# The Application of Linguistic Foundations in the Methodological Interpretation of the Holy Quran

**Muhammad Javad Norouzi** [1] ✉ iD

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Quran and Hadith Studies, Faculty of Islamic Studies and Jurisprudence, Al-Mustafa International University, Qum, Iran. Email: mohamadjavad_norozi@miu.ac.ir

| Article Info | ABSTRACT |
|---|---|
| | Linguistic principles serve as essential tools for analyzing the structure and meaning of propositions and play a central role in Quranic exegesis as one of the most effective methods for understanding divine texts. The Quranic language possesses distinctive features that set it apart from all other textual traditions. The research method adopted in this article is descriptive–analytical, based on a library-based approach. Focusing on the application of linguistic principles in the interpretation of the Quran, this article demonstrates that Quranic words and propositions, in addition to their conventional meanings, convey specialized and evolved concepts that can be analyzed within the framework of rational conventions and exegetical discourse norms. In this study, six fundamental linguistic principles are examined: the necessity of distinguishing language types, attention to specialized terminology, the representational nature of Quranic language, the conventional character of revelation, the polysemous nature of Quranic expression, and the multidimensionality of its propositions. The findings indicate that the Quran employs a multilayered and integrative linguistic system that purposefully utilizes rhetorical devices such as metaphor, metonymy, allusion, and allegory. While maintaining its connection to reality, this system simultaneously addresses the psychological, rational, and epistemological dimensions of the audience. Attention to these principles plays a critical role in the accurate understanding of divine intent in the process of Quranic exegesis. |

## Introduction

Linguistic rules of the Quran play a central role in the exegetical process, where various disciplines contribute to understanding the divine message. Among these, one of the most essential is the application of exegetical methods and principles. While this field was previously classified under Quranic sciences, it is now recognized as an independent discipline. Exegetical rules are general guidelines grounded in rational, scriptural, and conventional principles that an exegete must adhere to when interpreting the word of God. These rules, function both as tools for evaluating exegetical data and as safeguards against error, similar to how logic supports sound reasoning and the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) provides foundational principles for deriving Islamic rulings (*fiqh*).

Due to the significance of exegetical principles, this subject has consistently attracted the attention of Quranic exegetes. Some of these principles, such as referring ambiguous (*mutashābih*) verses to definitive (*muḥkam*) ones, were established from the earliest days of Islam, emerging alongside the initial revelation of the Quran. In contrast, other principles are rooted in rational conventions and the norms of discourse, and appear sporadically in works of *uṣūl* and *tafsīr*. Despite numerous scholarly efforts, a comprehensive work that collects and systematically analyzes all exegetical principles across different domains remains unavailable (Bābāʾī et al, 2009, p. 63).

At the same time, it has been reported that *al-Risālah* by Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī is the first written work addressing the shared principles between legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and Quranic exegesis (Al-ʿAk 1993, 42). Likewise, the book *Qawāʿid al-tafsīr* by Ibn Taymiyyah al-Ḥarrānī (542-621 AH) is recognized as the first independent work specifically devoted to exegetical principles (Ḥājī Khalīfah 1992, 2:1358).

Based on this foundation, the present article seeks to examine the most significant and practically relevant exegetical principles within the field of linguistics. What distinguishes this study from previous works is its applied approach to the analysis of linguistic rules; these principles are not merely discussed at a theoretical level but are instead derived directly from and examined within the context of Quranic verses.

## Concepts
### 1. Proverb (*Mathal*)

The term *mathal* (pl. *amthāl*) originally denotes "counterpart," "peer," or "something that resembles another in form or quality." Over time, its semantic range was extended through a process of metaphorical transfer to designate a widely circulated, proverbial saying—one that has gained currency in the collective linguistic repertoire by virtue of its recurrent and apt deployment in contexts analogous to the original situation in which it was first uttered. In technical parlance, this original situation is termed the *mawrid* (lit. "place of arrival" or "source"), referring to the primary historical or contextual circumstance that gave rise to the expression (Tahānawī 1996, 2:1449). Some scholars have stated: "*Mathal* and *mithal* refer to the similarity of intellectual meanings, whereas *mithl* (with a kasra on the mīm and sukun on the thāʾ) refers to the similarity of perceptible things. However, they have also been used interchangeably" (Ibn Qayyim Jawziyyah 1981, 18). In any case, *tamthīl* is a type of metaphor or parable that aims to embody immaterial and non-sensory meanings, make them apparent, and also demonstrate the resemblance between the two in terms of manifestation and presence.

