

The Pragmatic Dimensions of Alternation between First- and Second-Person Pronouns in Sūrat al-Kahf: Reading of the Communicative Structure of the Qur’ānic Text

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Abstract

Sūrat al-Kahf is one of the Qur’ānic chapters characterised by a cohesive narrative structure in which levels of discourse diversify and pragmatic voices intersect, rendering it a fertile field for pragmatic-linguistic inquiry. The alternation between first- and second-person pronouns constitutes one of the most prominent discursive mechanisms contributing to the construction of communicative action within the Qur’ānic text, as the ranks of discourse shift and its intentional dimensions multiply in accordance with pronominal transformations (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1995). This study aims to uncover the pragmatic dimensions of these transformations through an analysis of the loci of pronominal alternation in Sūrat al-Kahf and to elucidate the communicative, semantic, and argumentative functions they fulfil (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 2001). The research adopts a pragmatic approach that combines an analysis of the syntactic structure of pronouns with an examination of the situational contexts that render the pronoun a communicative act within the text (Tammām Ḥassān, 2010). The study concludes that pronominal alternation in Sūrat al-Kahf is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but rather a

meticulously crafted pragmatic construct that guides the recipient, endows the Qur'ānic discourse with its persuasive potency, and establishes a multilayered communicative relationship among the Divine speaker, the prophetic addressee, and the broader receiving audience.

Keywords: pragmatics; pronouns; pronominal alternation; Sūrat al-Kahf; communicative structure; Qur'ānic discourse.

Introduction

Contemporary linguistic studies have witnessed increasing interest in the mechanisms of discourse construction and how meaning is shaped within communicative contexts, an interest grounded in pragmatic linguistics, which has moved beyond viewing language as an abstract system to examining it as a communicative act produced within a specific situation and performing defined functions (Ibn Ya'ish, 1985). Pronouns are among the most prominent linguistic elements in which this pragmatic nature is manifested, owing to their close connection to communicative situations and their capacity to organise the relationship between the speaker, the addressee, and the agent within discourse ('Abd al-Jalīl, 2010).

Within the Qur'ānic text, the alternation between first- and second-person pronouns acquires profound semantic and pragmatic dimensions, as the discourse situation assumes multiple roles ranging from conveying the message, directing the discourse, and constructing argumentation, to deepening the emotional impact on the recipient (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1995). Among the Qur'ānic chapters in which this phenomenon clearly appears are Sūrat al-Kahf, owing to its inclusion of multiple narratives, its interwoven network of voices, and its diversity of discursive levels encompassing divine revelation, prophetic discourse, and narrative discourse (Ibn 'Āshūr, 2001).

The significance of this study lies in its aim to explore how pronouns are employed to organise discursive relationships, redirect discourse, and generate meanings that extend beyond direct lexical denotation to contextual and communicative meaning (Tammām Hassān, 2010).

Research Problem

The principal research problem involves the following questions:

What are the pragmatic functions of alternation between first- and second-person pronouns in Sūrat al-Kahf? Moreover, how does this alternation contribute to shaping the communicative structure of the Qur’ānic text? (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1995).

Hypotheses

1. The alternation of pronouns in Sūrat al-Kahf has pragmatic functions that extend beyond grammatical reference to the construction of communicative intentions (Tammām Ḥassān, 2010).
2. Pronominal shifts contribute to organising discourse levels and defining the relationships between the Divine speaker, the prophetic addressee, and the general recipient (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1995).
3. The pronoun in Sūrat al-Kahf is employed as an argumentative and directive mechanism within the structure of the Qur’ānic discourse (‘Abd al-Jalīl, 2010).
4. The alternation between first- and second-person pronouns serves as an effective tool in shaping sūrah’s unity and narrative and communicative coherence (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 2001).

