

## Comparative Constructions in the Language of the Holy Qur'an

## تراكيب المقارنة في لغة القرآن الكريم

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### الملخص

تركز الورقة الحالية على تعبير المقارنة في لغة القرآن، لغة الكتاب المقدس للأمة الإسلامية. فتبحث في الصنفين لمقارنات عدم المساواة: تراكيب المقارنة بين عنصرين وتراكيب المقارنة بين عنصر وعدة عناصر. وتهدف الورقة لتقديم وصف نحوي للصنفين من تراكيب المقارنة وبيان نقاط التشابه والاختلاف التي يمكن أن توجد بين الصنفين. وتسلسل الورقة الضوء أيضا على بعض السمات البلاغية المتكررة لهذه التراكيب كما يظهر في أمثلة تراكيب المقارنة في لغة القرآن. أوضحت الدراسة أن هناك ثلاثة أنواع من كل فئة، اثنان منها موجودان في صنفين تراكيب المقارنة. وتعد ظاهرة حذف عنصر أو أكثر، وظاهرة العطف بين معايير سمة المقارنة أو العطف بين تراكيب المقارنة ذاتها، وظاهرة المقارنة بين عناصر لا تشترك في سمة المقارنة أو المقارنة بين حدثين مختلفين هي سمات تميز تراكيب المقارنة في لغة القرآن. على حد علمي، لم يتم التطرق إلى تراكيب المقارنة في لغة القرآن من قبل، وبالتالي فإن الوصف المقدم في هذه الورقة هو المساهمة العلمية للعمل البحثي الحالي.

### الكلمات المفتاحية:

تراكيب المقارنة، عدم المساواة، المقارنة بين عنصرين، المقارنة بين عنصر وعدة عناصر

### Abstract

The focus of the present paper is the expression of comparison in the language of the Qur'an, the language of the Di-vine Book of the Muslim nation. It investigates the two classes of inequality comparisons: comparative constructions and superlative constructions. It aims to provide a syntactic scrutinization of the two classes of comparison constructions and points out any similarities and distinctions that may be present between the two classes. The paper also sheds light on some recurrent rhetorical aspects of the construction as found in the instances of comparison constructions in the language of the Qur'an. The study shows that there are three types of each class, two of which are present in the two classes of comparison constructions. Deletion of an element(s), coordination of parameters or of construction(s) and comparison of items not sharing the same property of the comparison or of two distinct events are characterizing aspects of comparative constructions in the language of the Qur'an. To the best of my knowledge, the topic of comparison constructions in the language of the Qur'an has not been tackled before and hence the characterization provided in this paper is the original contribution of the current research.

### Keywords

comparison constructions, inequality, comparative, superlative

## INTRODUCTION

The topic of comparison constructions has attracted the attention of researchers cross-linguistically, often with the aim of investigating the syntactic and semantic nature of the construction. Other works go further with the aim to identify the typology of the language with respect to the comparison construction. The focus of this paper is the comparison construction in the language of the Qur'an, the language of the Divine Book of the Muslim nation. It focuses on the syntactic aspects and some recurrent linguistic and rhetorical features of the two classes of inequality comparison constructions, namely comparative and superlative constructions. It also highlights some linguistic and rhetorical features that are recurrent in the two classes of the construction in the language of the Qur'an. Before proceeding, it is essential to give an overview on the definition and composition of comparison constructions.

Languages differ as to the strategies used in expressing a comparison. However, the term comparison construction is mainly used in cases where the comparison is syntactically marked. For example, of the two sentences that involve a comparison, only the sentence in (1b) is described in the literature as a comparison construction.

- 1)
  - a. Kim's salary is 5000 and Lee's salary is 10,000.
  - b. Kim is more intelligent than Lee

(Bacskai-Atkari, 2014: 2).

A comparison construction is defined as one that represents a quality, quantity or degree and one which relates to a 'relative position on some scale or relative degrees of some gradable property' (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002:1099). A comparison construction is composed of a number of basic elements. The first of these elements is what is referred to as the comparee, which is the entity under comparison. In (1b), *Kim* is the comparee. The other element is the standard of comparison and it is element to which the comparee is compared; in (1b), *Lee* is the standard of comparison. There is also the parameter which points out the property of comparison.<sup>1</sup> This is represented by the adjective *intelligent*. The quantifier *more* is described as the index which indicates the degree and the marker of comparison is represented by *than* in the given English sentence (see

<sup>1</sup> In Arabic, the adjective which represents the parameter of the comparison has a specific morphological pattern. The pattern is referred to as *ʔaf ʕal it-tafāʔil* or the relative form, where *ʔaf ʕal* includes three consonants as in *ʔaCCaC*. For example, the

Stassen, 1984; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p.1099; Bacskai-Atkari, 2014).

### Research Questions

The paper aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are the syntactic aspects of comparative constructions and superlative constructions as they are found in the language of the Qur'an?
2. What are the differences between the two classes of comparison constructions?
3. What are some of the recurrent linguistic features of the comparison construction in the language of the Qur'an?

