

## Some Functions of Ellipsis in Religious Texts

Assist. Prof Abbas Deygan Darweesh

College of Education/ University of Babylon

### Abstract:

Ellipsis is the non-expression of sentence elements whose meaning can be retrieved by the addressee <sup>(1)</sup>. In grammatical analysis ellipsis is a term used for a sentence, where for reasons of economy, emphasis or style a part of the structure has been omitted. Using ellipsis can restrict possible readings, express otherwise ineffable meanings, clarify discourse functions and establish rapport between the addresser and the addressee.

### Preliminaries

Ellipsis is the non-expression of sentence elements whose meaning can be the addressee. It is the shared information that allows the addresser retrieved by to omit out things that have been said, or hinted at earlier. In grammatical analysis, ellipsis is a term used to refer to a sentence where, for reasons of economy, emphasis or style, apart of the structure has been omitted, which is recoverable from the scrutiny of the context. For further information see: Halliday, 1994; Quirk et al, 1985; Crystal 2003; Hendriks, 2004; May, 2005; Bertomen, 2005; Hardt, 2005. In literature on Arabic, ellipsis is preferred since it shortens discourse and makes it easily learnt by heart and recited. This can definitely be noticed in poetry, speeches and proverbs. Following the trails of ellipsis, the meaning can easily be grasped without any modification and the style 'will be effective. (ابن جني، ١٩٥٢ : ٨٣) ; (مطلوب، ١٩٨٠ : ٢٠٧) claims that

Arabs prefer brevity to prolixity because the former leads to understanding whereas the latter to misunderstanding. Although ellipsis is a highly pervasive phenomenon in natural languages, its function has largely remained a mystery. Using ellipsis can restrict possible readings, express otherwise ineffable meanings, clarify discourse functions and establish rapport between the addresser and the addressee.

In this paper, I argue that ellipsis has more interpersonal functions than merely meeting the address's wish to reduce his efforts. As such; this paper limits itself to the exploration of such functions as realized in verbal sentence in the religious book called "Nahjul-Balagha" (henceforth N.B.) where in the elided forms contribute different functions than their full counter forms do. This paper is structured as follows. Section one introduces the book of "Nahjul- Balagha" (The Peak of Eloquence). Section two highlights the conception of linguistic ellipsis in classical Arabic <sup>(2)</sup>. Section three is dedicated thoroughly to the analysis of various functions of ellipsis explicable in N.B. And section four rounds the paper off with conclusions.

### 1. Nahjul-Balagha (The Peak of Eloquence)

Nahjul-Balagha is the most reputed collection of the utterances of Ali Bin Abi Talib (A.S.) (The Prince of Believers). The book was compiled by Sharif Razi towards the close of the 4<sup>th</sup> century of Hijra. This book is divided into three categories: firstly, sermons and decrees, secondly, letters and communications and thirdly, maxims and counsels. The sermons and preaches of Ali Bin Abi Talib are so highly valued and

---

<sup>(1)</sup> The terms addresser /addressee are used here to refer to the speaker/writer and the listener/reader respectively.

<sup>(2)</sup> The term Classical Arabic refers to the language known to us from about the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Arabic language has been the medium of expression for the works of poets, historians, theologians, philosophers and other scholars. Furthermore, it is the language of the Glorious Quran.

venerated in the Islamic world. They are taught, read and learnt as reflections on philosophy, piety and faith. The sermons are masterpieces of literature and a model of the art of rhetorics. That is why some people think that:

*His eloquence (Ali) is such that he is the leader of the eloquent and the chief of the rhetoricians... and from him the world has learnt the art of speech and rhetorics.*  
(Reza, 2003: 12)

## 2. Ellipsis in Arabic

Ellipsis in the concept adopted throughout this study seems to have been discussed by Arab rhetoricians within either brevity or omission in its broadest sense, i.e. obligatory and optional. Arabs are highly interested in brevity which mostly involves the omission of superfluous linguistic items. Brevity is thought of as a mode of meaning expression in fewest linguistic items. (Al-Hashimi, 1940: 231)

It should be noted, however, that omission is not done haphazardly. Arab grammarians have put rules for ellipsis, for what can and cannot be omitted in an utterance in a particular context, otherwise unintelligibility or ambiguity will often loom indistinctly. Arab grammarians warn against using ellipsis unless it is necessary and/or understood. (ابن الأثير ، ١٩٥٩ : ٢٧٥ ؛ الزركشي ، ١٩٥٧ : ١٠ )

ابن جني (1900: 360) considers ellipsis as a mark of good style with a degree of reduction, compactness and connectedness. He alludes to the centrality of context in various elliptical phenomena since it is a decisive factor in the interpretation of all types of omission and without its clues the whole discourse will be nonsensical. In other words, the elided pieces of meaning must be recovered from the context or even inferred, otherwise communication would have never been intact or restored.

### 2.1. Arabic Verbal Sentence

The Arabic simple verbal sentence may be described in terms of four elements: Verb (V); Subject (S), Object (O) and Adverbial (A). The simple sentences can be joined together by conjunctive particles which have a coordinative function or a subordinative function.

#### 2.1.1. Verb and Object

Arabic verbal sentence has a basic VSO word order. The verb is either transitive or intransitive where the latter governs the noun in the accusative. The object can either stand separately or can be suffixed to the verb. Transitive verbs are either monotransitive, ditransitive or tritransitive.

#### 2.1.2 Subject

The subject is either an explicit noun or an implicit/implied pronoun

- |                |                                |
|----------------|--------------------------------|
| 1) حضر الرئيس  | <i>The president came.</i>     |
|                | <i>The president-nom came.</i> |
| 2) جاء متأخراً | <i>He came late.</i>           |
|                | <i>late came – he</i>          |

In this sentence, the subject is the implicit third person masculine singular pronoun "huwa" (he). The subject is realized by either a nominal element in the nominative (noun or enclitic pronoun).

