

# FUNCTIONS OF INTERROGATION IN THE HADITH: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY

by  
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This paper investigates the major interrogative functions in the Prophet Muhammad's Hadith, as represented in *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, a collection of sayings and deeds of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH ['peace be upon him']). The article endeavors to provide answers to the following questions: 1) What types of interrogation particles are used in the Hadith? 2) What are the interrogative functions that are used in the Hadith? And 3) To what extent do translations of the interrogative functions found in the Hadith reflect the functions of the original Arabic interrogatives?

The article's theoretical framework builds on the assumption that language is best interpreted in accordance with the context of the situation. In addition, the ethnography of communication approach is shown to be useful in interpreting the use of interrogation in the Hadith. In the study, it is argued that use of the Arabic interrogation particle, the hamza, is the Prophet's major way of interrogating as a means of conveying his message in the Hadith. Consequently, in order to appropriately interpret interrogation and its functions in the Hadith, its readers (whether insiders or outsiders) will have to take into account the context of the situation, including the sociocultural elements, values, religious beliefs, and settings in which the Hadith were originally delivered; this is particularly important in the case of Orientalists who are interested in reading, discussing, or interpreting the Prophet's Hadith. Finally, since simple translations of the Hadith do not conserve the original interrogative functions found in the Arabic version, the study recommends for the translator of Hadith to provide additional information that will help readers understand the real or appropriate interpretation of these functions, as they are used in the Hadith.

## *1. Introduction*

Linguists, sociolinguists, and philosophers pay close attention to the nature and role of language in general, and have developed a

number of different theories about religious language in particular. One reason for their interest in religious language stems from their interest in questions of meaning, in particular how words about God derive their meaning. Another reason for their interest in religious language is based in their attempt to analyze and evaluate religious beliefs, as these are expressed in the form of statements and propositions.

Many linguists and sociolinguists have adopted a functional framework for discussing religious discourse. Thus, Peterson et al. (1991), when discussing the language used in religious contexts, point out that the

functional analysts tried to understand the functioning of religious language. They sought to learn what kinds of tasks it performs. They came to see language as a complex social phenomenon that is adequate to the ever-changing purposes of human beings. And religious language was seen, therefore, as serving certain unique human purposes.

A functional analysis applies a plethora of methods and approaches to their subjects; these approaches and methods all have one single thread in common, viz., the use of language in its social context (Spolsky 1998:4). The next section provides more information on the functions of language as conceived by linguists and sociolinguists who are interested in language in general and in the religious language in particular.

## *2. Sociolinguistics and the study of the language of religion*

Sociolinguistics is the field, as Spolsky (1998:3) points out, that 'studies language and society, between the uses of language and the social structures in which the users of language live'. Spolsky adds

that sociolinguistics assumes that human society is made up of many patterns and behaviors'. Since religion is a domain of human behavior with an important language component, the study of religion and its accompanying language properly belongs in sociolinguistics. Similarly, Samarin (1976) argues that

sociolinguistics studies the ways speakers select products of their grammar (one might call them texts or discourse) according to social variables. Sociolinguistics is concerned therefore with choices or decisions that speakers make (a) where the linguistic code (or grammar) permits and (b) where these choices have cultural significance... Sociolinguistic studies of religion [thus] seek to determine the way in which language is exploited for religious ends. (1976:2-3)

In applying these aspects and perspectives to religious studies, sociolinguistics is expected to inform us how the language of religion and its various functions are structured, as well as how they are related to other aspects of a given culture. Such a sociolinguistic and functional approach to language is, thus, essential for the analysis and interpretation of religious discourse such as that of the Holy Qur'an and of Prophet Muhammad's *Hadith*<sup>1</sup>; these are the texts which constitute the corpus analyzed in the present study.

Pandharipande (1987) emphasizes the significance of sociolinguistics for the study of language of religion; she summarizes the major contributions of recent studies on the language of religion (Christian 1976, Ferguson 1976, Gossen 1976, Samarin 1976, and Robin 1976) as aiming to:

- (a) identify the functions, goals, and ends of language in the domain of religion;
- (b) characterize the way in which language structure is exploited for or adopted to religious ends;
- (c) provide a norm to separate the institutionalized variety of

language, i.e. the language of religion from the non-religious ordinary language; (d) point out how religious beliefs influence the structure of the language; and (e) finally, make a strong case for the necessity to take into account the religious context for an adequate analysis of the language of religion and for the intelligibility of religious discourse. (Pandharipande 1987:299)

Other studies such as Hymes (1962) (cited in Stubbs, 1987:46), propose seven broad types of factors or components of language in use: Sender, Receiver, Message, Form, Channel, Code, Topic, and Setting (Hymes 1962: 110). To these seven factors, Hymes says, there correspond seven functions: the expressive/emotive, the directive/conative/persuasive, the poetic, the contact (physical or psychological), the metalinguistic (focusing on meaning), the referential, and the contextual/situational (Hymes 1962: 117). (In a footnote (1962: 111), Hymes refers to Roman Jakobson's well-known 'Concluding Remarks' delivered at the 1958 Conference on Style at Indiana University and published in the 1960 *Proceedings* of the conference. The six functions listed there by Jakobson are near-identical to the seven listed by Hymes, minus one; the original authorship remains doubtful now that both protagonists have passed away, lately Hymes in 2009, but in the common knowledge the functions are considered to be Jakobson's, not Hymes' invention.)

In his commentary on the above-stated functions, Stubbs (1987:46-7) points out that for Hymes, the seven functions generally correspond to various factors to which speakers attend in speech situations. Thus, appropriate language may depend on different contributions corresponding to sender, receiver, message form, channel (e.g. speech versus writing), code (e.g. dialect, language or jargon), topic, and setting or situation.

Consider for example how, in terms of the previously listed factors, one might analyze or describe a sermon or a Hadith spoken

by the Prophet. The typical sender/speaker is the Prophet, the receivers/listeners are a group of Companions constituting a religious congregation, the setting/situation a mosque, the channel is the direct speech transmitted by the Companions, the message form is made up by the actual sounds, words, and sentences uttered by the Prophet, while the topic consists in some appropriate religious content. In a later article (1972a), Hymes provides a much fuller elaboration of the speech components; but the data provided in the 1962 article is sufficient for the purpose of the present study.