### Methodology and Data

The work is divided into two main sections which focus on the two classes of comparison constructions: comparative constructions and superlative constructions. The different types under the two classes are identified. When applicable, I point to Dixon's (2008; 2012) typology of comparison constructions. Other syntactic aspects of the various types are indicated which include the order of the elements, the sentence types and the expressed or deleted elements. The syntactic characterization is then followed by a representation of some of the rhetorical aspects that are recurrent in the comparison construction in the language of the Qur'an.

The data will be collected from the Qur'an by thoroughly examining the verses of several chapters. This will also be accompanied by an electronic search of the corpus for some instances, resulting in a number of comparable instances of the construction but ones which are found in different contexts and with varying features. Sources on the interpretation of the various verses and parsing of the construction are consulted. These include Al-Tabari (2000), Al-Baghawi (1997) and Al-Saadi (2000) for the interpretation, and Darwish (1983) on the syntactic parsing of the elements in the construction.

## COMPARATIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

### Types of Comparative Constructions

The type of comparative constructions that is frequently found in the language of the Qur'an is one where the parameter appears in a predicative position and it heads a verbless clause or a copula clause. This type is referred to in Dixon's typology (2008; 2012) as Type A1.<sup>2</sup> The parameter functions as the

adjective *ʕagīr* is changed into *ʔaʕgar* in comparison constructions (see Ryding, 2005; Versteegh, 2007; AL-Sulami, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Type A1 comparative constructions are attested in several languages as indicated by Treis (2018); for

predicate and hence this type is also referred to as the predicative construction. The comparee functions as the subject and the standard of comparison with the standard marker —which form a PP— functions as an adjunct to the parameter. The two following examples are predicative comparative constructions:

2)

وَرَزَقُ رَبِّكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى  
[20:131]

*wa rizq-u rabbi-ka xair=un wa*  
and provision-NOM lord-your better-NOM and  
*ʔabqā*  
more.lasting.NOM  
'but the provision of your Lord is better and more lasting.'

3)

فَإِنْ كَانُوا أَكْثَرَ مِنْ ذَلِكَ فَهُمْ شُرَكَاءُ فِي الثَّلَاثِ  
[4:12]

*f-ʔin kān=ū ʔaktar-a min ɗalika*  
and-if were=3PL more-ACC than that  
*fa-hum šurakāʔu fi it-tuluṯ*  
so=3PL partners in the-third  
'but if they were more than two, they share in a third.'

The comparee is represented by the NP *rizqu rab-bika* 'the provision of your lord' in (2) and the 3PL pronoun in (3). The parameter is an adjective. In (2), there are two coordinated adjectives namely *xayr* 'better' and *ʔabqā* ('more lasting' and in (3), it is the adjective *ʔaktara* 'more'. As will be pointed out in section 2.5, coordination within the comparison construction(s) is a recurrent aspect in the language of the Qur'an. Note that when the parameter heads a verbless clause, it is nominative-case marked as in (2), and when the parameter is in a copula clause, it is accusative-case marked as in (3).

There is also the standard of comparison in (3) which is represented by the demonstrative pronoun *ɗalika* 'that'. The standard marker is the preposition *min* 'lit. from', which is equivalent to the standard marker 'than' in the English language. On the basis of the type of standard marker, Stassen (1985) classifies comparative constructions in Arabic similar to other Semitic languages as source comparatives. As for the expression of the standard of comparison with the standard marker, it is optional —such as in (2)— as it is understood from context. This point will be returned to in the discussion on deletion in comparison constructions.

In this type of comparative constructions, i.e. Type A1 or the predicative construction, the parameter can also be found as a derived noun such as

instance, Kambaata, Muna, Murui, and Turkish Sign Language.

*quwwatan* 'strength' or an ordinary noun such as the coordinated nouns *ʔmwālan* 'money' and *ʔawlādan* 'children' in the example given in (4). Note that when the parameter is a noun, it occurs with an index—namely an adjective—that expresses quantity or intensity. In (4), the adjectives *ʔašadda* 'lit. more intense' and *ʔaktara* 'more' represent the index. The parameter with an index constructs a complex comparative construction in contrast to the constructions in (3) and (4) which are simple comparative constructions. In this category of predicative comparative constructions, it is the index that functions as the predicate and the parameter is an argument of the predicate. The parameter in this case is accusative-case marked.

4)

كَانُوا أَشَدَّ مِنْكُمْ قُوَّةً وَأَكْثَرَ أَمْوَالًا وَأَوْلَادًا  
[9:69]

*kān=ū ʔašadd-a min=kum*  
were=3PL more.intense-ACC than=2PL  
*quwwat-an wa ʔaktar-a ʔamwāl-an*  
strength-ACC and more-ACC money-ACC  
*wa ʔawlād-a*  
and children-ACC

'They were mightier than you in power and more abundant in wealth and children.'

