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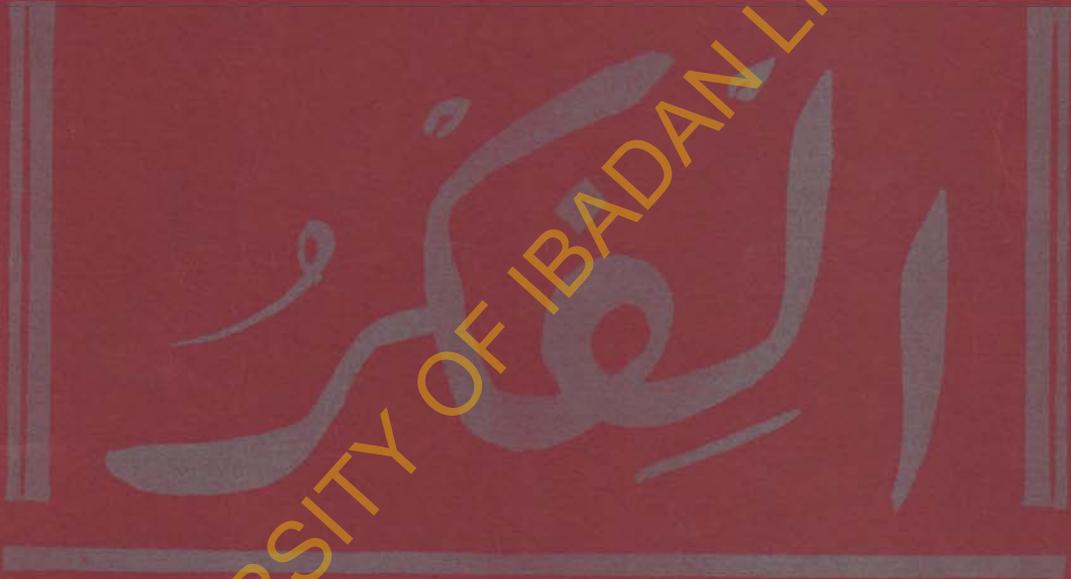
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Mufitkala

RELATIVISATION: AN AID TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE QURAN AND ARABIC SYNTAX

by

KAREEM MURITALA KEWUYEMI

It is an established fact that one needs to be knowledgeable in many branches of knowledge such as Arabic grammar, Arabic rhetoric, Asbabun-Nuzul, Hadith, etc. before one can have a proper understanding of the messages contained in the Qur'ān, the Book revealed to the Prophet for a period of about 23 years. Of all these branches, Arabic grammar is in a class of its own. It is through it that the deep structure of many Arabic sentences and Quranic verses are understood very well.

There are some sentences in Arabic, and many verses in the Qur'an that are basic. Arabic readers have no problem as far as they are concerned. They would get the messages without much effort. On the other hand, there are some sentences in Arabic and many Quranic verses that are derived. These derived sentences are those ones formed by combining basic sentences in a variety of ways or by adding some markers to the basic sentences such as conjunction, relativisation, disjunction, condition, modification etc. These forms of sentence pose a great problem for readers. It is not possible to treat all the needed branches of knowledge in this paper. Attention will only be paid to an aspect of Arabic grammar, relativisation. This is because the proper understanding of this aspect of Arabic grammar will go a long way in removing the ambiguities, doubts, misunderstandings, misconceptions, etc. which both Muslims and non-Muslims can have as regards some verses of the Qur'an. It will also help students of Arabic language to have a proper understanding of the usages of the relative pronouns in Arabic.

In this paper, all the relative pronouns will be discussed. Explanations on the possible translations and usages on each of them will be provided at the beginning of every relative pronoun. Examples will be cited from the Qur'ān and the classical Arabic books to explain the points being made. Some grammatical rules noted on them will be provided with a view to enhancing the understanding of their usages. A table which

comprises all the relative pronouns in Arabic and their usages is also to be presented. A tree diagram will also be used to explain the syntactic structure of some verses in the Qurān. In the tree diagram, it is clearly shown how a basic sentence in a Quranic verse at the top would have branches downward into the various constituents that make up the sentence or the verse. This shows the interdependence and function of the words in a sentence.¹

The relative pronouns introduce the clause that throws more light on the antecedents. The noun that the clause is talking about is called ANTECEDENT.² In Arabic, the relative pronouns are divided principally into two though there are some relative pronouns that can function in both groups. The two categories are Masculine relative pronouns and Feminine relative pronouns.

