

Interrogative Utterances In Surah Al-Baqarah

*Aly Bayoumy Ali Oteify**

The Qur'an is singularly distinctive in its style compared to any human composition. Human eloquence, with its remarkable history in the composition of poetry, has failed to compose even a single verse like that of the Qur'an. The Qur'anic composition is a living challenge for human beings to imitate its miraculous style.

This inimitable aspect of the Qur'an, among other things, proves that it was revealed by Allah (SWT) to Prophet Muhammad (SAAS). In addition, the miracle of its linguistic composition was a means to declare the faith based on monotheism and the introduction of a new order and a theo-centric guidance that was meant to unite humanity. Adopting the monotheistic faith gave rise to a new community, the Muslim ummah, that was able to bridge the differences between human beings in culture, race, colour and geographical boundaries. Consequently, the unique style of the Qur'an deserves a careful study.

The present study investigates the use of interrogative utterances in *surah al-Baqarah* and their contribution to the Qur'an's rhetorical style. Hopefully, the results of this study will be useful in later investigations of other parts of the Qur'an.

Aly Bayoumy Ali Oteify was Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, International Islamic University, Malaysia.

Significance of Interrogation

Interrogative structures may be used to make requests or polite commands and to perform many other functions according to the particular situation. Nobody has to go to school to learn how to ask questions in the different situations encountered in life.¹ Questioning is a behavioral phenomenon and is one of the recurrent phenomena of verbal behaviour that has been a focus of attention.

Generally speaking, interrogative utterances serve a communicative function. Charles C. Fries distinguishes between communicative utterances and non-communicative utterances. Communicative utterances comprise questions, greetings, calls, requests, commands, and statements while non-communicative utterances are those characteristic of such situations as surprise, sudden pain, prolonged pain, disgust, and the like.² The ability to ask and answer questions is a vital part of communication. In communication situations, interrogative utterances usually serve as gap-fillers in the framework of knowledge. They also serve a variety of other functions such as to obtain or retain attention; to make a request, order, or threat; and to be used as a rhetorical device. The questioning and answering activity is valuable to communication in many ways as it motivates and fosters communication, satisfies the need for information and provides feedback to make sure that units of information have been correctly understood.

A review of literature on questioning suggests that the linguists hold divergent opinions and follow different approaches. These differences in both views and approaches underline the complex nature of questioning.³

It should be noted that the two terms 'interrogative' and 'question' represent the overlap between formal and non-formal (functional) elements. Many linguists and investigators confuse the two terms and use them interchangeably.⁴ 'Interrogative' must be taken to refer to the formal element while 'question' must be taken to refer to the semantic or functional element. To adopt the terminology of transformational grammar, 'question' refers to the semantic reading represented by the presence of a Q morpheme in the underlying structure of an utterance, while 'interrogative' refers to the presence of one or more of the formal surface structure realizations of this Q morpheme. Thus,

A question pattern may be conceived of as an utterance belonging to a linguistic unit higher than the sentence rank, which has in its deep structure a universal semantic marker Q that is usually but not always realized in the surface structure by means of one or more of the formal surface structure markers and that also has other determiners, viz. situational and contextual.⁵

Taking into consideration this definition, stressing the relationship between form and function in the study of questioning, three patterns can be identified.⁶

A + Q + Inter utterance has a semantic question reading and one or more interrogative markers.

A - Q + Inter utterance has one or more overt formal interrogative markers but does not have a semantic question reading in its underlying structure. In order to determine that an interrogative utterance lacks the Q morpheme in the underlying structure, such factors as contextual and situational features have to be considered.

A + Q - Inter utterance has a semantic question embedded in it but is non-interrogative in form. Thus a + Q - Inter utterance becomes equal to a + Q + Inter utterance in that both have a Q morpheme in their underlying structures. They differ in their surface realizations, but this difference represents the dynamic nature of language whereby semantic notions can be expressed through various formal techniques.