Another type of comparative constructions which is found less frequently than predicative comparative constructions is the one described in the literature as the attributive construction. In this type, the parameter is an adjective that occurs in an attributive rather than a predicative position and it is within the NP that includes the element that the parameter modifies, i.e. the comparee. The function of the comparee varies but the parameter is always a modifier of the comparee N head. In the example in (5), there are two attributive comparative constructions. The pronoun *huwa* is the comparee and the adjectives *ʔadna* 'lower' and *xair* 'better' are the parameters. Note that the parameters agree with the comparee in being nominative-case marked.<sup>3</sup>

5)

قَالَ أَتَسْتَبْدِلُونَ الَّذِي هُوَ أَدْنَىٰ بِالَّذِي هُوَ خَيْرٌ  
[2:61]

*qāla ʔatastabdilūna illaḍḍi*  
says.3SG INTER.PRT.exchange that  
*huwa ʔadnā bi-llaḍḍi huwa xair*  
which lower for that which better  
'He said 'would you exchange that which is lower for that which is better?'

<sup>3</sup> In Arabic, an adjective modifier agrees in case, gender and number with the noun it modifies.

The parameter can also be a verb that is inherently a comparative lexeme, such as with *yuʔtir* and *yufaḍil*, both of which mean ‘to prefer’ as in (6) and (7). The construction including the verbal parameter represents a third type of the comparative construction. In this type, the verbal parameter which is a transitive verb is the predicate and the comparee is the object argument of the verb.<sup>4</sup> Note that the standard marker in comparative constructions with a verbal parameter is not the preposition *min* ‘than’ but the preposition *ʕalā* ‘lit. on’, which means ‘over’.

6)

بَلْ تُؤْتِرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا  
[87:16]

*bal tuʔtir=ūna il-ḥayāta*  
rather prefer=2PL the-life-ACC  
*id-dunyā*  
the-life.of.this.world  
‘Rather you prefer the life of this world.’

7)

وَأَنِّي فَضَّلْتُكُمْ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ  
[2:47]

*wa ʔann=ī faḍḍal=tu=kum ʔala*  
and EMPH.PRT=1SG prefer=1SG=2PL over  
*il-ʔālamīn*  
the-nations  
‘And I preferred you over the nations.’

In fact, this type of standard marker i.e. *ʕalā* ‘lit. on’ is consistent with locative comparatives in Stassen’s typology (1985; 2013), and hence it could be said that Arabic does not only include source comparatives but also locative comparatives.

### Order of Elements

The order of the elements varies according to the type of the comparative construction. The ordinary order of the elements in simple predicative comparative constructions with an adjective parameter is to have the comparee first, followed by the adjectival parameter and then the marker and the standard of comparison. In complex comparative constructions, the ordinary order is the same except that the index precedes the parameter. The ordinary order of simple and complex predicative comparative constructions can be summarized as follows:

Comparee – Parameter – Marker – Standard of Comparison

Simple Comparative Construction

Comparee – Index – Parameter – Marker – Standard of Comparison

Complex Comparative Construction

With that being said, there are several instances where the PP including the standard marker and the standard of comparison is found preceding rather

than following the parameter. In this respect, emphasis is placed on the standard of comparison. Accordingly, the index and the parameter are not in a sequence as in the ordinary order. In example (8), the PP including the standard marker *min* ‘than’ and the standard of comparison 2<sup>nd</sup> pronoun *ka* ‘you’ occurs between the index *ʔaktara* ‘more’ and the parameter *māl-an* ‘money’.

8)

أَنَا أَكْثَرُ مِنْكَ مَالًا  
[18:34]

*ʔana ʔaktar-u min=ka māl-an*  
1SG more-NOM than=2SG money-ACC  
‘I am greater than you in wealth.’

As for comparative constructions including a verbal parameter, the order is that of an ordinary verbal clause (VSO) where the parameter is the verb and the comparee is the object. The two elements are followed by the marker and standard of comparison when the latter are expressed. In attributive comparative constructions, there is no difference in the word order from simple comparative constructions where the comparee occurs first followed by the modifying parameter and the standard of comparison with the standard marker when the latter are expressed.

### Sentence Types

Comparative constructions can be found in different sentence types. The common sentence type is the statement, which can either be positive as in examples 1-6 or negative as in the verbal comparative construction in (9); the negative particle precedes the comparee and the parameter.

9)

قَالُوا لَنْ نُؤْتِرَكَ عَلَى مَا جَاءَنَا مِنَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ  
[20:72]

*qāl=ū lan nuʔtira=ka ʔalā mā*  
say=3PL not prefer=2SG over what  
*jāʔan=ā. min il-bayyināt*  
come.PST=1PL of the-clear.signs  
‘We prefer you not over what have come to us of the clear signs.’

However, comparative constructions in the language of the Qur’an in an interrogative are frequently found, whether they be information questions as in (10) and (11) or a yes/no question as in (12).

