

Cementing Devices and Ambiguity in the Holy Qur'an: Surat Al-Ma'eda 'The Banquet' as a Model

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Abstract: This study aims to identify the cementing devices used in the Holy Qur'an, Surat Al-Ma'eda 'The Banquet', in particular. Specific cementing devices appear to connect the phrases and clauses contextualized in the verses of this Sura. The study depended on an easy, clear and modern translation of the Holy Quran: 'Quran English Translation' by Talal Itani. The study's findings indicate that cementing devices can lead to having more than one interpretation of each verse under study. The study also found that cementing devices give rise to additional semantic senses and interpretations of certain lexemes discussed in this Surah. Finally, the study highlights the relationship between cementing devices and lexical and structural ambiguity, which appears clearly in the verses, hence giving different meanings and interpretations of the verses under investigation.

Keywords: Surat Al-Ma'eda, Ambiguity, Cementing devices, The Holy Qur'an, Semantics

Introduction

Linguistic semantics attempts to explain the knowledge of any language speaker, so that the speaker is able to communicate facts, feelings, intentions and imagination of other speakers to understand each other (Kreidler 1998). As a sub-discipline of linguistics, discourse analysis is concerned with the analysis of language and its linguistic forms, which examines the use of language meanings in real-life situations of communication. Snape and Spencer (2003, 200) reported that discourse analysis arises from the discipline of sociology and is concerned with "Examining the way knowledge is produced within different discourses and the performances, linguistic styles and rhetorical devices used in particular accounts." Not only does discourse analysis acknowledge that interprets the meaning of a piece of language is based on the knowledge of lexemes and structure, but also on how the relationship between language and the world works, i.e., the use of linguistic units in actual texts to convey meanings (Lwin 2022).

Language in discourse is primarily concerned with sense exchange with a variety of meanings among the users of the language (Al-Rawajfeh 2018; Al-Saudi & Al-Rawajfeh 2021). The main function of discourse analysis is to describe the meanings of language and the various senses expressed by its users (Al-Harashneh et al. 2013). Bahaziq (2016, 112) points out that discourse can be differently understood based "on the situation and context in which discourse occurs". As part of discourse, "cohesion refers to the use of linguistic devices which connect sentences and clauses" (Cook 2001, 151). Ilyas (2014, 136) indicates that cohesion is an objective linguistic aspect realized as lexical and grammatical cohesive devices or discourse markers as suggested by other researchers. Moreover, Halliday defines cohesion as 'the set of resources for constructing relations in discourse which transcend grammatical structure'

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(Halliday 1994, 309). According to Leech (2001), cohesion is an approach that connect ideas linguistically to introduce texts. Al-Rawajfeh (2018) was the first researcher to call these types of devices as “Cementing devices or phrases”.

In this regard, many definitions of cohesive devices have been proposed by researchers. According to Huneety et al. (2017), cohesive devices can be used in different parts of the text to create different meaningful relations leading to the unity of the text. Many studies have been conducted on cohesive devices using various terms referring to discourse markers or cementing devices or other terms (Al-Saudi & Al-Rawajfeh 2021; Al-Shishtawi 2020). Al-Saudi and Al-Rawajfeh (2021), point out that they used the term cementing devices in their study not only to refer to lexical or grammatical devices, but also to sentences and clauses that connect sentences or texts to convey different meanings.

Therefore, this study is an attempt to identify some of the cementing discourse devices used in the Holy Qur'an, Surat Al-Ma'eda 'The Banquet' as a model. There are specific cementing devices that connect some phrases and clauses contextualized in the verses of this Surah. The study discusses the different meanings of such devices based on Talal Itani's modern translation of the Holy Quran: '*Quran English Translation*'. The study indicates that cementing devices have more than one interpretation of each verse under study. It also proposes that cementing devices give rise to additional semantic senses and interpretations of certain lexemes discussed in this Surah.

Literature Review

Discourse analysis, as a technical term, was first used in 1952 by Zellig Harris (Stalpers 1988). According to Juez (2009) and Sari et al. (2018), discourse analysis is concerned with analyzing and organizing language of the sentence and beyond, i.e., the language used socially, politically, and culturally. Halliday and Hassan (1980) state that cohesion as a part of discourse, which is found in texts and situations as linguistic and extra-linguistic building block, provides the text with some connectivity by creating sense relations in different texts. Halliday defines cohesion as 'the set of resources for constructing relations in discourse which transcend grammatical structure' (Halliday 1994, 309).

