



The Qur'an: Its Orality and Interpretation

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Abstract

This article sets out the use of orality as an element in the interpretation of the Qur'an. Orality in the Qur'an, such as rhyme, sound structure, and diction used in the Qur'an, are frequently regarded as part of the Qur'an's miracles and are hardly linked with Qur'an interpretation. Indeed, the orality component is closely related to the messages found in the Qur'an. This article demonstrates that rhyme and sound structure are essential characteristics employed by the Qur'an to deliver messages through recognizing orality as an indispensable aspect of the Qur'an's construction. Both can be perceived psychologically by listeners or readers of the Qur'an. Specific dictions in some verses were also employed as a medium to communicate the Qur'an's worldview while rejecting Arab society's views at the time. Orality has become a prominent feature of Qur'an interpretation.

Keywords: Interpretation of the Qur'an, Orality of the Qur'an, Arabic literature.

Introduction

The interpretation of the Qur'an in Islamic scholarship is a means of establishing Muslim religious practices, ranging from law to belief principles. According to Islamic scholarship, art in Islam, as a reflection of cultural practice, is also considered to be the result of the Qur'an

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interpretation, not in terms of its explicit provisions, but of its inner reality.¹ Apart from the text as the major element, the practice of interpreting the Qur'an also incorporates various elements, notably the context (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) in which the Qur'an was revealed, as well as the social and cultural realities of society as an audience or objects when the Qur'an was revealed (*syīyāq al-tanzīl*), as well as social realities when interpretation was performed.

The aspects listed above are critical requirements that interpreters must learn for their interpretations to achieve methodological standards. However, it should be noted that, in terms of the context of revelation, the Qur'an was constructed in the oral dimension rather than the literacy or writing dimension. Sound, rhyme, and the use of various dictions are significant linguistic features in the oral system as a medium for communicating messages and ideas. Yet, these components are frequently overlooked in Quranic interpretation.

Orality is seen as a miracle of the Qur'an in the context of the majesty of the Qur'an's literature,² rather than in the context of the medium used in delivering messages, ideas, or even the Qur'an's value system. Several previous studies undertaken by experts explain this, among others are Abū al-Ḥasan `Āli bin `Isā al-Rummānī (296-386 AH.) in *al-Nukat fī I`jāz al-Qur`ān* and Abū Bakr Muḥammad bin al-Thayyib al-Bāqillānī (403 AH.) in *I`jāz al-Qur`ān*. Al-Zarqānī in *Manāhil al-`Irfān fī `Ulūm al-Qur`ān* has separated stylistics from the field of *balaghah* into a distinct science in the study of Qur'an science.

Recent studies on the literature of the Qur'an generally revolve around two things. First, the affirmation of the beauty and eloquence of the language

¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987) especially Chapter 3. H.B. Jassin was captivated by the beauty of the words of the Qur'an. This literary scholar in Indonesia in the 1970s poeticized the translation of the Qur'an which he named *Bacaan Mulia*. Despite not a proficient in Arabic, Jassin ventured to carry out his project. Previously, in the 1960s, Mohammad Diponegoro, Djamil Suherman, and Mohammad Saribi Afri had also written translations of the suras in Juz `Ammā. In the 1990s, Jassin created a mushaf with a poetic face, *Al-Qur'an Al-Karim with the Face of Poetry*. This name caused a negative reaction from some Muslims in Indonesia, including the Ministry of Religion and the Indonesian Ulema Council. It was banned. Regarding this controversy, see H.B. Jassin, *Kontroversi Al-Qur'an Berwajah Puisi* (Jakarta: Graffiti, 1995).

² M. Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan Al-Qur'an, Fungsi dan Peran Wahyu dalam Kehidupan Masyarakat* (Bandung: Mizan, 1992), p. 16.

of the Qur'an as investigated by Abdin Chande,³ Helmi Syaifuddin,⁴ Iman Mersal,⁵ and A. Rippin.⁶ Second, the beauty of the Qur'anic language serves as the basis for its miracles as examined by Hasanuddin Chaer and Lalu Supriadi Bin Mujib.⁷ Amīn al-Khūlī and Bint al-Syāṭī' are some writers who use a literary approach as the basis for interpreting the Qur'an. Both use literary analysis as part of the interpretation of the Qur'an.⁸ These two writers' contributions to the interpretation of the Qur'an are substantial, yet the phonological aspect has not been thoroughly addressed.

This article discusses the significance of oral aspects and dimensions in the Qur'an for understanding God's messages. In this research, phonology, as an area of science that examines sound, is presented not only as part of the stylistics of the Qur'an but also as ways of thinking and worldviews built by the Qur'an. At the same time, the Qur'an takes a leap in expressing God's messages. This study seeks to demonstrate that the Qur'an's linguistic feature is more than simply a communication structure with a beautiful style of language; it also creates a new and different world of meaning with culturally existing notions in pre-Islamic Arab society.

Arabic: The Qur'anic Cultural Space

The Qur'an, as a revelation revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, exists in the realms of history and humanity. It undergoes a transformation from *al-kalām al-naḥsī* (the idea of God) to *al-kalām al-laḥzī* which uses symbols of human language. This transformation occurs because the process of revealing Allah's words (*kalām Allāh*) to the Prophet Muhammad as a sort of message (*risālah*) is a communication. Naturally, communication involves the speaker or sender, which is Allah; a recipient, which is the Prophet Muhammad; a code of communication, which is Arabic; a channel, which is the Holy Spirit

³ Abdin Chande, "Symbolism and Allegory in the Qurān: Muhammad Asad's Modernist Translation," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 15, no. 1 (2004): 79–89.