10)

وَلَتَعْلَمَنَّ أَيُّنَا أَشَدُّ عَذَابًا وَأَبْقَى  
[20:71]

*wa lataʔammunna ʔayyu=nā ʔaššaddu*  
and EMPH.PRT.know 2PL which more.intense  
*ʕaḍāban wa ʔabqā*  
torment and more.lasting

<sup>4</sup> Dixon’s (2008; 2012) Type A2 represents comparative constructions including a verbal parameter but one which is an intransitive verb.

'and you shall surely know which of us can give the severe and more lasting torment.'

11)

قَالَ أَتَسْتَبْدِلُونَ الَّذِي هُوَ أَدْنَىٰ بِالَّذِي هُوَ خَيْرٌ  
[2:61]

*qāla ʔatastabdilūna illaddī huwa*  
says.3SG INTER.PRT.exchange that which  
*ʔadnā bi-llaḍī huwa xair*  
lower for that which better  
'He said 'would you exchange that which is lower for that which is better?''

12)

أَلَمْ أَشَدُّ خَلْقًا أَمْ مَنْ خَلَقْنَا  
[37:11]

*ʔahum ʔaššaddu xalq-an ʔam man*  
are=3PL harder-NOM creation-ACC or those  
*xalaq=na*  
create.PST=1PL  
'Are they harder to create or those whom we have created?'

The interrogative sentence can also be negative as in example (13); in this case, the negative particle occurs between the interrogative particle and the comparee.

13)

أَوَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِأَعْلَمَ بِمَا فِي صُفُورِ الْعَالَمِينَ  
[29:10]

*ʔwa laysa illahu bi-ʔaflama*  
INTERR.PRT not Allah PRE-know.better  
*bi-ma fī ṣudūri il-ʔalami*  
PRE-that in breasts the-nations  
'Is it not Allah who knows best of what is in the breasts of the nations?'

Moreover, several interrogative comparative constructions are found within an imperative sentence such as the example in (14) which starts with the verb *qul* 'say'.

14)

قُلْ هَلْ أُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِشَرٍّ مِّنْ ذَلِكَ مُتُوبَةً عِنْدَ اللَّهِ  
[5:60]

*qul hal ʔu=nabbiʔu=kum bi-ššarrin*  
say INTERRO.PRT 1SG=tell=2PL PRE-worse  
*min ḍalika matūbatan ʔinda illah*  
than that recompense from Allah  
'Say: "Shall I inform you of something worse than that, regarding the recompense from Allah?''

Another sentence type in which comparative constructions can be found in the Qur'an is what can be described as a sworn declaration sentence such as the example in (15). The sworn declaration is indicated by the verb *yuqsimān* 'they swear' and the swearing particle *la* that is attached to the comparee.

15)

فَيُقْسِمَانِ بِاللَّهِ لَشَهَادَتُنَا أَحَقُّ مِنْ شَهَادَتَيْهِمَا  
[5:107]

*fa-yuqsimāni bi-illāhi*  
and-swear=3DUL PRE-Allah  
*la-šahādatu=nā*

SWEAR.PRT-testimony=our

*ʔahaqqu min šahādati=himā*

truer than testimony=their

'They swear by Allah (saying): "We affirm that our testimony is truer than that of both of them."'

Comparative constructions are also found within a conditional sentence such as the example in (16).

16)

فَإِنْ كَانُوا أَكْثَرَ مِنْ ذَلِكَ فَهُمْ شُرَكَاءُ فِي النَّارِ  
[4:12]

*fa- ʔin kān=ū ʔaktar-a min ḍalika*

and-if were=3PL more-ACC than that

*fa-hum šurakāʔu fī it-tuluṭ*

so=3PL partners in the-third

'but if they were more than two, they share in a third.'

Note that in the different sentence types, there is no change in the order of the elements constituting comparative constructions.

### Deletion

One characterizing feature of comparative constructions in the language of the Qur'an is the deletion of an element or more as the element(s) is understood from context. There are different cases of deletion that are attested in the data under study. The most frequently deleted element in comparative constructions is the standard of comparison; in this case, the standard marker is also deleted. For example, in (17), the comparee is the pronoun *huwa* 'it' and the parameter is the adjective *ʔqsaṭ* 'fairer'. There is no PP representing the standard of comparison and the marker, but the meaning is understood from context.

17)

ادْعُوهُمْ لِآبَائِهِمْ هُوَ أَقْسَطُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ  
[33:5]

*ʔudʔū=hum li-ʔabāʔi=him huwa ʔqsaṭu*

call-them PRE-fathers =their 3SG fairer

*ʔinda illāh*

with Allah

'Call them by their fathers, that is more just with Allah.'

In the preceding context, the case of adopting children and not calling them by their real fathers is mentioned. In this verse it is mentioned that calling them after their fathers is fairer. Thus, the implied meaning of the standard of comparison is 'not calling them by their fathers' and the meaning of the comparative construction with the deleted standard of comparison is 'calling them by their fathers is fairer with Allah than not calling them by their fathers.'

