

INTEROG: The Interrogative

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Discussion

Read

From The Encyclopedia of Arabic Rhetoric



All rhetorical devices> Sentence Construction & Syntactical Stylistics ('ilm al-ma'ānī)

Alphabetical list

Definition

From the sources

The Interrogative (*al-istifhām*) is an Arabic rhetorical device where a [communicator](#) uses an interrogative construction not to seek previously unknown information, but to convey another meaning or rhetorical purpose understood from context.^{[1][2][3][4]}

In the [ordinary use of the interrogative](#), a [communicator](#) seeks understanding or knowledge about something not already known. In its rhetorical use, this information-seeking function is displaced: the interrogative form remains, but another meaning or effect is intended, such as affirmation, denial, rebuke, command, astonishment, or other context-dependent purposes.^{[1][2][3][4]} This departure from ordinary interrogative function belongs to the broader rhetorical phenomenon of *ikhrāj al-kalām 'alā khilāf muqtaḍā al-ẓāhir* ("expression contrary to the apparent requirement of the situation").^[5] The resulting rhetorical question does not function primarily to elicit an answer, but to produce an effect upon the [addressee](#).^[6]

For the ordinary linguistic system of Arabic questions, including the interrogative tools, *taṣawwūr* and *taṣdīq*, and the respective uses of *al-hamza*, *hal*, and the interrogative nouns, see [Questions and Interrogatives in Arabic \(al-Istifhām\)](#).

Linguistic Operations

From the sources

- The Interrogative retains the linguistic form of a question while departing from its ordinary function of seeking unknown information. The intended meaning is instead determined by contextual indications.^{[1][2]}
- Nasif describes this distinction as an utterance being interrogative in wording (إنشاء لفظاً) while conveying declarative content in meaning (خير معنى). He gives 'alam nashrah laka ṣadraka ("Have We not expanded your breast for you?", [Q. 94:1](#)) as an example whose intended meaning is "We have expanded it" (شرحناه), with the interrogative form adopted for rhetorical effect.^[3]
- Ghani states that departure from genuine information-seeking is understood through contextual indicators (قرائن الحال or قرائن المقال), while the interrogative wording itself remains present.^[1]
- The meaning conveyed through this departure varies according to context. The sources identify purposes including Affirmation, Denial, Rebuke, Command, Prohibition, Astonishment, Threat, Glorification, Belittling, and others.^{[1][2][4]}
- Abdul-Raof describes the corresponding communicative mechanism in terms of the [communicator](#) producing an effect upon the [addressee](#) rather than seeking an answer.^[6]

Recognition

From the sources

The Interrogative may be present when:

- An utterance has interrogative form, but the context indicates that the [communicator](#) is not genuinely seeking information previously unknown to them.^{[1][2]}
- The matter asked about is already known to the [communicator](#), so that the interrogative construction instead conveys another purpose understood from context.^[2]
- Contextual indicators (قرائن الحال or قرائن المقال) establish that the interrogative wording has departed from its ordinary



الاستفهام

INTEROG: The Interrogative

Category

Sentence Construction & Syntactical Stylistics ('ilm al-ma'ānī)

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Provenance

Sources

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- information-seeking meaning.^[1]
- The utterance does not function as a genuine request for an answer but instead produces a rhetorical effect upon the addressee.^[6]

Encyclopedia Interpretation

The following diagnostic tests aid identification:

- **Test 1 — Information-seeking:** determine whether the [communicator](#) is plausibly seeking information not already known to them. If so, the construction is an ordinary interrogative rather than an instance of the rhetorical device.
- **Test 2 — Context:** if literal information-seeking is not intended, determine whether contextual indications support another meaning or purpose, such as Affirmation, Denial, Rebuke, Command, Prohibition, Astonishment, or Threat.
- **Test 3 — Rhetorical function:** determine whether interpreting the utterance as a genuine question fails to account for its communicative function, while one of the contextually supported rhetorical purposes does.

For identification of the interrogative construction itself, rather than its rhetorical use, see [Questions and Interrogatives in Arabic \(al-Istifhām\)](#).

Diagnostic Communicative Enhancements

From the sources

The Interrogative can have a wide range of pragmatic effects as described in the "[Types of The Interrogative](#)" section.

Applying the Recognition Framework

The information on this page can be used to evaluate whether this device is present in a candidate [lexical item](#) using the [Specific Device Recognition](#) part of the [Universal Framework for Identifying Arabic Rhetorical Devices](#):

- Use the Definition, Mechanism, and Recognition sections of this page in [Step 1](#).
- Apply the substitution test in [Step 2](#).
- Consider contextual indicators in [Step 3](#).
- Use the Diagnostic Communicative Enhancements section of this page in [Step 4](#).