⁴ Helmi Syaifuddin, "Sastra Al-Qur'an Di Tengah Aliran Sastra Indonesia," *LiNGUA: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa dan Sastra* 1, no. 2 (2011): 20–34.

⁵ Iman Mersal, "Reading the Qur'ān in the Poetry of Adonis," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 19, no. 1 (2016): 1–33.

⁶ A Rippin, "British Society for Middle Eastern Studies The Qur ' an as Literature: Perils, Pitfalls and Prospects Author (s): A . Rippin Reviewed Work (S):" 10, no. 1 (2012): 38–47.

⁷ Lalu Supriadi Bin Mujib, "Analisis Pemikiran Sastra Najm Al-Dîn Al-Thûfî Dalam Al-Iksîr Fî `Ilmi Al-Tafsîr," *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 26, no. 1 (2018): 14.

⁸ Aisyah Abdurrahman, *Al-Tafsîr Al-Bayānî Li Al-Qur'ān Al-Karîm* (Mesir: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.).

(Angel Gabriel); and a message, which is the Qur'an.⁹

Therefore, in capturing the meanings in the Qur'an (as a message of Allah), understanding Arabic (as a code of communication) becomes the most important part. In many contexts (at least in six parts: Ṭāhâ [20]: 13; Yūsuf [12]: 2; al-Zumar [39]: 28; Fuṣṣilat [41]:3; al-Syūrā [42]:7; al-Zukhruf [43]: 3) the Qur'an clearly states that it is a linguistic text constructed in reason and Arabic (*`arabiyyun*). This assertion emphasizes the human, historical, and functional aspects of the Quranic language. Because Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an's audience are Arabs, Arabic becomes the language of communication.

As a communication code used in delivering the messages of the Qur'an, Arabic has various distinctive characters. First, words in Arabic generally have a trilateral root (*binā' šulāsi*) from which various word forms can be formed. A vocabulary and its derivatives, formed from the same root letter, all have meaning. Despite the variety of interpretations it generates, they all have a unifying "basic meaning".¹⁰ For example, the word *qāla*—consisting of three letters: *qaf*, *wawu*, dan *lam*—means "to say", which is compounded by the meaning of "to move". That is, "to say" implies a movement of the mouth and tongue. Without movement, there would be no words. From these three letters, several words can be formed which are united in one basic meaning, which is "to move". First, the word *waqala* (*wawu*, *qaf*, and *lam*) means: "to lift one leg while the other leg rests on the ground". It contains the basic meaning of "to move". Second, the word *al-waqalu* means "the stone used to go up". This word also has the basic meaning of "to move".¹¹

Second, different sounds in a word with the same letter structure in Arabic have different meanings and places in different speaking contexts. For example, the word *daraba* which is composed of the letters *ḍad*, *ra'* dan *ba'*, which means "to hit", when read *ḍuriba* (reading *ḍammah* in the first letter and reading *kasrah* in the middle letter) changes the active verb into passive; the meaning that appears later is "being hit". This change in vowel is related to the different underlying factors (*`amil*) in the M structure. Quraish Shihab, gives an example for this matter: *mā aḥsanu al-samā'i* and *ma*

⁹ Lihat, Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, "The Textuality of the Koran" in *Islam and Europe in Past and Present*, (NIAS, 1997), 43.

¹⁰ This kind of analysis can be seen, for example, in `Ali `Abdul Wāḥid Wafī, *Fiqh al-Lughah* (Kairo: Lajnah al-Bayān al-`Arabī, 1962).

¹¹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Mukjizat Al-Qur'an, Ditinjau dari Aspek Kebahasaan, Isyarat Ilmiah dan Pemberitaan Gaib* (Bandung: Mizan, 1999), 95.

aḥsana al-samā'a. The first one is a question about what is most beautiful in the sky, while the second is an expression of admiration for the beauty of the sky.¹²

Third, Arabic also contains vocabulary with similar meanings. Moreover, *fushā* Arabic is a collection of dialects of the tribes during the Jahiliyah. Ahmad ibn Fāris revealed that al-Asmū'i memorized 70 words with the meaning of stone, Ibn Khaluwaih collected 500 words with the meaning of lion, 200 words with the meaning of snake, and 50 words with the meaning of sword. Several linguists examined terms that are thought to have the same meaning, including Abū Manṣūr al-Ša'ālabī in *Fiqh al-Lughah*, Abū Hilāl al-`Asykāri in *al-Furuq al-Lughawīyyah*, Aḥmad ibn Fāris in *al-Šāḥib fī Fiqh al-Lughah*, and Abū al-Faṭḥ `Usmān ibn Junniy in *al-Khaṣā'is*.¹³

In addition to these characteristics, Arabic is a medium for poets to produce numerous poetry as a way of communication for the Arab community. This cannot be isolated from Arab society's culture prior to the Islamic era, which is skilled in composing poetry. Poets' contests involving varied works of poetry were frequently organized. As a form of appreciation, selected poetry works were hung on the door of the Kaaba. At that period, Arab society was likewise extremely strict in discriminating between the indigenous (*arabī*) and the foreigner (*ajam*). This discrimination applies not just to race, ethnicity, and skin color, but also to language. A person's fluency in articulating Arabic in everyday life as well as his expertise in composing literary works or poetry, become one of the dominant references to determine whether or not a person is Arabic.¹⁴