Another common case of deletion in the language of the Qur'an is that of the comparee. In the example in (18), the parameter, the standard of comparison, and standard marker are expressed but the comparee is implied; it is understood as *ʔāyat* 'a verse'. Note that the noun *ʔāyat*, which stands for the implied comparee, has a different referent from the noun *ʔāyat* 'a verse' mentioned in the preceding clause, which has the same referent as that of the pronoun

*hā* 'it' which represents the standard of comparison.  
18)

مَا نَنْسَخُ مِنْ آيَةٍ أَوْ نُنسِئُهَا نَأْتِ بِخَيْرٍ مِنْهَا  
[2:106]

*ma na=nsax min ṣayatin ṣaw*  
whatever 1SG=abrogate PRE verse or  
*nunsi=ha na=ṣti bi-xairin*  
cause.to.be.forgotten=3SG 1SG=bring pre-better  
*min=ha*  
than=3SG

'Whatever a verse We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, we bring a better one.'

There are also interesting cases when only one element is expressed as the other elements are deleted. For example, in the verse given in (19), only the parameter is expressed, with the comparee, the standard marker and the standard of comparison being deleted. In this example, the parameter is the adjective *ṣaxfa* 'more hidden'. The implied meaning of the comparee is understood as the pronoun 'that' and the implied meaning of the standard of comparison with the standard marker is 'than the secret'. So, the overall meaning of the construction is 'that which is even more hidden than the secret'.

19)

وَإِنْ تَجَهَّرَ بِالْقَوْلِ فَإِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ السِّرَّ وَأَخْفَى  
[20:7]

*wa ṣin tajhar*  
and EMPH.PRT speak.aloud.2SG  
*bi-il-qawli fa-ṣinna=hu yaṣlamu*  
PRE-the-saying PRE-EMPH.PRT=3SG know.3SG  
*is-sirra wa ṣaxfa*  
the-secret and more.hidden

'And if you speak aloud, then verily, He knows the secret and that which is yet more hidden.'

In another example given in (20), only the comparee is expressed, with the other elements being deleted and only understood from context. In this example, the comparee is the pronoun *huwa* 'he'. The sentence starts with the interrogative *ṣam man* 'is it' which questions 'who is better?' i.e. is it this person with the mentioned characteristics better or the person mentioned in the preceding context (the verse representing the preceding context is given in (21)). Accordingly, the implied parameter is the comparative adjective *xair* 'better' and the standard of comparison has the referent of the person described in (21).

20)

أَمَّنْ هُوَ قَانِئٌ أَنْاءَ اللَّيْلِ سَاجِدًا وَقَلِيمًا يَخْذُرُ الْآخِرَةَ وَيَرْجُو رَحْمَةً رَبِّهِ  
[39:9]

*ṣam-man huwa qanitun ṣanaṣa*  
INTERRO.PRT-who 3SG obedient during  
*il-layli sajidan wa qaṣiman yaḥḍaru*

<sup>5</sup> The ordinary case is that the standard marker co-occurs with the standard of comparison; the expression or deletion of the former depends on that of the latter.

the-night prostrating and standing fear.3SG  
*il-ṣaxirata wa yarjū raḥmata rabbi=h*  
the-Hereafter and hope.3SG mercy lord=his  
'Is the one who is obedient to Allah, in the depths of the nights prostrating and standing in prayers, fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the mercy of his Lord.'

21)

وَإِذَا مَسَّ الْإِنْسَانَ ضُرٌّ دَعَا رَبَّهُ مُنِيبًا إِلَيْهِ ثُمَّ إِذَا خَوَّلَهُ نِعْمَةً مِنْهُ نَسِيَ مَا كَانَ يَدْعُو إِلَيْهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ  
[39:8]

'And when some hurt touches man, he cries to his Lord, turning to Him in repentance. But when He bestows a favor upon him from Himself, he forgets that for which he cried for before, and he sets up rivals to Allah, in order to mislead others from His path.'

Another case of deletion is the instance where only the standard of comparison is deleted. In the example in (22), the comparee, the parameter and even the standard marker are expressed but the standard of comparison is understood.<sup>5</sup> The standard of comparison has the same referent of the NP *il-muṣminīna* 'the-believers'.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the overall meaning of the construction is that the prophet is closer to the believers than the believers are to themselves.

22)

النَّبِيُّ أَوْلَىٰ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ مِنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ  
[33:6]

*ṣan-nabiyyu ṣawla bi-il-muṣminīna min*  
the-prophet closer PRE-the-believers than  
*ṣanfusi=him*  
selves=them  
'The prophet is closer to the believers than themselves.'

The different attested cases of deletion within comparative constructions in the language of the Qur'an are summarized below. The first case is that of comparative constructions including all the elements without deletion.