##### 2.1.2.1. Deputy Subject/Agent

In a sentence with a passive verb, the object of the corresponding sentence becomes a deputy subject/agent marked for the nominative. See (4.2).

### 2.1.3. Adverbial

An adverbial can be realized by adverbs, prepositional phrases and circumstantial accusative:

- 3) Adverb جاء أمس *He came yesterday.*  
*yesterday came – he*
- 4) Prepositional phrase ذهب إلى المدرسة *He went to school*  
*school went - he*
- 5) Circumstantial accusative رأيته نائماً *I saw him sleeping*  
*sleeping saw –I-him*

To sum up, these elements may combine to form the following basic verbal sentence patterns: VS, VSO, VSOO, VSOOO, VSOC, VSA, and VSOA. For further information, see: (Al-Aswad, 1983; Bakir, 1980; Beeston, 1986; Cantarino, 1975; Hassan, 1963; Wright, 1955; Khalil, 1999)

## 3. Data Analysis

In this section, I will postulate that ellipsis has more functions than merely meeting the addresser's wish to reduce his efforts. Though this paper is a model-free, I will examine the functions in line with the observations originating with Hendriks and Spender (2005) who suggest that the elided forms contribute function and restrict possible interpretations and allow us to say things which that are otherwise ineffable, ambiguate/disambiguate discourse structure, serve as a rapport device that could be relevant to dialogue systems etc. moreover, I will draw upon the findings of different linguists who propose different terms and definitions. See (Crystal, 2003; Hendriks, 2004; Bertomen, 2005; Hardt, 2005; May, 2005)

### 3.1. VP Ellipsis

Arabic grammarians contend that the ellipsis of the lexical verb is rare if compared to the ellipsis of the subject and the direct object. Nevertheless, it can be elided alone with its subject. (الجرجاني ، ١٩٦٩)

The verb can also be elided either obligatorily or optionally. The former is syntactically motivated while the latter is rhetorically/pragmatically motivated. In N.B., the VP is ellipped likewise in seventy-seven places to fulfill the following functions: (اللامي ، ٢٠٠١)

#### 3.1.1 Refusal

The verb along with its implied subject is ellipped in the following interrogative clauses, to express denial.

- 6) فعلى من اكذب أ على الله ؟ فانا أول من آمن به ؟ أم على نبيه ؟

*Against whom I lie? Whether against Allah? But I am who believed in him.*

*Whether*

*his Prophet?*

*against*

In the first example, the intransitive verb أكذب “lie-I” along with its first person singular masculine pronoun “I” is ellipped in the second and the third interrogative clauses since it is recoverable from the first interrogative clause where it is mentioned first. The impetus behind the omission of the verb phrase is to drag the addressee's attention to the prepositional phrase على الله (to Allah) and not to any other clausal components. This is done to foster the act of denial and/or refusal. The addresser refuses to commit the sin of lying to Allah for whatever the cost may be since a man

of faith like him holds lying in abhorrence.

### 3.1.2 Proclamation

The verb phrase of saying is optionally ellipted in the following example:

7) ما يريد عثمان إلا أن يجعلني حملاً ناضجاً بالغرب : أقبل وأدبر

*Ottoman just wants - he to make me like the water - drawing camel so that I may*

*forward and backward with the bucket.*

The omission of the intransitive verb يقول "says-he" in the second clause is recoverable from the linguistic context which presupposes the verb of saying. The interpretation of the elided vp depends on the mentioning of the verbs يريد "wants-he" and جعل "makes-he" where both insinuate the proclamation of the message which entails belittling of the person by instructing him to follow orders.

### 3.1.3 Specification

This function is realized in the following example:

8) وعندنا أهل البيت أبواب الحكم وضيء الأمر

*We, the family of the Prophet Mohammed, possess the keys of wisdom and the lights of prudence*

This example involves the omission of the vp أعني "mean-I" because the word أهل "people/family" is in the accusative case and stands for the direct object of the ellipted transitive verb أعني "mean-I". Such an ellipsis draws the attention to the specified noun phrase أهل البيت (lit. The people of the house) (Family of the Prophet: Ali, Fatima, Hassan, and Hussein) <sup>(1)</sup>. If the vp had been mentioned, the noun phrase would have not been at a focus.

### 3.1.4 Reproach

The vp is ellipted obligatorily in the following example:

9) قولاً بغير علم وغفلة من غير ورع وطمعاً في غير حق

*Will there be saying without action, overlooking without piety and coveting things not right?!*

10) وشوهوا بإعفاء الشعور محاسن خلقهم ، ابتلاءً عظيماً ، وامتحاناً شديداً واختباراً مبيناً و تمحيصاً بليغاً

*They deformed their morality by forsaking good sense and thus got severe trial,*

*harsh testimony, affliction and painful judgment.*

Three verb phrases are ellipted in the first example. They are يقول "says-he"; يغفل "overlooks-he" and يطمع "covets-he". They are recoverable from the existing three accusative verbal nouns: قولاً "saying"; غفلة "overlooking" and طمعاً "coveting". The use of rhetorical questions along with the ellipsis of the verb phrases has a forceful style of expressing reprimand and rebuke. The addresser reproaches ignorant and greedy people and impeaches their impiety. As regards the second example, four verb phrases are elided obligatorily. They are: ابتلاهم "tries-he-them"; امتحنهم "tests-he-them";

<sup>(1)</sup> See the different Prophetic Hadiths, concerning the sacred status of these people, as they are transmitted and quoted by

various theologians and traditionists.