In the context of the above information, our discussion will focus on the interrogative functions as handled by the Prophet in his Hadith. The present paper is thus oriented toward developing a framework for analyzing and interpreting the various interrogative devices and their functions as they are used in the Prophet's Hadith and presented and narrated in *Sahih Al-Bukhari*.<sup>2</sup>

### *3. Statement of the questions in this study*

This paper investigates the major functions of interrogation in Arabic religious discourse as generally represented in the Prophet's Hadith. It aims at providing a better understanding and interpretation of both the language of religion as represented in the Hadith and of the specific aspects of the language used in religious discourse. It also attempts to investigate one particular feature of the language of the Hadith: the use and functions of interrogation, especially as represented by the use of the *hamza*, the major interrogation particle in Arabic. Thus the paper discusses, and tries to find answers to, the following research questions:

1. What types of interrogation particles are used in the Hadith?

2. What are the interrogative functions used in the Hadith?  
And
3. To what extent does the translation of the interrogative functions found in the Hadith reflect the interrogative functions of the original Arabic?

The study of interrogation in the Hadith is essential for an understanding of the form and functions of religious language with a view to its interpretation. A study of the language of religion that can precisely characterize the structure of the language of a particular religion such as Islam is therefore needed. More importantly, such a study is needed in order to provide insight into the underlying system of Muslim religious beliefs—beliefs which are seriously misinterpreted by Western people in general and by many Orientalist scholars in particular. Also, such a study would be helpful in understanding not only the linguistic structure of Classical Arabic, as it is represented in the Prophet's Hadith; in addition it would promote a better understanding and an appropriate interpretation of the beliefs of this particular religious system. Such an understanding and interpretation are of crucial importance in our modern world, since after the Holy Qur'an, the Prophet's Hadith constitutes the second major source of legislation in Islam.

#### *4. Theoretical framework*

The theoretical framework of the present paper is based on the view, held by many sociolinguistics scholars such as Kachru (1981), Halliday (1978), Hymes (1974) and others, that language is best studied and interpreted in terms of its contexts of situation. Language is considered to have a function or a meaning dependent on its use in some social and cultural contexts. It is thus the contextual function

that constitutes the linguistic function and guarantees linguistic meaning and interpretation.

The paper's theoretical approach is that of the ethnography of communication as a means to interpret and discuss the intended meaning of, and the functions underlying, the Prophet's use of interrogation in the Hadith. Hymes (1966; 1972b; 1974) developed this approach as a challenge to Chomsky's then dominant linguistic theory, with its focus on 'competence' as the idealized speaker's knowledge of the grammatical rules. Hymes' focus, instead, was on 'communicative competence': the tacit social, psychological, cultural and linguistic knowledge that governs the *appropriate* use of language. Elsaadany (1999) points out that in this approach,

language uses and functions have theoretical priorities over language structure (that, however, is also taken into account in the interpretation of data by the ethnographer). In other words, this approach integrates both the structures and functions of language that are parts of the communicative competence. (1999:67-8)

Thus, the ethnography of communication is an integral approach that subsumes other approaches. It sees language as part of a matrix of meanings, beliefs, and values that extend beyond the knowledge of grammar.

This integral approach to discourse makes the ethnography of communication an ideal framework for the analysis of the language of religion, as represented in the Prophet's Hadith. In order to appropriately interpret the functions and intended meanings of interrogation in the Hadith, one should look into the religious, cultural, social, interpersonal and contextual relationships in terms of which the Hadith have been conveyed. As Schiffrin (1994:412) has argued, when one considers questions and answers (or interrogation in general) in different speech events, an ethnographic analysis

shows 'how the form and function of questions could be part of two different communicative events, defined not only in terms of who participated in each, but also in terms of participant goals, act sequences, and norms for interaction and interpretation'.

Spolsky (1998) likewise points out that the ethnography of communication moves the focus of analysis from the sentence to the speech event and adds that

[it] provide[s] a wider canvas on which to paint the complexity of language behavior in its social setting, and a technique for capturing some of the ways in which each may reflect the other. It open[s] up the way to the study of language in use, to the importance of different channels, to the critical importance of relations between speaker and hearer, and to the social context of the language. (1998:22)

Against this wider background and in terms of the above-mentioned theoretical framework, the interpretation and discussion below of the functions of interrogation in religious discourse are set.

### 5. *Interrogation in Arabic*

Interrogation in Arabic is called *?istifhaam*<sup>3</sup>, which literally means 'inquiry' or 'investigation'. *?istifhaam* is formed by the use of certain interrogation particles (IP), called '*?adawaatu l-?istifhaam*'. Interrogation in Arabic has three basic features that distinguish it from English interrogation as follows.

First, the interrogation particle (IP) must be present in the question:

- [1] **hal**      δahaba ?al-walad-u  
 IP did    went    the-boy-NOM  
 'Did the boy go?'



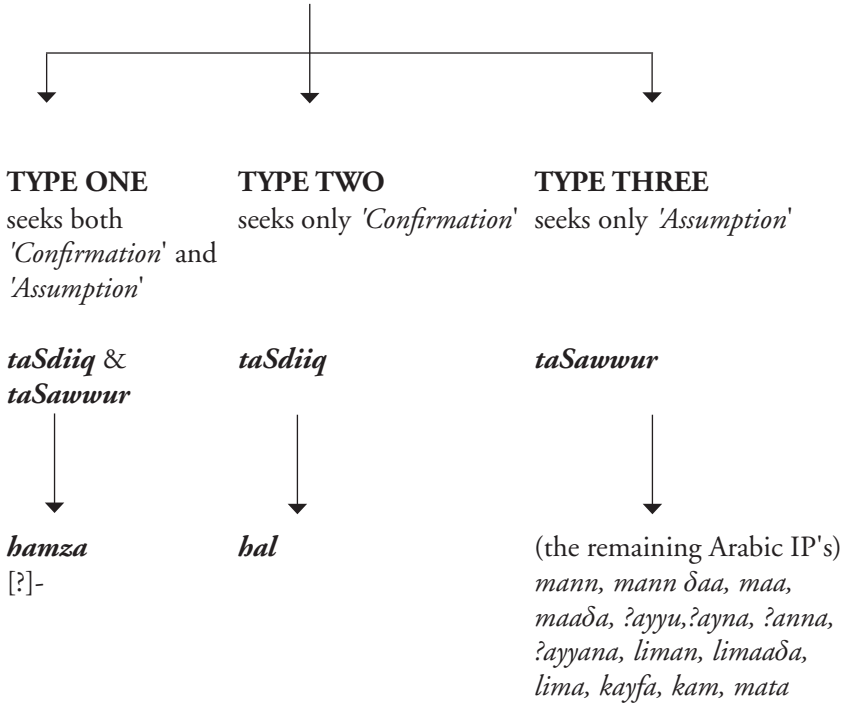
Second, unlike English, Arabic does not have verb-subject inversion. Instead, the syntactic arrangement (the order) of the declarative statement remains the same. The following formula represents the order in which an interrogative statement appears in Arabic:

- [2] **IP + Declarative Statement + Question Mark**  
 hal kataba ?al-waladu ?ad-dars-a ?  
 did wrote the-boy the-lesson-ACC  
 'Did the boy write the lesson?'