Types of The Interrogative

Command (*al-amr*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys a command rather than seeking information.^{[2][7][8]}

Source Example

فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُنْتَهُوْنَ

Will you then desist?
Quran 5:91

Explanation

The interrogative does not genuinely ask whether the addressees will desist, but conveys a command. Hashimi explicitly glosses its intended force as *intahū* ("Desist!").^[9]

Constructed Example

هَلْ سَتُنْظِفُ غُرْفَتَكَ؟

Will you clean your room?

Explanation

The literal question requests confirmation of a future act, but the intended force is a command: "Clean your room!"

Prohibition (*al-nahy*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys a prohibition rather than seeking information.^{[2][7][10][8]}

Source Example

أَتُخْشَوْنَهُمْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ أَحَقُّ أَنْ تُخْشَوْهُ

Do you fear them? No, it is God whom you should more justly fear.

Quran 9:13

Explanation

The literal question ("do you fear them?") in fact conveys a prohibition against fearing anyone other than God.^[9]

Constructed Example

أَتُخَاطِرُ بِصِحَّتِكَ بِالتَّدخينِ؟

Do you risk your health by smoking?

Explanation

The question is not a genuine inquiry into the addressee's habits, but conveys the sense "Do not risk your health by smoking."

Rebuke (*al-tawbīkh*)

From the sources

The Interrogative rebukes the [addressee](#) for something done, or being done, that should not have been.^{[1][2][11][7][10]}

Source Example

أَفَيُتَّبِعُونَ الْبَاطِلَ وَيُؤْمِنُونَ وَيُحْمَدُونَ اللَّهَ هُمْ يَكْفُرُونَ

Is it that they believe in falsehood and are ungrateful for the favour of God?

Quran 16:72

Explanation

The question rebukes the addressees' conduct rather than genuinely inquiring about it.^[12]

Constructed Example

كَيْفَ تَعْرِفُ أَنَّهُ لَنْ يَكْتَشِفَ أَحَدٌ مَا فَعَلْتَهُ؟

How do you know that no one will find out what you did?

Explanation

The question rebukes the addressee's assumption rather than requesting an explanation.

Mockery (*al-tahakkum wa al-sukhriyya*)

From the sources

The Interrogative mocks, ridicules, or expresses scorn rather than genuinely seeking information.^{[1][2][10][8]} Abdul-Raof separately describes a rhetorical interrogative use as "sarcasm".^[7]

Source Example

أَعْقَلُكَ يَسْوَغُ لَكَ أَنْ تَفْعَلَ كَذَا؟!

Does your intellect justify you doing such a thing?!

Explanation

The question expresses scornful belittling rather than genuine doubt.^[13]

Constructed Example

أَهَذَا مَا تُسَمِّيهِ إِنِّجَارًا؟

Is this what you call an achievement?

Explanation

The **communicator** is not asking whether the **addressee** calls the result an achievement, but uses interrogative form to mock the description of it as such.

Threat (*al-wa'id / altahdid*)

From the sources

The Interrogative threatens or warns the **addressee** rather than seeking information.^{[1][2][11][7][10][8]}

Source Example

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِعَادٍ

Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with 'Aad?

Quran 105:1

Explanation

The question conveys a threat/warning by reference to past punishment.^[13]

Constructed Example

هَلْ تَرْغَبُ مِنِّي أَنْ أَغْضَبَ؟

Do you want me to become angry?

Explanation

The question conveys an implicit threat rather than seeking the addressee's actual wish.

Denial (*al-inkār*)

From the sources

The Interrogative denies or rejects the matter expressed by the question rather than seeking information about it.^{[1][2][7][10][8]}

The denial rejects a claim as false (إنكار تكذبي) or it may be a rebuke for something that ought not to have occurred (إنكار).^{[1][2]} The denial may also be classified according to whether it relates to a past or future action.^{[10][8]}

Source Example

أَغَيْرَ لِلَّهِ تَدْعُونَ

Would you call upon any other than Allah for help?

Quran 6:40

Explanation

The question denies that people can call upon anyone other than God.^[9]

The question denies that people can call upon anyone other than God.^[1]

Constructed Example

أَيُّسْتَوِي الْمُجْتَهِدُ وَالْكَسُولُ؟

Are the diligent person and the lazy person equal?

