

Questions and Interrogatives in Arabic (al-Istifhām)

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From The Encyclopedia of Arabic Rhetoric

Affirmation in Arabic (al-Taʿkid) describes the ordinary linguistic system by which a **communicator** strengthens a reporting statement according to the **addressee's** disposition towards the proposition being conveyed. For the rhetorical device in which the degree of affirmation deliberately departs from what would ordinarily be expected for the addressee's state, see **AFFIRM: Affirmation**.

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Overview

Affirmation (*al-taʿkid* or *al-tawkid*) strengthens or confirms the proposition conveyed by a reporting statement (*al-khabar*). Ghani gives the linguistic meaning of *al-tawkid* as strengthening (*al-taqwiya*).^{[1][2][3][4][5]}

The degree of affirmation ordinarily appropriate to a reporting statement depends upon the **addressee's** disposition towards its proposition. The sources distinguish three corresponding modes of reporting (*adrub al-khabar*).^{[2][3][1][4][5]}

Initial Reporting

In initial reporting (*al-khabar al-ibtidāʾī*), the **addressee** is open-minded (*khālī al-dhihn*) towards the proposition and neither doubts nor denies it. Affirmatory marking is therefore ordinarily unnecessary.^{[2][3][1][4][5]}

Source Example

﴿الْمَالُ وَالْبَنُونَ زِينَةُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَالْبَاقِيَةُ الصَّالِحَةُ خَيْرٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ ثَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ أَمَلًا﴾

Wealth and children are the adornment of the life of this world, but the enduring good deeds are better with your Lord in reward and better in hope. (Q18:46)

Explanation

Ghani gives the verse as an example of a statement requiring no affirmatory device because the **addressee** is neither doubtful nor denying.^[6]

Constructed Example

الطقس جميلٌ اليوم.

The weather is pleasant today.

Explanation

The proposition is presented to an open-minded **addressee** without any affirmatory device, corresponding to ordinary initial reporting.

Request Reporting

In request reporting (*al-khabar al-talabī*), the **addressee** is doubtful, hesitant, or uncertain (*mutaraddid*) regarding the proposition. An affirmatory element is therefore ordinarily appropriate in order to strengthen the judgment and remove the uncertainty.^{[2][3][1][4][5]}

Source Example

إِنَّ الْإِمْتِحَانَ قَرِيبٌ

Indeed, the examination is near.

Explanation

Ghani gives the sentence as an example of affirmation directed towards a doubtful **addressee**. The proposition is strengthened by one affirmatory device, *inna*.^[6]

Constructed Example

إِنَّ الطَّرِيقَ مُزْدَجِمٌ.

Indeed, the road is congested.

Explanation

The [addressee](#) is uncertain whether the road is congested, so the proposition is strengthened with one affirmatory device, *inna*, corresponding to ordinary request reporting.

Denial Reporting

In denial reporting (*al-khabar al-inkārī*), the [addressee](#) denies or rejects the proposition (*munkir*). The statement is therefore ordinarily strengthened more heavily, with the degree of affirmation increasing according to the strength of the denial.^{[2][3][1][4][5]}

Source Example

وَاللَّهِ إِنَّ الْإِمْتِحَانَ لَقَرِيبٌ

By God, indeed the examination is surely near.

Explanation

Ghani gives this as part of his graduated series illustrating increasing degrees of affirmation. The proposition is strengthened by three affirmatory elements: the oath (*al-qasam*), *inna*, and the *lām* attached to قَرِيب, corresponding to the stronger affirmation appropriate to denial.^[7]

Constructed Example

وَاللَّهِ إِنَّ الطَّرِيقَ لَمُزْدَجِمٌ.

By God, indeed the road is surely congested.

Explanation

The [addressee](#) denies that the road is congested, so the [communicator](#) strengthens the proposition with the oath, *inna*, and the *lām*, corresponding to ordinary denial reporting.