Masculine Relative Pronouns³

1. **الذي** : is translated as “who”, “that” and “which”. It is the relative pronoun for the masculine singular, human and non-human. It can function in all the three cases: nominative (subject), accusative (object) and genitive (complement of a preposition) without changing its form.

فليعبدوا رب هذا البيت الذي اطعمهم من جوع وأمنهم من خوف

Let them worship the Lord of this House (Ka'bah) Who provides them with food against hunger and with security against fear (Q 106:4)

ب هذا البيت : is the antecedent

الذي : is the relative pronoun for human which refers to the antecedent.

It is used in the objective case of the verb (**فليعبدوا**)

اطعمهم : is the dependent clause.

The antecedent, the relative pronouns and the verb are all masculine, and are in singular forms. The relative clause throws more light on the Lord of the House so that the listeners will have no doubt as regards the

intended meaning of the verse. This refers to Allah, the Provider. It was not AbdulMuttalib, the custodian of Ka`bah by then.

"ووضعنا عنك وزرك الذي أنقض ظهرك"

"And we removed from you your burden which did gall your back". Q 94:2-3.

Here, is the relative pronoun for non-human and in the objective case of the verb.

"اقرأ وربك الأكرم الذي علم بالقلم"

"Read, and your Lord is the most Generous Who taught by the pen.
" Q 96:3-4.

الذي : is the relative pronoun for human. It is in the subjective case.

The relative clause explains further Allah's other role apart from being generous i.e. teaching man the use of pen.

Q 2:50

قال ربنا الذي أعطى كل شئ خلقه ثم هدى

لا يصلأها إلا لأشقى الذي كذب وتولى،

Q 92:15-18

وسيجنبها الأتقى الذي يؤتي ماله يتزكى

Q 87:1-2

سبح اسم ربك الأعلى الذي خلق فسوى

٢. الذان is translated as "who", "that" and "which". It can only function in the nominative case (e.g. subjective case). It is the relative pronoun for the masculine dual human and non-human

والذان يأتيانها منكم فاذوهما

"(The two men) among you who are guilty of lewdness, punish them both." (Q 4:16). The antecedent is inferred from the relative pronoun and, or the verb in the clause as "the two men" (or two males).

It should be noted that most antecedents of the relative pronouns in the Qur'an follow this pattern (i.e. they are inferred from the verb in the dependent clause or from the previous verses).

الذان is the relative pronoun for the masculine dual (human) in the nominative case. It is the subject of the verb, يأتيان

يأتيان is the verb for the masculine dual human.

The implicit antecedent, the relative pronoun and the verb are masculine dual.

3. **الذين** is translated as “whom/who” that and which.

It can only function in the accusative case (e.g. objective case) and the genitive case (e.g. complement of a preposition). It is the relative pronoun for the masculine dual, human and non-human.

رَبِّ ارْنَا الَّذِينَ أَضَلَّانَا مِنَ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنْسِ

“Show us those among Jinns and men *who* misled us.” Q 41:29. The antecedent is inferred from the relative pronoun and the verb in the subordinate clause as two beings (i.e. the men and the Jinn).

الذين is the relative pronoun for the masculine dual (beings) in the accusative case (i.e. object of the verb)

أضلا is the verb for the masculine dual.

The implicit antecedent, the relative pronoun and the verb are in a perfect harmony (i.e. masculine dual).

فَرَحَتْ بِالْوَالِدَيْنِ الَّذِينَ نَجَّحْنَا

الوالدين Is the antecedent. It is the complement of the preposition.

الذين Is the relative pronoun for the masculine dual in the genitive case (i.e. complement of the preposition)

نجحنا is the verb for the masculine dual.

4. **الَّذِينَ** is translated as “who, “which” and “that”.