Explanation

The question does not genuinely seek a judgement about whether the two are equal; it denies their equivalence through interrogative form.

Impossibility

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys that the state of affairs expressed by the question is impossible for the [addressee](#).^[7]

Source Example

أَتَشْرَبُ مَاءَ الْبَحْرِ؟

Do you drink sea water?

Explanation

Said to convey that the matter literally asked about is impossible.^[14]

Constructed Example

هَلْ تَظُنُّ أَنَّهُ يُمَكِّنُكَ الْهُرُوبُ مِنْ قَدَرِكَ؟

Do you think you can escape your destiny?

Explanation

The question conveys that escaping one's destiny is impossible, rather than genuinely asking the addressee's belief.

Astonishment (*al-ta'ajjub*)

From the sources

Interrogative expresses astonishment or wonder at something rather than seeking information about it.^{[1][2][4][11][10][8]}

Source Example

مَا لِهَذَا الرَّسُولِ يَأْكُلُ الطَّعَامَ وَيَمْشِي فِي الْأَسْوَاقِ

"What kind of messenger is this who eats food and goes about in market-places?

Quran: 25:7

Explanation

The question expresses astonishment that a messenger of God would do ordinary things like eating food and going to the market.^[13]

Constructed Example

كَيْفَ نَجَحْتَ فِي الْإِمْتِحَانِ دُونَ أَنْ تَدْرُسَ؟

How did you pass the exam without studying?

Explanation

The question conveys astonishment at the outcome rather than seeking an explanation.

Affirmation (*al-taqrīr*)

From the sources

The Interrogative is used to make the addressee acknowledge/affirm something already established, generally by prefacing a negated clause with hamza.^{[1][2][4][10][8][3]}

Source Example

أَلَمْ نُشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ

Did We not expand your breast for you?

Quran: 94:1

Explanation

The negated hamza-question compels acknowledgement of an already-established fact ("We did expand it").^{[15][9]}

Constructed Example

أَلَمْ أُسَاعِدْكَ فِي الْمَاضِي؟

Did I not help you in the past?

Explanation

The negated question compels the addressee to acknowledge a fact already known to both parties.

Amplification (*al-takthīr*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys multiplicity or abundance rather than seeking a literal quantity.^{[2][11][8][4][10]}

Source Example

وَكَمْ مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْنَاهَا

How many towns have We destroyed?

Quran 7:4

Explanation

The word *kam* here does not seek a numeric answer but conveys the great number of destroyed towns.^[16]

Constructed Example

كَمْ مَرَّةٍ حَذَرْتُكَ مِنْ هَذَا؟

How many times have I warned you about this?

Explanation

The word *kam* here conveys the great number of prior warnings rather than seeking a count.

Negation (*al-nafy*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys negation (, *nafy*), with the interrogative expression functioning with the force of a negative statement.^{[1][2][4][10][8]}

Source Example

هَلْ جَزَاءُ الْإِحْسَانِ إِلَّا الْإِحْسَانُ

Is the reward for good anything but good?

Qur'an 55:60

Explanation

The Interrogative here is conveying Negation (النفى, *nafy*). The question does not seek information about what the reward for good might be; it conveys that the reward for good is nothing other than good.^{[17][9]}

Constructed Example

هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الصَّادِقُ وَالْكَاذِبُ؟

Are the truthful and the liar equal?

Explanation

The question does not genuinely seek a judgement about whether the two are equal; it conveys the negation of their equality.

Glorification (*al-ta'zīm*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys glorification by magnifying or exalting the referent asked about.^{[1][2][11][10][8]}

Source Example

مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ

Who is it that can intercede with Him except by His permission?

Qur'an 2:255

Explanation

The Interrogative here is conveying Glorification (التعظيم, *ta'zīm*). The question magnifies the authority of God by presenting intercession before Him as dependent entirely upon His permission.^[17]

Constructed Example

مَنْ يَبْلُغُ مَبْلَغَ هَذَا الْعَالِمِ فِي الْعِلْمِ؟

Who could attain the standing of this scholar in knowledge?

Explanation

The question is not primarily intended to identify another person, but to magnify the scholar's standing by presenting it as exceptionally difficult to equal.

Belittling (*al-tahqīr*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys Belittling (التحقير, *taḥqīr*) by diminishing the standing or significance of the referent asked about.^{[2][11][10][8]}

Source Example

أَهَذَا الَّذِي مَدَحْتَهُ كَثِيرًا

Is this the one whom you praised so greatly?

