A STUDY OF IRONY AS A STYLISTIC DEVICE IN SOME VERSES OF THE HOLY QURAN

BY

MOHAMMED AHMED QASSEM SA'EFAN

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Examining Committee

1- Dr. Abdel-Majid Thalji
   Chairman

2- Dr. Mohammed Farghal
   Member

3- Dr. Hassan Shuqair
   Member

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Mohammed Sa'esfan

ABSTRACT

The present study examines irony in the Holy Quran as an advanced and intellectual phenomenon whose principal purpose is not mere attack, satire or belittling of others, nor is it a humorous style generating ridicule and scorn; it is intended to put the mocks on man's follies, sins and disbelief in order to accomplish what is good for his life and faith.

Quranic sarcasm, in other words, is exploited stylistically to salvage people from corruption and bring them to shores of hope and enlightenment by deconstructing the integrity of its victims to be taken as an example for other peoples.

Focusing on the strategies in which readers detect ironic utterances, this study argues that irony in the Holy Quran supersedes both the traditional definition as well as Grice's account of verbal irony; such accounts assume that the implicated meaning could actually contradict the literal sense of the utterance. Instead, the 'echoic mention' theory is adopted as it seems a more viable and generalizable framework of analysis; it may account adequately for the cases where the sarcastic verses communicate the opposite of what they literally say, and for the cases where they do not. Such cases include rhetorical questions, ironical quotations, simile and analogy. This theory
together with presupposition and contexture, i.e. composition 'ta'liq' or arrangement of words of the Holy Quran 'nazm' can serve as interpretive mechanisms in accounting for irony in this study. This thesis starts from the premise that Quranic sarcasm is a variety of echoic interpretive use. Sarcastic verses echo (implicitly) thoughts, social norms and rituals to express an attitude of ridicule and disrespect towards those dull-witted and imperceptive persons who hold such thoughts.

The thesis comprises five chapters. The first chapter includes a review of related literature. It surveys some medieval Arab rhetoricians' account of implicature and sarcasm and outlines some semantic and pragmatic theories concerning irony.

The second chapter deals with the purpose and scope of the study; it includes a general summary of the foundation of Grice's account, with special emphasis on cases of flouting conversational maxims, and a demonstration of the 'echoic mention' theory. A carefully worked out argument is presented in favour of the 'echoic mention' framework.

In the third chapter, this theory is applied to many sarcastic verses with reference to 'presupposition' and 'contexture' as two interpretive measures that can be utilized by readers of the Holy Quran to arrive at the intended meaning. Notions such as rhetorical questions (whose purpose is sarcasm) and ironical quotations are discussed in this part of the thesis.

The fourth chapter addresses irony by analogy (tamthil), simile (tashbih) and lexical irony, showing that the 'echoic mention' theory of verbal irony is more promising than previous proposals on the subject.

The fifth and final chapter includes a summary of the main issues discussed, and certain conclusions drawn herewith.