Third, unlike English interrogatives that may have a falling tone or intonation, Arabic interrogatives have always a rising intonation or tone, e.g.

- [3] hal ?akala ?al-waladu (rising)  
 IP-did ate the-boy  
 'Did the boy eat?'

Many Arab grammarians such as Al-Maraghi (1993), Fayud (1998), Matlub & Al-Basir (1982), Zufri (1988), and Al-Ghalayyini (1987), to list just a few, are of the opinion that interrogation in Arabic is of three types, as represented in Figure (1).

Figure 1: *Interrogation Types in Arabic*

The difference between *taSawwur* 'assumption' and *taSdiiq* 'confirmation' lies in the fact that the former does not seek a Yes/No reply, but only the specification of the person/thing that the questioner asks about, whereas for the latter the expected reply is Yes/No. The following examples may shed more light on the uses and types of the interrogation particles illustrated in Figure (1).

**TYPE ONE:** An IP that is used for both *taSawwur* 'assumption' and *taSdiiq* 'confirmation': the hamza

The hamza is the only interrogation particle in Arabic that is used for both *taSawwur* 'assumption' and *taSdiiq* 'confirmation'. Arab grammarians regard the hamza as the major interrogation particle

in Arabic; its phonetic equivalent is the glottal stop [ʔ]. Amaireh (1987:110) points out that the hamza differs from the other interrogation particles in Arabic by its use for both *taSdiiq* 'confirmation' and *taSawwur* 'assumption'. What also makes the hamza distinctive from the other particles is its sentence-initial usage; it even occurs before coordinated sentences starting with *wa-* 'and' and *θ umma* 'then'. For example, when the questioner asks

- [4] ʔafi ʔal-bayti ʔaxuka ʔam fi l-jaamiʕati  
 IP-is in the-home brother-your or at the-university  
 'Is your brother at home or at the university?'

the expected answer to the question in (4) should not be Yes/No; instead, the addressee is expected to say: 'My brother is at home' or 'My brother is at the university'. Such use of the hamza is for *taSawwur* 'assumption'. On the other hand, when the questioner asks:

- [5] ʔa-ta-tawaqqaʕ min ʔamriikaa ʔal-xayra  
 IP-do you-expect from America the-good  
 'Do you expect the goods from America?'

The expected reply from the addressee should be either 'Yes, I do' or 'No, I don't.' Such use of the hamza is for *taSdiiq* 'confirmation'.

- [6] ʔa-ʔanta faʕalta haḏa bi-ʔaalihati-na ya-ʔibrahiim<sup>4</sup>  
 IP- you did-you this with-deities-our O-Abraham  
 'Are you the one who did this to our deities/gods, O Abraham?'

In example (6), the questioners are unsure whether or not it is Abraham who has destroyed their idols. They are seeking, therefore, a clarification from Abraham if he did it himself, in order to confirm their assumption that Abraham is the one who destroyed their idols.

**TYPE TWO:** An interrogation particle that is used only for *taSdiiq* 'confirmation' is *hal, as* illustrated in the following examples:

- [7] hal                      ḡahaba                      ʔHmad  
 IP-did                      went-he                      Ahmad  
 'Did Ahmad go?'
- [8] hal      ḡaakara                      ʔHmad                      ʔad-darrsa  
 IP-did    studied-he                      Ahmad                      the-lesson  
 'Did Ahmad study the lesson?'

The speaker in (7) or (8) does not seek *taSawwur* 'assumption', but he/she is seeking *taSdiiq*, a confirmation from the addressee: 'yes' for confirmation, or 'no' for negation or denial.

**TYPE THREE:** Interrogation particles that are used for *taSawwur* 'assumption' only.

All Arabic interrogation particles other than the *hamza* and *hal*, are used for *taSawwur* 'assumption' only. The addressee is expected to provide the missing piece of information that the questioner is asking about.

- [9] mann      kataba                      haḡihi                      ʔal-qiSSa  
 IP-who      wrote-he                      this                      the-story  
 'Who wrote this story?'
- [10] mata                      raja9a                      ʔal-walad  
 IP-when      came back-he                      the-boy  
 'When did the boy come back?'
- [11] yasʔalu                      ʔayyana                      yawmu                      ʔal-qiyaama<sup>5</sup>  
 ask-he      IP-when                      day                      the-Judgment  
 'He asks: 'When is the Day of Resurrection?'

- [12] maa            ?ismuka  
 IP-what       name-your  
 'What's your name?'

The answers to questions (9), (10), (11) and (12) are expected to provide the missing information asked about by means of the interrogation particles (English equivalents are *who*, *when*, and *what* respectively). Type Three Arabic interrogation is similar in use to the wh-type question in English.

In addition to these general usages of Arabic interrogation, there are other uses and functions that will be illustrated in the following sections. Since the hamza subsumes the other types of interrogation in Arabic, our discussion of the interrogative functions in the Hadith will start out with interrogative forms having an utterance-initial hamza.

### 6. *Hadith and interrogation functions*

One of the characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad's style in the Hadith is his use of the question technique. The Prophet poses his questions in such a way as to catch the Companions' attention, making them very eager to know the answer. Generally, the Prophet starts many Hadith by posing a question; then he listens to his Companions' answer; depending on the answer, he either agrees with it, denies it, or modifies it. On many occasions, the Companions answer the Prophet's question by saying, 'Allah and His Messenger know best'. This answer shows the Companions' politeness as well as their eagerness to acquire more knowledge from the Prophet. Although the Companions may know the answers to the Prophet's questions, they refrain from providing their own answers lest what they think they know already has been altered through God's revelation to His Prophet. In most cases, the Prophet utilizes the question technique

as an educational method, as a means to make his Companions reflect more on the topic that he is talking about.