It can function in all the three cases without changing its form.

| | | | | |
|------|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|
| هم | مصلين الذين | ل | ل | ويل |
| they | who worshippers | the | for | woe |

| | | | |
|---------------|------------|--------|-----------|
| سَاهُونَ | هَم | صَلَات | عَنْ |
| neglectful | their | prayer | from |
| و يَمْنَعُونَ | يُرَافُونَ | هَم | الَّذِينَ |
| refuse and | show off | they | who |

المَاعُونَ

neighbourly needs

“Who to the worshippers, who are neglectful of their prayers,

who want to be seen (of men), and who refuse to supply even

neighbourly needs”. Q 107:4-7.

المصلين is the antecedent in the genitive case (i.e. complement of) the Preposition, (ل). It is also the antecedent for the following three subordinate clauses in the chapter.

الَّذِينَ is the relative pronoun for the masculine plural in the genitive case. It must be mentioned here that when الَّذِينَ is used to refer to worshippers it includes both males and females. In fact, in Arabic, if there is a mixture of males and females, a masculine word is used. It may be a masculine noun, a masculine verb, a masculine pronoun etc.

الَّذِينَ is the pronoun for the masculine plural. It also includes females as explained above.

عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ are the prepositional phrase.

سَاهُونَ is the masculine plural in the subordinate clause.

الَّذِينَ as discussed above.

هَم as discussed above.

يُرَافُونَ is the verb for the masculine plural. It also includes feminine plural as explained above.

و is the conjunction.

يمنعون Is the verb for the masculine plural. It also includes feminine plural as discussed earlier.

The antecedent, the relative pronouns the personal pronouns in the dependent subordinate clause, and the verbs in the subordinate clause are all in the plural forms referring to both males and females.

Explanations

The relative clauses in this *Sūrah* throw more light on the worshippers whom Allah curses. It is those who are unmindful of their prayer, make show-off of their acts, and are not charitable. It means Allah curses the worshippers who have the three qualities mentioned in the *Surah*, i.e. lack of concentration in *Ṣalat*, show-off and meanness. The verse should not be generalised to other devotees who don't have the three bad qualities mentioned in the *Sūrah*.

The implication of this is that the verse of the Qur'an should not be quoted out of context. So, the word *Waylum* (ويل) should be related to the sense or meaning of what comes before and after it. The knowledge of relativisation has cleared the ambiguities, doubts and misunderstanding one would have had or had had as regards the verse. Here are other examples:

- Q83:1-2 ويل للمطففين الذين إذا اكتالوا على الناس يستوفون
 إن الذين كفروا ساء عليهم ءانذرتهم أم لم تنذرهم لا يؤمنون
 Q2:6 هدى للمتقين الذين يؤمنون بالغيب
 Q77:15 ويل يومئذ للمكذبين الذين يكذبون بيوم الدين

Feminine Relative Pronoun⁴

5. التي is translated as "who". "that" and "which"

It is the relative pronoun for the feminine singular, human and non-human. It is also the relative pronoun for the masculine plural and feminine plural, (non-human). It can function in all the three cases nominative, accusative and genitive without changing its form.

نار الله الموقدة التي تطلع على الأفئدة...

They are the relative pronouns for the feminine plural (only human). It can function in all the three cases. Only the first two are used in the Qur'an. The other, اللواتي is used in the classical Arabic literature.

حرمت عليكم أمهاتكم وأمهاتكم الآتي أرضعنكم

“Prohibited for you, are your mother...your foster mother, *who* gave you suck.” Q. 4:23

أمهاتكم is the antecedent (feminine plural)

الآتي is the relative pronoun for the feminine plural (human).

أرضعنكم is the verb for the feminine plural.

The antecedent, the relative pronoun and the verb are feminine plural

Explanation

The second mention of أمهاتكم in the verse is understood to be foster-mother because of the relative clause that explains other types of mother one can have apart from the one who gave birth to one.

إن أمهاتهم إلا الآئ ولدنهم

“None can be their mothers except those who gave them birth...” Q 58:2

Relative Pronoun for both Masculine and Feminine⁵

9. التي is translated as “who”, “that” and “which”

التي is the relative pronoun for masculine and feminine plural numbers for non-human. It is used in all the three cases.

رأيت الأفيال التي رقصت

I saw the elephants that danced.

الأفيال Is the antecedent, masculine plural (non-human).

التي is the relative pronoun used for the masculine plural, non-human.