Explanation

The question in this example does not genuinely seek to establish the person's identity; it diminishes the person by expressing incredulity that someone of such apparently low standing should have received so much praise.^{[17][9]}

Constructed Example

أَهَذَا مَا تَفْتَخِرُ بِهِ؟

Is this what you are proud of?

Explanation

The question does not genuinely seek to identify what the **addressee** takes pride in, but diminishes the value or significance of the thing being presented as a source of pride.

Arousing Interest (*al-tashwīq*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys Arousing Interest (التشويق, *tashwīq*) by drawing the **addressee**'s attention and stirring eagerness towards what is about to be disclosed.^{[1][2][11][10][8]} Akkawi notes that al-Suyūṭī groups this together with Encouragement (التريغيب, *targhīb*) under a single heading rather than treating them separately.^[10]

Source Example

هَلْ أَذِلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ تِجَارَةٍ تُنْجِيكُمْ مِنْ عَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ

Shall I direct you to a transaction that will save you from a painful punishment?

Quran 61:10

Explanation

Rather than simply announcing what follows, the question first arouses the **addressees**' interest in learning about the figurative "transaction" that will save them.^{[17][9]}

Constructed Example

هَلْ أَخْبِرُكَ بِسِرٍّ يَغَيِّرُ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ؟

Shall I tell you a secret that will change everything?

Explanation

The question draws the **addressee**'s attention and creates eagerness to hear what the **communicator** is about to disclose.

Reproach (*al-ʾitāb*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys blame or disappointment towards the **addressee**.^{[1][10]}

Source Example

أَلَمْ يَأْنِ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْ تَخْشَعَ قُلُوبُهُمْ لِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ

Has the time not yet come for the believers that their hearts should be humbled at the remembrance of God?

Quran 57:16

Explanation

The question reproaches the believers for the delay in their hearts' submission, rather than genuinely asking about timing.^[18]

Constructed Example

أَلَمْ أَقِفْ مَعَكَ عِنْدَمَا احْتَجَجْتَ إِلَيَّ؟

Did I not stand by you when you needed me?

Explanation

The [communicator](#) does not genuinely seek confirmation of whether the support was given, but uses the question to reproach the [addressee](#) for conduct perceived as failing to acknowledge or reciprocate it.

Alarming/Magnifying Seriousness (*al-tahwīl*)

From the sources

The Interrogative magnifies the gravity or momentousness of the matter asked about.^{[1][2][11][10][8]}

Source Example

الْحَاقَّةُ ۖ مَا الْحَاقَّةُ ۖ وَمَا أُذْرَاكَ مَا الْحَاقَّةُ

The Inevitable Reality! What is the Inevitable Reality? And what will make you know what the Inevitable Reality is?

Qur'an 69:1–3

Explanation

Hashimi identifies the interrogative expressions here as conveying Alarming/Magnifying Seriousness (التهويل, *tahwīl*). The questions magnify the momentousness and gravity of the event rather than functioning as ordinary requests for information.^[19]

Constructed Example

وَمَا أُذْرَاكَ مَا الَّذِي سَيَحْدُثُ إِنْ قَبِيلَ هَذَا الْأَمْرِ؟

And what could make you comprehend what will happen if this matter fails?

Explanation

The question magnifies the seriousness of the possible consequences rather than merely requesting a prediction of what will happen.

Regret/Lament (*al-taḥassur* / *al-ḥuzn*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys Regret or Lament (الحسرة والحزن / التحسر, *ḥasra wa-ḥuzn* / *taḥassur*) by expressing sorrow over something lost, past, or no longer attainable.^{[1][2][10]}

Source Example

ما للمنازل أصبحت لا أهلها
أهلبي ولا جيرانها جيرانبي؟!

Why have these homes become places where neither the inhabitants are my kin, nor the neighbors my neighbors?

- Shams al-Dīn al-Kūfī

Explanation

The question is a lament at the situation of the homes rather than seeking literal information.^[13]

Constructed Example

أَيْنَ تِلْكَ الْأَيَّامُ الَّتِي كُنَّا نَجْتَمِعُ فِيهَا؟
Where are those days when we used to gather together?

Explanation

The question expresses sorrowful longing for days that have passed rather than genuinely asking where those days are.