### *6.1 Interrogative Forms in the Hadith*

The Prophet uses many interrogative forms in delivering his Hadith. Table (1) sums up all the interrogation particles used either by the Prophet himself, by the Companions, or by Others (such as questions attributed to God, to Gabriel and the other Angels, to non-Companions, even to Satan and kings and emperors outside the Arabian Peninsula; and so on).

As to retrieving the interrogation particles in the Hadith, this had to be done manually by the researcher, as the computer software available for the Hadith does not provide any scanning and counting facilities.

Looking at the interrogation particles summarized in Table (1), one immediately notices the high frequency of occurrence of the hamza, as used by the Prophet, by the Companions, and by Others. This phenomenon serves to illustrate the use of the hamza as the major interrogation particle in Arabic in general, and in religious discourse in particular. For this reason, the present study focuses on the hamza, which, as stated before, outnumbers all the other interrogation particles used in Arabic. In particular, just the Prophet's use of the hamza as an interrogation particle amounts to a total of 326 times, as seen in Table (1); it will be the focus of discussion in the following section.

Table 1: *Interrogative Particles in the Hadith*

Interrogative Particles	By the Prophet	By the Companions	By Others	Total	English Equivalents of Arabic IPs
1. <i>hal</i>	133	154	34	<b>321</b>	N/A
2. <i>hamza</i>	<b>326</b>	512	50	<b>892</b>	N/A
3. <i>mann</i>	106	145	32	<b>283</b>	who; whom
4. <i>maa</i>	227	379	37	<b>643</b>	what
5. <i>kayfa</i>	48	132	13	<b>193</b>	how
6. <i>kamm</i>	11	26	0	<b>37</b>	how much; how many
7. <i>?ayna</i>	59	75	12	<b>146</b>	where
8. <i>?anna</i>	3	3	2	<b>8</b>	when (for future)
9. <i>mata</i>	8	11	0	<b>19</b>	when
10. <i>?ayyana</i>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>	when
11. <i>maaḍa</i>	36	60	16	<b>112</b>	what
12. <i>?ayyu</i>	36	107	14	<b>157</b>	which
Total	997	1604	210	<b>2811</b>	

## 6.2 Interrogative Functions in the Hadith

The language of the Prophet's Hadith is generally characterized by its refined style, brevity of expression, originality of its phrases and expressions, and absence of mannerism and artificiality. It is also obvious that the language of the Hadith is affected by the language

of the Holy Qur'an. In delivering his messages to the Companions and to Muslims in general, the Prophet makes use of many linguistic techniques. Among these is the use of interrogative forms and more particularly, of rhetorical questions. Along with his use of different types of regular, such as Yes/No and Wh-questions, the Prophet efficiently utilizes rhetorical questions to help him convey his message in an effective and clear way.

As mentioned in Sections 2 and 4 above, sociolinguistics and the ethnography of communication have been helpful in defining the functions, goals, and ends of language use in the religious domain, by pointing to the religious context as indispensable for an adequate analysis of the language of religion and for the intelligibility of religious discourse; any reader or researcher should take these points into account in their analyses of religious language. Thus, it is incumbent upon the readers of the Prophet's Hadith to be aware of the social, cultural, religious and contextual backgrounds in order to reach the appropriate interpretation of the Hadith; by incorporating the above prerequisites into their study of the language of the Hadith, the researchers will be able to identify the following interrogative functions, as they are employed by the Prophet in his use of the question technique.

### 6.2.1 *taqriir* 'Confirmation/affirmation':

The examples below illustrate this interrogative function in the Hadith. Again, without relating them with their contexts of situation, it is difficult to really appreciate such functions.

[16]	yaa	ma9sara	?al-?anSaari	?alam	?ajid-kum
	O	people	the-Ansaar	IPdidn't	I-find-you
	dullallan	fa-hada-kum	?allaahu	bii	
	astray	then-guided-you	Allah	through	me



wa-kuntum mutafarriqiina fa-?allafakum ?allaahu  
 and-were-you scattered-you then-gathered-you Allah  
 bii wa-kuntum 9aalatan fa?aGnaakum  
 through me and-were-you poor then-enrich-you  
 ?allahu bii  
 Allah through me

'O the people of *Ansaar* 'Helpers'! Didn't I find you astray, and then Allah guided you on the right Path through me? You were divided into groups, and Allah brought you together through me; you were poor and Allah made you rich through me?' [**Hadith # 4330**]

- [17] ?ara?ayta-kum law ?axbartu-kum ?anna xaylan  
 IPdid see-you if I-tell-you that enemy cavalry  
 bi-lwadii turiidu ?ann tuGiiru 9alay-kum  
 in-the valley want to attack on-you  
 ?a-kuntum muSaddiqiyya  
 IP-would-you believe me  
 'Suppose I told you that there is an (enemy) cavalry in the valley intending to attack you, would you believe me?' [**Hadith # 4770 & 4971**]

6.2.2 ?*inkar* or *tawbiix* 'Denial' (indicating reproach/rebuke/censure):

This interrogative function is very common in the Prophet's Hadith. The reason, in this case, may be that the Companions were new to Islam and unintentionally may do something that the Prophet considers to be wrong or unacceptable from the Islamic viewpoint.

- [18] yaa ?abaa δarr ?a9ayyarta-hu  
 O father dhar IP-did abuse-him  
 bi-?ummi-hi  
 by-mother-his

'O Abu Dhar! Did you abuse him by calling his mother with bad names?'

[**Hadith # 30 & 2554**]

[19] ?atařfa9u fi Haddin min Huduudi ?allaah  
 IP-do you-intercede in legal punishment of punishments Allah  
 'Do you intercede for somebody in a case connected with Allah's prescribed punishments?' [**Hadith # 3475**]

[20] yaa ?usama ?aqatalta-hu ba9da ?an qaala  
 O Usama! IP-did killed-him after that said-he  
 laa ?illaaha ?illaa ?allaah  
 no deity except Allah  
 'O Usama! Did you kill him after he had said: there is no deity worthy of worshipping but Allah?' [**Hadith # 4269**]

[21] ?afalaa qa9adta fii bayti ?abii-ka wa-?ummi-ka  
 IP-didn't stay-he in house father-his and-mother-his  
 fa-nađarta ?a-yuhda ?ilay-ka ?am laa  
 then-see-you IP-do grant to-you or no  
 'Why didn't you stay at your parents' house and see if you will be given gifts or not?' [**Hadith # 6636**]

### 6.2.3 *nahy* 'Prohibition/Forbiddance':

This function, too, is very common in the Hadith, due to the fact that newly converted Muslims do not know many of the teachings of Islam. This is why the Prophet tries to impart to them the new teachings or verdicts through the use of rhetorical questions, as shown below. Again, the addressees will understand the Prophet's intentions quite appropriately, as his rhetorical questions are more effective than direct commands or prohibitions.