اختبرهم "examines-he-them"; and محصّهم "judges-he-them" respectively. These verb phrases are recoverable from the non-omitted cognate accusatives: ابتلاء 'trail'; امتحاناً "testing"; اختباراً "examining" and تمحيصاً "judging" respectively. The morphology of these verbs involves tense, the agent, the action and the receiver of the action. All these grammatical phenomena are recoverable from the linguistic context. That is, tense is perfect, the doer of the action refers to Almighty Allah and the receivers of the action are human beings. What remains then is the action. The action is best realized through the verbal noun, i.e. cognate accusative. This is because the verbal noun necessitates constancy and assiduity. The addresser neither concerns himself with the agent nor with the tense. Rather, he is concerned lucidly with the action. By omitting the verb phrase the action is then given due emphasis.

### 3.1.5 Instruction

This function is obviously illustrated in:

- 11) فصمداً صمداً حتى ينجلي لكم عمود الحق

*Keep one enduring till the right of Truth drowns upon you.*

The verb phrase اصمدوا "endure-you pl" is obligatorily ellipted, and is reiterated from the two repetitive forms of the accusative verbal noun صمداً "enduring". Arab grammarians and rhetoricians assert that the expression of a command or an instruction is better expressed via verbal nouns than through verbs. This is because the expression of such a function is nurtured strongly through verbal nouns: the force of which is extolled by pragmaticians and rhetoricians verbatim.

### 3.1.6 Invocation

In the example:

- 12) اللهم سقيا منك مجيبه مروية ... اللهم سقيا منك تعشب بها نجادنا

*O my Allah! Give rain from Thee with which our high lands get covered with green herbage.*

One can realize that the obligatory ellipsis of the verb phrase in the imperative sentence اسقنا "give rain-us" explicates the function of invocation. The addresser beseeches Allah to pour out rain because of the draught, aridity and a want of rain. The verb phrase is recoverable from the non-omitted verbal nouns, سقياً "giving/pouring rain". It is unanimously agreed upon by semanticists and rhetoricians that verbal nouns consolidate the expression of request or invocation. As such, this function is expressed via verbal nouns with a perfection and precision unequalled by the verb phrase.

### 3.1.7 Persuasion

This function is realized in:

- 13) فالله الله أيها الناس فيما استحفظكم من كتابه

*So remember Allah, O People, about what He has asked you in His book to take care of.*

- 14) عباد الله ، الله الله في أعز الأنفس عليكم

*O creatures of Allah! Fear Allah, Allah, in the matter of your own selves which are the most beloved and dear to you.*

- 15) العمل العمل ، ثم النهاية النهاية والاستقامة الاستقامة ثم الصبر الصبر والورع الورع

*Action! Action! Then look at the end the end, and remain stead fast stead fast. Therefore, exercise endurance, endurance, and piety, piety.*

In all these imperative sentences, the verb phrases are obligatorily elided. These verbs are اتقوا "fear-you pl"; راقبوا "remember-you pl"; راعوا "comply with-you pl"; أحسنوا "do good-you pl" and أصلحوا "reform-you pl" respectively. The second person plural masculine subject pronominals are suffixed to the verbs. The verbs are recoverable from the existing accusative abstract nouns.

The addresser intends to persuade the addressee to fear Allah, to abide by the teachings of Islam which call for faith, righteousness and charity.

This function is executed through vivacious repetitive forms of the abstract nouns. Repetition is resorted to here to evoke a powerful emotional effect wherein the concept of persuasion is highly articulated and elaborated with vigour and vividness. Repetition is a discourse structuring device. Repetition is composed with a persuasive intent. It is one way to treat a marked structure with a special rhetorical effect that forces the addressee's attention onto the issue targeted. That is, repetition can be rhetorically effective only in attracting the addressee's attention to real arrangement which is located in the ideas and their logical organization. It not only expresses the argument, but it is the argument itself.

This can also be clearly seen in the letter by the addresser to his son Imam Hassan when the former was on his death bed:

- 16) الله الله في الأيتام ، والله الله في الجيران ، والله الله في الصلاة ، والله الله في بيت ربكم ... والله  
*(Fear) Allah (and) keep Allah in view in the matter of orphans... (Fear) Allah (and) keep Allah in view in the matter of your neighbors... (Fear) Allah (and) keep Allah in view in the matter of Qura'an... (Fear) Allah (and) keep Allah in view in the matter of prayer... (Fear) Allah (and) keep Allah in view in the matter of Jihad.*

Again, various verb phrases are ellipted in a discourse which revolves on the idea of fearing Allah and piety. The verbs, which have the graphic realization of أوصيكم "recommend-I-you 2n pl masc", are understood from the same repetitive nouns which all refer to Allah. The repetition of the word "Allah" emphasizes the oneness of Allah ingeniously. In an argumentative discourse, Arab rhetoricians advocate the use of repetition as a highly stylized form deployed premeditatingly to enliven the power of persuasion. Repetition does not ornament an already constructed argument, for without repetition there would be no argument. Repetition keeps the addressee to a definite viewpoint. It is rhythmic, cohesive and rhetorical, and as such, persuasion is the result. To learn more about repetition in Arabic argumentative texts. To learn more about repetition in argumentative texts, see (Johnstone, 1991)

### 3.2 Subject Ellipsis

The subject of the verbal sentence is ellipted in more than nine hundred places in N.B. The ellipsis of the subject occurs in passive sentences. (اللامي ، ٢٠٠١ )