Significance of *Surah Al-Baqarah*

The revelation of the Qur'an started in Makkah and continued after the Prophet's (SAAS) migration to Madinah. Qur'anic verses belonging to the two periods of revelation are distinguishable from one another by various characteristics. Verses revealed in Makkah are concerned mainly with the new faith based on monotheism, since the most crucial issue at the time was the conversion of the polytheistic Makkah community to monotheism. After the *hijrah*, the new community formed in Madinah encountered different circumstances through contact with the local Jewish population, who could not conceal their rejection of the new religion, and a group of people who apparently adopted the new religion but secretly worked against it. At the same time, there was a great need for regulations to help the Prophet (SAAS) and his Companions establish the believers as a community, which later developed into a state. It is, therefore, natural that the Madinah verses tend to deal with the organization of various aspects of life.

Surah al-Baqarah, the second surah of the Qur'an, was the first to be revealed in Madinah.⁷ It is this surah that contains most of the verses from which have been derived rules dealing with commercial transactions, ethics, marriage, divorce, and the like. This *surah*, which is also the longest in the Qur'an, discusses various issues that combine in a matrix based on two coherent subjects: (a) the hostility of the Jews, living in Madinah,

toward Islam, and (b) preparation of the new Muslim community to spread Islam throughout the world.

In regard to the significance of *surah al-Baqarah*, the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) is reported to have said, 'Learn *surah al-Baqarah* for it is a blessing and neglecting it is a pity yielding misery. It is far-fetched to the dishonest', and 'Don't make your homes look like a graveyard; Satan cannot stand a place where *surah al-Baqarah* is recited'. It is further narrated that the Prophet (SAAS) asked a group of men about what they recited of the Qur'an and when a young man informed him reciting of *surah al-Baqarah*, the Prophet (SAAS) made him the leader of the group.⁸

Surah al-Baqarah is characterized by the occurrence of questioning in many of its parts. This unique feature is closely associated with its being the first surah to be revealed in Madinah. On the one hand, the Muslims needed to know more about their new faith, so that it was natural for questioning to play an active role in their verbal behaviour. This verbal behaviour has linguistic as well as religious significance, for it reflects the Muslims' eagerness to let the new faith control and guide every aspect of their lives as a sign of their complete submission to the will of Allah (SWT). On the other hand, many questions imposed themselves on the Muslims living in Madinah as a result of the fierce campaign against them launched by Jews, polytheists, and hypocrites. Verses were revealed in order to dismiss doubts and put an end to wickedness. Thus questioning played a vital role in clarifying the truth and purifying the faith.

Methodology

A linguistic analysis has been carried out in the present study with the purpose of identifying different types of interrogative utterance that characterise the Qur'an. The corpus chosen for analysis has been *surah al-Baqarah*, which comprises 286 verses. The aim has been to examine each verses, taking into consideration the formal markers used in the Arabic language to characterize interrogative utterances. Thus the linguistic analysis carried out in this study has been based on the notion that different linguistic utterances are usually characterised by one or more of the surface structure formal markers.

This task of analyzing linguistic utterances becomes more and more complicated when the analysis goes beyond the surface structure (form) to deal with the deep structure (function), since other underlying markers have to be considered in the light of a careful analysis of contextual and situational features. Consequently, the aim of the analysis carried out in

this study becomes two-fold: (a) an examination of the Qur'anic verses in order to distinguish interrogative utterances from other types of utterance, classify interrogative utterances into patterns, and identify the characteristic features of each pattern; and (b) a study of the contextual and situational features related to each verse in which an interrogative utterance is used.⁹

ANALYSIS

Form of Interrogative Utterances

Reviewing the related literature has revealed that interrogation is used in the Arabic language to inquire about something – its nature, time, place or manner; it is also used to inquire about the meaning implied in a declarative sentence. This purpose is usually achieved through the use of the tools of interrogation. These tools of interrogation are two fold: (a) the use of norm, and (b) the use of articles (*huruf*).

The first method of interrogation is similar to the use of interrogative words in English. The interrogative words used in Arabic are من (who), ما (what), متى (when), أين (where), كم (how many), كيف (how), and the like. This may be labelled information interrogation, since the utterances used for this purpose are utilized to seek information or to work as gap-fillers in the framework of knowledge.

The second method of interrogation is also similar to English interrogative utterances that begin with a main verb, e.g.: 'Have you a watch?', 'Have you lost your watch?', 'Do you know his address?' Such interrogative utterances usually call for a yes or no answer and are therefore usually referred to as yes/no questions.

