

The Use of the Cementing Marker *minkabl* in the Holy Qur'an: A Semantic Analysis

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Abstract

This paper presents a semantic analysis for the word *minkabl* “before or previously” as a cementing marker in the Holy Qur'an. Eight verses, where the word *minkabl* is used as a cementing marker, were selected for the purpose of analysis. The analysis of the data shows that the use of the cementing marker *minkabl* serves to add one intended meaning to the verse.

Keywords: Qur'an, cementing markers, language, semantics, meaning, before.

1. Introduction

Semantics creates an interesting area for analyzing the meaning of linguistic items. It is the study of meaning (Lyon, 1977). The word meaning, in particular, is very important for the semantic analysis of sentences. It can help one determine the meaning of sentences as “the meaning of a sentence can be predicted from the meaning of the words it contains” (Aliyeva, 2016, p. 1763).

The Holy Qur'an—the sacred text of Islam (Mozaheb et al., 2017) presents a rich source for linguistic information in general and semantic analysis in particular. It uses a well-organized language that makes it a reliable source for language creativity. The language of the Holy Qur'an is “unique in its eloquence and style, which differentiate[s] it from any other Classical Arabic text” (Alrabiah et al., 2014, p. 2).

The language of the Holy Qur'an consists of words that have meaning. Moreover, the meaning of words in the Holy Qur'an is preserved (Allan, 2014). In other words, each word has its own meaning that can be found in any dictionary and in any Arabic text. For example, the word *kulu* “eat” in the following part of the verse has its original meaning “the act of swallowing food”—the meaning that can be found in the dictionary (ibid: 2014).

“كلو من طيبات ما رزقناكم”

“Eat of the good food that we provided you with”

The meaning of words also develops and acquires new meaning (ibid). For example, the same word, (*ta*)*kulu*, can have another meaning in the following verse—the act of swallowing and ownership (ibid: 2014).

“ولا تاكلوا اموالكم بالباطل”

“And do not take others' wealth unfairly”

Words in the Holy Qur'an can serve as cementing markers. Cementing markers are common words that are used in the middle between two sentences or phrases and give each sentence its own different meaning (Al-Rawajfeh and Al-Khalafat, 2019). For example, the word *sawaa* ‘whether’ in the Holy Qur'an gives each sentence in the verse joined to it a different meaning. The following example explains the use of *sawaa* as a cementing marker (Al-Mrayat et al., 2019:223):

1. *inna allaḏiina kafaro sawaaʔon ʔalayhim ʔaʔandartahom am lam tonḏirhom la yoʔmino.* Al-Baqarah, verse 6

‘Indeed, those who disbelieve - it is all the same for them whether you warn them or do not warn them - they will not believe’.

The word *sawaa* ‘whether’ in the example above is a cementing marker that connects two sentences with a different meaning for each one. In the first part, *inna allaḏiina kafaro sawaaʔon*, it gives the meaning that disbelievers are the same. In the second part, *sawaaʔon ʔalayhim ʔaʔandartahom am lam tonḏirhom la yoʔmino*, it gives the meaning that whether disbelievers are warned or not, they won't believe—the sameness. (ibid: 2019)

Researchers have analyzed the words of the Holy Qur'an for various purposes. For example, Allan (2014) discussed the role that the Holy Qur'an played in preserving the meaning of Arabic words and its development. On the other hand, Mozaheb et al., (2017) analyzed several verses in the Holy Qur'an to discuss several aspects of language. They pointed out that the linguistic heritage of the Qur'an is not restricted to one language and it is the sign of God.

Other researchers have focused on pragmatic aspects of the Holy Qur'an. For example, Ghazal (2017) analyzed a number of verses in the Holy Qur'an using Grice's maxims to highlight the intentional meaning of the verses. He concluded that floating these maxims reflects the style of language of the Holy Qur'an and develops one's ability to find the implied meaning.

This paper contributes to previous research on the language of the Holy Qur'an. Therefore, the present paper argues that the word *minkabl* "before or previously" is a cementing marker that gives a different meaning for each part of the verse and specifies one intended interpretation for it.

2. Data Collection

The data were collected from the Holy Qur'an. The sample consists of 8 verses containing the word *minkabl*. The word *minkab* in these verses functions as a cementing marker.

A purposive sample is used to collect the data. The researchers have selected the verses based on two criteria. First, the verse must contain the word *minkabl*. Second, the word must function as a cementing marker.