Early and modern Arabic grammarians purport that the passive in Arabic is a lexical operation bringing changes to the verb and does not consist in major transformations in the syntactic structure of the sentence. Arabic passives are, therefore, morphological in which the passive form of the verb is derived by internal vowel change. The occurrence of the passive verb triggers the absorption of the object into the subject position without having to move it. This does not result in thematizing the

non-agent as is the case in many Indo-European languages. The object affected noun does not only occupy the position of the subject but also assumes all the diacritic features a subject usually takes. For further information, see: (Keenan, 1985; Kalil, 1999; Wright, 1955; الاستريادي ، ١٩٩٦ )

### 3.2.1 Focus of Information

This function is realized in the following example:

- 17) بدئت من سلاله من طين ، ووضعت في قرار مكين ، ثم أخرجت من مقرك إلى دار لم تشهدا  
*You were originated from the essence of clay and placed in a still place for a known length and an ordained time.... Then you were taken out from your place of stay to a place you had not seen*

This example encompasses four passive clauses. Each of them begins with a transitive verb which appears in the passive and has annexed to it first person masculine pronoun. This pronominal refers to the generic term "man" and stands for the deputy agent. The verb phrases are followed by various prepositional phrases which pertain to various adverbial functions. These verb phrases are: "were-originated" بدئت; "were-placed" وضعت; "was-taken" أخرجت.

The connotation of these verbs are associated with the omnipotency of Allah. The objective of the episode is how man is created by Allah and the high destiny offered to him in his intellectual, moral and spiritual nature by Allah a priori. Since these divine powers are well understood and retrieved from resources outside the text, the agent is elided and the object affected noun vis-a-vis "man" is highlighted and brought to focus. Actually, texts are organized into units of information. Information can also be organized on the clause/sentence level according the principles of "new" and "given". The given information contributes the least to the development of communication, while the new contributes the most to the communication process. The participants in the message already share the given information while the new information enriches the addressee's knowledge: locates the focus and the climax within it. Syntactically, the agent is associated with the given/old information, while the nonagent component is, generally speaking, associated with the new information. This account seems to be more defensible and readily applicable to Arabic rhetoric. That is why the addresser prefers to leave the agent unmentioned and in case he wants to mention the agent recourse is had to active voice since the active sentence and its passive counterpart have different focal areas. For rhetorical reasons, the noun with the nominal case is more important than the one with the accusative case. As such, the non-agent of the passive construction is awarded the nominative status in order to carry the highest degree of communicative dynamism and whose attraction can not be resisted. By emphasizing the non-agent, the addresser is presenting a non phoric component i.e. that is not received by the addressee from other sources. The emphasis is used to express what the addresser wishes to say about the already known pieces of information. To sum up, ellipsis is used unambiguously to mark the focus of information by avoiding repetition of given information. For a detailed discussion of information organization, see: (Halliday, 1994; Lock, 2003; Greenbaum and Quirk, 2003)

### 3.2.2 Removing Readings

Though ellipsis often introduces ambiguity, it sometimes removes ambiguity that would otherwise occur. Well-attested examples are the following:

- 18) ليس فيهم سلعة أبور من الكتاب إذا تلي حق تلاوته ، ولا سلعة أنفق بيعاً ولا أغلى ثمناً من الكتاب إذا حرف عن مواضعه

*For them there is more worthless than Qura'an if it is recited as it should be recited, nor anything more valuable than the Qura'an if its verses are removed from their places. [It is misstated].*

19) كن في الفتنة كابن اللبون ، لا ظهر له فيركب ، ولا ضرع فيحلب

*In times of sedition, be just like the infant camel neither it is mounted nor is it milked.*

These examples consist of clauses that are structurally parallel wherein the subjects are not pronounced because they are passivized. In the first example, the book refers to the Glorious Quran. It is described as *تُلي* "is-recited" and *حُرِّفَ* "is-misstated". Yet, there is no specific reference to the agent who recites or misstates it. The disappearance of the subject signals a very restricted meaning. The addresser may, for reasons, related to personal attitudes, refer to a particular agent. This may lead to a mismatch between the addresser meaning and that of the addressee(s). The addresser wishes to say that the referentiality of the agent is irrelevant to the interpretation of the event and there is no such a need to delineate it. Ambiguity stems if the subject is overtly stated, because the addressee(s) will associate the event with that particular agent and not with somebody else. This will go in contradiction to all intents and purposes of the addresser. As a result opacity will prevail and the message will be totally prevaricated. This surely applies to the elided agent of the second example wherein two passivized verbs are present. They are *يُرْكَب* "is-mounted" and *يُحَلَب* "is-milked". The episode talks about incitement to sedition. The addresser preaches people not participate in such a heinous event. The addresser endeavours to provide a symmetrical reading of the event as against asymmetrical one provided by the addressee(s). To remedy this, ellipsis provides the addressee(s) with clues about the coherence relations and instructs that the two readings of the same elided agent stand as contrastive topics. In that, the addresser touches upon the boundaries of generalization while the addressee's reading relates to irrelevant definiteness.