[22] ?amaa 9 alimta ?anna ?aal muHammad  
 IPdidn't knew-you that family Muhammad  
 laa ya?kuluuna ?al-Sadaqa  
 not eat-they the-charity  
 'Don't you know that Muhammad's offspring do not eat what  
 is given in charity?'  
**[Hadith # 1485 & 1491]**

[23] ?atukallimuunii fii Haddin min Huduudi ?allaah  
 IP-do you-talk to me in legal punishment of punishments Allah  
 'Do you intercede with me in a matter involving one of the  
 legal punishments prescribed by Allah?' **[Hadith # 4304]**

[24] laa taqul δalik ?alaa taraahu qad qaala  
 not you-say that IPdon't you see-him that said  
 laa ?ilaha ?illaa ?allahu yuriidu bi-δalika wajha ?allahi  
 no god except Allah he-wants by-that sake Allah  
 'Do not say so [that the person is a hypocrite]. Haven't you  
 observed that he said: 'No one has the right to be worshipped  
 but Allah for Allah's sake only?'  
**[Hadith # 425]**

#### 6.2.4 *9arD* 'Offer/Proposition':

The Hadith teem with this kind of functions. The Prophet uses them in order to capture the Companions' attention and make them eager to receive his message.

[25] ?alaa ?unabbi?u-kum bi-?akbar ?al-kabaa?ir  
 (repeated three times)  
 IP-don't I-inform-you of-greatest the-sins  
 'Should I inform you about the greatest of the great sins?'  
**[Hadith # 2654]**

[26] ?alaa ?adulla-ka 9ala kalimatin min kanzin  
 IPdo I tell-you of a word of treasure  
 min kunuuzi ?al-jannati  
 of treasures the-Paradise  
 'Shall I tell you a sentence, one of the treasures of Paradise?'  
 [Hadith # 4202]

[27] ?a-falaa jaariyatan tu-laa9ibu-ha wa-tu-laa9ibu-ka  
 IP-haven't a virgin you-play-her and-she-play-you  
 'Haven't you married a virgin with whom you may play and  
 she may play with you?' [Hadith # 2097]

### 6.2.5 *tašwiiq / tarGiib* 'Thrilling/Making one excited or eager':

In his Hadith, the Prophet uses various ways to deepen the meaning of his message and touch the addressees' hearts. One of these is his usage of interrogative, rather than declarative statements, employing the kind of *tašwiiq* or *tarGiib* that will make people do certain things or refrain from doing other things.

This interrogative function is very common in the Hadith; it is also included in many other functions. For instance, examples (28-31) below include some interrogative statements that go far beyond regular interrogative forms. They function as statements that express *tašwiiq* or *tarGiib*. This style of using the question technique captures the addressees' attention and makes them eager to know, for example, as in (28), what their Lord will say, or tell them. Likewise, in example (29), the Prophet tries to show Muslims the importance and significance of the five daily prayers. To achieve this goal, the Prophet likens a person who five times a day takes a bath in a running river next to his/her house to the believer who performs the prescribed five daily prayers in their due times. Taking into account their prayers, God forgives the

believers' sins committed between prayers. Again, the interrogative technique is very effective in making Muslims eager to perform the prayers.

- [28] ?a-tadruuna      maaða      qaala      rabbu-kum  
 IP-do-you know    what      said      Lord-your  
 'Do you know what your Lord has said?' [**Hadith # 4147**]
- [29] ?a-ra?ay-tum    law            ?anna    nahran    bi-baabi  
 IPdo-see-you    if            that      a river    in-door  
 ?aHadi-kum      yaGtasilu    fii-hi    kulla      yawmin  
 one-your        bathe-he    in-it     every      day  
 xamsan    maa    taqulu    ðalika    yubqii    min    darani-hi  
 five        what    you-say    that      remain    of      dirt-his  
 'Don't you see if there is a river at the door of anyone of you and he took a bath in it five times a day, would you notice any dirt on him?' [**Hadith # 528**]
- [30] ?alaa      ?u9allimu-ka    ?a9ðama    suuratin      fi  
 IP-shall    I teach-you    greatest    Surah/chapter    in  
 ?al-qur?aani    qabla    ?ann    ta-xruja    mina    ?al-masjidi  
 the-Quraan    before    that    you-exit    from    the-mosque  
 'Shall I not teach you the greatest Surah ['chapter'] in the Qur'an before you leave the mosque?'  
 [**Hadith # 5006**]
- [31] ?ala      ?uHaddiðu-kum    Hadiiðan    9an  
 IP-shaal    I tell-you            a speech    about  
 ?al-ddajjal    maa    Haddaða    bi-hi    nabiyyin    qawma-hu  
 the-Dajjal    not    told          of-it    a prophet    people-his  
 'Shall I not tell you about the Dajjal ['Antichrist'], a story about him which no Prophet told his people [before]?'  
 [**Hadith # 3338**]

6.2.6 *ʔistibʔaad* 'Elimination/Exclusion':

Although it is difficult to define this function, it is not hard to find in the Prophet's Hadith. The following examples illustrate this function.

- [32] ʔawa muxrijiyya humm  
 IPwill drive me out they  
 'Will they drive me out?' [**Hadith # 3**]
- [33] ʔa-turawna haaḏhi TaariHatan walada-ha fii ʔa-naar  
 IP-do-you think this [woman] throw son-her in the-fire  
 'Do you think that this lady can throw her son in the fire?'  
 [**Hadith # 5999**]
- [34] ʔa-fayadaʔu ʔiSbaʔa-hu fii fii-ka taqDamu-ha  
 IP-do-let he finger-his in mouth-your you-bite-it  
 'Did you expect him to let his finger in your mouth so that  
 you might snap and cut it?' [**Hadith # 2265**]

6.2.7 *taʔajjub* 'Exclamation':

There are many instances of this interrogative function in the Hadith. See the following examples:

- [35] ʔawa kulukum yajidu ḥawbayni  
 IP-has every one find two garments  
 'Has every one of you got two garments?'  
 [**Hadith # 350/365**]
- [36] ʔawa fii šakkin ʔanta yaa ʔibna ʔal-xaTTaab-  
 IPdo in doubt you O son of the-Khattab



6.2.9 *ʔixbaar / taHqiiq* 'Notification/Certification':

Some Hadith are used to inform readers or addressees about things that the Prophet wanted them to know.