3. Analysis and Discussion

This section discusses the analysis of the eight verses that include the word *minkabl*, as a cementing marker. The following examples were taken from the Holy Qur'an:

In the verses below, the word *before* "من قبل" gives two meanings for each verse but asserts one for it. In particular, it is used as an adjective describing a noun in the first part of each verse. On the other hand, it serves as a cementing marker that indicates an order, a warning, and events to be accomplished before specific time when it is combined to the whole verse.

1. فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ الْقَيِّمِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ يَوْمٌ لَا مَرَدَّ لَهُ مِنْ اللَّهِ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصْدَعُونَ. (الروم: 43)

"So, direct your face toward the true religion *before* a day when there is no repelling to Allah...."

2. اسْتَجِيبُوا لِرَبِّكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ يَوْمٌ لَا مَرَدَّ لَهُ مِنْ اللَّهِ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ مَلْجَأٍ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَمَا لَكُمْ مِنْ نَكِيرٍ. (الشورى: 47)

"Respond to Allah *before* a day when repelling to Allah is not possible...."

3. يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْفِقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ يَوْمٌ لَا بَيْعَ فِيهِ وَلَا خُلَّةٌ وَلَا شَفَاعَةٌ وَالْكَافِرُونَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ (البقرة: 254)

"Oh believers expend what we have given you *before* the day on which there will be no barter, and no friendship or intercession, and those who are disbelievers will be sinners."

In verse 1, the first part of the verse, "So, direct your face toward the true religion before," emphasizes an invitation—scarifying oneself for the sake of true religion that one has already believed with before the present time. In other words, the word *before* is exploited to be used as an adjective describing a previous true religion that one believed with in the past. Combing the two parts of the verse using the cementing marker emphasizes an order to be accomplished at specific time. The addressee is ordered to sacrifice himself for the true religion and its instructions before the Judgment Day.

The word *before* in verse 2 is used as a cementing marker that emphasizes an order to be taken at specific time. The first part of the verse "Respond to Allah before" explains that the addresses are invited to respond to what the speaker has already asked for. Therefore, the word "before" shows an invitation that took place in the past. This invitation is described as a previous or past invitation. When reading the whole verse, one can notice that before is used to clarify an order to be taken at specific time. That is, the addressees have to obey their God before the Judgment Day.

The last verse above also includes the word *before* functioning as a cementing marker. The first part of verse 3, "Oh believers expend what we have given you before" is an invitation for believers to spend their wealth that they had already owned for good deeds. The word *before* in this part of the verse describes the wealth that the addresses owned in the past. Thus, it is an old owned wealth. Hence, the second part of the verse, "...before the day on which there will be no barter, and no friendship or intercession, and those who are disbelievers will be sinners." indicates an order and limits the time during which this wealth must be spent. In other words, the addresses are ordered to spend their wealth on good deeds not at any time, but before specific time (the Judgment Day).

4. يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ آمِنُوا بِمَا نَزَّلْنَا مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا مَعَكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَطْمِسَ وُجُوهَ قَرَرَدَهَا عَلَىٰ أَدْبَارِهَا أَوْ تَلْعَنَهُمْ كَمَا لَعَنَّا أَصْحَابَ السَّبْتِ وَكَانَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ مَفْعُولًا. (النساء: 47)

“Oh people who were given Al-ketab, believe what we have already revealed, asserting what you have, before we obliterate faces to turn them back or before we curse them as Ashab el-sabt”

In addition to orders that are to be committed before a specific time, the cementing marker *before* is also used to assert a warning. For instance, in verse 4, “Oh people who were given Al-ketab, believe what we have already revealed, asserting what you have before,” one can understand that this part is an invitation for a group of people (*ahlal-ketab*) to believe what has already been revealed. In this part of the verse, the word *before* is used to show previous revealed knowledge. Combining it within the first and the second part of the verse, the word is a cementing marker that carries a specific meaning—a warning. The speaker warns the addressees in order to believe what has been revealed before an action (a punishment) that will be taken if they do not believe.

5. تِلْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهَا إِلَيْكَ مَا كُنْتَ تَعْلَمُهَا أَنْتَ وَلَا قَوْمُكَ مِنْ قَبْلِ هَذَا فَاصْبِرْ إِنَّ الْعَاقِبَةَ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ. (هود: 49)

“That is from the unseen events that we reveal to you and those that are not known for you and for your tribe before this ...”