This type of interrogation is achieved in Arabic through the use of the hamzah and the word هل. For example:

أما رأيت الاهرامات؟
هل عرف الانسان القمر؟

('Have you ever seen the pyramids?'),
('Has man known the moon?').

It should be noted that Arabic interrogation is not dealt with in detail because the primary concern of the present study is an investigation of the use of interrogative utterances in the Qur'an.¹⁰ This goal is achieved by identifying the interrogative markers in Arabic and using them as guides in the search for Qur'anic verses containing utterances that are interrogative in form.

On this basis, forty-seven verses of *surah al-Baqarah* can be considered interrogative. Because a Qur'anic verse may include more than one utterance, *surah al-Baqarah* actually contains fifty-nine interrogative utterances, twenty-five of which are information utterances and thirty-four are of yes/no utterances category.

Information utterances

Information utterances are those which, as far as form is concerned, seek information. Examples that represent the different interrogative markers used are as follows.

كيف تكفرون بالله وكنتم أمواتا فأحياكم ثم يميتكم ثم يحييكم ثم إليه ترجعون

How can you reject faith in Allah, seeing that you were without life and he gave you life? Then will He cause you to die and will again bring you to life. And again to Him will you return.(28).¹¹

وإذا قيل لهم أمنوا بما أنزل الله قالوا نؤمن بما أنزل علينا ويكفرون بما ورأه وهو الحق مصدقا لما معهم قل فلم تقتلون أنبياء الله من قبل ان كنتم مؤمنين

When it is said to them, 'Believe in what Allah has sent down', they say, 'We believe in what was sent down to us'. Yet they reject all besides, even if it be truth confirming what is with them. Say: 'Why then have you slain the prophets of Allah (SWT) in times gone by, if you did indeed believe?'(91).

ومن أظلم ممن منع مسجد الله ان يذكر فيها اسمه وسعى فخرابها أولئك ما كان لهم ان يدخلوها الا خائفين لهم في الدنيا خزي ولهم في الآخرة عذاب عظيم

And who is more unjust than he who forbids that Allah's name should be celebrated in places set aside for his worship? Whose zeal is to ruin [those places]? It was not fitting that such should themselves enter them, except in fear. For them there is nothing but disgrace in this world, and in the world to come an exceeding torment(114).

أم كنتم شهداء إذ حضر يعقوب الموت إذ قال لبنيه ما تعبدون من بعدي قالوا نعبد الهك واله آبائك إبراهيم واسماعيل واسحق الها واحدا ونحن له مسلمون

Were you witnesses when death appeared before Jacob? Behold, he said

to his sons, 'What will you worship after me?' They said, 'We shall worship your God and the God of your fathers, of Abraham, Isma'il, and Isaac - the one God. To him we bow [in Islam]'(133).

أم حسبتم أن تدخلوا الجنة ولما يأتكم مثل الذين خلوا
من قبلكم مستهم البأساء والضراء وزلزلوا حتى يقول
الرسول والذين ءامنوا معه متى نصر الله ألا ان نصر
الله قريب

Or do you think that you shall enter the Garden without such [trials] as came to those who passed away before you? They encountered suffering and adversity and were so shaken in spirit that even the Apostle and those of faith who were with him cried, 'When [will come] the help of Allah?' Ah! Truly, the help of Allah is [always] near!(214).

أو كالذى مر على قرية وهى خاوية على عروشها قال
أنى يحيى هذه الله بعد موتها فأماته الله مائة عام ثم
بعثه قال كم لبثت قال لبثت يوما او بعض يوم قال
بل لبثت مائة عام فانظر الى طعامك وشرابك لم
يتسنه وانظر الى حمارك ولنجعلك ءاية للناس وانظر
الى العظام كيف ننشرها ثم نكسوها لحما فلما تبين له
قال اعلم أن الله على كل شىء قدير

Or [take] the similitude of one who passed by a hamlet all in ruins. To its roofs he said, 'Oh! How shall Allah bring it to life after [this] its death?' But Allah caused him to die for a hundred years then raised him up. He said, 'How long did you tarry?' He said, 'A day or part of a day'. He said, 'No, you have tarried thus a hundred years. But look at your food and your drink, they show no signs of age. And look at your donkey. And that we may make of you a sign unto the people, look further at the bones, how we bring them together and clothe them with flesh'. When this was shown clearly to him, he said, 'I know that Allah has power over all things'.(259).