Degree and Accumulation of Affirmation

Affirmatory devices may be combined within a single reporting statement. Their accumulation increases the strength of affirmation.^{[2][3][1][5]}

Ghani illustrates this cumulatively with a series of statements concerning the nearness of an examination:^[1]

- إِنَّ الْإِمْتِحَانَ قَرِيبٌ — one affirmatory element: *inna*.
- إِنَّ الْإِمْتِحَانَ لَقَرِيبٌ — two affirmatory elements: *inna* and the *lām*.
- وَاللَّهِ إِنَّ الْإِمْتِحَانَ لَقَرِيبٌ — three affirmatory elements: the oath, *inna*, and the *lām*.
- وَاللَّهِ إِنَّ الْإِمْتِحَانَ إِنَّ الْإِمْتِحَانَ لَقَرِيبٌ — four affirmatory elements, adding lexical repetition.
- وَاللَّهِ إِنَّ الْإِمْتِحَانَ إِنَّ الْإِمْتِحَانَ لَقَرِيبٌ قُرْبًا شَدِيدًا — five affirmatory elements, additionally employing the absolute object (*al-maf'ūl al-muṭlaq*).

This progression illustrates the cumulative and separately identifiable nature of affirmatory devices.^[8]

Means of Affirmation

Arabic employs a wide range of linguistic and grammatical means to strengthen reporting statements.^{[2][3][1][5]}

Common Affirmatory Tools

Frequently attested means include:

- *inna* and *anna*.^{[2][3][1][5]}
- The initial *lām*.^{[2][3][1][5]}

- Oaths (*al-qasam*).^{[2][3][1][5]}
- The separating pronoun (*damīr al-faṣl*).^{[2][3][1][5]}
- The heavy and light forms of *nūn al-tawkīd*.^{[2][3][1][5]}
- *qad* with the past-tense verb.^{[2][3][1][5]}
- *al-sīn* and *sawfa* in appropriate future constructions.^{[2][3][5]}
- Certain grammatically additional particles (*al-hurūf al-zā'ida*).^{[2][3][1][5]}
- *innamā*.^{[3][1][5]}
- Repetition (*al-takrār*), including repetition of negation in appropriate constructions.^{[3][1][5]}
- Fronting and postponement (*al-taqdīm wa-l-ta'khīr*), where the altered order contributes affirmatory force.^{[1][3][5]}

Ghani also includes particles of attention, conditional constructions, and other context-dependent constructions among the means through which affirmation may be realised.^[1] :contentReference[oaicite:2]{index=2}

Nominal and Verbal Sentences

The means of affirmation vary according to sentence structure.

In nominal sentences (*al-jumla al-ismiyya*), Ghani lists devices such as the initial *lām*, *inna*, *anna*, and the oath among the available affirmatory constructions.^[1]

In verbal sentences (*al-jumla al-fi'liyya*), affirmation may occur through forms such as *nūn al-tawkīd*, an oath together with the *lām* of the oath response, and *qad* before the past-tense verb.^[1]

Funūn and Abdul-Raof additionally treat the use of a nominal sentence in place of its verbal counterpart and the fronting of the logical subject before its verb as grammatical means of increasing affirmation.^{[3][5]}

Affirmation of Positive and Negative Statements

Affirmation applies both to positive assertion (*al-ithbāt*) and to negation (*al-nafy*).^[1]

Ghani illustrates affirmation within negative statements by contrasting:

- مَا رَبُّكَ بِظَلَّامٍ — the negative proposition is affirmed through the additional *bā'*.
- وَاللَّهِ مَا رَبُّكَ بِظَلَّامٍ — the same proposition is strengthened further by combining the oath with the additional *bā'*.

Thus, affirmation strengthens the certainty of the proposition whether the proposition itself is affirmative or negative.^[9] :contentReference[oaicite:3]{index=3}

Examples of Specific Affirmatory Constructions

Ghani gives several Qur'anic examples illustrating particular means of affirmation.