Comparee – Parameter – Standard Marker – Standard of Comparison

Comparee – Parameter – -----

----- – Parameter – Standard Marker – Standard of Comparison

----- – Parameter – -----

Comparee – -----

Comparee – Parameter – Standard Marker – -----

### Other Features of the Construction in the Language of the Qur'an

<sup>6</sup> The NP is part of the PP which is a complement of the adjective parameter *ṣawlā* 'closer'.

One recurrent feature of the many instances of comparative constructions in the language of the Qur'an relates to coordination. Coordination can be of two or more parameters or indexes within the single construction. For example, in (23), the three parameters *ʔaqṣaṭu* 'more just', *ʔaqwamu* 'more solid', and *ʔadnā* 'less likely' are coordinated with the conjunction *wa* 'and'.

(23)

ذَلِكُمْ أَهْسَطُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَأَقْوَمُ لِلشَّهَادَةِ وَأَدْنَىٰ أَلَّا تَرْتَابُوا  
[2:282]

*ḍalikum ʔaqṣaṭ-u ʔinda illahi wa*  
that more.just-NOM with Allah and  
*ʔaqwam-u li-ššahādati wa*  
more.solid-NOM for-evidence and  
*ʔadnā ʔalla tartabū*  
more.away.NOM to have.doubt.2PL

'That is more just with Allah; more solid as evidence, and more convenient to prevent doubts among yourselves.'

There is also the coordination of two constructions. For example, in (23), two clauses are coordinated by the conjunction *ʔam* 'or'. The first clause includes the comparee *ḍalika* 'that', which refers to the punishment mentioned in the preceding context. The parameter in both clauses is the adjective *xair* 'better' which is deleted in the second clause. The comparee in the second clause is the NP *jannatu il-xuld* 'the paradise of eternity'. The standard of comparison is not expressed in the two clauses as the meaning is implied; in each clause it has the same referent as the referent of the comparee in the other clause. This aspect of referent exchange of the elements in the construction is a characterising feature in contexts where coordination is found. Needless to say, the feature is an instance of coherence in the language of the Qur'an.

(24)

فَلِأَنَّكَ خَيْرٌ أَمْ جَنَّةُ الْخُلْدِ الَّتِي وَعِدَ الْمُتَّقُونَ  
[25:15]

*qul ʔa-ḍalika xair-un ʔam*  
say INTERRO.PRT-that better-NOM or  
*jannatu il-xuldi illatī w<u>ʔ<i>da*  
paradise the-eternity which <PASS>promise.PST  
*il-muttaqūn*  
the-pious

'Is that better or the Paradise of Eternity which is promised to the pious people?'

This same feature of referent exchange between the elements of the coordinated constructions applies to the examples in (25) and (26).

(25)

فَلِأَنْتُمْ أَعْلَمُ أَمْ اللَّهُ  
[2:140]

*qul ʔa-ʔantum ʔaʔlam-u*  
say INTERRO-PRT know.better-NOM  
*ʔami illah*  
or Allah

'Do you know better or does Allah?'

(26)

أَهُمْ أَسَدُّ خَلْقًا أَمْ مَنْ خَلَقْنَا  
[37:11]

*ʔahum ʔaššaddu xalq-an ʔam man*  
are=3PL harder-NOM creation-ACC or those  
*xalaq=na*  
create.PST=1PL

'Are they harder to create or those whom we have created?'

Comparative constructions can also be found embedded in another comparative construction as in the example in (27). The relative clause *illadḍī huwa ʔadna* 'that which is lower' represents the first comparative construction. It includes the other relative clause *illadḍī huwa xair* 'that which is better', which is also a comparative construction that functions as a complement of the preposition *bi* 'for'.

(27)

قَالَ أَتَسْتَبْدِلُونَ الَّذِي هُوَ أَدْنَىٰ بِالَّذِي هُوَ خَيْرٌ  
[2:61]

*qāla ʔatastabdilūna illadḍī huwa*  
says.3SG INTER.PRT.exchange that which  
*ʔadnā bi-lladḍī huwa xair*  
lower for that which better

'He said 'would you exchange that which is lower for that which is better?'

Another recurrent feature of comparative constructions in the language of the Qur'an is the comparison between elements that do not share the property expressed by the parameter is a feature found in several instances of comparative constructions in the language of the Qur'an (see e.g. Zuckermann, 2006 for the same aspect in Israeli Hebrew). For example, in the comparative constructions given in (24) and repeated in (28) for convenience, the comparee and the standard of comparison do not share the aspect denoted by the parameter *xair* 'better'. The meaning is that 'is it this kind of punishment that is described better or the paradise'. A punishment, however, cannot be described as being good in a literal sense.

(28)

فَلِأَنَّكَ خَيْرٌ أَمْ جَنَّةُ الْخُلْدِ الَّتِي وَعِدَ الْمُتَّقُونَ  
[25:15]

*qul ʔa-ḍalika xair-un ʔam*  
say INTERRO.PRT-that better-NOM or  
*jannatu il-xuldi illatī w<u>ʔ<i>da*  
paradise the-eternity which <PASS>promise.PST  
*il-muttaqūn*  
the-pious

'Is that better or the Paradise of Eternity which is promised to the pious people?'