Several studies have been conducted concerning discourse analysis of cementing devices. Al-Saudi and Al-Rawajfeh, (2021) investigated cementing devices used in Surat Al-Qasas, one of the chapters of the Holy Qur'an. The study indicated that the use of cementing devices gives rise to a different understanding of the meanings and interpretations of the verses discussed in the study. The term 'cementing devices' was first used in a study conducted by Al-Rawajfeh (2018), concerning discourse markers in the Holy Qur'an. The term is considered as equivalent to the terms *discourse markers* or *cohesive devices*, “as a common word, phrase, clause, sentence, or a particle, or even a mark or pause used between two sentences or phrases”, revealing different contextual meanings related to the text and its interpretation.

Further, Halliday and Hasan (1976) point out that the unity of text is generally related to some cohesive devices, which are used in different texts in order to give rise to a variety of sense relations that contribute to the unity of the text. According to Alami (2015), discourse markers as contingent elements categorize speech by combining interactional and variation methods to discourse, to analyze the roles of markers in the discourse created. Schiffin (1987) explains that discourse markers are used to indicate the topic boundaries of discourse, that is the end of one topic leads to starting the next one, in which they play an important role in guiding and analyzing the discourse. According to Fraser (1990), the analysis of sentence meaning may produce two related or unrelated senses: Content meaning is when the sentence gives one sense only, and the speaker meaning, which expresses the intention of the speaker.

In addition, Johnstone (2002) indicates that cohesion is used to link a sentence with another sentence in a text, which shows that there exists a set of internal cohesive devices.

These cohesive devices are reference, conjunctions, and substitution, where text receivers are able to join different sentences, clauses, and phrases inside the text or outside the text. Besides, Graesser et al. (2004, 193) refers to cohesion as employing clear structures, words, phrases, or sentences, which can help understand the proposition of themes and topics of the text. According to Partridge (2012, 117), lexical cohesion is described as ‘the relationships in meaning between lexical items in a text and, in particular, content words and the relation between them’.

On the other hand, the term cementing devices is used in this study to refer to discourse markers or cohesive devices. Al-Saudi and Al-Rawajfeh, (2021) pinpoint that cementing devices are not only connecting words, phrases, and sentences that contribute to the text cohesion, but they are also essential semantic devices to achieving act of communication in the text. Further, Kiraz, (2001) indicates that Arabic is the language of strong structure and derivation. Accordingly, dealing with language constituents is a requirement for understanding the Arabic language at all levels.

Therefore, the primary concern of this study is to identify cementing devices that are used in Surat Al-Ma’eda ‘The Banquet’ in the Holy Qur’an and describe their functions as used in this Surah. The study also aims at analyzing these devices, which cause such differences in the interpretations and meanings conveyed in the Surah. Besides, it attempts to highlight these devices and their associations with lexical items in the verses under investigation.

Methodology

In this study, we apply a descriptive and analytical approach to study the cementing devices in the Holy Qur’an by referring to one of the clearest and easiest translations of the Holy Qur’an: ‘*Qur’an English Translation*’ by Talal Itani (2017). The translation is meant to give an approximate meaning of the Arabic text. However, the analysis of the cementing devices in Surat Al-Ma’eda ‘The Banquet’ is conducted by the researchers themselves according to their understanding of the semantic meanings that can arise by reading the verse twice: one where the cementing device belongs to the first clause (at the end of the clause), and the other where the cementing device appears at the beginning of the second clause. Thus, the researchers analyze the functions of such cementing devices in order to reveal the different senses and interpretations of each verse under study.

Results

Here we pay special attention to identifying and analyzing discourse devices in the Holy Qur’an, Surat Al-Ma’eda ‘The Banquet’ in particular. We dub these lexical devices ‘cementing devices’. Few studies have recently tackled similar devices in different Quranic suras (e.g. Al-Rawajfeh (2018), Al-Khalafat and Al-Rawajfeh (2019), Al-Marayat et al. (2019), and Hajjaj and Al-Rawajfeh (2020). These studies have investigated cementing markers which could be words, phrases, or even clauses in the Holy Qur’an. It is worth mentioning here that such devices are found abundantly in the Holy Quran and rarely found in any literary work or other genres. We will look at these devices from semantic and syntactic points of view as these two fields complement each other. In the analysis provided below, we will write the Aya (verse) under question in Arabic, followed by its translation from Itani (2017). Two other translations will be provided depending on whether the cementing device is part of the first or second clause. In most cases, the cementing word/ phrase or clause will have two different meanings, hence two different interpretations of the same verse under question.