[40] ʔafalaa ʔakuunu 9abdan ʃakuuran  
 IP-should I be slave thankful  
 'Shouldn't I be a thankful slave?' [**Hadith # 1130**]

[41] ʔaraʔaytum maa ʔunfiqa munḏu xalaqa  
 IP-do you see what has spent since created  
 ʔal-samaawaati wa-l-ʔarḏ  
 the-heavens and-the-earth  
 'Do you see what He has spent since He created the heavens and earth?' [**Hadith # 1130**]

6.2.9 *tanbiih* 'Warning / Admonition':

The Prophet sometimes uses interrogative statements in order to warn Muslims of certain evils or bad practices that they should be aware of, respectively avoid. Again, the function of the interrogation comes about through the indirect effect that it creates among the addressees or readers in general. The following example illustrates this.

[42] yaʔtii 9ala ʔan-naasi zamaan-un laa  
 come upon the-people a time not  
 yubaalii ʔal-marʔu maa ʔaxaḏa min-hu  
 care the-man/one what take/gain from-it  
 ʔa-mina ʔal-Halaali ʔam mina ʔal-Harami  
 IP-is-from the-legal or from the-illegal  
 'A time will come upon the people when one will not care how one gains one's money, legally or illegally.' [**Hadith # 2059**]



All the functions described above cannot be analyzed appropriately unless the analyst is acquainted with all the beliefs and other factors making up the cultural and natural context in which the Hadith were created, and which were discussed in the theoretical framework provided in sections 2 and 3 of this paper. The next section looks at how these functions of the interrogative are realized in translations of the Hadith.

### *7. Translation and the functions of the interrogative*

The previous section discussed the functions of the interrogative in the Hadith. Certain of these functions may not be found in the corpus of Hadith, as collected in *Sahih Al-Bukhari* and analyzed here. This does not mean that such functions are completely absent from the Prophet's Hadith; the present study has limited its scope to the Hadith found in *Sahih Al-Bukhari*. Other collections of Hadith<sup>6</sup> may contain other functions.

In order for the reader to appropriately interpret or discuss the interrogative functions in Hadith, s/he should take into consideration certain sociocultural factors that play an essential part in defining the intended meaning of interrogation in Hadith. Such factors include, but are not limited to, religious beliefs, the culture, the contexts of situation in which the Hadith were delivered, addresser-addressee relationships, the nature of the topics delivered, and other factors that may affect the interpretation of the Hadith.

In order to clarify this point, we will analyze one complete Hadith (No. 1741) as an example; it is rendered in English as example [43].

[43] Abu Bakra (May Allah be pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet (PBUH ['peace be upon him']) delivered to us a

speech (*khutba*) on the Day of *NaHr* (sacrifice). [1] He said, 'Do you know which day (*yawm*) it is today?' [2] We said, 'Allah and His Messenger know better?' [3] He remained silent for so long that we thought that he might give that day another name. [4] He said, 'Isn't it the Day of *NaHr* (sacrifice)?' [5] We said, 'Yes! It is'. [6] He further asked, 'Which month (*šahr*) is this?' [7] We said, 'Allah and His Messenger know better?' [8] He remained silent for so long that we thought that he might give it another name. [9] He then said, 'Isn't it the month of *Dhul Hijjah*?' [10] We replied: 'Yes! It is'. [11] He further asked, 'Which town (*balad*) is this?' [12] We replied, 'Allah and His Messenger know better?' [13] He remained silent for so long that we thought he might give it another name. [14] He then said, 'Isn't it the holy/sacred/forbidden town [i.e. Makkah]?' [15] We said, 'Yes! It is'. [16] He said, 'Surely your blood and your wealth [properties] are sacred to one another like the sanctity of this day of yours, in this month of yours, in this town of yours till you meet your Lord [Allah].' [17] He said, 'Haven't I conveyed Allah's Message to you?' [18] They said, 'Yes, you have'. [19] He said, 'O Allah! Be witness: So it is incumbent upon those who are present to convey it [this information] to those who are absent, because the informed one may comprehend it [i.e. what I have said] better than those who are present and who will convey it to him'. [20] 'And: do not encourage the disbelievers by killing one another after I am gone'.

In order to correctly interpret the meanings and functions of interrogation in this Hadith, one should be familiar with the occasion on which it was delivered, with the knowledge shared between the Prophet and the Companions, and with the religious connotations of certain key words used in the Hadith, such as *yawm* 'day', *šahr* 'month', and *balad* 'town'. The theoretical framework of the

ethnography of communication allows us to decode the linguistic information represented by this shared knowledge. Specifically, the reader has to understand the culture in which the exchanges between the Prophet and his Companions took place in the Hadith translated above. Moreover, the reader has to know that the Companions are recent converts to Islam, that they are unaware of many facts about their new religion, and that they definitely need to know more about that religion and its teachings. By taking such factors into consideration while reading or interpreting the Hadith, the student is likely to be able to at least decode the intended meanings and functions of the interrogative in the Hadith.

Furthermore, by taking into account the context needed to analyze the religious discourse adequately, the reader will also experience the need to appropriately interpret the language of the Hadith, especially as it is manifested in the use of interrogatives and of religiously 'loaded' words. For instance, the words *yawm* 'day', *šahr* 'month', and *balad* 'town/city', referred to in the Hadith quoted above, are religiously significant, being fraught with religious meaning. The word *yawm* refers to one of the most religious and sacred days in Islam, the Day of Sacrifice that crowns the Pilgrims' religious activities in performing *Hajj*, the so-called 'fifth pillar' of Islam; it is a day that the people of Makkah (Mecca) used to sanctify and celebrate even before the advent of Islam. Likewise, the word *šahr*, which refers to the sacred month of *Dhul Hijjah*, and the word *balad*, which refers to the sacred, holy or forbidden city of Makkah, have the same religious, social, and cultural significance as does the word *šahr*. If the reader does not know the religious significance of such words, s/he will miss a major part of the information needed to interpret the questions posed by the Prophet in his Hadith. This leads us to conclude that the questions in exchanges (1), (4), (6), (9), (11), and (14) in the Hadith translated above are not to be interpreted as regular Wh-questions or Yes/No questions, but as speech acts performing certain functions as intended by the Prophet.