Research Objectives

1. To analyse the phenomenon of pronominal alternation in Sūrat al-Kahf from a pragmatic perspective (Tammām Ḥassān, 2010).
2. To highlight the communicative functions of pronouns within the structure of the sūrah (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1995).
3. To observe the relationship between pronouns and the situational context and to determine their role in directing meaning (‘Abd al-Jalīl, 2010).
4. To uncover the communicative structure of the Qur’ānic text through the study of pronouns (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 2001).

5. To contribute to the development of Qur'ānic linguistic studies from a modern pragmatic perspective (Tammām Ḥassān, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

First: Pragmatic Concept and Emergence

Pragmatics emerged in the second half of the twentieth century as Western linguistics shifted beyond its rigid structuralist model (Ibn Ya‘īsh, 1985). Discourse was no longer viewed as an independent linguistic system but rather as a communicative act in which the speaker, context, and communicative intentions interact (Tammām Ḥassān, 2010). Pragmatics came to prominence through the works of Austin, Searle, and Grice, who devoted significant attention to the relationship between language and action, the influence of context in constructing meaning, and the importance of the speaker's intentions in determining meaning (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1995).

Second: Pronouns in Modern Linguistics

In modern linguistics, pronouns are considered referential units whose meaning shifts according to context (‘Abd al-Jalīl, 2010). Pronouns possess linguistic features that make them tools for identifying the agent or addressee, with a fundamental pragmatic function in organising discursive relationships within the communicative situation (Tammām Ḥassān, 2010).

Third, pronouns in pragmatics

In pragmatics, a pronoun is viewed as a communicative marker that enables the speaker to direct meaning within a given context. Among the most important concepts are as follows:

***-Context (maqām):** encompassing the speaker, the addressee, the purpose, and the communicative circumstances (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1995).

***-Speech acts:** the pronoun participates in the performance of speech acts such as commands, prohibitions, and exhortations (Ibn 'Āshūr, 2001).

***-Communicative intention:** the pronoun functions as a tool for achieving the communicative aim (Tammām Ḥassān, 2010).

***-Implicature and orientation:** the pronoun is a deictic element that is dependent on the situation of the address ('Abd al-Jalīl, 2010).

Fourth: Pronominal Alternation Concept and Dimensions

Pronominal alternation is the movement of discourse between first- and second-person pronouns in a manner that generates multiple voices and shifts in perspective (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1995). It serves several functions:

1. Diversifying the trajectory of discourse
2. Redirecting the recipient
3. Constructing narrative or argumentative tension
4. Highlighting discursive authority
5. Balancing between proclamation, instruction, and admonition (Ibn 'Āshūr, 2001)

Fifth: Pronouns in the Qur'ānic Text Pragmatic Dimensions

The Qur'ānic text is characterised by multiple levels of discourse and a direct relationship between the Divine speaker and the human recipient (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1995). Pronouns are employed to:

1. Determine the degree of proximity between the speaker and the recipient
2. Construct doctrinal and legislative relations
3. Grant the argumentative force of the Qur'ānic narrative
4. Establish multilayered communication (Tammām Ḥassān, 2010)

Applied Analysis of Sūrat al-Kahf

First: Research Method

This study adopts the descriptive-analytical method, which allows the examination of the Qur'ānic text from a pragmatic perspective to understand how pronouns are used to organise communicative structure. The method aims to uncover the pragmatic functions of pronominal alternation between first- and second-person pronouns and to determine its effect on the construction of different levels of discourse (Tammām Ḥassān, 2010).

The research steps include identifying all occurrences of personal pronouns in the sūrah, examining their textual context, analysing their role in directing discourse, supporting persuasive argumentation, and organising the relationship between speaker and addressee (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1995, 2001).

Second: Research Sample

The research sample consists of the complete Sūrat al-Kahf (110 verses), which contains the following:

*-Direct divine statements in first-person form, such as “We” and “Indeed, We”, which reflect divine authority and the directive function of the text (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1995).

*-Dialogic and narrative passages, such as the accounts of Mūsā and al-Khiḍr, in which alternation between first- and second-person pronouns is evident.

*-General addresses believers in second-person form, such as “O you who believe”, aiming to involve the reader and listener in the discourse (Tammām Ḥassān, 2010).