Arabic Literature and the Leap of the Qur'anic Language

When the Qur'an was revealed, the Arabic language, with its numerous uniqueness and peculiarities, as well as Arabic culture and literature, were a socio-cultural space. Surah Ibrāhīm [14] verse 4 emphasizes that socio-

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ See, Syihabuddin Qalyubi, *Stilistika al-Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Titian Ilahi Press, 1997), p. 47; M. Quraish Shihah, *Mukjizat Al-Qur'an, Ditinjau dari Aspek Kebahasaan, Isyarat Ilmiah dan Pemberitaan Gaib*, 96-7. Muḥammad Syahrūr, a contemporary Islamic thinker from Damascus, is among those who believe that there are no synonyms in the Qur'an. On the basis of this principle, he builds a careful analysis of every word in the Qur'an. Further see in some of his books, including *al-Kitāb wa al-Qur'ān. Qirā'ah al-Mu'āṣirah* (Damaskus: al-Ahali li al-Thibā'ah wa al-Nasyr wa al-Tauzī', 1990).

¹⁴ M. Nur Kholis Setiawan, *Al-Qur'an Kitab Sastra Terbesar* (Yogyakarta: Elsaq, 2006), 75.

culturally, the Qur'an cannot be separated from the language and culture of Arab society. However, the Quranic world view of meaning is not a complete picture of Arab civilization at the time. We may trace this in the Qur'an's stylistics (*uslūb*)¹⁵ and socio-linguistics, where the Qur'an constructs a worldview with a distinct meaning.

In terms of phonology (sounds of language, including consonants and vowels), preferences for the use of words or language structures, types of sentence structures, diction, and deviations (grammatical deviation),¹⁶ are crucial components that can be utilized to interpret messages in the Qur'an. It has a unique feature that gives rise to two essential messages: harmony in orality and the meaning delivered. Harmony is shown by variations in consonant and vowel sounds.¹⁷ It takes various and different forms. First, the variation of vowel and consonant sounds with various words; in Surah Al-Kahf [18], verses 9-16, for example, at the end of these verses there is a vowel sound "a", but it is accompanied by a variety of consonants, generating different sounds, which are *ba* (verses 9 and 15), *da* (verses 10, 11, 12, and 13), *ṭa* (verse 14) and *qa* (verse 16).

Second, the variation between different vowel sounds in a series of several verses as depicted in Surah Sad [38] verses 71-88. At the end of each verse in this nine series of verses, the vowel sound "i" dominates, but in verses 73, 79, 81, and 84, the vowel "u" is dominating. The consonants that follow the vowels vary as well, generating the sounds of *tin*, *din*, *'un*, *rin*, *lin*, *sun*, and so on. This serves to keep readers and listeners from becoming bored.

Third, the repetition of the same letter sound as presented in the repetition of the letters *ra*, *kaf*, *dal*, and *ha*. In Surah Al-Qamar [54] verses 33-41; Al-Insān [76], verses 1-13; Al-Burūj [85] verses 2-9, 12-18; Al-Fajr [89] verses 1- there is a repetition of the letter *ra*. Pada Q.S. 'Abasa [80] verses 17-

¹⁵ Stylistics is the study of the language used in literary works. See, Harimurti Kridalaksana, *Kamus Linguistik* (Jakarta: PT. Gramedia, 1983), 157. In Arabic literature stylistics is known as (*uslūb*) with rhetorics (*Balāghah*). According to him, *balaghah* is a static science, while stylistics is a dynamic science; *Balaghah* cannot be separated from syntactic rules (*nahwu*) Inconsistencies with them are deemed mistakes, although stylistics employs preferences and deviations to convey the choice and deviation of sentences. See, Syukri Muḥammad 'Ayyad, *Madkhal ilā 'Ilm al-Uslūb*, (Riyād: Dār al-'Ulūm, 1982), 44-7.

¹⁶ Panuti Sudjiman, *Bunga Rampai Stilistika* (Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti, 1993), p. 14. In the context of the Qur'an, since the third century after Hijrah, studies of the stylistics of the Qur'an have been carried out, but are still limited to *Balaghah*.

¹⁷ This kind of analysis see, for example Syihabuddin Qalyubi, *Stilistika Al-Qur'an Pengantar Orientasi Studi Al-Qur'an*.

23; Al-Syams [91] verses 1-15 there are repetitions of the letter *ha*. In Surah Al-Fajr [89] verses 6-12, there are repetitions of the letter *dal*, while in verses 17-20 there is a repetition of *mim*; In Surah Al Inshirah [94] verses 1-4, there is a repetition of the letter *kaf*, in verses 5-6 there is a repetition of the letter *ba'*.

Fourth, repetition of pronunciation in several verses. For example, the repetition of the pronunciation of *al-tāriq* in Surah Al-Ṭāriq [86], verses 1-2; the pronunciation of *kaida* in Surah Al-Ṭāriq [86], verses 15-16; *dakka* in Surah Al-Fajr [89], verse 21; *ṣaffa* in Surah āl-Fajr [89] verses 22; *aḥad* in Surah Al-Fajr [89] verses 25-26; and *ʿaqabah* in Surah Al-Balad [90] verses 11-12.