They ask you what they should spend [in charity]. Say: 'Whatever you

spend that is good is for parents, kindred, orphans, those in want, and wayfarers. And whatever you do that is good, Allah knows it well'(215).

ويسئلونك عن الحيض قل هو أذى فاعتزلوا النساء
في الحيض ولا تقربوهن حتى يطهرن فإذا تطهرن
فأتوهن من حيث أمركم الله ان الله يحب التوابين
ويحب المتطهرين

They ask you concerning women's courses. Say: 'They are a hurt and a pollution, so keep away from women in their courses and do not approach them until they are clean. But when they have purified themselves, you may approach them in any manner, time, or place ordained for you by Allah. For Allah loves those who turn to him constantly, and He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean'(222).

The last two examples deserve close examination. In each the word 'ask' as used in the utterance carries the question morpheme and therefore may be considered equivalent to a formal interrogative marker. Consequently, utterances having the word 'ask' in any form (present, past, infinitive) have been considered implicitly interrogative, whether 'ask' is accompanied by an explicit interrogative marker or occurs alone. In verse 215, we find يسألونك ('They ask you') followed by ماذا ينفقون ('what they should spend'), while in verse 222, the utterance contains only يسألونك عن الحيض ('They ask you concerning women's courses').

Yes/no utterances

Yes/no utterances are those requiring a yes or no answer. They are signified by the use of either a hamzah or the word -ù as in the following:

وإذا قيل لهم ءامنوا كما ءامن الناس قالوا أنؤمن كما
ءامن السفهاء ألا إنهم هم السفهاء ولكن لا يعلمون

When it is said to them, 'Believe as the others believe', they say, 'Shall we believe as the fools believe?' No, it is surely they who are the fools, but they do not know(13).

واذا لقوا الذين ءامنوا قالوا ءامننا واذا خلا بعضهم الى بعض قالوا أتحدثونهم بما فتح الله عليكم ليحاجوكم به عند ربكم أفلا تعقلون

Behold! When they meet the men of faith, they say, 'We believe'. But when they meet each other in private they say, "Shall you tell them what Allah has revealed to you that they may engage you before your Lord?" Do you not understand [their aim]?(76)

أم تريدون أن تسئلوا رسولكم كما سئل موسى من قبل ومن يتبدل الكفر بالايمان فقد ضل سواء السبيل

Would you question your Apostle as Moses was questioned of old? But whoever changes from faith to unbelief has strayed without doubt from the even way (108).

ألم تر الى الملا من بنى اسرائيل من بعد موسى اذ قالوا لبنى لهم ابعث لنا ملكا نقتل في سبيل الله قال هل عسيتم ان كتب عليكم القتال ألا تقاتلوا قالوا وما لنا ألا نقتل في سبيل الله وقد اخرجنا من ديارنا وابنائنا فلما كتب عليهم القتال تولوا الا قليلا منهم والله عليهم بالظلمين

Have you not turned your vision to the chiefs of the Children of Israel after [the time of] Moses? They said to a prophet among them, 'Appoint for us a king, that we may fight in the cause of Allah'. He said, 'It is not possible, if you were commanded to fight, that you would not fight?' They said, 'How could we refuse to fight in the cause of Allah, seeing that we were turned out of our homes and our families?' But when they were commanded to fight they turned back, except a small band among them. But Allah has full knowledge of those who do wrong(246).

Function of Interrogative Utterances

A further analysis of the verse in *surah al-Baqarah* makes it possible to classify interrogative utterances into three main types that reflect the overlap between form and function in linguistic expression. As shown in table 1, the - Q + Inter utterance is the most frequent type. This is in agreement with the purpose of *surah al-Baqarah*. It was in Madinah that

Muslims began to unite as a distinct community in the presence of external threats from the Jewish community and even greater internal dangers from hypocrites who falsely declared their conversion to Islam. These two groups engaged the Muslims in various arguments in an effort to corrupt their loyalty to the new faith, but there came, to their rescue, the Qur'anic verses as sharp as swords - to state facts, to threaten unbelievers and hypocrites, to refuse, to criticize, to rebuke, to disdain, to perform miscellaneous functions through the use of utterances lacking the Q semantic reading in their underlying structure but having the interrogative markers in their surface structure. The primary function of an interrogative utterance is usually to seek some kind of information, but taking into consideration the circumstances forced upon the first Muslim community in Madinah, there was a greater need for another type of interrogative utterance that should perform various functions other than seeking information. This was best achieved through the use of - Q + Inter utterances.