There is also the case of drawing a comparison between two distinct events. In (29), for example, the comparative construction expresses the event of 'the believer's loving of Allah'. This is compared to the other event expressed in the preceding context as given in (30), i.e. the event of 'the people's loving of equals appointed for worship.' So, in the comparative construction in (29), the comparee is the relative clause and the index and the parameter are *ʔaššaddu ḥubban* 'love more'. The standard of

comparison and the standard marker are not expressed but are understood from the context given in (30). Therefore, the meaning of the comparison between the two events is as follows: 'the believer's loving of Allah' is greater than 'the mentioned people's loving of the ones they worship'.

29)

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَشَدُّ حُبًّا لِلَّهِ  
[2:165]

*wa illaddīna ḡamanū ḡaššaddu*  
and who believe.PST. more.intense-NOM  
*ḡubban. li-llah*  
love-ACC PRE-Allah

'But those who believe, love Allah more.'

30)

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَتَّخِذُ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ أَندَادًا  
[2:165]

'And of mankind are some who take (for worship) others besides Allah as rivals (to Allah)'

### Superlative Constructions

#### Types

The other class of inequality constructions in the language of the Qur'an is the class of superlative constructions. It is worth pointing out that superlative constructions exhibit similarities as well as differences from comparative constructions, which will be indicated through the subsequent characterization. Like in the case of comparative constructions, there is the type referred to as the predicative construction i.e. one where the parameter is in the predicative position. An example of this type is given in (31). In this example, the comparee is the pronoun *ḡanta* 'you' and is the subject of the verbless clause. The parameter is the definite adjective *il-ḡašla* 'the highest' and is the predicate.

31)

إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْأَعْلَى  
[20:68]

*ḡinnaka ḡanta il-ḡašla*  
EMPH.PRT.2SG 2SG the-uppermost  
'You will have the uppermost hand.'

Also, like the case with comparative constructions, superlative constructions in the language of the Qur'an can be found as an attributive construction, i.e. where the parameter is in an attributive position and where the parameter and the comparee are within the same NP. In this type, the parameter functions as a modifier of the comparee rather than a predicate as in the case of the predicative construction. The example in (32) is an attributive superlative construction.

32)

فَيُعَذِّبُهُ اللَّهُ الْعَذَابَ الْأَكْبَرَ  
[88:165]

*fa-yuḡaddibu=hu illāh-u*  
then-punish=3SG Allah-NOM

*il-ḡaḡab-a il-ḡakbar-a*  
the-punishment-ACC the-biggest-ACC

'Then Allah will punish him with the greatest punishment.'

In this attributive construction, the parameter is the definite adjective *il- ḡakbar* 'the biggest', which functions as a modifier of the comparee head N *il-ḡaḡab* 'the punishment', which in turn functions in this example as a direct object of the verb *yuḡaddib* 'punish'.

A third type of superlative constructions which is not possible with comparative constructions is the one occurring in the pattern called a construct state.<sup>7</sup>

In construct state superlative constructions, the parameter is the head and the comparee, which is a genitive-cased marked N, functions as a complement. In the construct state superlative construction given in (33), the parameter is the adjective *ḡardal* 'worst' and the comparee is the definite N *il-ḡumur* 'the age'.

33)

وَمِنْكُمْ مَّن يُرَدُّ إِلَىٰ أَرْدَلِ الْعُمُرِ  
[16:70]

*wa min=kum man yuraddu ḡila ḡardali*  
and of=2pl who are.sent.back to worst  
*il-ḡumur*  
the-age

'And there are some who are sent back to the worst of ages.'

Note that in all the above examples, only the comparee and the parameter are expressed. This is another point of divergence between the two classes of comparison constructions; while in comparative constructions, there can be found the standard marker followed by the standard of comparison, the case is different with superlative constructions. In superlative constructions, the two elements are understood from context, and the construct state can be rephrased to a pattern including the preposition *min* (lit. from) and the standard of comparison and the meaning is similar to 'of all' or 'of other'.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, the understood meaning in (33), for instance, is similar to 'the worst of all ages'.

Nevertheless, there are examples of superlative constructions where the standard of comparison without a standard marker are expressed. In (34) and (35), for example, the standard of comparison is part of a construct state that includes the parameter; the parameter is the head and the standard of comparison is the complement of the parameter.

34)

الَّذِينَ اللَّهُ بِأَحْكَمِ الْحَاكِمِينَ

<sup>7</sup> The construct state is a pattern found in Semitic languages where there are two constituents, the first being a noun or an adjective and the second is a genitive-case marked noun (see Ryding 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Note that the preposition *min* is different from the marker *min* in comparative constructions which is equivalent to the marker 'than' in English.