### 2. Metaphor (*Istiʿārah*)

The term "metaphor" (*istiʿārah*) literally means "to borrow." In rhetoric, it denotes a figure of speech in which a word is used beyond

its literal meaning due to resemblance or contextual cues (Hāshimī 2018, 208). *Istiʿārah* is essentially a more eloquent form of *tashbīh* (simile) in which one of its components—whether the "*mushabbah*" (the object compared), the "*mushabbah bihi*" (that to which it is compared), or the "wajh al-shabah" (the point of similarity/the common feature)—is omitted. It thus constitutes a type of figurative expression (*majāz*) grounded in analogy (*tashbīh*) (Hāshimī 2018, 208).

## 3. Figurative Expression (*Majāz*)

In a general classification, *majāz* is divided into two types: linguistic figurative expression (*majāz lughavī*) and figurative expression in attributions (*majāz fī Isnād*).

### 3.1. Linguistic figurative expression (*Majāz Lughavī*)

*Majāz lughavī*, also called *majāz fī mufrad*, refers to the use of a word in a meaning other than its literal or intended sense. Its forms include omission, addition, general for specific and vice versa, specific for general and vice versa, naming the concomitant for the necessary and vice versa, naming the cause for the effect and vice versa, naming something by its location and vice versa, naming something according to its result, naming something by its instrument, and naming something by its opposite (Suyūṭī 1994, 2:72).

### 3.2. Figurative Expression in Attributions (*Majāz fī Asnād*)

*Majāz fī asnād*, also called rational/mental figurative expression (*majāz ʿaqli*), occurs when an action or quasi-action is attributed to something it does not literally belong to, but is related to it (Suyūṭī 1994, 2:70). For example: *"and when His signs are recited to them, they increase their faith, and who put their trust in their Lord"*[1] *(Quran 8:2).* In this verse, the recitation of the verses is described as increasing their faith, whereas the real cause of the increase is God; the recitation serves only

---

[1]. ﴿... وَ إِذا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ آياتُهُ زادَتْهُمْ إيماناً وَ عَلى رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ﴾ (الأنفال/٢)

as the means (*asbāb*). The purpose of discussing these classifications is to show that discerning literal from figurative meanings without mastery of Arabic rhetorical sciences (*ʿilm al-bayān*) is nearly impossible and may lead to incorrect interpretations.

## Foundational Linguistic Principles of the Quran

The most important principles in the linguistic domain of the Quran include the following:

### 1. The Principle of Distinguishing Semantic Layers of Language

Undoubtedly, a causal relationship between word and meaning is established according to a general law of the human mind. Through the correlation and repeated association of a word and its meaning, or through their occurrence in influential contextual conditions, a mental link forms such that the perception of one element immediately triggers the recall of the other (see Ṣadr 1990, 60).

Since words were initially coined to express basic, conventional, and often sensory meanings without attention to specific referential characteristics, their semantic range has evolved over time in tandem with cultural growth and the emergence of abstract concepts. As a result, these same terms have come to be employed in more complex and nuanced senses. This semantic expansion is observable not only at the lexical level but also within propositions. Consequently, when interpreting a Quranic word or statement, it is essential to determine whether its intended meaning is the conventional one or a more abstract and specialized usage.

In the Quran, words with familiar colloquial meanings are often employed to convey elevated conceptual realities. In such cases, it is as if a new, more profound meaning overlays the original term while still preserving a traceable connection to its earlier usage. For instance, the word *nūr* (light), which initially denoted tangible light such as that of the sun or a lamp, is used in the Quran to signify broader, more

encompassing meanings: *"All praise belongs to Allah, who created the heavens and the earth and made the darkness and the light…"*[2] *(Quran 6:1).*

However, the referent of this term is not limited to sensory light. The word *nūr* is designated for anything that is "manifest in itself and a source of manifestation for others," even if it is not physically perceptible. Thus, knowledge (*ʿilm*) is also called light, as reflected in the hadith, "knowledge does not lie in the abundance of learning; rather, it is a light that God casts into the heart of whomsoever He wills to guide"[3] (Fayḍ Kāshānī 1985, 1:10). Knowledge, like light, is both manifest and revealing. On this basis, both reason (*ʿaql*) and faith (*īmān*) are also regarded as forms of light. This is affirmed in the Quran, where faith is described with the same designation: *"Is he who was lifeless, then We gave him life and provided him with a light by which he walks among the people, like one who dwells in a manifold darkness which he cannot leave? To the faithless is thus presented as decorous what they have been doing"*[4] *(Quran 6:122).*

When we understand "*nūr*" in this sense, meaning that which is manifest in itself and reveals other things, without restricting it to visibility by the physical eye, the intellect, or the heart, and without concerning ourselves with *how* it manifests and reveals, then there is no problem in calling God Almighty "*nūr*" as well: *"Allah is the Light of*

---

[2]. ﴿ٱلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ٱلَّذِي خَلَقَ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضَ وَجَعَلَ ٱلظُّلُمَٰتِ وَٱلنُّورَ...﴾ (الانعام/١)

[3]. و في الحديث النبوي: «ليس العلم بكثرة التعلم إنما هو نور يقذفه اللّه في قلب من يريد اللّه أن يهديه».