Fifth, the repetition of adjacent sounds. For example, the repetition of sounds in the pronunciation of *ṭumisat*, *furijat*, *nusifat*, *uqqitat*, and *ujjilat* in Surah Al-Mursalat [77] verses 8-12; lafal *gharqa*, *nasyṭa*, *sabha*, *sabqa*, dan *amra*, in Surah Al-Nāzi'āt [79] verses 1-5; *rājifah*, *rādifah*, *wājifah*, *khāsyi'ah*, *ḥāfirah* in Surah Al-Nāzi'āt [79] verses 6-10; *suyyirat*, *uṭṭilat*, *ḥusyirat*, *sujjirat*, *zuwwijāt*, *su'ilat*, *qutilat*, *nusyirat*, *kusyitāt*, *su'irat* in Surah Al-Takwīr [81]: 3-12; *duḥā*, *sajā*, *qalā*, *tardā*, *awā*, *hadā*, dan *aghna*, in Surah Al-Ḍuḥā [93] verses 1-8.

The use of rhymes and adjacent sound variations is part of the way the Qur'an conveys the message and the worldview of meaning that is built into it. It began as a means of carrying out a literary revolution. The rhymes that have been set in one surah and subsequently altered to various and even conflicting rhymes demonstrate that the Qur'an is not a literary text like the literary texts that existed and thrived in Arab civilization at the time. For example, in Surah al-Nāzi'āt [79] verses 1-5, pronunciation is used where the vowels and rhymes are very close together, but when entered in verses 6-14, the rhymes change with words that sound much different. Something similar happened to Surah Al-Ḍuḥā [93]. Verses 1-8 end with words that are closed with a light vowel sound, however after entering verses 9-11, each end of the verse is concluded with a pronunciation ending in a consonant sound that is quite heavy in pronunciation. From a linguistic and literary perspective, these findings indicate that the textuality of the Qur'an was affected by Arabic literature rather than being born of Arab culture.

The second matter is concerned with the phonological worldview of meaning. The relationship between a certain sequence of sounds and the expressed meaning in language is arbitrary. However, if a pronunciation sound resembles or alludes to the word conveyed, the meaning is regarded as stronger. The form of *maṣdar ruba'ī muḍā'af* (a four-letter infinitive with

sound repetition), for example, means “repetition”. For instance, *qarqarah* means “stomach rumble”, *jarjarah* means “noise”, *qa`qa`ah* means “tinkle”. The repetition in *`ain fi`l* (the second letter is verb) shows repetition. For example, *fattaḥa* means “to open up”, *qatta`a* means “to cut”, and *kassara* means “to break”.¹⁸

The psychological connotations that are raised are also tied to the features of the sound of the letters used in the Qur'an. For example, the letter *sin* in Surah Al-Nās [114]. The letter *sin* is a fricative consonant that cannot be produced with the mouth open, but by attaching the upper teeth to the lower teeth on the tip of the tongue. Sounds like these are specifically picked to evoke the whispers of evildoers and deception, as Satan does. Fricative sound carries the message that evil can be born from the subtle yet deceitful whisperings of people who have evil deeds, and bad things are frequently plotted in undisclosed communication.

In Surah Al-Nāzi'āt [79]: 6-14, the letters *ra* and *fa* are repeated. The repetition of the letter *ra* with rapid pronunciation describes the vibrations produced and is supported by the sounds of *fa'* and *jim* which are preceded by a long vowel. The Qur'an uses this type of sound system to depict the situation of the earth's vibrations, a terrified heart, and a tense atmosphere.¹⁹ In verses that use such an oral system, they carry messages of unusual and frightening circumstances

The variation of rhyme—by displaying the alternation of vowels and consonants—and the harmony of sounds featured in the Qur'an verses, as well as the psychological implications given, are not only linked to the aesthetic features of the Qur'an language for readers and listeners. Furthermore, the Qur'an explicitly states that it is neither poetry nor prose in the Arab tradition. The literary characteristics of the Qur'an prove that it does not have the rules of *`arud* and *qawafi*, as in Arabic poetry. The Qur'an refutes the views of those who claim that the Qur'an is not poetry (Surah Al-Ḥāqqah [69] verse 41).

Regarding these characteristics, Musailamah, a figure who claims to be a prophet, attempts to replicate the literary features in the Qur'an verses, but he just imitates the sound system, with no significance or psychological vibrations. Al-Wālid bin Al-Mughirah, an expert on pre-Islamic poetry and a Meccan polytheist, argued against Arab writers who claimed that the

¹⁸ Maḥmūd Aḥmad Najlah, *Lughah al-Qur`ān fi Juz `amma* (Beirūt: Dār al-Naḥḍah al-`Arabiyyah, 1981), 335-340.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

Qur'an was poetry at the time it was revealed. He firmly said "*mā hāzā biqauli basyar*". His identification was based on linguistic evidence that the sound and rhyme in the Qur'an differed from the poetic standards they were familiar with in the realm of Arabic literature at the time.²⁰ A similar confession emerges from Labid ibn Rabi'ah. This Arab poet maestro, once hung his compositions at the door of the Kaaba to show his ability to compose poetry among the Arab community. At that time, Arab society believed that no writer could match Labid's work. Not long after, the followers of the Prophet Muhammad came with some verses of the Qur'an and hung them in front of the door of the Kaaba. Labid read it. He was stunned by the rhyme and diction used in the text because it was a novel contribution to the literary tradition that existed in Arab civilization at the time.²¹

The structure of rhyme and vocabulary incorporated into the Qur'an with this aesthetic dimension is not just tied to poetry and prose aspects, as was the case with literary compositions that existed in Arab civilization at the time.²² The Qur'an, with the literary dimension it brings, is a new thing among Arabic literature that lived at that time. From a literary point of view, the narrative of the Qur'an is one of the leaps and at the same time resistance to the aesthetic dimensions of Arabic literature that have far been established. Conceptually, terms that refer to poetry are distinguished from terms that refer to the narrative of the Qur'an. In poetry, the term *qāfiyah* is used while *fāṣilah* is used in the Qur'an; the term *bait* in poetry, in the Qur'an, the term *ayat* is used; the term *kasidah* in poetry, in Qur'an the term *sūrah* is used. This indicates that the Qur'an, from a literary perspective, represents a new genre in Arab society's literary tradition.²³ Both Muslims and nonbelievers recognize this leap in the Qur'an.²⁴

²⁰ Muḥammad `Abdullāh Darraz, *al-Naba' al-`Azīm* (Kuwait: Dār al-Qalam, 1974), 92.