Lexical Cementing

In this section, cementing is realized by one word, usually a discourse marker, hence dubbing it lexical. Verse 89 is a good example here

لَا يُؤَاخِذُكُمُ اللَّهُ بِاللَّغْوِ فِي أَيْمَانِكُمْ وَلَكِنْ يُؤَاخِذُكُمْ بِمَا عَقَّدْتُمُ الْأَيْمَانَ فَكَفَّارَتُهُ إِطْعَامُ عَشْرَةِ مَسْكِينٍ مِنْ أَوْسَطِ مَا تُطْعَمُونَ أَهْلِيكُمْ أَوْ كِسْوَتُهُمْ أَوْ تَحْرِيرُ رَقَبَةٍ فَمَنْ لَمْ يَجِدْ فَصِيَامُ ثَلَاثَةِ أَيَّامٍ ذَلِكَ كَفَّارَةُ أَيْمَانِكُمْ إِذَا حَلَفْتُمْ وَاحْفَظُوا أَيْمَانَكُمْ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٨٩﴾

Allah will not call you to account for your thoughtless oaths, but He will hold you accountable for deliberate oaths. The penalty for a broken oath is to feed ten poor people from what you normally feed your own family, or to clothe them, or to free a bondsperson. But if none of this is affordable, then you must fast three days. This is the penalty for breaking your oaths. So be mindful of your oaths **as well**. **This** is how Allah makes things clear to you, so perhaps you will be grateful.

The discourse marker '*katha:lik*' can be a conjunction and thus translated as 'as well'. It can also function as an adverb in which case it is translated as 'in this way/ like this/ this is how'. Therefore, if we take it as a conjunction, it will link the two sentences right before it: '*This is the penalty for breaking your oaths. So be mindful of your oaths as well*'. Contextually, it can mean 'therefore' as well. Accordingly, this discourse marker conveys a cause/effect meaning as breaking an oath incurs a penalty, therefore one needs to be mindful of their oaths.

By contrast, '*katha:lik*' can function as an adverb that has scope over the preceding clauses: the whole verse/ aya is discussing breaking oaths and the penalty for that. For this reason, you (believers) should be grateful to Allah because He guided you to the right path and He made things clear to you.

Phrasal Cementing

Phrasal cementing refers to those phrases that may belong to a preceding clause or a following one. We start with verse 26 which exhibits phrasal cementing:

قَالَ فَإِنَّهَا مُحَرَّمَةٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أَرْبَعِينَ سَنَةً يَتِيهُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَلَا تَأْسَ عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْفَاسِقِينَ ﴿٢٦﴾

He said, "It is forbidden for them, **for forty years**, they will wander aimlessly in the land. So do not grieve over the defiant people."

The verse reads straightforwardly: If the temporal adverb 'for forty years' is part of the first clause, then the holy land is forbidden for Israeli people for forty years. They will then wander aimlessly in the land. However, no information is given about the wandering time. However, if the time adverb 'for forty years' is part of the second clause, they will wander aimlessly in the holy land for forty years as the land is forbidden to them because of their sins and disobedience.

The second example is verse (41):

يَا أَيُّهَا الرَّسُولُ لَا يَحْزُنْكَ الَّذِينَ يُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْكُفْرِ مِنَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا آمَنَّا بِأَقْوَاهِمُمْ وَلَمْ تُؤْمِنْ قُلُوبُهُمْ **وَمِنَ الَّذِينَ هَادُوا** سَمَاعُونَ لِلْكَذِبِ سَمَاعُونَ لِقَوْمٍ آخَرِينَ لَمْ يَأْتُوكَ تَبْحُرُونَ الْكَلِمَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَوَاضِعِهِ.

O Messenger! Do not let those who are quick to disbelief grieve you—from among those who say with their mouths, "We believe," but their hearts do not believe, **and from among the Jews**, listeners to lies, listeners to other people who did not come to you. They distort words from their places.

The prepositional phrase '*and from among the Jews*' can be part of the first clause. This indicates that Allah tells his messenger 'Mohammed' not to let disbelievers, whether those who pretend to be believers (hypocrites), or the Jews, to grieve him. By contrast, the prepositional phrase '*and from among the Jews*' can be taken as the topic of the second clause whose predicate is the active participle 'listener to lies and listeners to people who do not come to the messenger. This verse came down to the messenger because some of the Jews listened to the lies of their rabbis who distorted the Torah and listened to other Jews who told them to ask the prophet about the punishment of two Jews who committed adultery. The people of those adulterers did not want to punish them. So, they sent some Jewish people to see what the prophet would say about their punishment. If the punishment was like what the distorted Torah said, they would accept it. Otherwise, they would not. Thus, Allah tells His messenger that

from among the Jews, there are some who do not listen to what you say. Instead, they listen to the distorted commandments that their rabbis made up and they also listen to those (Jews) who did not come to you to take the right commandment/ punishment.

