the active voice in Present Tense, partly because of the demands of rhyme and rhythm, and partly because the stylistic markedness of this construction was not obvious to me at the time. Although the passive construction refers to person (M. Katnić-Bakaršić, *op.cit.*, p. 251) – it is clear that this is about incurring God's wrath, and for this reason the meaning of the translation is correct – the construction should be translated differently in order to preserve its stylistic markedness: *And not of those whose portion is wrath*.
- (12) See Marina Katnić-Bakaršić, *op.cit.*, pp.125-127.
- (13) *Qur'an*, 48:1-2.
- (14) The *Qur'an*, 36:22.
- (15) The *Qur'an*, 7:158.
- (16) This is why some Bosnian translations of this āyat are syntactically inaccurate: ... *Oh, people, I am Allah's messenger to all of you, His rule is in Heavens and on Earth...* The translation of this relative clause should be: ... *People! I am to all of you the messenger of Allah, to Whom belongs everything that is in Heavens and on Earth...*