²¹ M. Nur Kholis Setiawan, *Al-Qur'an Kitab Sastra Terbesar*, 74.

²² As emphasized by Thaha Husein that the Qur'an is not poetry and not prose, but it is the Qur'an. See Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Maḥmūd al-Naṣṣ, Dirāsah fī `Ulūm al-Qur`ān* (t.kt: al-Hai'ah al-Miṣriyyah al-`Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1993), 162.

²³ Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Maḥmūd al-Naṣṣ, Dirāsah fī `Ulūm al-Qur`ān* 162.

²⁴ Several verses in the Qur'an describe this fascination, including Al-Māidah [5]: 83, Al-Isrā' [17]:107-109, Al-Ahzāb [32]: 15-16, dan al-Zumar [39]: 23. The stories of the first generations of confusion may be found in *sīrah* and *maghāzi*. For example, Ibn Al-Aṣīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārikh* (Beirut: 1979); Ibn Kaṣīr, *Sīrah al-Nabawiyah* (Muṣṭafā `Abd al-Wāhid (ed) (Kairo: 1964), Volume I.

Efficiency and Deviation: Media for Message Delivery

In addition to the phonological aspect, the aspects of meaning and implicit messages built by the Qur'an are reflected in the vocabulary, accuracy, and effectiveness of its use. As a medium of communication, the vocabulary used by the Qur'an is a representation of the details of the meaning constructed. Al-Jāhiz (w. 255/868 AH),²⁵ compared the text of the Qur'an with the Arabic poetry of Jahiliyah and Islamic poetry and concluded that the Qur'an never had a useless sentence. The concept of synonymy in the Qur'an does not build the same denotative meaning but has a different connotation. According to Al-'Asyākir, the word used to refer to one object has a distinctive feature that is not shared by other words.²⁶ Thus, the character of synonymy in the Qur'an differs from the general Arabic phenomenon, which considers synonymy as a natural occurrence.²⁷

For instance, the words *maṭar* and *ghaiṣ*. These two words have the denotation meaning of "rain". Arabic writers treat these two vocabularies as synonyms (*tarāduf*), but in the Qur'an, the word *maṭar* is always used in connection with the question of God's torment (Surah Al-Nisā' [4] verse 102; Al-A'rāf [7] verse 84; Al-Anfāl [8] verse 32; Hūd [11] verse 82; Al-Hijr [15] verse 74; Al-Furqān [25] verse 40; Al-Syu'arā' [26] verse 173; Al-Naml [27] verse 58; Al-Aḥqāf [46] verse 24), while the word *ghaiṣ* relates to God's grace (Surah Lukmān [31] verse 34; Al-Syūrā [42] verse 28).²⁸ The words *na'am* and *balā*, can be translated into "yes", to answer a question. According to Ibn 'Abbās, as quoted by al-Zarkāsī, the word *na'am* is used as an answer to justify a question, whether the redaction of the question is negative or positive. While the word *balā* is used as an answer to a question in a positive form. In Surah Al-A'rāf [7] verse 172, Allah says: *alastu birabbikum, qālū balā syahidnā*— "Am I not your Lord?" They replied, "Yes, You are! We testify." ... is used in the context of this verse to answer the previous question in the context of a positive sentence, to affirm that their Lord is Allah. When the word *na'am* is used, the editorial question that is negated is emphasized in

²⁵ Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāhiz, *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, (Beirut: t.p., 1985), I: 20.

²⁶ 'Aisyah 'Abdurrahmān bin al-Syāṭi, *al-I'jāz al-Bayāni li al-Qur'ān*, (Kairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1984), 211-4.

²⁷ Compare with Imel Badi' Ya'qub, professor of linguistics at the University of Lebanon, said that synonyms are a natural language phenomenon in every language. See, Imel Badi' Ya'qub, *Fiqh al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah wa Khaṣā'ishuhā* (Beirut: Dār al-ṣāqafah al-Islamiyyah, t.th.), p. 176.

²⁸ See al-Jāhiz, *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, I: 20.

the answer. The meaning produced is “Yes, you are not my God”.²⁹

A similar thing is found in the words *ru'ya* and *aḥlām*. These two words were often translated as the same, which is “dream”. In the Qur'an, both are used in different contexts. The word *aḥlām* in the Qur'an is used in a plural form and is preceded by the word *adghās* (confusing) (Surah Yūsuf [12] verse 44; Al-Anbiyā' [21] verse 5). The word *ru'ya* is used seven times, in the singular, and all in the context of the true meaning of dreams (Surah Al-Shāffāt [37] verse 105; Yūsuf [12] verses 5, 43-44, 100; Al-Isrā' [17] verse 60, and Al-Faḥ [48] verse 27).³⁰ Thus, the construction of meaning built by the Qur'an is different from the norm in Arab society. The word *aḥlām* means “a bad and confusing dream”, while the word *ru'ya* is translated into “a dream that will happen”.