[95:8]

*ʔa-laysa* *illah-u*  
EMPH.PRT-negative.PRT Allah-NOM  
*bi-ʔaḥkami il-ḥakim-īn*  
PRE-wisest the-judges-GEN  
'Is not Allah the wisest of all the judges.'  
35)

وَأَنْتَ أَزْكَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ  
[21:83]

*wa ʔanta ʔarḥam-u*  
and 2SG most.merciful-NOM  
*ir-raḥim-īn*  
the-merciful.PL-GEN  
'And you are the most merciful of all those who show mercy.'

### **Order of Elements**

The order of the elements in superlative constructions differs according to the type of the construction. In predicative and attributive superlative constructions, the comparee occurs first followed by the parameter which in turn is followed by the standard of comparison when the latter is expressed as in the examples given in (31) and (32). In construct state superlative constructions such as the example in (33), however, the parameter occurs first, which is then followed by the comparee. The order of the elements and possible patterns of superlative constructions can be summarized as follow:

Comparee – Parameter  
Comparee – Parameter – Standard of Comparison-  
Parameter – Comparee

### **Sentence Types**

Superlative constructions can be found as a statement, such as the examples given in (31-33) and (35). It can also be found in an interrogative as in the example in (34), which in this case is negative.

### **Findings**

In the language of the Qur'an, two classes of inequality comparison constructions are found; namely comparative constructions and superlative constructions. The two classes exhibit similarities as well as distinctions. As for comparative constructions, the most frequently occurring type is the predicative construction or what is referred to as TypeA1 in Dixon's (2008; 2012) typology. In this type, the parameter is a predicate and the comparee is the subject of the clause. The standard marker is the preposition *min* 'lit. from', which is equivalent to the standard marker in English i.e. 'than'. Therefore, Arabic is classified under languages with source comparatives. The second type of comparative constructions which occurs less frequently is the attributive construction, in which the parameter functions as a modifier of the comparee and the two elements are in an attributive position. There is also, however, a third type of comparative constructions which includes a transitive verbal parameter. In this type of comparative constructions, the standard marker is *ʔala* 'on' rather than *min* 'lit. than'. Therefore, be-

side Arabic comparative constructions being classified under source comparatives, as pointed out by Stassen (1985; 2013), it is not the only type involved. Obviously, source comparatives can be seen as the typical type. As for superlative constructions, there are three types: the predicative, attributive, and the construct state superlative constructions, each of which show distinct behaviour. Therefore, superlative constructions share with comparative constructions the predicative and the attributive types of comparison constructions. Another distinction between superlative constructions and comparative constructions is that the standard marker in the former is always implied but it can be overtly expressed in the latter. The order of the elements within the two classes of comparison constructions differ according to its type; change of ordinary order for emphasis is sometimes found.

As for the other aspects of the construction, diversity is found with respect to comparative constructions than with the instances of superlative constructions. Comparative constructions can be found in different sentence patterns including a statement, an interrogative (whether as positive or negative), an imperative, and a sworn declaration. Deletion of any elements in comparative constructions is a characterising feature of the construction in the language the Qur'an. Several cases of deletion are found. There is the deletion of a single element as well as multiple elements, resulting in cases where only one element of the comparative construction is expressed while all the other elements remain implied and understood from context. A frequent case is the deletion of the standard of comparison with the standard marker. There is also the deletion of either the comparee or the parameter alone. Finally, there is the deletion of the standard of comparison while the other elements, including the standard marker, are expressed, the regular case being the standard marker and the standard of comparison are either both expressed or both deleted. Coordination of two or more parameters and coordination of two comparative constructions is recurrent in the language of the Qur'an. Comparison between elements not sharing the same property that is expressed by the parameter or between distinct events is also a characterising feature of comparative constructions in the language of the Qur'an. As for superlative constructions, it can be found as a statement or an interrogative and the standard of comparison is the element that can be found deleted.

In fact, the varying order of the elements, the sentence types, the several cases of deletion, coordination and comparison between distinct events or elements not sharing the property expressed by the parameter shed light on the rhetorical features of the comparison construction in the language of the Qur'an.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The present work has focused on the two classes of inequality comparison constructions in the language of the Qur'an namely comparative constructions and superlative constructions. It has shed light on the syntactic aspects of the two classes, identifying the different types, the order of elements within the construction, the sentence types in which the construction occur, and the expressed or the deleted elements in the construction. The study has also indicated the differences between the two classes and highlighted other characterizing linguistic and/or rhetorical features of the construction. Therefore, the contribution of the present work can be seen from different angles; the characterization of the comparison construction in the language of the Qur'an, a topic not tackled before, is an enrichment of the linguistic work on Arabic in general and on the language of the Qur'an in particular. In addition, the study adds to research on comparison constructions cross-linguistically. One class of comparison constructions referred to in the literature as equality constructions is not studied in the present work. Conducting a study on the features of the respective construction in the language of the Qur'an or in Arabic in general would thus contribute to linguistic literature.

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