### 3.2.3 Glorification

This function is triggered off in the following examples:

20) ألبسه الله ثوب الذل و شمله البلاء ، وديث بالصغار والقماءة و ضرب على قلبه بالإسهاب  
وأدیل الحق منه بتضييع

الجهة: اد وسم الخدمات ومنفذ النص ف

*Allah covers him with the dress of disgrace and the clothes of distress. He is kicked with the contempt and scorn [is abased], and his heart, is vetted with screen: (of neglect) [is blinded]. Truth is taken away to suffer ignoring [is perverted] and justice is denied to him.*

ندعوك حين قنط الأنام ، و منع الغمام ، وهلك السوام (21)

*We call Thee when the people have lost hopes, cloud has been denied and cattle have died.*

The first example contains various clauses. The subject of the first clause is explicitly stated, i.e. Allah. The subjects of the other clauses are elided through passivization. The events in all these clauses allude to Allah as being supreme and exalted in might and divinity. However, part of politeness strategies the addresser refrains from



referring to Allah by any vituperative epithets which describe Allah as the source of humiliation. These epithets are implicated in the following passivized verbs: ديث "is-abased"; ضرب "is-blinded"; أديل "is-perverted"; سيم "is-wronged"; منع "is-denied". Instead, the addresser believes unequivocally that Allah should be glorified and extolled. He adheres to the conviction that man should be close to Allah with propitiatory acts. Following the same premise, the subjects of the second example are also ellipted through passivization. These verbs may involve the conceptions of منع "denial" and هلاك "extermination or death". The addresser again refuses to ascribe the negative attribute of non-providing to Allah. In opposition, the addresser insists that all the divine bounties of Allah should be proclaimed by man. In line with the addresser's propositions, Allah is the sole provident who cares for human beings and all He has created. In matter of fact, ellipsis can be recognized as a positive politeness strategy (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Morand and Ocker, 2003). The researcher contends that the addresser is imbued with the desire to make any possible effort to avoid face or minimize the number and size of face threatening act (FTA), as much as he can. This entails that any verbal act needs to be properly mitigated in an attempt to minimize or even abolish face threat similar to what the addresser has done. The addresser has omitted part of the message to establish a relationship with the addressee and this helps soften the Face Threatening Act made. Since the addressee is Allah here, He requires the ceremonies of glorified respectful address. In this sense, then, the elided utterances express a subset of the meanings of their full counterparts. For a detailed discussion on FTA, see (Eelen, 2001; Flores, 1999; Trosborg, 1995)

### 3.2.4 Contempt

In the example:

22) عصي الرحمن ، ونصر الشيطان ، وخذل الإيمان

*Allah was being disobeyed, Satan was given support [triumphed] and Belief has been forsaken.*

The subjects of the parallel clauses are elided through passivization. The verbs are: عصي "was disobeyed", نصر "was triumphed" and خذل "was forsaken". These deputy subjects are: الرحمن "Most Merciful"; الشيطان "Satan" and الإيمان "faith" respectively. The interpretation of the events contained in the parallel structures has negative connotations. Such connotations relate to disobedience, evil-doing, loss and going astray. The omission of the agent is pragmatically motivated so as to reinforce derogation and contemptibility.

Evidently, syntactic categories stem from pragmatic functions. A sentence may have alongside its literal sense some sort of illocutionary force indicated by the syntactic form(s). Accordingly, the addresser makes a direct appeal to the addressee by inviting him to agree with general proposition of the concept of contempt. This proposition is concealed in the ellipsis of the agent which is accomplished through adopting the passive voice. This proposition is reinforced by three parallel and semantically equivalent structures. By doing so, the addresser extends his tone from pure composition to pure denunciation. That is, he has pity upon wrong-doers since they do not know what the consequences are and at the same time he condemns the act of wrong doing since it leads to destruction. The worst imputation thrown out against them is worldliness. This is not found in the plain sense of the syntactic structure, but it is rather implied so as ellipsis can assist the addressee(s) to meticulously read between lines. Following the strategies of successful communication, the addresser says

nothing more than what is required. Through agent ellipsis the addresser tries to convey the force of contempt in order to bid the addressee(s) to stop doing an act that does not suit him/them.

### 3.2.5 Introducing Ambiguity

One of the obvious side-effects of ellipsis is that it can introduce ambiguity as in:

23) فأتيج له قوم قتلوه

*A group [was] overpowered him and [they] killed him.*

The episode here relates to the historical incident of the murder of the fourth Orthodox Caliph Ottoman. The incident is hinted at in the use of the passive verb "أتيج" "was-overpowered". The addresser neither imputes murder to Allah nor to the devil so it remains a puzzling issue. Ambiguity is then, so as to speak, recommended as a means of problem-solving. This type of ambiguity seldom creates impeachment problems. This observation is not surprising from a communicative perspective. Since the addresser knows what meaning he wants to convey, his task is to select the form for that meaning. Only when the form is selected do alternative meanings become available. The purpose of the addresser, however, is not to leave the addressee in uncertainty as to the meaning to be expressed. Because the addressee has to put in some effort to decode the message, when he succeeds the result is a positive attitude towards the addresser. That is why interpreting an elided form can really have similar effect as escaping a maze. In this sense, the purposeful introduction of ambiguity through ellipsis can be subsumed under another function, namely to contribute to a positive rapport with the addressee(s).

### 3.2.6 Semantic Extension

The addresser, sometimes, stretches out his discourse to extend semanticity in an exquisite lofty style. This is subtly expressed in the following example:

24) لقد صرفت نحوه أفئدة الأبرار

*Hearts of virtuous persons have been inclined towards him.*

The addresser does not limit the entity of the real elided agent of the verb "صرفت" "have been inclined". The meaning of the sentence here is that hearts of the some righteous yet unspecified agents were directed towards the teaching of Prophet Mohammad.

By not specifying the agent, it could have more than one specific reference. This is because the addresser does not invest the expression with reference by the act of referring. The addresser stands in fear of referring to Allah as one possible agent whereas there is another possibility of another agent who performs or fills in the agentive role. To avoid such a referential disparity, the addresser unmistakably branches out the narrow limits of agent co-referentiality. This in turn enriches the sentential semanticity and leaves conspicuous room for inference.