Pride/Boasting (*al-fakhr*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys Pride or Boasting (الفخر, *fakhr*), particularly where the [communicator](#) asks rhetorically about themselves or their own qualities or achievements.^{[1][10]}

Source Example

أَلَيْسَ لِي مُلْكٌ مِصْرَ

Is not the kingdom of Egypt mine?
Quran 43:51

Explanation

Pharaoh's question does not seek confirmation of an unknown fact; it boasts of his dominion, calling on his people to acknowledge his greatness and supremacy.^[20]

Constructed Example

أَلَمْ أَكُنْ أَوَّلَ مَنْ وَقَفَ فِي وَجْهِ الْخَطَرِ؟

Was I not the first to stand in the face of danger?

Explanation

The [communicator](#) does not seek information about their own conduct, but invokes it rhetorically as a source of pride.

Deeming Remote/Improbable (*al-istib'ād*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys Deeming Remote or Improbable (الاستبعاد, *istib'ād*) by presenting the matter asked about as remote, unlikely, or difficult to conceive.^{[2][4][10][8]}

Source Example

أَتَنبِئُ لَهُمُ الذِّكْرَى وَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ رَسُولٌ مُبِينٌ

How can there be a reminder for them when a clear messenger has already come to them?

Qur'an 44:13

Explanation

The Interrogative here conveys Deeming Remote/Improbable (الاستبعاد, *istib'ād*). The question presents their taking heed as remote or unlikely in view of their previous response to a clear messenger.^{[21][9]}

Constructed Example

أَتَنَى لَهُ أَنْ يَبْلُغَ غَايَتَهُ وَهُوَ لَا يَسْعَى إِلَيْهَا؟

How could he reach his goal when he makes no effort towards it?

Explanation

The question does not genuinely ask how the goal might be reached, but presents its attainment as improbable given the absence of effort.

Familiarizing/Reassurance (*al-isti'nās*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys familiarizing or Reassurance by putting the [addressee](#) at ease or drawing them gently into conversation rather than primarily to obtain information.^{[2][10]}

Source Example

وَمَا تِلْكَ بِيَمِينِكَ يَا مُوسَىٰ

And what is that in your right hand, O Moses?
Qur'an 20:17

Explanation

The question addressed to Moses serves to create familiarity and put him at ease rather than functioning merely as a request to identify what he is holding.^[9]

Constructed Example

كَيْفَ وَجَدْتَ الطَّرِيقَ إِلَيْنَا؟

How did you find the journey here?

Explanation

Addressed conversationally to a newly arrived guest, the question may serve to put the [addressee](#) at ease and establish familiarity rather than merely seeking information about the journey.

Alerting to Error (*tanbīh 'alā al-Khaṭa'*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys Alerting to Error (التنبيه على الخطأ, *tanbīh 'alā al-khaṭa'*) by drawing the [addressee](#)'s attention to a mistaken preference, judgement, or choice.^[2]

Source Example

أَتَشْتَدِلُونَ الَّذِي هُوَ أَدْنَىٰ بِالَّذِي هُوَ خَيْرٌ

Would you exchange that which is better for that which is inferior?
Quran 2:61

Explanation

Hashimi identifies the Interrogative here as Alerting to Error (التنبيه على الخطأ). The question draws attention to the mistaken choice of preferring what is inferior over what is better.^[13]

Constructed Example

أَتَتْرَكُ الْأَوْضَحَ وَتَخْتَارُ الْأَشَدَّ غُمُوضًا؟

Would you leave what is clearer and choose what is more obscure?

Explanation

The question draws the [addressee](#)'s attention to what the [communicator](#) presents as a mistaken choice rather than merely asking which option will be selected.

Alerting to Falsehood (*tanbīh 'alā al-bāṭil*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys Alerting to Falsehood (التنبيه على الباطل, *tanbīh 'alā al-bāṭil*) by drawing attention to the falsity or invalidity of a claim or position.^[2]

Source Example

أَفَأَنْتَ تُسْمِعُ الصُّمَّ أَوْ تَهْدِي الْعُمْيَ

Can you make the deaf hear, or guide the blind?

Quran: 10:42

Explanation

Hashimi identifies the Interrogative here as Alerting to Falsehood (التنبيه على الباطل). The question exposes the invalidity of supposing that the [addressee](#) can compel those unreceptive to hear or be guided.^[13]

Constructed Example

أَفَتُظُنُّ أَنَّ الْكَذِبَ يَصِيرُ حَقًّا بِكَثْرَةِ تَكَرُّارِهِ؟

Do you think that falsehood becomes truth merely by being repeated often?

Explanation

The question does not genuinely seek the [addressee](#)'s opinion, but draws attention to the falsity of the proposition that repetition can transform a false claim into truth.