The third example is related to another prepositional phrase:

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا **مِنْ قَبْلِ** أَنْ تَقْدُرُوا عَلَيْهِمْ فَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿34﴾

Except for those who repented **before** you apprehended them. So know that Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.

The prepositional phrase *min qabl* 'from before' is translated as one word in English, i.e. before. If taken as part of the first clause, the meaning would be 'except for those who repented before. This clause comes as a complement for the previous verse: "The punishment for those who fight Allah and His Messenger, and strive to spread corruption on earth, is that they be killed, or crucified, or have their hands and feet cut off on opposite sides, or be banished from the land". This indicates that if someone fights Allah or His Messenger, or strives to spread corruption on earth, they should be killed, or crucified, or have their hands and feet cut off on opposite sides, or be banished from the land EXCEPT those who have repented before (you know about them). Alternatively, it can mean that they have repented **before this command**. On the other hand, if *min qabl* 'from before' is taken as part of the second clause, then it indicates that if they repent before you capture them, then you leave them to Allah who is Forgiving and Merciful (for those who repent).

Another example of the phrasal cementing is verse 94:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَيَبْلُوَنَّكُمُ اللَّهُ **بِشَيْءٍ** مِّنَ الصَّيِّدِ تَتَأَلَّهَ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَرِمَاحُكُمْ لِيَعْلَمَ اللَّهُ مَن يَخَافُهُ بِالْغَيْبِ ۚ فَمَنِ اعْتَدَىٰ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فَلَهُ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿94﴾

O believers! Allah will surely test you **with a thing/ game** within the reach of your hands and spears to distinguish those who fear Him in secret. Whoever transgresses from now on will suffer a painful punishment.

The word '□aj?' can mean a 'thing'. In this reading, Allah will surely test your (believers) belief with anything. This is because life is a big ordeal and believers will certainly be tested during their life many times so that Allah knows who fears Him. In the other reading, '□aj?' means a 'game'. So, Allah will test you (believers) with a small game that you can reach without a weapon or a big game that you will need spears (weapon) to hunt. This affliction takes place in certain months in which you are prohibited from hunting. So, Allah will distinguish those who fear Him in secret, i.e., they will not hunt birds or other animals even when there is nobody watching them.

Clausal Cementing

The last type of cementing devices takes place at the clause level. In other words, a clause may be used to cement two other clauses. Let's take verse no. 12 as an example:

وَلَقَدْ أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَ بَنِي إِسْرَآئِيلَ وَبَعَثْنَا مِنْهُمُ اثْنَيْ عَشَرَ نَقِيبًا وَقَالَ اللَّهُ إِنِّي مَعَكُمْ ۚ لَئِنْ أَقَمْتُمُ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَيْتُمُ الزَّكَاةَ وَآمَنْتُمْ بِرُسُلِي وَعَزَّرْتُمُوهُمْ وَأَقْرَضْتُمُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا لَّأُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَلَأُدْخِلَنَّكُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ

Allah received a pledge from the sons of Israel, and We raised among them twelve chiefs, **and Allah said "I am with you"**, if you perform the prayer, and pay the alms, and believe in My messengers and support them, and lend Allah a loan of righteousness, I will remit your sins and admit you into Gardens beneath which rivers flow.

The clause 'and Allah said "I am with you"' can be part of the first proposition. Therefore, the meaning is that After Allah received a pledge from the sons of Israel, He raised twelve chiefs among them and *He told them that He is with* them. He is supporting them unconditionally. By contrast, if 'and Allah said "I am with you"' is part of the second proposition, then this indicates that Allah said that he is with you (chiefs) ONLY if you perform the prayer, and pay the alms, and believe in My messengers and support them, and lend Allah

a loan of righteousness. If so, then He will remit your sins, and admit you into Gardens beneath which rivers flow. Thus, "I am with you" is contingent on doing the good deeds mentioned in the verse.

The second example of clausal cementing is verse no. 64:

وقالت اليهود يد الله مغلولة غلت أيديهم ولعنوا بما قالوا، بل يداه مبسوطتان ينفق كيف يشاء وليزيدن كثيرا منهم ما أنزل إليك من ربك طغيانا وكفرا وألقينا بينهم العداوة والبغضاء إلى يوم القيامة كلما أوقدوا نارا للحرب أطفأها الله ويسعون في الأرض فسادا والله لا يحب المفسدين ﴿64﴾.