There is a central issue in discussing communication via language. In a matter of fact, linguistic expressions are merely indexical devices for conjuring up in the mind of the addressee some creative processes that might [italics are mine] correspond to the thoughts that the addresser has and wishes to convey. One can say that words, phrases, and utterances do not stand for things, thoughts, propositions, but rather have the potentiality of implying such entities so as the addressee(s) could recourse to referential reasoning based on the linguistic, non-linguistic and experiential cues. As

such, semanticity will be expanded by fully remarkable unlimited insights and colourful tunes.

### 3.3 Object Ellipsis

This direct object is ellipted in more than one hundred seventy places in N.B. The ellipsis of the object contributes in the following functions (اللامي ، ٢٠٠١).

#### 3.3.1 Non-transitivity

The object is elided since it is felt as superfluous as in the following examples:

25) هلك من ادعى ، وخاب من افترى

*He who claimed (otherwise) [feigned] is ruined and who concocted [fabricated] falsehood is disappointed.*

26) إن سألوا الحفوا ، وإن عذلوا كشفوا

*When they were asked they gave nothing and when they reproofed they disclosed.*

27) ولعمر الله أردت أن تذم فمدحت ، وإن تفضح فافتضحت

*By the Eternal Allah, you had intended to revile me but you have praised me, and to humiliate [disgrace] me but you have yourself been humiliated [disgraced].*

The direct objects are omitted in the first example. These objects are realized by the pronominal "hu" which denotes third person singular masculine accusative suffixed to the verbs: "feign-past"; افترى "fabricate-past". By omitting the objects, the addresser refers to the agents who were perished and disappointed as being slanderers and fabricators. The victimized themes affected by the actions of feigning and fabrication are not highlighted or brought to focus as if the above mentioned transitive verbs were made intransitive. This applies to the second example wherein the addresser delineates the detestable characteristics of the hypocrites when they سألوا "ask past-they" and عذلوا "reproof past-they". If the addresser mentioned the direct objects of the two verbs الناس "people", the addressee would imagine that the negative connotations might cling to the direct objects of the verbs and not to the agents who are the real target of bitter criticism. Again, the transitive verbs are dealt with as if they were not followed by the obligatory direct objects. As regards the third example, the objects are elided for the same reasons stated earlier. Here, the discourse is a letter sent to "Muaawiyah", the adversary of the addresser vis-à-vis Imam Ali. The addresser certifies that the agent of the sentence intends to perform the act of ذم "dispraise" while in fact he praises unknowingly. At the same time, the same agent, i.e. Muaawiyah, tries to perform the act of فضح "disgrace" but he himself has become the object of indignation. The addresser believes that it is not relevant to mention explicitly the entities that are affected by the act of dispraise and disgrace because if mentioned the addressees may cherish the illusion that these gruesome acts are associated with the recipient of the action and not with the doer of the action per se.

The addresser cannot afford to avoid the use of the transitive verbs تذم "dispraise-you" and تفضح "disgrace-you". Yet, he uses them freely as being intransitive verbs without the overt realization of the objects; the addresser appears to have a perfect understanding of cause and effect. In his discourse, the addresser ascertains that primacy need to be given to the agents as they are involved directly in doing the ill-natured actions than to the elided objects themselves. The ellipsis of the direct object is called for to solidify the structure and lore of argumentation in which the addresser

sets forth his claims which have been proven valid through ellipsis. The role played by ellipsis to instantiate the valid argument stems from the contention that arguments are not made fully explicit. Some premises are supposed by the addresser to be too well known to be worth being stated.

### 3.3.2 Economy

The notion of economy is one of the deriving forces behind ellipsis. This can be elicited from the following examples:

28) ولئن أمهل الله الظالم لن يفوت أخذه

*Although Allah gives time to the oppressor, His catch would not spare him.*

29) فإنما انتم كالمرأة الحامل ، حملت فلما أتمت أملت

*You are like the pregnant woman who, on completion of the period of pregnancy delivers a dead child.*

The elided objects in these examples are recovered from the linguistic context. The object is realized in the first example by the third person singular masculine accusative pronoun "hu" suffixed to the transitive verb يفوت "spares-he". The accusative pronominal refers back to the direct object of the verb of the main clause أمهل "gives time-he", i.e. الظالم "the oppressor". Economy is established when ellipsis is restricted to those cases where the elided material is recoverable by the addressee because some identical element is present in the sentence. Thus, economy is by itself sufficient to explain the presence of ellipsis. The ellipsis of the object in the second example is also recoverable from the linguistic context. The presence of different repetitive forms of the same lexeme حمل "pregnancy" makes it possible for the addresser to omit the direct object of the transitive verb أتمت "complete past-she". This elided object refers to حمل "pregnancy" which in turn can be retrieved from the context. Aided by ellipsis; the addresser truly takes the stand that he should say no more than he must. He believes beyond all doubts that the addressee is able to recover the unpronounced material. This is also true of the following example:

30) فأما الناكثون فقد قاتلت وأما القاسطون فقد جاهدت وأما المارقة فقد دوخت

*I fought the preachers of the promise; I confronted wrong-doers and I dizzied the disobedient.*

Here, there are three elided objects. They are realized by the third person plural masculine accusative pronominal "hum" (them) suffixed to the verbs: قاتلت "fight past-I"; جاهدت "confront past-I" and دوخت "make dizzy past-I" respectively. These objects refer back to the preceding nominal: الناكثون "the preachers of promise"; القاسطون "the wrong doers"; المارقة "the disobedient". The episode revolves around the struggle between the addresser and those outlawed wrong doers.