TABLE 1

Frequency of utterances in *surah al-Baqarah*

Type	Frequency
+ Q + Inter	8
- Q + Inter	46
+ Q - Inter	5
Total	59

On the other hand, when there was a need for seeking information, this was satisfied through the use of some + Q + Inter or + Q - Inter utterances. The following verses exemplify utterances belonging to these three types. These verses are accompanied by comments which clarify the effect of contextual and situational features on identifying the distinguished functions of interrogative utterances.

+ Q + Inter

An utterance of the + Q + Inter type exemplifies the primary function of interrogative utterances in which the main purpose is to seek information.

interrogative marker in its surface structure. It usually calls for an answer that performs the function of a gap-filler.

يسئلونك عن الخمر والميسر قل فيهما اثم كبير ومنفع للناس واثمهما أكبر من نفعهما ويسئلونك ماذا ينفقون قل العفو كذلك يبين الله لكم الايت لعلمكم تتفكرون

They ask you about wine and gambling. Say: 'In them is great sin and some profit for men, but the sin is greater than the profit'. They ask you how much they are to spend. Say: 'What is beyond your needs'. Thus does Allah make clear to you His signs in order that you may consider(219).

Here there are two equivalent questions calling for information. The first one lacks the interrogative marker while the second one shows it clearly. Both of them, however, perform the same function.

Q + Inter

A - Q + Inter utterance reflects the richness and vitality of linguistic expression. It shows the depth of language through the rhetorical functions it performs. Utterances belonging to this type are highly significant as they produce a kind of effective style through which ideas are best expressed. Most of the interrogative utterances investigated in this study (forty-six out of fifty-nine utterances) belong to this type.

It has been noticed that - Q + Inter utterances perform a number of significant functions. Classifying these functions into main categories is not an easy task, owing to the overlap between them. Despite this difficulty, efforts have been made to disentangle the main functions on the basis of the most prevalent characteristics in the contextual and situational features associated with the utterances. Table 2 contains a tentative classification of functions that minimizes the possibility of interference. Verses illustrating the various types of function follow:

TABLE 2
- Q + Inter utterances in *surah al-Baqarah*

Function	Frequency
Stating or declaring	11
Denying or refusing*	18
Wondering and objecting	3
Blaming and reprimanding	6
Threatening	3
Demanding	1
Encouraging	1
Drawing attention and arousing interest	3
Total	46

* *With or without reprimand.*

Stating or Declaring

أولا يعلمون ن الله يعلم مايسرون وما يعلنون

Know they not that Allah knows what they conceal and what they reveal?(77)

This interrogative utterance performs the function of stating or declaring that Allah (SWT) knows everything and that the hypocrite is therefore in a very bad position. This idea could have been expressed through the use of a declarative utterance, but the use of an interrogative utterance is more effective as it makes the hypocrite question himself concerning this matter and ponder his destiny if the declaration turns out to be true.

ألم تعلم أن الله له ملك السموت والأرض وما لكم من
دون الله من ولي ولا نصير

Know you not that to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth? And besides him you have neither patron nor helper(107).

In this verse there is a declaration referring to the basic Islamic belief that dominion over all things belongs to Allah (SWT). Man is but a vicegerent who should act according to the teachings of Allah (SWT), shown in his Book, during the process of making the best use of his surroundings.

Denying or Refusing

أفتطمعون أن يؤمنوا لكم وقد كان فريق منهم
يسمعون كلم الله ثم يحرفونه من بعد ما عقلوه وهم
يعلمون

Can you entertain the hope that they will believe in you, seeing that a party of them heard the word of Allah and perverted it knowingly after they understood it?(75).

The Muslims kept hoping that the Jews, being the people of a holy Book, would realize the truth of Islam and believe in it. Then came the interrogative utterance in the above verse to deny this and to ask the Muslims to despair of the conversion of the Jews to Islam, reminding them of how a party of the Jews had forged the words of Allah.