Source Example

﴿إِنَّ هُدَىٰ اللَّهِ هُوَ الْهُدَىٰ﴾

Indeed, God's guidance is the true guidance. (Q2:120)

Explanation

The proposition is affirmed by *inna* and further strengthened by the separating pronoun *ḍamīr al-faṣl* in هو.^[7]

Constructed Example

إِنَّ خَالِدًا هُوَ الْمُدِيرُ.

Indeed, Khalid is the manager.

Explanation

The proposition is affirmed by *inna* and further strengthened by the separating pronoun *ḍamīr al-faṣl* in هو.

Source Example

﴿وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَذُو مَغْفِرَةٍ لِّلنَّاسِ عَلَىٰ ظُلْمِهِمْ﴾

Indeed, your Lord is surely full of forgiveness for people despite their wrongdoing. (Q13:6)

Explanation

Explanation:
The proposition is strengthened by *inna* and the *lām* attached to ذُو.^[9]

Constructed Example

إِنَّ الْمُعَلِّمَ لَذُو خَبْرَةٍ وَاسِعَةٍ.

Indeed, the teacher surely has extensive experience.

Explanation

The proposition is strengthened by *inna* and the *lām* attached to ذُو.

Source Example

﴿وَإِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَشَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ﴾

Indeed, your Lord is surely severe in punishment. (Q13:6)

Explanation

The proposition likewise combines *inna* with the *lām* to increase its affirmatory force.^[9]

Constructed Example

إِنَّ هَذَا الْعَمَلَ لَصَعْبٌ.

Indeed, this task is surely difficult.

Explanation

The proposition combines *inna* with the *lām* attached to the predicate صَعِبَ, increasing its affirmatory force.

Lexical Expressions of Affirmation

Affirmation may also be conveyed by lexical expressions whose meaning itself conveys certainty or confirmation. Ghani gives expressions such as:

- لَا شَكَّ — "there is no doubt";
- لَا رَيْبَ — "there is no doubt";
- حَقًّا — "truly";
- صِدْقًا — "truthfully";
- يَقِينًا — "certainly";
- لَا بُدَّ — "inevitably";
- لَا مِرَاءَ — "without dispute".

These expressions can themselves add affirmatory force without functioning as one of the dedicated grammatical particles listed above.^[10]:contentReference[oaicite:4]{index=4}

Functions of Affirmation

In its ordinary use, affirmation strengthens the proposition conveyed by the statement.

Ghani explicitly gives the rhetorical benefit of affirmation as:

يُعَوِّي الْمَعْنَى، وَيَزِيدُ تَأْيِيدَهُ فِي النَّفْسِ

"It strengthens the meaning and increases its effect upon the psyche."^[11]:contentReference[oaicite:5]{index=5}

For a doubtful [addressee](#), affirmation helps remove hesitation and establish certainty regarding the proposition.^{[2][3][5]}

For a denying [addressee](#), the degree of affirmation ordinarily increases in accordance with the strength of the denial.^{[2][3][1][4][5]}

‘Atīq additionally associates an affirmatory device such as *inna* with economy of expression (*al-ijāz*), since an affirmatory construction may perform work that would otherwise require repetition.^[2]

Funūn notes that an affirmatory construction may also contribute to the cohesion and expressive quality of discourse, such that removing an element such as *inna* from an appropriate construction can diminish its *rawnaq al-naẓm*.^[3]

Ordinary and Rhetorical Use

The system described above represents the ordinary correspondence between the [addressee](#)'s disposition and the degree of affirmation appropriate to it. The [communicator](#) ordinarily regulates affirmation according to whether the addressee is open-minded, doubtful, or denying.^{[2][3][1][4][5]}

Arabic rhetoric also recognises deliberate departure from this expected correspondence (*al-khurūj ‘an muqtaḍā al-zāhir*). That rhetorical exploitation of the ordinary system is treated separately at [AFFIRM: Affirmation](#).^{[2][3][4][5]}

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1.

↑

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[a](#)[b](#)

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↑

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