The standard explanation for ellipsis in these texts is in terms of the addresser's economy (or least effort). By not expressing sentence elements whose presence is not essential for the meaning of the sentence, the addresser would be able to communicate more with few words. Evidently, the addresser deploys ellipsis to signal the existence of a co-referential reading associated with the reduced syntax. This goes in line with the standard view on ellipsis according to which the full or the marked utterance is the default case and ellipsis or unmarked utterance is the special case.

### 3.3.3 Rhyming

The ellipsis of the object helps create rhyming as in the following example:

- 31) فاتقوا الله تقيّة من سمع فخشع ، و اقترف فاعترف ، ووجا فعمل ، و حاذر فبادر وأيقن فأحسن  
و عبر فاعتبر ، وحذر فحذر ، وزجر فازدجر ، وأجاب فأجاب ، فراجع فتاب ، واقتدى فاحتذى ، وأرى  
فأرى

*Fear Allah like him who listened (good advice) and bowed before it, when he committed sin he admitted it, when he felt fear he acted virtuously, when he apprehended , he hastened (towards good acts), when he believed he performed virtuous acts, when he was taught to take lesson (from the happiness of this world) he did take the lesson, when he was taught to desist he abstained (from evil), when he responded to the call (of Allah) he leaned (towards him), when he turned back (to evil) he repented, when he followed he almost imitated and when he was shown (the right path) he saw it.*

The text, on the one hand, contains transitive and intransitive verbs. The actions associated with these verbs all denote and express piety and righteousness. They are performed by a pious person and as such the actions mirror the inherent characteristics of mysticism. The objects of the transitive verbs are elided and are recoverable from the linguistic and extra linguistic situations. Ellipsis here contributes towards giving heed to the religious actions contained in these verbs. Yet, the appearance of the object could have directed the addressee's thought to something else and consequently attention to these actions would be distracted and dispersed.

On the other hand, the appearance of the objects of these verbs can drastically spoil the rhyming scheme and bring up discordance. The text consists of rhyming sets of words which are related on the phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic levels. The members of each set are combined to each other by the conjunction "faa": an inseparable sequential additive particle which has here the meaning of reason or cause. These verbs are: Sami9a "listen past-he"; khasha9a "bow past-he"; ?iqtarafa "commit past-he"; ?i9tarafa "admit past-he"; wajila "fear past-he"; 9amila "act past-he"; Hathara "apprehend past-he"; baadara "hasten past-he"; ?ayqana "believe past-he"; ?aHsana "perform past-he"; 9ubbira "was asked-he"; ?i9tabara "take the lesson past-he"; Huththira "was asked to desist"; Hathara "abstain past-he"; zujira "was asked"; izdajara "learn past-he"; raaja9a "turn back past-he"; taaba "repent past-he"; ?ajaaba "answer past-he"; ?iqtadaa "follow past-he"; Hathaa "imitate past-he"; ?uriyya "was seen"; ?araa "see past-he". From a corollary observation of these rhyming graphic units, one can undoubtedly foretell that style is forcibly brusque and abnormally emphatic. These rhyming sets of verbs create luscious and rhetorically luxurious effect: such dyadic sets exhibit phonological patterning which often creates repetition on the morphological level which is in turn realizable within structurally parallel constructs. Such a network of interlinked structural paragon conveys sentiments and consequently adds to the connection between images and ideas a tinge of emotive heightening and reinforces the global themes. Such an authorial tone is subtle, complex and variable so as to give solidity to the rhetorical organization of cause and effect. That is to say, attention is paid to reconcile the rhetorical aims and their linguistic manifestations in a non ad hoc manner.

These eloquence canons could have been impaired if the direct pronominal objects are explicitly wedded to the verbs. The non-ellipsis of the objects in such a ritualistic context would have inescapably weakened the rhetoric of the text and as such the

colourful appeal to the addressees be awfully inexorable and rhetorically suspended.

### Conclusions

To conclude, in this paper, I have identified the rhetorical functions of VP ellipsis in the religious book of Nahjul-Balagha (The Peak of Eloquence). I have shown how Arabic VP ellipsis exhibits different functions which govern the VP construction and captures the fact that ellipsis in Arabic must be recoverable because knowing what has been deleted is necessary for understanding the ellipted components. What is to be recovered is not the syntactic function only, but information about the functions performed by the syntactic expressions. It is the identity of these functions we have already looked for: what the main functions are raised by the VP ellipsis.

I have also argued that the addresser's economy is not sufficient to explain the presence of ellipsis in N.B. I have discussed several examples illustrating that ellipsis can have many other functions than merely meeting the addresser's wish to reduce his efforts: ellipsis can convey non-expressible aspects of meaning or a subset of the multiple meanings expressed by the corresponding full form. From a corollary observation, one can conclude that the ellipsis of the agent of the verb rates higher than the ellipses of the lexical verb or the direct object of the transitive verb. This is because the passive structure explicates a focal area which is different from that posed by its active counterpart. Though the ellipsis of the lexical verb is rare in Arabic, the data show a few examples in which the elided lexical verb can encode various rhetorical functions. The paucity of the elided verbal element could be attributed to the contention that the verb represents the nucleus of the Arabic verbal sentence round which other parts collect. If the verbal element is elided, the sentence may lose its idiosyncratic typological features concomitant of it. The ellipsis of the third component of the verbal sentence is centered on the direct object. Arabic transitive verbs are followed by accusative nouns or nominals. When these elements are elided, the verbs stop to function transitively. As such, the object loses focus, interest and importance. This type of elision, similar to other two types mentioned earlier, is rhetorically/pragmatically motivated. Arabic allows optional and obligatory ellipsis as a strategy to serve various discursual functions which all draw upon the context of discourse, the structure of the utterance and the intended meaning.

**Note:** The researcher adopts the Riza's translation (2004) of Nahjul-Balagha, but sometimes he modifies some of the translations to suit the analysis requirements.