Third: Pragmatic Analysis of Pronouns

1. First-person pronouns

First-person pronouns (I, We) are used in the Qur'ānic text to impart divine authority to the discourse and to orient the speech act towards fulfilling communicative purposes.

These pronouns contribute to the construction of divine argumentation and narrative within the sūrah while reinforcing the directive and instructive nature of the text (Ibn 'Āshūr, 2001).

2. Second-person pronouns

Second-person pronouns (you, you all, those who) are employed to address believers or the general reader directly and to involve them in contemplation and reflection. These pronouns help facilitate interaction between the text and the recipient, clarify individual and collective responsibilities, and enhance the effectiveness of ethical and emotional guidance ('Abd al-Jalīl, 2010).

3. Alternation between pronouns

Pronominal alternation in Sūrat al-Kahf demonstrates the pragmatic flexibility of the text, as voices shift between the following:

*-Direct divine discourse

*-Instructional or dialogic discourse between the sūrah's characters

*-General address to believers

This alternation organises the various discourse levels, reorients the recipient, and highlights the argumentative and directive dimensions of the text, thereby ensuring textual unity and sustaining its pragmatic impact (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1995; Tammām Ḥassān, 2010).

Fourth: Partial Conclusion

It may be concluded that pronominal alternation in Sūrat al-Kahf:

1. It is pragmatically structured and not a random linguistic phenomenon.
2. Multiple functions, including direction, argumentation, construction of authority, and engagement of the reader, are performed.

3. Reflects the flexibility of the Qur'ānic discourse in integrating different levels of communicative interaction among speakers, addressee, and narrative (Ibn 'Āshūr, 2001).

Discussion

The preceding analysis demonstrates that pronominal alternation in Sūrat al-Kahf constitutes a precise pragmatic mechanism that contributes to the construction of the Qur'ānic discourse at multiple levels. Pronouns function not merely as grammatical tools but also as organisational elements of communication, reflecting the relationship between the Divine speaker, the direct addressee, and the general recipient (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1995).

The analysis also revealed that the functions of pronouns vary according to context:

1. **Directive function:** the pronoun is used to guide or directly address the recipient, as in "O you who believe, fear God" (Tammām Ḥassān, 2010).
2. **Argumentative function:** By employing the first-person pronoun to establish truths and persuade the recipient, as in "Indeed, We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'ān so that you may understand" (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1995).
3. **Narrative function:** This function is evident in Qur'ānic stories, where alternation between the pronouns of various characters animates dialogue and highlights instructional and narrative relationships (Ibn 'Āshūr, 2001).

This alternation is a fundamental element of the sūrah's communicative structure, creating dynamic interaction between the text and the recipient and affirming the doctrinal and moral dimensions of the Qur'ānic discourse. It further contributes to distributing discursive centrality among God as speaker, the Prophet ﷺ as addressee, and the listener or reader, thereby enhancing the text's persuasive power ('Abd al-Jalīl, 2010).

Conclusion

The study concludes that the alternation between first- and second-person pronouns in Sūrat al-Kahf is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but an integrated pragmatic

construct that contributes to fulfilling the text's communicative aims. The principal findings include the following:

1. Pronouns are employed as tools for managing various levels of discourse, including narrative, dialogue, and direct address.
2. Pronominal alternation enhances the directive, argumentative, and narrative functions of the text, thereby increasing its communicative effectiveness.
3. The Qur'ānic text displays a high degree of pragmatic flexibility, enabling it to guide the recipient and engage them in the communicative act.
4. The adoption of the analytical–pragmatic approach provided a precise understanding of the relationships between pronouns and situational contexts, opening avenues for enriching Qur'ānic linguistic studies (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1995; Tammām Ḥassān, 2010).

In conclusion, the pronoun in the Qur'ān is a central pragmatic tool, and the alternation between it and the addressee ensures the continuity of effective communication while reflecting the meticulously organised structural design of the Qur'ānic text.

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