Alerting to Error of Course (*tanbīh 'alā ḍalāl al-ṭarīq*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys Alerting to Error of Course (التنبيه على ضلال الطريق, *tanbīh 'alā ḍalāl al-ṭarīq*) by drawing attention to the [addressee](#)'s having strayed from the right path or direction.^{[2][8]}

Source Example

فَإَيْنَ تَذْهَبُونَ

So where are you going?

Qur'an 81:26

Explanation

Hashimi identifies the Interrogative here as Alerting to Error of Course (التنبيه على ضلال الطريق). The question does not literally request a destination, but draws attention to the [addressees](#)' deviation from the correct course.^[13]

Constructed Example

فَإِلَى أَيْنَ تَمْضِي وَقَدْ تَرَكْتَ الطَّرِيقَ الصَّحِيحَ؟

Where are you heading when you have already left the right path?

Explanation

The question does not primarily seek a destination, but alerts the [addressee](#) to having departed from the course presented as correct.

Equivalence (*al-taswīya*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys Equivalence (التساوي, *al-taswīya*) where two alternatives are presented as having the same

Source Example

سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أُنذِرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

It is the same for them whether you warn them or do not warn them; they will not believe.

Qur'an 2:6

Explanation

Hashimi explicitly identifies the Interrogative here as conveying Equivalence (التسوية, *taswiya*). The interrogative hamza in *a-andhartahum* introduces one alternative, paired with *am* and the contrasting alternative *lam tundhirhum*. The construction does not genuinely ask which alternative applies; both warning and not warning are presented as equivalent with respect to the outcome that follows: they will not believe.^[9]

Constructed Example

أَسَافَرْتَ الْيَوْمَ أَمْ غَدًا؟ فَالْأَمْرُ عِنْدِي سَوَاءٌ.

Will you travel today or tomorrow? It is all the same to me.

Explanation

The two alternatives are presented as equivalent from the **communicator's** perspective; choosing one rather than the other does not alter the relevant outcome.

Impatience (*al-istibtā'*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys Impatience (الاستبطاء, *istibtā'*) by expressing that something desired or awaited is perceived as delayed.^{[1][2]}

Source Example

الْأَمْ وَفِيمَ تَنْقَلُبُنَا رِكَابَ
وَنَأْمُلُ أَنْ يَكُونَ لَنَا أَوَانُ؟
فَهَلْ لِي أَنْ أَرَاكَ قُبَيْلَ مَوْتِي
وَلَوْ فِي النَّوْمِ يَا بِنْتَ الْكِرَامِ؟

How long and for what purpose will mounts carry us from place to place, while we hope that our time will come?
Will I ever see you before my death, even if only in a dream, O daughter of the noble?

Explanation

Hashimi explicitly identifies the interrogatives in this example as conveying Impatience (الاستبطاء, *istibtā'*). The questions express impatience at the continued delay of the hoped-for meeting rather than functioning merely as requests for information.^[22]

Constructed Example

مَتَى يَصِلُ الرَّدُّ وَقَدْ انْتَضَرْنَا أَيَّامًا؟

When will the reply arrive, after we have already waited for days?

Explanation

The question expresses impatience at the perceived delay of the expected reply rather than functioning merely as a neutral inquiry about its time of arrival.

Feigned Ignorance (*al-tajāhul*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys Feigned Ignorance (التجاهل, *tajāhul*) when the [communicator](#) asks about something despite already knowing the answer, for a rhetorical purpose rather than to obtain information.^[10]

Source Example

أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْهِ الذِّكْرُ مِنْ بَيْنِنَا

Has the message been sent down to him, of all of us?
Quran 38:8

Explanation

The disbelievers use the question to express surprise that revelation should have come to Muhammad rather than to one more prominent among them, though they knew the truth of his prophethood.^[23]

Constructed Example

أَأَنْتَ الَّذِي كَسَرْتَ هَذَا وَقَدْ رَأَيْتَكَ تَفْعَلُهُ؟

Was it you who broke this, when I saw you do it?

Explanation

The [communicator](#) already knows who performed the action, but adopts the form of a question rather than seeking genuinely unknown information.

Reminder (*al-tadhkīr*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys Reminder (التذكير, *tadhkīr*) by recalling to the [addressee](#) something already known or previously experienced rather than seeking new information.^[10]

Source Example

أَلَمْ نُشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ

Did We not expand for you your breast?
Quran 94:1

Explanation

Akkawi identifies the Interrogative here as Reminder (التذكير, *tadhkīr*). The question does not seek to establish whether these things occurred, but recalls them to the [addressee](#) as matters already known.^[24]

Constructed Example

أَلَمْ تَقِفْ مَعَكَ يَوْمَ احْتَجَجْتَ إِلَيْنَا؟

Did we not stand by you on the day you needed us?