### Bibliography:

- Al-Aswad, M.K. (1983). *Contrastive Analysis of Arabic and English Verbs in Tense, Aspect and Structure*. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan: Ann Arbor.
- Ali Reza. (trans.) (2003). *Imam Ali (A.S.) Peak of Eloquence: Sermons, Letters and Sayings as compiled by Sayyid Sheriff Al-Raze*. Qum: Anassiriya Publications.
- Bakir, M. (1980). *Aspects of Clause Structure in Arabic: A Study of Word Order Variation in Literary Arabic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Linguistic Club.
- Beeston, A. (1986). *Written Arabic: An Approach to the Basic Structures*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Bertomen, N. (2005). *Integrating Pragmatic Information in Grammar. An Analysis of Intersentential Ellipsis*. <http://csli-publications.Stanford.edu/HPSG/6/abstr.bk.Shtm/-7k>.

- Brown, P. and S Levinson (1987). *Politeness*. CUP.
- Cantarino, V. (1975). *Syntax of Modern Arabic Prose*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Crystal. (2003). *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Eelen, G. (2001). *A Critique of Politeness Theories*. Manchester: St Jerome Publishing.
- Flores, N. H. (1999). "Politeness Ideology in Spanish Colloquial Conversation. The Case of Advice". *Journal of Pragmatics*.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1994). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Edward Arnold.
- Hardt, D. (2005). *Ellipsis and the Structure of Discourse*. <http://jos.oxfordjournals.org/cg/content/html>.
- Hendriks, P. (2004). *Coherence Relations, Ellipsis and Contrastive Topics*. [www.let.rug.nl/~hendriks/](http://www.let.rug.nl/~hendriks/) contrast 03.
- Hendriks, P and S., Jennifer (2005). *Why be Silent? Some Functions of Ellipsis in Natural Language*. In J Spenader and P. Hendriks (eds.). *Proceedings of the ESSLLI'05 Workshop cross-moular Approaches to Ellipsis*. England: Heriot Watt University.
- Johnstone, B. (1991). *Repetition in Arabic Discourse*. John Benjamin's Publication Company: Amsterdam/ Philadelphia.
- Khalil, A.M. (1999). *A Contrastive Grammar of English and Arabic*. Jordan Book Centre.
- Keenan, E.L. (1985). "Passive in the World Languages" In: T. Shopen (ed.), *Language Typology and Syntactic Description*. (Clause structures (Vol.1) CUP.
- Lock, G.(2003). *Functional English Grammar*: CUP.
- May, K. (2005). *Ellipsis in Spontaneous Spoken Language*. [www.fran.it/roby/resources/BonatoPH.D](http://www.fran.it/roby/resources/BonatoPH.D). Thesis
- Morand, D. and R.J. Ocker. (2003). *Politeness Theory and computer-mediated communication*. *Proceedings of the 36<sup>th</sup> Hawaii International Conference on the system sciences*.
- Petra Hendriks and Jennifer Spender. (2005). "Why Be Silent? Some functions of Ellipsis in Natural Language". In J. Spenader and P. Handriks (eds). *Proceedings of the ESSLLI'05 Workshop on Cross-Modular Approaches to Ellipsis*. England: Heriot Watt University.
- Quirk, R., S. Greenbaum, G. Leech, and J. Svartvic (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London: Longman.
- Quirk, R. and S. Greenbaum (2003). *A Student Grammar of the English Language*. Longman.
- Trosbory, A. (1995). *Interlanguage Pragmatics: Requests, Complaints and Apologies*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Wright, W. (1955). *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*. CUP.

## المصادر العربية

- ابن الأثير ، ضياء الدين ( ١٩٦٠ ) . *المثل السائر في أدب الكاتب والشاعر* . القاهرة : مطبعة نهضة مصر .
- ابن جني ، أبي الفتح عثمان ( ١٩٥٢ ) . *الحقائق* . تحقيق : محمد علي النجار . القاهرة : مطبعة دار الكتب المصرية .
- الاستربادي ، الرضي ( ١٩٩٦ ) . *شروح الرضي على الكافية* . بنغازي : جامعة كار يونس .
- الجرجاني ، عبد القاهر ( ١٩٦٩ ) . *دلائل الإعجاز* . القاهرة : مطبعة الفجالة الجديدة .
- الزركشي ، بدر الدين محمد عبد الله ( ١٩٧٥ ) . *البرهان في علوم القرآن* . عيسى البابي الحلبي وشركاؤه .
- الصالح ، صبحي ( ٢٠٠٤ ) . *نهج البلاغة* . دار الأسوة للطباعة والنشر ، طهران .
- العسكري ، ابن هلال ( ١٩٥٢ ) . *كتاب الصناعتين* . دار إحياء الكتب العربية ، عيسى البابي الحلبي وشركاؤه .
- القزويني ، جلال الدين محمد بن عبد الرحمن الخطيب ( ١٩٣٩ ) . *الإيضاح في علوم البلاغة* . القاهرة : مطبعة السنة - المحمدية .
- اللامى ، محمود عبد حمد ( ٢٠٠١ ) . *الجملة الفعلية في نهج البلاغة : دراسة دلالية* . رسالة ماجستير . كلية التربية ، جامعة القادسية .
- مطلوب ، أحمد ( ١٩٨٠ ) . *أساليب بلاغية : الفصاحة ، البلاغة ، المعاني* . الكويت . وكالة المطبوعات .
- الهاشمي ، أحمد ( ١٩٤٠ ) . *جواهر البلاغة في المعاني والبيان والبديع* . عصر مطبعة الاعتماد .