In addition to the precise meanings in the language that appear to be synonyms at first glance, the Qur'an's choice of vocabulary is also based on the principles of efficiency economy, and precision of meaning. In the economic aspect, the Qur'an builds a communication system using words that are effective and efficient. The word *mar* is used in Surah Al-Nāzi'āt [79] verses 30-1. includes all types of consumptive plants, such as stemless vegetables (cabbage leaves, melons, beans), grasses, and tubers. The Qur'an simply describes all of these plant types as nourishment for humans and livestock with the term *mar*.³¹ In language theory, the economic premise of this word becomes a reference for whether or not a communication process is effective.

Related to the principle of accuracy of meaning, the Qur'an uses words according to what is needed in the context of narratives and events. For example, when describing the condition of the old and weak Prophet Zakaria (Surah Maryam [19] verses 3-6), Qur'an uses the pronunciation of *wahana al-`azmu minnī* (my bones have become brittle), not *wahana al-laḥmu minnī* (my flesh have become brittle). ones are where meat sticks. When the bones become brittle, the flesh becomes fragile as well. The state of Zakaria's elderly age is also described by the word *wasyta`ala al-ra'su syaiba*. If the word *syaiiba* is moved to *wasyta`ala al-syaiibu fi al-ra'si*, the meaning changes. The word *syaiiba* means “grey hair has spread across my head”, while in the

²⁹ Al-Zarkasi, *al-Burhān fī `Ulūm al-Qur`ān* (Kairo: al-Halabi, 1957), IV: 262.

³⁰ `Aisyah `Abdurrahmān bint al-Syāṭi, *al-I`jāz al-Bayāni li al-Qur`ān*, 215-6. In the following pages of this book Bint al-Syāṭi analyze some other words that are considered synonymous, for example, *ḍiyā`* with *nūr* and *ṣubḥ* with *al-fajr*.

³¹ Al-Jāhiz, *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, I: 20.

second sentence it means “grey hair is in the head”. In the first sentence structure model, it is described where the grey hair has spread slowly and eventually fills the head, while in the second sentence it is only depicted that there is gray hair on the head, maybe in the back, middle, or front.³²

Aside from the accuracy of meaning and the usage of words in sentence patterns to establish a correct understanding, the Qur'an deviates in various circumstances, both in terms of literary and language structure. Deviation in the literary context serves to keep the listener or audience interested and boredom. For example, in Surah Al-Syu`arā [26] verses 78-82; verses 78 and 79 begin with the words *allazī*, but verse 80 begins with the word *wa iżā*, and verses 81 and 82 begin with the word *allazī* again. In addition, in the context of language structure, *fā'il* (actor) in verses 78, 79, 81, and 82 is Allah, while the actor in verse 80 is the first person singular (Ibrahim). When aligned with the plot of verses 78, 79, 81, and 82 Surah Al-Syu`arā [26], verse 80 will read: *wallazī amradanī*. In this verse there is also a deviation in the use of the pronoun *huwa* (He). The word *yahdīn*, *yuṭ`imunī*, *wa yasqīn*, and *yasyfīn* are preceded by the pronoun *hua*, while the word *yumītunī* and *yuhyīn* are not preceded by the pronoun.³³

In the context of literature, this deviation creates a diverse mood, providing the idea that there is something new and not dull in a sequence of sentences. Meanwhile, The meaning of the sentence is influenced by a deviation in the context of sentence structure. In the example above, the mention of the actor of the verb 'He' (Allah) in verses 78, 79, 81, 82 and the mention of the actor of the verb 'I' (Ibrahim) in verse 80 implies lessons on manners in communication. Good things, such as creating, giving instructions, feeding and drinking, turning off and giving life, should be entrusted to Allah, while bad things, such as illness, should be entrusted to the human himself. It becomes obvious that the deviation included in the Qur'an's sentence structure is more than simply a beautiful literary expression that deviates from traditional conventions; it also contains meanings and psychological elements that the Qur'an expresses to the listener.

Arabic Literature and the Perspective of the Qur'an

³² For more details in various contexts, see Al-Khaṭīb al-Iskāfī, *al-Durrah al-Tanzīl wa Ghurrah al-Ta`wīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Afāq al-Jadīdah, 1973), pp. 239-240.

³³ See Syihabuddin Qalyubi, *Stilistika Al-Qur'an Pengantar Orientasi Studi Al-Qur'an*, pp. 59-60.

Language and culture are two interrelated concepts. Among anthropologists, there are three views of this relationship.³⁴ First, the language used in society is seen as a reflection of the overall culture of the community. This view later became the basis for some anthropologists to understand a society through its languages.

The second view explains that language is part of culture. This view places language under the umbrella of culture. Language is viewed as a unique phenomenon from other cultural elements, such as art, but holds a distinctive place.

The third view describes that language is a condition for culture. There are two meanings here. First, language is a condition for culture in a diachronic sense. That is, language precedes culture because through language humans know the culture of their people. We know Javanese society, for example, through language. Through language humans are raised, praised, cursed, and so on. Second, Language is a condition for culture since the elements needed to construct language are essentially the same as those used to construct culture, notably logical connections, correlations, and so on. Underlining this third view, Levi-Strauss explains that language and culture are the results of the activity of the human mind.³⁵ Thus, the relationship between language and culture is not causal, but because both are the product or result of the activity of human reason.

did not mention the process of reasoning activity in the language. It is critical to investigate this thinking process further in relation to the language of the Qur'an. Because, according to the Qur'an, language is more than just a correct, beautiful, and poetic way of speaking—which is usually a study in *Balaghah* (rhetoric)—but also a way of reasoning. The reasoning is an important aspect to see and understand the language of the Qur'an.