Furthermore, the Prophet's silence after the Companions' answers to his questions is significant, as it makes the addressees very eager to hear what the Prophet has to say. (For convenience, the questions will be repeated below, in [44]).

- [44] Exchange (1) 'Do you know which day '*yawm*' it is today?'  
 Exchange (4) 'Isn't it the Day of Nahr ('Sacrifice')?'  
 Exchange (6) 'Which month '*šahr*' is this?'  
 Exchange (9) 'Isn't it the month of *Dhul Hijjah*?'  
 Exchange (11) 'Which town '*balad*' is this?'  
 Exchange (14) 'Isn't it the holy/sacred/forbidden town  
 (i.e. Makkah)?'  
 Exchange (17) 'Haven't I conveyed Allah's Message?'

Such interrogative functions pave the way for the important and sacred message that the Prophet wants to specifically convey to his Companions and to Muslims in general. The message is exemplified in exchange (16) of the same Hadith that sanctifies the Muslims' blood and properties. The significant likening of the sanctity and sacredness of the month of *Dhul Hijjah*, the Day of *NaHr* 'Sacrifice' and the city of *Makkah* is very strongly achieved through the use of juxtaposition and the question technique. This technique is frequently and efficiently used by the Prophet, even to the extent that the Companions did not dare to answer his questions (even though they knew the answers); they feared that what they thought they knew for certain might have been altered or changed by the Prophet following a Divine revelation. The reader has to take such factors into consideration when interpreting the use of interrogation in the Hadith. Without taking such religious, social, and sociolinguistic factors into account, any interpretation of the Hadith will prove to be lacking in insight, accuracy, and appropriateness.

When we take a closer look at the English translations of the questions in the Hadith quoted above and elsewhere in this study,

we discover that they do not exhibit the same functions as are found in the Arabic version. If we are to follow Quirk and Greenbaum's (1980: 192) definition and classification of interrogatives, the Prophet's questions in the above-quoted Hadith, as well as the other questions cited in the present study, when transliterated and translated, can only be interpreted as regular English questions that do not reveal the same functions that are consistently found in the original Arabic questions. In other words, the translated questions will be considered either as regular Yes/No questions, Wh-questions, or general information-seeking questions. However, in this way the questions cited in [44] above do not reflect the functions that are conveyed by the Arabic original and which can be extracted on the basis of the original Arabic text. The Prophet's questions in that Hadith do not seek information which the Prophet does not know (as defined by Quirk and Greenbaum (1980) for this type of questions). They are used by the Prophet for the purpose of preparing the Companions' minds to receive the important and sacred message that he states at the end of this Hadith, in exchange (16). In order to obtain an insight into such functions, and to adequately interpret the use of interrogation in the Hadith, the reader has to go back to the context of situation, the sociocultural factors, and the religious contexts and beliefs that decisively affect the interpretation of the Prophet's questions to his Companions. Without taking such variables into account when reading the Hadith, or interpreting its use of interrogation, such a reading and interpretation will certainly be lacking greatly in depth and accuracy.

As El-Zeini (1994:379) has suggested, in order to control the quality of commercially available translations of sacred texts, there has to be a body overseeing and assessing such translations, particularly when it comes to the great religions' sacred books, 'because of their significant role in formulating the cultural and religious backgrounds of the recipients. Therefore, errors in such books have serious effects that should always be avoided... Hence, teamwork is

a suggested procedure for translating such books in order to produce a translation of optimal quality'.

In our case, such teamwork will not be sufficient if the translators fail to provide the readers and recipients of the Hadith with the sociocultural and religious contexts and factors that are bound to affect the interpretation of religious discourse.

### 8. Results

This study has investigated the use of interrogation and its functions in Arabic religious discourse, with special emphasis on the Hadith. In particular, it has analyzed the uses and functions of the hamza, the major interrogative particle in Arabic. The study has posed certain questions and suggested possible answers.

The first question was about the various types of interrogation particles. Here, the study showed the various types of interrogation particles occurring in the Hadith; based on the text of *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, it discussed in some detail the different interrogation particles in Arabic (summarized in Table (1), above). Special attention has been paid to the use of the major Arabic interrogation particle, the *hamza*, which has been shown to outrank in frequency all the other interrogation particles in Arabic. For this reason, the current study has focused its discussion on the use of the *hamza* and its functions in the Prophet's Hadith.

Regarding the answer to the second question, which asked about interrogation in the Hadith, the study discussed the many functions of interrogation. It showed that the use of interrogation in the Hadith does not exhaust the available interrogative functions in Arabic; there may be others that the current study did not elaborate upon, either because of its limited scope or because of limits of space. The present study studied certain interrogative functions occurring in the Hadith as shown in the Prophet's use of the *hamza*, discussed

in Section (6.2); the general discussion of interrogation in Section (6) involved other Arabic interrogation particles as well.

Third, and finally, the present study asserts that the English translation of the interrogatives in the Hadith does not adequately render the interrogative functions conveyed by their Arabic equivalents. Thus, Hadith readers who do not have direct access to the Arabic text should be made familiar with the religious and sociocultural factors that are crucial in understanding the function of the Prophet's repeated rhetorical questions and their intended meaning. Without such information, those readers will not be able to fully understand, interpret, or appreciate the Hadith.

### 9. Conclusion

The present study has discussed the various types of interrogation in Arabic religious discourse. In particular, it provides a framework for studying and interpreting interrogation and its functions in the Hadith, with special attention to the uses and functions of the *hamza*, the major Arabic interrogation particle. The study does not claim to have furnished an exhaustive list of the interrogative functions in religious discourse, as derived from both the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith. The exclusive focus of discussion was on the uses and functions of the *hamza*, specifically as used by the Prophet in his Hadith. Other usages and functions of the other interrogation particles used either by the Prophet, the Companions, or by Others, as classified in Table (1), were not dealt with here. The discussion of such other interrogation particles may reveal other interrogative functions that are beyond the limits of the current study.

This study also shows the use of the question technique in religious discourse to be very effective in conveying the religious message. The Prophet uses this technique in order to impart his teachings and the new Islamic directives to the newly converted Companions

and to Muslims in general. Such question techniques make the Companions receive the Prophet's intended meanings in a positive and direct way.