أيود أحدكم أن تكون له جنة من نخيل واعناب تجري
من تحتها الأنهر له فيها من كل الثمرات وأصابه الكبر
وله ذرية ضعفاء فإصا بها اعصار فيه نار فاحترقت
كذلك يبين الله لكم الآيت لعلكم تتفكرون

Does any of you wish that he should have a garden with date palms and vines and streams flowing underneath and all kinds of fruit, while he is stricken with old age and his children are not strong, that it should be caught in a whirlwind with fire therein and be burnt up? Thus does Allah make clear to you signs, that you may consider (266).

This verse contains a vivid description of a garden full of everything that any person could desire. All of a sudden this beautiful scene turns into a dim and hateful one in which the owner of the garden is depicted as an old man who has young, helpless children. A catastrophe occurs, and the beautiful garden is burnt up. This dramatic scene begins with the interrogative utterance 'Does any of you wish...?' On hearing about the beautiful garden, the receiver of the interrogative utterance will at once reply, 'Yes, I do wish to own this garden'. But when the horrible picture is completed, it arouses pity and fear leading to the natural response of refusing to be involved in a situation of this kind.

Thus the function of the interrogative utterance becomes clear: to call for denying or refusing a wish of this catastrophic type. This highly effective Qur'anic expression aims at showing how good deeds (like charity, keeping ordinances, etc.) are completely destroyed or become useless when they are followed by evil ones. Therefore men of faith are required to avoid evil deeds.

Wondering and Objecting

ان الله لا يستحي أن يضرب مثلا ما بعوضة فما فوقها فأما الذين ءامنوا فيعلمون أنه الحق من ربهم وأما الذين كفروا فيقولون ماذا أراد الله بهذا مثلا يضل به كثيرا ويهدى به كثيرا وما يضل به الا الفسقين

Allah does not disdain to use the similitude of things, lowest as well as highest. Those who believe know that it is truth from their Lord. But those who reject faith say, 'What does Allah mean by this similitude?' By it He causes many to stray, and many He leads into the right path. But He causes not to stray, except those who forsake [the path] (26).

The interrogative utterance used in the above text was made by those who rejected Islam. Expressing their wonder and objection to the status of the Qur'an as revelation, they aimed at spreading doubt by arguing that the Qur'an was composed by the Prophet (SAAS) and claiming as proof of this the Qur'an's use of the similitude of trivial things. The Qur'anic text proves their argument to be false and misleading because Allah (SWT) uses similitude to lead people to the right path but the unbelievers insist on forsaking it.

وقال لهم نبيهم ان الله قد بعث لكم طالوت ملكا قالوا
 أنى يكون له الملك علينا ونحن أحق بالملك منه ولم
 يؤت سعة من المال قال ان الله اصطفه عليكم وزاده
 بسطة فى العلم والجسم والله يؤتى ملكه من يشاء
 والله واسع عليم

Their Prophet said to them, 'Allah has appointed Saul as king over you'. They said, 'How can he exercise authority over us when we are better fitted than he to exercise authority and he is not even gifted with wealth in abundance?' He said, 'Allah has chosen him above you and has gifted him abundantly with knowledge and bodily prowess. Allah grants His authority to whom He pleases. Allah cares for all, and He knows all things' (247)

This Qur'anic text refers to a famous argument between the Jewish Prophet Samuel and his followers concerning who was to be crowned king over them. The interrogative utterance in the verse expresses the Jew's objection to Saul, who was crowned by Allah (SWT) on grounds of knowledge and physical prowess, because they wanted selection to be based on wealth. The chief consideration in their minds was selfishness: each one wanted to be leader and king himself, instead of desiring sincerely the good of the people as a whole, as a leader should do.

Blaming and Reprimanding

أتأمرون الناس بالبر وتنسون أنفسكم وأنتم تتلون
 الكتب أفلا تعقلون

Do you enjoin right conduct on the people and forget [to practice it] yourselves, and yet you study the scripture? Will you not understand?(44)

It happened that the Jewish rabbis used to advise those who had converted to Islam to stick to the new faith while they themselves rejected it despite having a clear description of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) in the *Torah*. This contradictory behaviour was exposed in the Qur'anic text through the use of two interrogative utterances intended to rebuke the Jews for not resorting to the voice of wisdom and to the fact mentioned in their scripture.