Since the first time the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, the disbelievers of Mecca have struggled to define and interpret the Qur'an in terms of the literature featured within it; some call it magic (Surah Al-An`ām [6] verse 7; Yūnus [10] verse 76; Al-Zukhruf [43] verse 30; Al-Aḥqāf [46] verse 7; Al-Mudāṣṣir [74] verse 24), and some accuse to it as a fabricated lie (Surah Saba' [34] verse 43). This kind of cynical response is described in Surah al-Mudāṣṣir [74] verse 11-26—the second verse in descending order—

³⁴ Heddy Shri Ahimsa-Putra, *Strukturalisme Levi-Strauss, Mitos dan Karya Sastra* (Yogyakarta: Galangpress dan Yayasan Adikarya IKAPI, 2001), pp. 24-5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 25.

about the tense mental situation and uncertain emotions of people who hear the recitation of the Qur'an. For them, no illustration can explain their mental tension, other than that of the Prophet Muhammad as a magician and poet. That was how they conclude the linguistic narrative of the Qur'an.

The emotional and derogatory allegations and conclusions are firmly condemned by the Qur'an (Surah al-Ṭūr [52] verse 29-31; Yāsīn [36] verse 69). The Qur'an is also not the Prophet Muhammad's language in terms of style: the Qur'an's style differs from the Prophet Muhammad's style.³⁶ Each individual, in general, has a distinct linguistic style and personality. In Indonesian literature, Taufik Ismail, Sapardi Djoko Damono and A. Mustofa Bisri, for example have their own characteristics in writing poetry. People who are used to reading their works will easily notice it. Zurrumah, a famous writer, once wrote a poem that Jarir suggested adding. The addition was compiled directly by Jarir, who inserted it at the end of the verse and Zurrumah agreed. When Zurrumah met al-Farazdaq, he was asked to present his poetry. Zurrumah read it too—including the insert from Jarir. Then, al-Farazdaq commented, *“laisa hāza min bahrika muḍīfuhā asyaddu lahbīna minka*—this is not your composition, which adds to it far more than you.”³⁷

The major issue is not the Makah poets' incapacity to frame the Qur'an with previously acknowledged writings, but their rejection of the Qur'an's existence. Of course, the difficulty will be overcome if they are willing to point out the contrasts and parallels in the formal structure and literary style of the Qur'an with poetry and prose that they are familiar with. However, they vehemently rejected the source of the divinity of the Qur'anic text and

³⁶ We note that the wording of the Qur'an and the hadiths both talk about the same thing. For example, when the two of them talk about the prohibition of overeating and drinking. Surah al-A'rāf [7] verse 31. While the Prophet's hadith narrates it—in *Sunan al-Timīzī*, “Kitāb al-Zuhd ‘an Rasūlillāh”, Bab Mā jā’a ‘an Karāhiyati Kaṣrah al-Akl, no. 2302—as follows:

مَا مَثَلًا أَدْمِيٍّ وَعَاءَ شَرًّا مِنْ بَطْنٍ بِحَسْبِ ابْنِ آدَمَ أَكَلَاتُ يُعْمَنُ صَلْبُهُ فَإِنْ كَانَ لَا مَخَالَةَ قَتَلْتُ لِطَعَامِهِ وَتَلْتُ لِشَرَابِهِ وَتَلْتُ لِنَفْسِيهِ .

Both texts warn those who are overeating and drinking. However, the style of language and the dictions used are different. In the verses of the Qur'an, Allah is shown as a subject who is involved in the warning, and the style of language uses commands (*amr*) and prohibitions (*nahy*). While in the hadith, Allah is not involved as a subject who plays an important role in the warning; the language style used also uses the narrative style of news, not in the form of commands or prohibitions.

³⁷ Muhammad Zaghlul Salam, *ṣalāṣu Rasā'il ft I'jāz al-Qur'ān al-Rumnāni, al-Khaṭṭābi wa al-Jurjāni* (Kairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, t.th), 22.

accused Muhammad of being a liar and insane.³⁸

Their accusations were socio-historically absurd. Because, as a receiver of the Qur'an's revelation long before that pivotal time, Muhammad was regarded by the Arab society as an honest and trustworthy man. Even he was awarded the title "Al-Amīn" by the Arab community at that time. On the basis of his honesty, Khadijah, who would eventually become his wife, paid Muhammad twice as much while he handled his business.³⁹

These cynical rejections and accusations arose because the language of the Qur'an, in its communication structure, is not just a beautiful and poetic way of speaking, but also a way of reasoning in which a world view differs from the world view of society at the time is constructed. The Qur'an conceptually offers new cultural reasoning and challenges old cultural reasoning. The Qur'an firmly claims itself as a guide to life (Surah Al-Baqarah [2] verse 3). Through the vocabulary used, the Qur'an builds a worldview. The Qur'an transforms various words that are commonly used in Arabic conversation into new meanings. This transformation of meaning offers a different perspective and reasoning than that which has been established in Arab society.

In terms of semantics, the Qur'anic language is not only a tool for communicating and thinking, but it also incorporates a conception of the world surrounds it.⁴⁰ The word "Allah" for example, was known by pre-Islamic Arabs. This term has appeared and is used historically not just in pre-Islamic poetry, but also in a combination of people's names. The name of the Prophet Muhammad's father was `Abdullāh. The pre-Islamic Arabs believed in Allah as a name to identify the God who created the heavens and the earth, the creator of rain and the giver of life.

The Qur'an records this belief (Surah Al-Ankabūt [29] verse 61).