The cementing marker *before* can be also used to indicate situations revealed at specific time. The cementing marker in verse 5 explains situations that were not known for the addressee before specific time. In the first part of the verse, it indicates that the addressee is being notified about some of unseen situations that he and his tribe are not familiar with in the past. Therefore, the word “before” describes the unseen situations as previous unknown situations. Adding the cementing marker to the whole verse explains that these unseen events were not known to the addressee and his tribe before specific time—before the period when they had been declared¹.

The cementing marker *before* is also used to specify a group of people. In verse 6 below, the first part ‘For those who repented before’ includes a speech to those who are repentant sinners in the past. The word *before* in this part indicates that the speech is directed for anyone who repented in the past. Combining the cementing marker *before* within the whole verse indicates that this speech is directed for a specific group of repentant sinners—those who repented before the guidance was able to convince them to repent.

6. إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ تَقْدِرُوا عَلَيْهِمْ فَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ. (المائدة: 34)

“For those who repented before you apprehend them, know that Allah is forgiving and merciful.”

In the verses below, the word *before* “من قبل” also serves as a cementing marker that asserts one meaning for the verse. In particular, the word is used to show a positive attitude. On the other hand, it serves as a cementing marker that indicates a negative meaning to the whole verse.

7. وَلَقَدْ كُنْتُمْ تَتَمَنَّوْنَ الْمَوْتَ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ تَلْفُوهُ فَقَدْ رَأَيْتُمُوهُ وَأَنْتُمْ تَنْظُرُونَ. (آل عمران: 143)

“You did wish death before you face it and you have seen it with your own eyes.”

8. كُلُّ الطَّعَامِ كَانَ حَلَالًا لِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ إِلَّا مَا حَرَّمَ إِسْرَائِيلُ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ تُنَزَّلَ التَّوْرَةُ فَمَنْ قَاتَلُوا بِالتَّوْرَةِ فَاتَّلَوْهَا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ. (آل عمران: 93)

“All food was lawful to the tribe of Israel except what Israel forbade himself before Tawrah was revealed...”

For example, the interpretation of the first part of verse 7, “You did wish for death before” indicates the addressees’ fulfilled wishing in the past. The addressees are rewarded by fulfilling their wishing that they had it before by the virtue of being martyrs and warriors². The word *before* is used to show a fulfilled wishing in the past—a positive attitude. Combining the second part of the verse “...before you met it and now you have seen it with your own eyes”, the sentence takes on the meaning that the addressees do not wish to die because they now can see that this wish would be very difficult to realize. In other words, the word *before* serves as a cementing marker that is exploited to show one’s withdrawn from an action that was to be taken—a negative attitude.

Using the cementing marker in verse 8 also adds specific meaning to the interpretation. When reading the first part of the verse, “All food was lawful to the children of Israel except what Israel forbade himself before,” one can understand that any type of food is permitted to be eaten by Israel’s tribe except the one type that Israel forbade himself from in the past because of sickness. The word *before* is used in this part to indicate almost all types of food were permitted for the tribe—a positive meaning. On the contrary, when reading the first part of the verse with the second part, “...before Tawrah was revealed.” a new interpretation is emphasized: Not all types of food are permitted for Israel’s tribe because they have already been documented in Tawrah, a reliable source³. In other words, the cementing marker is used to show a complete different meaning that contradicts the first revealed meaning.

¹ التفسير الميسر (الحجم العادي)/مجمع الملك فهد لطباعة المصحف الشريف ط 4- المدينة المنورة 1433 هـ

² التفسير الميسر (الحجم العادي)/مجمع الملك فهد لطباعة المصحف الشريف ط 4- المدينة المنورة 1433 هـ

³ التفسير الميسر (الحجم العادي)/مجمع الملك فهد لطباعة المصحف الشريف ط 4- المدينة المنورة 1433 هـ

We have seen that the cementing marker *minkəbl* is exploited to specify one particular intended meaning for the verses above. It explains an order, a warning, or events to be committed before specific time—the judgment Day and specification for a group of people. It also added a contradictory meaning within the two parts of the verse.

4. Conclusion

This paper presented a semantic analysis for the word *minkəbl* “before or previously” as cementing marker. It argued that the use of *minkəbl* gives a different meaning for each part of the verse and specifies one intended interpretation for the verse. It determined more clearly the intended meaning of the verse.

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