ولقد آتينا موسى الكتب وقفينا من بعد بالرسول

وءاتينا عيسى ابن مريم البينت وأيدنه بروح القدس
أفكلما جاءكم رسول بما لا تهوى أنفسكم استكبرتم
ففريقا كذبتهم وفريقا تقتلون

We gave Moses the Book and followed him up with a succession of apostles. We gave Jesus the son of Mary clear [signs] and strengthened him with the holy spirit. Is it that whenever there comes to you an apostle with what you yourselves desire not, you are puffed up with pride? Some you called impostors, and others you slay! (87).

This verse refers to the Jews' despicable treatment of Allah's prophets and messengers. The interrogative utterance used here serves to reprimand the Jews and, by extension, anyone who engages in behaviour of this kind.

Threatening

هل ينظرون الا أن يأتيهم الله فى ظلل من الغمام
والملائكة وقضى الأمر والى الله ترجع الامور .

Will they wait until Allah comes to them in canopies of clouds with angels and the questions go back [for decision] (210)

This verse originally addressed the unbelievers at the time of Prophet Muhammad (SAAS), but it should be taken to refer to unbelievers at any time since the Qur'anic principles and rules are valid for all human beings irrespective of place or time.

The interrogative utterance here presents a threat to the unbelievers, asking them not to waste time, not to wait until the Day of Judgement, when Allah (SWT) will come accompanied by his angels to question everyone about his faith and his deeds, a day described in other parts of the Qur'an as extremely horrifying and unbearable. Thus, the purpose is to threaten the unbelievers, advising them not to wait too long in accepting Islam.

Demanding

أم حسبتم أن تدخلوا الجنة ولما يَأبكم مثل الذين
خلوا من قبلكم مستهم البأساء والضراء وزلزلوا

هتئى يقول الرسول والذئن ءامنوا معه متى نصر الله
 ءلا ان نصر الله قريب

Or do you think that you shall enter the Garden without such [trials] as came to those who passed away before you? They encountered suffering and adversity and were so shaken in spirit that even the Apostle and those of faith who were with him cried, 'When [will come] the help of Allah?' Ah! Truly, the help of Allah is [always] near! (214).

The above verse states to the believers that in order to win the grace of Allah (SWT) and enjoy the bliss of Paradise, they have to be so strong in spirit and faith that they can encounter any kind of suffering or adversity, gaining more strength and reinforced faith, exactly like the early Muslims, who experienced stress and suffering to the extent that both the Prophet (SAAS) and his followers demanded, 'When will the help of Allah come?'. Then Allah (SWT) shows his wisdom, that his help is always near on condition that he who seeks Allah's help should first strive hard, doing his best to overcome suffering and adversity. Then he can call for Allah's help, and just then he finds it near.

Encouraging

من ذا الذئن يقرض الله قرضا حسنا فيضعفه له
 اضعافا كثيرة والله يقبض ويبسط واليه ترجعون

Who is he that will lend to Allah a beautiful loan, which Allah will double unto his credit and multiply many times? It is Allah who gives [you] want or plenty, and to him shall be your return (245).

The function performed by the interrogative utterance in the above verse is to encourage everybody to spend in the cause of Allah (SWT). The utterance in its interrogative form is more motivating than in any other form. It arouses rivalry in such a way that anyone who hears the utterance would like very much to be the one who hastens to offer the beautiful loan to Allah in order to have it doubled and multiplied, because it is Allah (SWT) in whose hands are the keys to want or plenty.

Drawing Attention And Arousing Interest

ألم تر الى الذى حاج ابراهيم فى ربه أن آتاه الله الملك
 اذ قال ابراهيم ربي الذى يحيى ويميت قال أنا أحيى
 وأميت قال ابراهيم فإن الله يأتى بالشمس من المشرق
 فأت بها من المغرب فبهت الذى كفر والله لا يهدى القوم
 الظالمين

Have you not seen one who disputed with Abraham about his Lord, because Allah had granted him power? Abraham said, 'My Lord is he who gives life and death'. He said, 'I give life and death'. Said Abraham, 'But it is Allah that causes the sun to rise from the east. Do you then cause it to rise from the west?' Thus was he confounded who [in arrogance] rejected faith. Nor does Allah give guidance to an unjust people (258).