رقصت is the verb for the feminine singular. It is also used for masculine plural, non-human.

Notes: التي is the relative pronoun used for the feminine singular (human and non-human) and the masculine plural (non-human) and the feminine plural (non-human).

رفقت Is the verb for the feminine singular, the masculine plural (non-human) and the feminine plural (non-human).

10. ما for non-human

It is translated as “which” and “that”

It is the relative pronoun for the masculine and feminine (singular, dual and plural). It can function in all the three cases (i.e. nominative, accusative and genitive) without changing its form.

يوم ينظر المرأ ما قدمت يداه

“The day when man will see (the deeds) which his hands have sent forth”. (Q 78:40).

The implicit antecedent is *al-a'mal* (i.e. the deeds). It is the masculine plural for non-human..

ما is the relative pronoun for the masculine plural (non-human).

قدمت is the verb for the masculine plural non-human.

ما for human⁶

ما can be used for human if the antecedent refers to both human and non-human.

يسبح له ما في السماوات وما في الأرض

“All that is in the heavens and (all that) is on the earth glorify Him (Allah).” Q 59:24.

The implicit antecedent refers to all the creatures, human and non-human⁷

ما is the relative pronoun for both the masculine and the feminine, singular, dual and plural (human and non-human).

Ma as the relative pronoun does not agree with its antecedent in terms of gender and number.

11. من Is translated as "who", "whom" and "that".⁸

It is the relative pronoun for both the masculine and the feminine (singular, dual and plural). It can function in all the three cases without changing its forms.

The antecedent of the relative pronoun من is always implicit.

It is the verb of the dependent clause which من introduces and the context of the sentence that indicate gender and number.

Here are some examples:

| <u>Masculine</u> | <u>Feminine</u> |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| ٤ ذهب من نصر زيدا | ١ ذهبت من نصرت زيدا |
| ٥ ذهب من نصرنا زيدا | ٢ بت من نصرتنا زيدا |
| ٦ ذهب من نصرنا زيدا | ٣ ذهبت من نصرتنا زيدا |

The antecedent of من is inferred from the verb in the dependent clause. The antecedent of numbers 1, 2 and 3 are feminine singular, dual and plural (هو هما هن) respectively which are inferred from the verbs in the dependent clauses. The antecedents of numbers 4, 5 and 6 are masculine singular, dual and plural (هو هما هم) respectively which are inferred from the verbs in the dependent clauses.

Q 30:29

من يهدي من أضل الله

Q 99:7

من يعمل مثقال ذرة خيرا يره

من Is used for non-human in the following circumstances:

- i. If non-human is made to assume the position of human, man is used as the relative pronoun for such an antecedent.

ومن أضل ممن يدعو من دون الله من لا يستجيب لهم إلى يوم القيامة...

"And who is more astray than one who invokes besides God, such as will not answer him to the Day of Judgement." Q 46:5.

The Arabic word, "man" in this verse refers to the idols (non-human).

وادعو من استطعتم من دون الله إن كنتم صادقين

"And call whomsoever you can other than Allah to your help if you speak the truth". Q. 11:13.

ألم تر أن الله يسيح له من في السماوات وما لارض والطير صافات
كلّ قد علم صلاته وتسبيحه والله عليم بما يفعلون

- ii. If the implicit antecedent refers to both human and non-human, is also used as the relative pronoun.

ألم تر أن الله يسيح له من في السماوات وما لارض والطير صافات
كلّ قد علم صلاته وتسبيحه والله عليم بما يفعلون

"Have you not seen that it is Allah whose praises all beings in the heavens and on the earth do celebrate, and the birds with wings outspread. Each one knows its own (mode of prayer and praise). God knows well all that they do." Q 24:41.

- iii If it is used to break down the general statement that was earlier made.

والله خلق كلّ دابة من ماء
فمنهم من يمشي على بطنه
ومنهم من يمشي على رجليه
ومنهم من يمشي على أربع

"Allah has created every moving creature from water...(This is a general statement).

The breakdown is...

- "of them there are some that creep on their bellies" (reptiles, non-human)
- "of them, there are some that walk on two legs" (human beings and birds)"

- "of them, there are some that walk on four" (animals)
- Allah creates what He wills. Allah is able to do things (Q 24:45).