Recall that Arabic has implicit subjects, i.e., the pronominal subject does not surface. Recall also that Arabic does not have inanimate pronouns. Instead, animate and inanimate nouns can be replaced by the same pronouns, e.g., *huwa* 'he/ it' can refer to a person such as *dad* or a thing like a phone. In light of this, we give two different translations for the verse depending on the implicit subject of the underlined clause. The first translation reads as follows:

And the Jews say, "The hand of Allah is tightfisted." Tightfisted are their hands and cursed are they for what they say. Rather, both His hands are extended, He spends however He wills. And He will surely add many.

So, the Lord comments on the Jews' fallacy that His hands are tightfisted which is a metonymy for parsimony. The Lord says that it is their hands which are tied. Allah's hands are extended, and he spends as he wills since He owns and knows everything in this universe. So, He gives some people many things *and adds as much as He wills*. But He also gives little to other people like the Jews in this verse.

The second translation is as follows: And the Jews say, "The hand of Allah is tightfisted." Tightfisted are their hands and cursed are they for what they say. Rather, both His hands are extended, He spends however as He wills. And that which has been revealed to you from your Lord *will surely increase transgression and disbelief in many of them*". In this reading, the subject of the predicate 'increase' is 'that which has been revealed to you from your Lord'. According to the Arabic structure, the clause *wa la-yazi:danna kathi:ran minhum* 'will increase ... in many of them' has a pronominal subject that is equivalent to 'it' in English. Thus, instead of having one of the canonical word orders in Arabic for double object structures, namely SVOO and VSOO, this sentence has VOSO word order.

Some cementing clauses appear in a negated proposition. For instance, the first clause in Verse 68 includes a negation in the predicate:

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لَسْتُمْ عَلَى شَيْءٍ حَتَّى تُقِيمُوا التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ ۖ ... ﴿68﴾

Say, 'O Prophet, "O People of the Book! **You have nothing to stand on** unless you observe the Torah, the Gospel, and what has been revealed to you from your Lord."

In the first reading, the theme is 'O People of the Book!' and the rheme is 'You have nothing to stand on'. This indicates that after Islam came, it annihilated all previous divine religions. In other words, Judaism and Christianity do not hold anymore, and therefore Jews and Christians cannot consider themselves followers of any religion. However, in the second reading/ interpretation, the previous predicate becomes a main clause for the conditional clause: You have nothing to stand on unless you observe the Torah, the Gospel, and what has been revealed to you from your Lord (the Quran). Thus, Judaism and Christianity still sustain if Jews and Christians observe the Torah, the Gospel, and the Holy Quran. According to this reading, the theme is 'you (people of the book)' and the rheme is 'you have nothing to stand on unless you observe the Torah, the Gospel, and what has been revealed to Muhammed from your Lord.

Finally, in some cases, the cementing clause may liaise two verses as in verses 70-71:

لَقَدْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَ بَنِي إِسْرَآئِيلَ وَأَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمْ رَسُولًا قَالُوا مَا جَاءَهُمْ رَسُولٌ بِمَا لَا تَهْوَىٰ أَنْفُسُهُمْ فَرِيقًا كَذَّبُوا وَفَرِيقًا يَقْتُلُونَ ﴿70﴾ وَحَسِبُوا أَنَّا لَنَكُونَ فَتْنَةً ۖ

Indeed, We took a covenant from the Children of Israel and sent them messengers. Whenever a messenger came to them with what they did not desire, **they denied some and killed others** (70) They thought there would be no consequences.

In the first reading, the Lord tells the Children of Israel that whenever a messenger came to them with what they did not desire, they denied some and killed others. So, the underlined clause is the main clause that predicates the adverbial clause ‘whenever a messenger came to them with what they did not desire’, they denied some and killed others. In the second reading, the underlined clause is followed by a comment that the Children of Israel denied some messengers and killed others, and they thought they can get away with it.

Conclusion

The Holy Qur’an is a genre that is similar to none of the genres that writers, poets and critics are familiar of. One of the unique rhetoric structures in the Holy Qur’an is the cementing devices: lexemes, phrases or clauses that can be semantically and syntactically part of a preceding or a following clause. This study investigated the cementing devices used in Surah Al-Ma’eda ‘The Banquet’. The study found that cementing devices give rise to different interpretations of each verse under study since these devices may add semantic senses and interpretations of certain lexemes, phrases and clauses discussed in the Surah. Finally, the study highlighted the relationship between cementing devices and lexical and structural ambiguity, thus giving different meanings and interpretations of the verses under study.

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