The interrogative opening of this verse is very significant because it has been used as a linguistic technique performing the function of drawing the attention of the Prophet (SAAS) to what Allah (SWT) wanted to tell him. Thus the Qur'anic text succeeds, through linguistic means, in arousing the interest of the Prophet (SAAS), making him anxious to know the details of Abraham's story. It is described vividly in an artistic way that makes the hearer of the Qur'anic verse visualize a complete dramatization of the argument between Abraham and the unbeliever who, being granted power, wrongly thought that he controlled giving life and death and was confounded when asked to control the rising and setting of the sun.

The expression *ألم تر؟* ('Have you not seen?') is highly rhetorical in Arabic, signifying something drastic, immense, or unusual. The use of 'seeing' actually calls for visualization and is normally used before telling an unusual or very significant story.

Conclusion

The Qur'anic style is indeed remarkable and deserves attention. Interrogative utterances contribute greatly to the Qur'an's eloquence. The use of interrogative utterances in everyday situations is one of the recurrent phenomena of verbal behaviour. Although interrogative utterances are primarily used to seek information, they may have a variety of rhetorical purposes such as declaring, denying, objecting, or threatening.

This study has focused on investigating the form and function of the interrogative utterances contained in *surah al-Baqarah*, adopting a descriptive approach based on the analysis and classification of linguistic utterances taking into consideration their contextual and situational features. Following this approach, the study has yielded some significant results. It has referred to the formal signals or markers that distinguish the use of interrogative utterances in the Qur'an.

It has been found that *surah al-Baqarah* is rich with interrogative utterances, which are skilfully employed to perform a variety of significant functions in addition to being used as gap-fillers in the framework of knowledge. Through interrogation, many religious notions have been stated, and many rules and doctrines have been declared; attention has been obtained and retained in order to pave the way for presenting religious teachings and beliefs. Interrogation has also been used to express wonder, objection, denial, blame, rebuke, threat, and the like. Interrogation is a useful technique for enriching linguistic expression and achieving desired effects.

NOTES

1. A.B.A. Oteify, 'Questioning for a Pedagogical Purpose', Unpublished Ph.D. thesis (England: Wales University, 1979), p. 1.
2. Charles C. Fries, *The Structure of English: An Introduction to the Construction of English Sentences* (London: Longmans, 1952), pp. 52-53.
3. Oteify, *op. cit.*, p. 2. See also Roger Fowler, *Understanding Language: An Introduction to Linguistics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974); Andreas Koutsoudas, 'On Wh-Words in English', *Journal of Linguistics*, 4;2 (1968), pp. 267-73; D. M. McKay, 'What Makes a Question?' *The Listener*, 63; 1623 (1960), pp. 789-90; Stanley L. Payne, *The Art of Asking Questions* (Princeton and New York: Princeton University Press, 1951).
4. For details see *Ibid.*, pp. 3-1
5. *Ibid.* p. 10.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-34.
7. Three authoritative sources of Qur'anic interpretation have been consulted: Jalal al-Din Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Mahalli and Jalal al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman bin Abi Bakr al-Suyuti, *Al-Qur'an al-Karim wa Bihamishihi Tafsir al-Imamain al-Jalalain*; Muhammad bin 'Ali al-Shawkani, *Fath al-Qadir al-Jami' baina fann al-riwayah wa dirayah min 'ilm al-tafsir*, and Syed Qutb, *Fi zilal al-Qur'an* (n.p., 1982).
8. All but a few verses of *surah al-Baqarah* belong to the Madinah period.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.
10. For detailed discussion of Arabic interrogation see A.F.L. Beeston, *The Arabic Language Today* (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1970); Abdulla Mustafa Dannan, 'Yes/No Question in English and Modern Standard Arabic: Contrastive Study with Special Emphasis on Syntactical Relationships', Unpublished M.A. thesis, (London: London Institute of Education, 1971); Robert J. Di Piatro, *Language Structure in Contrast* (Rowley, M.A.: Newbury House Publishers, 1971); Hilary Wise, *A Transformational Grammar of Spoken Egyptian Arabic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975); N.V. Yushmanov, *The Structure of the Arabic Language*, trans. Moshe Perlmann (Washington, DC: Centre for Applied Linguistics of the Modern Language Association of America, 1961).

Verses quoted from *surah al-Baqarah* are indicated by numbers within parentheses throughout the text of this study.