1. أي i translated as "which", "what", "what kind of", "whoever", "whosoever", "any", etc.

It is mostly used as the relative pronoun for the masculine singular, human and non-human. It is occasionally used as the relative pronoun for the feminine singular, human and non-human. It is inflected in all the three cases; nominative (*dammah*), accusative (*fathah*) and genitive (*kasrah*). It however remains in "dammah" in all the three cases if it is used as the possessed (*al-Muda'af*) in a possessive noun and the subject of the subordinate clause is deleted. It is compulsory that the verb in the main clause of which "ayy" is to act as the relative pronoun should be in the future tense.¹⁰

يسرني أيهم هو قادم

"I am pleased with any of them that is coming"

يسر is the main verb and in the future tense.

أي is the relative pronoun for the masculine singular (human).

هو is the subject of the subordinate clause.

قادم is the predicate

N.B. If the subject of the subordinate clause is deleted, the relative pronoun must be in the nominative case. It, then, reads thus:

يسرني أيهم قادم

تصدق على البنسين وابدأ بأي هو أقرب إليك

تدهشني أيهمخطبت

4. Deletion of the Relative Pronoun¹¹

The deletion of the relative pronoun is possible if the noun qualified (i.e. the antecedent) is indefinite. Here are some examples: رجل ضربه

هن السول لنور يستضاء به مهند من سيوف الله مسلول

Arabic Relative Pronouns¹²

| Cases | *** ** | Singular Human and Non- Human | Singular Dual Plural Human | Singular Dual Plural Non- Human | Plural Non- Human | Plural Human | Dual Human Non- Human | Singular Human Non- Human | |
|--------------------|-----------|---|-------------------------------------|---|-------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|
| Subjective Case | | أيّ | من | ما | التي | الذين | الذان | الذي | Masculine |
| | | **** | *** | ** | | * | | | |
| Objective Case | صفر | أي | من | ما | التي | الذين | الذين | الذي | |
| Genitive Case | | أي | من | ما | التي | الذين | الذين | الذي | |
| Subjective Case | | أي | من | ما | التي | الآتي، الائي | اللتان | التي | Feminine |
| | | | | | | ، اللواتي | | | |
| Objective Case | صفر | أي | من | ما | التي | الآتي، الائي، اللواتي | اللتين | التي | |
| Genitive Case | | أي | من | ما | التي | الآتي، الائي، اللواتي | اللتين | التي | |

* It is also used for a group of males and females

** It is used for human occasionally

*** It is used at times for human

**** It is not commonly used for the feminine

***** It refers to zero relative pronoun i.e. the relative pronoun has been deleted.

Conclusion

It is clear from the above that gender, number, human and non-human are pronounced in the Arabic relative pronouns. But this is not to say that some relative pronouns are not used interchangeably. For instance, *al-ladhi* and *al-ladhiya* are used for human and non-human, masculine and feminine, singular, dual and plural as explained above.

The explanations on the usages, meanings and some analyses given in the introduction of every relative pronoun will go a long way in guiding and helping students and Arabic learners to produce correct infinite sentences from finite set of rules. The paper has succeeded in removing the ambiguities that one may have as regards some verses of the Qur'an. This is due to the understanding of subordination in Arabic. We have used mostly Qur'anic verses to explain the usages of the relative pronouns in Arabic. This is because as far as the Arabic language is concerned, the Qur'an is considered the highest authority for solving problems of Arabic language.

Definition of Terms used in the tree diagram

| | | |
|------|---|----------------------|
| S | = | Main sentence |
| Np | = | Noun phrase |
| N | = | Noun |
| Vp | = | Verb phrase |
| V | = | Verb |
| PP | = | Prepositional phrase |
| P | = | Preposition |
| Det | = | Determiner |
| Com | = | Complimentizer |
| Adj | = | Adjective |
| Conj | = | Conjunct |

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4. *Ibid*: p.41.
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7. Allah says in the Qur'ān that al that is in the heaven and on the earth glorify Him. This shows that human and non-human beings involve in His glorification. "And that there is not a thing but glorifies His praise. But you understand not their glorification." Q. 59:24.

إن من شيء إلا يسبح بحمده ولكن لا تفقهون تسبيحهم
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