As to the claim that the translated version of the Hadith does not reveal the same insights and intended meanings that can be inferred from the original Arabic version, a similar view has been expressed by the translator of *Sahih Muslim*, Siddiqi (1977:vii), who points out that

the mere translation of words conveys no more than the outer shell, and thus misses the original beauty of the words translated. The problem becomes insurmountably difficult when we take into consideration the fact that it is not the matter of translating a book of Arabic into English but translating the words of the Holy Prophet (may peace be upon him). He was divinely inspired and was thus gifted with a very chaste mode of expression, the like of which is not found in human history. The translation of his words and expressions is, therefore, bound to remain but a distant and faulty echo of the original meaning and spirit.

One of the implications of the present study is that religious discourse is different from regular, ordinary, or non-religious discourse. One should take into account the religious contexts, the addresser-addressee relationships, and the appropriate language functions in order to achieve an adequate analysis of the language of religion and of religious discourse in general.

In discussing religious discourse, a number of issues need further analysis and clarification, if we are to do justice to its various functions, including those of interrogation and declaration (as in the Hadith). First, we badly need a genuine and detailed description of religious discourse. It is of the utmost importance to analyze and recognize all the factors and phenomena that help elucidate the significance and interpretation of such discourse. Second, further work needs to be



done on the specific ways of clarification and analysis that are proper to religious language or discourse. Such work should somehow specify the differences between religious discourse and other types of discourse such as scientific, legal, commercial, etc. Finally, some further questions may be raised in connection with the current study, such as:

1. Can other interrogation functions be inferred from the analysis of interrogation particles other than the *hamza*. as used by the Prophet and the Companions?
2. Are there any differences between the Prophet's usage of the *hamza* and the Companions'?
3. Are there any functional differences between the Prophet's usage of interrogation in general and that of the Companions?
4. Does the use of indirect questions (i.e. questions that do not contain overt interrogative devices) on the part of the Prophet reflect the same or different functions, when compared to so-called rhetorical questions?
5. Can the analysis of interrogation in other books of Hadith (see Note 6 below) tell us more about the (same or different) interrogation particles and interrogative functions as those analyzed in *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, the corpus of the present study?
6. Can the Hadith, or any religious discourse in general, be translated in such a way that the translated version reflects the same sociolinguistic, sociocultural, and religious factors that affect the interpretation of the religious discourse, as it is consistently practiced in the original Arabic texts?

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## Notes

1. The Arabic word *Hadith* means 'talk' or 'speech'. In its religious context and meaning, the word *Hadith* means the sayings, utterances of approval or disapprovals (including silence as a kind of approval), deeds and actions attributed to the Prophet (PBUH) himself, or any of the Prophet's actions as reported by the Companions. Instead of using the plural form of the word *Hadith*, which is *Ahadith*, the singular form, *Hadith*, will be adopted to refer to the plural as well.

There are two types of Hadith: the Holy Hadith or *Hadith Qudsi*, and the Prophetic Hadith. The *Hadith Qudsi* is attributed to Allah and is delivered to us by the tongue of the Prophet (PBUH). This is to say that in the *Hadith Qudsi*, the meaning is attributed to Allah directly, but its formation or wording is due to the Prophet (PBUH). The Prophetic Hadith, on the other hand, are attributed to the Prophet (PBUH) as regards both meaning and wording; they were uttered under Divine guidance.

2. *Sahih Al-Bukhari* is a collection of the Prophet's Hadith that is considered the second most authentic book after the Qur'an. Khan (1997:18), in the introduction to the translation of *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, points out that it has been unanimously agreed that Imam Bukhari's work is the most authentic of all the other works in Hadith literature put together. The authenticity of Al-Bukhari's work is such that the religious learned scholars of Islam said concerning it: 'the most authentic book after the Book of Allah [i.e. Al-Qur'an] is *Sahih Al-Bukhari*.'

*Sahih Al-Bukhari* contains 7563 Hadith that are authentically related to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Khan (1997:10) also points out that

Imam Bukhari in his *Sahih* has classified and arranged the *Ahadith* according to the subject matter that they deal with. He gave to each chapter a title indicating a certain point and under that title he stated down all the *Ahadith* that are relevant. This procedure has resulted in the occurrence of the same *Hadith* under various headings, because one *Hadith* might deal with a great number of aspects of Islamic Jurisprudence. Imam Bukhari used each *Hadith* so that every point that can be inferred from it is

referred to... The chapters and the *Ahadith* are [also] numbered. (1997:10)

3. The following phonetic symbols are adopted in the transliteration of Arabic words in this study:

**a) Emphatic vs non-emphatic consonants:**

/ **T** / as in *Taaba* 'he recovered' vs / **t** / as in *taaba* 'he repented.'  
 / **D** / as in *Dalla* 'he went astray' vs / **d** / as in *dalla* 'he guided'  
 / **S** / as in *Sayf* 'summer' vs / **s** / as in *sayf* 'sword'  
 / **ḍ** / as in *ḍalla* 'he remained' vs / **ḍ** / as in *ḍalla* 'he became despised'

**b) Glottal Stop (hamza) / ʔ /:** as in

*ʔabb* 'father'; *saʔala* 'he asked'; *samaaʔ* 'sky'; *suʔaal* 'question'

**c) Back consonants:**

**i) Velar Fricatives / x /, / G /**

/ **x** / as in *xadd* 'cheek'  
 / **G** / as in *Gadd* 'tomorrow'

**ii) Pharyngeal Fricatives / H /, / ʁ /**

/ **H** / as in *Haddada* 'he specified'  
 / **ʁ** / as in *ʁaddada* 'he enumerated'

**iii) Glottal Fricative / h / as in**

*haddada* 'he threatened'; *huna* 'here'; *huwa* 'he';  
*haam* 'important'

- d) Vowels:** Arabic has three pairs of short and long vowel phonemes. They are illustrated in Table (3).

**Table (3): Arabic Vowels**

	Front	Central	Back
High	<b>ii</b> [Long] <b>i</b> [Short]		<b>uu</b> [Long] <b>u</b> [Short]
Low		<b>aa</b> [Long] <b>a</b> [Short]	

4. The Holy Qur'an 21: 62.  
 5. Ibid., 75: 6.

6. There are other authentic books of Hadith. The following are the most authentic and famous, after *Sahih Al-Bukhari*.
1. Sahih Muslim
  2. Sunan Ibn Maa'ajeh
  3. Sunan Abi Dawud
  4. Jaami' Al-Termiḍi
  5. Sunan Al-Nasaa'i

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