³⁸ Amīn al-Khūli dan Naṣr Hāmid Abū Zayd, *Metode Tafsir Sastra*, terj. Khairon Nahdiyyin (Yogyakarta: Adabpress, 2004), 100.

³⁹ Thaha Husein described that Khadijah usually gave 20% sales commission to people who run his business, but for Muhammad he dared to give 40% commission. See, Thaha Husein, *Cahaya Rasul, Catatan Terlupakan dari Kehidupan Nabi Muhammad*, terj. Siti Nurhayati and Imam Bukhari (Yogyakarta: Navila, 2006), 114.

⁴⁰ Toshihiko Izutsu is one of the people who developed a comprehensive study of semantics in the Qur'an. He wrote three books, all of which used semantic analysis, such as *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qoran*; *God and Man in the Qoran*; and *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology: A Semantical Analysis of Iman and Islam*. Awareness of semantic studies in the Qur'anic studies was initiated by Muqātil ibn Sulaimān (w. 150/767 AH) as shown in his work entitled *al-Asybah wa al-Nazā'ir fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* dan *Tafsīr Muqātil Ibn Sulaimān*.

However, in the Qur'anic worldview, they fail to draw rational conclusions from their statements since they also worship other items in addition to Allah (Surah Al-Ankabūt [29] verse 63). In their conception of divinity, there is also a hierarchy in which Allah is placed in the highest position among other gods (Surah. Al-Zumar [39] verse 3; Al-Ahqāf [46] verse 28). This means that in their conception there are many Gods. When the word "Allah" is written in the Qur'an, The meaning that is constructed differs from the pre-Islamic Arab society's idea. It is used in Islam to refer to pure monotheism (Surah Al-Nisā' [3] verse 36; Al-A`rāf [7] verse 65, 73, 85, Hūd [11] verse 50, 61, 84, Al-Naḥl [16] verse 36; Al-Mu'minūn [23] verse 23,32) and pure monotheism is associated with virtue in social behavior (Surah Al-Ankabūt [29] verse 36).

The word "Allah", whose meaning is transformed by the Qur'an, is culturally significant not just as a sign system, but also as a conceptual foundation for changes in reasoning and theology. The ideological transformation of meaning here converts the belief system, which was previously based on the polytheistic system, to a pure monotheistic system. As a sign system, the word "Allah" is still used to mark and name the God who is worshipped, but its meaning has been radically changed. Thus, the Qur'an's transformation of meaning is not a matter of word homonymy, but of a profound change in meaning creation tied to the entire conceptual structure of pre-Islamic Arab civilization.

This transformation process was built by the Qur'an for building reason and a new conception of the worldview of the Qur'an. The semantic meanings produced by the Qur'an indicate to us that the Meccan disbelievers' opposition was not exclusively due to the literary aspect of the Qur'an, which jolted their aesthetic reasoning, causing them to stumble and stutter. However, the fundamental issue is intellectual objection grounded on the Qur'anic belief system and worldview.

We can find other vocabularies in the Qur'an as keywords whose conceptual meaning is transformed. For example, the words *īmān*, *iḥsān*, *kufr*, and *ẓulm*. Semantically, the various vocabularies used by the Qur'an—although previously used in Arabic communication—are a medium for constructing the world of meaning. In this context, the Qur'an utilizes the distinctive character of the Arabic language which tends to lead to the aspect of ideality.⁴¹ The Qur'an not only carried out a semantic revolution against

⁴¹ In Arabic, the mind is the standard for which everything is measured. The real world is described by the size of the world of meaning (mind). The purpose of creating words in

key terms that were typically established in pre-Islamic Arab civilization, but it also carried out ideological resistance against Arab society's theological hegemony at the time.

Conclusion

The Qur'an's linguistic aspect is a phenomenal side in the history of language and literature. Aside from being God's message, it cannot be isolated from the social and cultural space of Arab culture as it was revealed to Muhammad. However, none of the contemporaries' Arab writers could equal the substance, grammar, and stylistics. The Qur'an confirms this (Surah Al-Isrā' [17] verse 88; Al-Ḥāqqah [69] verse 41). It has historically been considered outstanding by Arab society, which has a strong literary legacy. They argue that the Qur'an cannot be presented in a form that already exists in Arab literary tradition, such as poetry or prose.

The arrival of the Qur'an in Arab culture was not only a divine communication in which God imparted moral instructions to mankind, but it also emerged as a literary opposition to the Arab literary world of the time. The patterns, rhymes, and language of the Qur'an serve as a means for both opposition and conquest to Arabic literary traditions. Pre-Islamic Arab society was made nervous and stuttered. They committed illogical behavior as a result of their anxiety and stuttering: they accused Muhammad of being insane and the Qur'an of witchcraft, despite the fact that they acknowledged Muhammad's legitimacy long before he got the revelation.

This rejection is also produced by the Qur'an's transformation of meaning through the semantic field. This meaning transformation process dismantles the ideology of paganism and politicism that has been established in pre-Islamic Arab society. The Qur'an, as a sign of language and a worldview, conquers Arab society's literary system, culture, and worldview that are contrary to the Abrahamic religion's principles. The Qur'an's linguistics and word view of meaning should not only be viewed through the lens of the Qur'an's miracles but should also serve as the foundation for understanding and interpreting God's messages in the Qur'an.

Arabic is to create emotional meanings rather than external forms (real world). See, `Uṣmān Amīn, *Falsafah al-Lughah al-`Arabiyyah* (Mesir: al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah li al-Ta'lif wa al-Tarjumah, 1969), 29-31.

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