Explanation

The question recalls to the [addressee](#) a past event presumed to be known rather than genuinely seeking information about whether it occurred.

Encouragement (*al-targhīb*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys Encouragement (الترويج, *targhīb*) by presenting something desirable in interrogative form so as to encourage the [addressee](#) towards it.^[10]

Source Example

هَلْ أَذُكُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ تِجَارَةٍ تُنْجِيكُمْ مِنْ عَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ

Shall I direct you to a transaction that will save you from a painful punishment?

Quran 61:10

Explanation

Akkawi identifies the Interrogative here as conveying Encouragement (الترغيب, *targhib*). The question presents what follows as desirable and encourages the [addressees](#) towards it rather than functioning merely as a request for an answer.^[25]

Constructed Example

هَلْ أَذُكُّكَ عَلَىٰ طَرِيقٍ يُقَرِّبُكَ مِنْ هَدَفِكَ؟

Shall I show you a way that will bring you closer to your goal?

Explanation

The question presents the proposed course as desirable and encourages the [addressee](#) to become receptive to it rather than merely asking whether guidance is wanted.

Offer (*al-ʿarḍ*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys an Offer (العرض, *ʿarḍ*) by gently inviting or requesting the [addressee](#) to undertake an action.^{[10][8]}

Source Example

أَلَا تُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ

Would you not like God to forgive you?

Qur'an 24:22

Explanation

Akkawi identifies the Interrogative here as conveying an Offer (العرض, *ʿarḍ*). The interrogative does not function merely to discover whether the [addressees](#) desire God's forgiveness, but gently prompts them towards the course of action associated with attaining it.^[26]

Constructed Example

أَلَا تَجْلِسُ مَعَنَا قَلِيلًا؟

Won't you sit with us for a little while?

Explanation

The question functions as a gentle invitation to sit with the [communicator](#) rather than primarily as an inquiry into whether the [addressee](#) will do so.

Wishing (*al-tamannī*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys Wishing (التمني, *tamannī*) when an interrogative construction expresses a desire for something rather than genuinely seeking information.^{[10][8]}

Source Example

فَهَلْ لَنَا مِنْ شُفَعَاءَ فَيَشْفَعُوا لَنَا أَوْ نُرَدُّ فَنَعْمَلْ غَيْرَ الَّذِي كُنَّا نَعْمَلُ

Are there any intercessors for us who might intercede for us, or might we be returned so that we could act differently from what we used to do?

Explanation

Akkawi identifies the Interrogative here as conveying Wishing (التمني, *tamanni*). The speakers express a desire for intercession or for an opportunity to return and act differently, rather than merely requesting information about whether either possibility exists.^[27]

Constructed Example

فَهَلْ لَنَا أَنْ نَعُودَ يَوْمًا إِلَى تِلْكَ الْأَيَّامِ؟

Might we one day return to those days?

Explanation

The question expresses the **communicator's** wish to return to a past time rather than functioning primarily as a request for information about whether such a return will occur.

Supplication (al-du‘ā‘)**From the sources**

The Interrogative conveys Supplication (الدعاء, *du‘ā‘*) when the interrogative form is used to make an appeal or plea rather than to seek unknown information.^[10]

Source Example

أَتُهْلِكُنَا بِمَا فَعَلَ السُّفَهَاءُ مِنَّا

Will You destroy us for what the foolish among us have done?

Quran 7:155

Explanation

The interrogative of supplication expresses entreaty rather than a genuine question.^[28]

Constructed Example

هَلْ لِي مِنْ عَفْوِكَ نَصِيبٌ؟

Might I have a share of your forgiveness?

Explanation

The question functions as a plea for forgiveness rather than primarily seeking information about whether forgiveness is available.

Informing (al-ikhbār)**From the sources**

The Interrogative conveys Informing or Reporting (الإخبار, *ikhbār*) when an utterance takes interrogative form while functioning semantically as a statement or report rather than as a genuine request for information.^{[10][8]}

Source Example

أَفِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ أَمْ ارْتَابُوا

Is there a disease in their hearts, or have they fallen into doubt?

Quran 24:50

Explanation

Akkawi reports that al-Suyūṭī identifies this as an example of Informing (الإخبار, *ikhbār*). The interrogative form does

not function primarily to obtain unknown information, but conveys a statement concerning the condition of those being described.^[21]

Constructed Example

أَلَيْسَ هَذَا هُوَ الْأَمْرُ الَّذِي حَذَرْنَاكَ مِنْهُ؟

Is this not the very matter we warned you about?

Explanation

The question functions substantially as a report or assertion that the present situation is the very one previously warned about, rather than primarily seeking confirmation from the [addressee](#).

Argumentative Reproach (*al-tabkīt*)

From the sources

The Interrogative conveys Argumentative Reproach (التبكيّة, *tabkīt*) when the question confronts the [addressee](#) with a claim or position in a manner that rebukes or confounds them rather than genuinely seeking information.^{[10][8]}

Source Example

أَأَنْتَ قُلْتَ لِلنَّاسِ اتَّخِذُونِي وَأُمِّي إِلَهَيْنِ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ

Did you say to the people, "Take me and my mother as two gods besides God"?

Qur'an 5:116

Explanation

The interrogative wording here conveys *tabkīt*. He explains it as a reproach directed at the Christians concerning what they claimed, rather than as a genuine request to discover whether the statement had been made.^[23]

Constructed Example

أَتَدَّعِي الْعَدْلَ وَأَنْتَ تَحْكُمُ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ عَلَى هَذَا النَّحْوِ؟

Do you claim justice while judging between people in this way?

Explanation

The question confronts the [addressee](#) with the incompatibility between their claim and their conduct, functioning as reproach rather than as a genuine inquiry into whether they claim to be just.

Technical

- The detailed linguistic system underlying Arabic interrogation — including the inventory of interrogative tools, the distinction between *taṣawwur* and *taṣdīq*, the respective functions of *hamza* and *hal*, simple and compound *hal*, and the semantic functions of the interrogative nouns — is treated separately at [Questions and Interrogatives in Arabic \(al-Istifhām\)](#). This page restricts its main analysis to the rhetorical use of interrogative constructions.
- The supplied sources differ considerably in their inventories and classifications of rhetorical purposes. Purposes listed on this page are therefore treated as source-attested functions rather than as members of a single harmonised taxonomy.^{[1][2][4][11][10]}
- Akkawi (pp. 122–137) records a particularly extensive catalogue of rhetorical purposes, drawing chiefly on al-Suyūṭī and al-Zarkashī. Purposes attested there but not independently identified by the other supplied sources are retained as single-source attestations rather than treated as universally recognised categories.^[10]

Encyclopedia Interpretation

The Interrogative provides a particularly clear illustration of the distinction made in this [Encyclopedia](#) between a rhetorical operation and its rhetorical effects. The identifiable operation remains comparatively stable: an interrogative construction is used for a purpose other than genuine information-seeking. The effect produced by that operation, however, is context-dependent and may be interpreted as Command, Prohibition, Rebuke, Mockery, Threat, Astonishment, Affirmation, or numerous other meanings. Because such effects are more dependent upon contextual interpretation, analysts may agree that the rhetorical operation is the Interrogative while differing over the precise effect it produces. Accordingly, effects such as Astonishment (التعجب, *ta'ajjub*) and Mockery (التهكم والسخرية, *tahakkum / sukhriyya*) are recorded as possible effects

of the Interrogative rather than treated as independently annotatable rhetorical devices. See [Principle 4: The Encyclopedia Uses a Mechanism-First Typology](#).

- Impossibility is retained under the English label used by Abdul-Raof; no corresponding Arabic technical label has been assigned editorially in the absence of one established by the supplied source.

Historical

- Funūn attributes an additional set of extended meanings of al-istikhbār to Ibn Fāris (d. 395 AH), drawn from his work al-Ṣāhibī fī Fiqh al-Lughā, including uses glossed as tafajjuʿ ("lamentation"), tabkīt ("reproach"), istirshād ("seeking guidance"), ifhām ("informing"), takthīr ("amplification"), and taḥqīq wa-ikhbār ("verification and reporting").^[4] Several of these correspond to purposes Akkawi attests independently and by a different route (via al-Suyūṭī rather than Ibn Fāris): compare Regret/Lament (التفجع), Argumentative reproach (التبكيـت), Seeking guidance (الاسترشاد), Informing (الإخبار), and Amplification (التكثير) above.^[10] Atiq independently cites this same Ibn Fāris material directly, with its own examples, giving a third route to the same cross-reference.^[8]

Further Reading

- [Not all questions require an answer](#) 

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