[4]. ﴿أَوَمَنْ كَانَ مَيْتًا فَأَحْيَيْنَاهُ وَجَعَلْنَا لَهُ نُورًا يَمْشِي بِهِ فِي النَّاسِ كَمَنْ مَثَلُهُ فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ لَيْسَ بِخَارِجٍ مِنْهَا كَذَٰلِكَ زُيِّنَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾ (الانعام/١٢٢)

*the heavens and the earth" (Quran 24:35).* In this sense, God is the absolute Light, and all other lights are darkness in comparison to Him, because only He is inherently manifest and revealing by His very essence (Muṭahharī 2002, 3:98-104).

ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī, in analyzing this issue, writes that our familiarity and habitual associations lead us to interpret concepts such as life, knowledge, power, speech, throne, pedestal, angel, and Satan merely in terms of material instances. However, words have not primarily been coined for material referents, but rather their meanings have been determined based on their functions and purposes. Therefore, if the conceptual function of a word remains intact in a new referent, its application is to be considered literal (*ḥaqīqī*) rather than metaphorical (*majāzī*). Just as words like "lamp," "scale," and "weapon" continue to be used literally despite changes in their referents, so too their usage remains genuine because these terms were coined for the essence of the meaning, not for specific material examples (Ṭabāṭabāʾī 1973, 1:10).

Ayatollah Jawādī Āmulī offers a different analysis of semantic transformation. He writes: "Words are designated for the essences (*arwāḥ*) of meanings, not for their outward forms. The specific features of the referent do not affect the scope of the concept, and a comprehensive meaning can encompass various referents, whether physical, imaginal, or intellectual." (Jawādī Āmulī 2011, 3:228).

From the foregoing analyses, it can be concluded that the specific characteristics of referents at the time of coinage have no effect on the assigned meanings of words. Consequently, those meanings can also be applied to more complete and, so to speak, abstract referents. In any case, attention to this principle is essential in the process of interpretation, since it enables one to explain many of the Quranic terms and propositions without necessarily resorting to figurative language or ellipsis. To clarify this issue, let us consider several Quranic terms.

## A. The Term *Taqwā*

The term *taqwā* derives from the root *waqā*, which originally means "shield" or "protection," that is, something that preserves a thing from harm (Rāghib Iṣfahānī 1995, 881). In the Quran, however, it is employed to refer to the guarding of the soul against impurity and sin, as in the verse: *"And whoever is wary of Allah, He shall make a way out for him"*[5] *(Quran 65:2).* The connection between the abstract meaning and the original lexical sense lies in the fact that just as a shield protects a person from harm, accidents, and war, *taqwā* safeguards one's soul and spirit from punishment and sin (Ibn Manẓūr 1985, 15:104).

## B. The Term *Tasbīḥ*

The Quran refers repeatedly to the *tasbīḥ* (glorification) performed by all creatures, whether human beings, as conscious beings, or other entities that do not possess awareness in the human sense. In several verses, the Quran mentions the *tasbīḥ* of all natural phenomena and reminds humans that they do not perceive this glorification: *"There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification"*[6] *(Quran 17:44).* The sensory and original meaning of the root *sabaḥa* is "to swim" or "to float" (Fīrūzābādī 1995, 1:226), and it also refers to swift movement in water or air (Rāghib Iṣfahānī 1995, 392). Horses are called *al-sawābiḥ* (see Quran 79:3) because they swiftly move their forelegs while running. Similarly, the term *al-sābiḥāt* is used for ships due to their buoyancy in water, and for stars because of their movement across the celestial sphere (Makārim Shīrāzī 1994, 26:75; Ibn Manẓūr 1985, 2:470). The primary meaning of *tasbīḥ*

---

[5]. ﴿...مَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ۚ وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ اللَّهَ يَجْعَلْ لَهُ مَخْرَجًا﴾ (الطلاق/٢)

[6]. ﴿... وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَلَٰكِنْ لَا تَفْقَهُونَ تَسْبِيحَهُمْ ...﴾ (الإسراء/٤٤)
*"...There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification ..." (Quran 17:44)*

is rapid motion or swiftly heading toward a destination. Quranic verses on the *tasbīḥ* of all beings, including humans, indicate their hastening toward God, the ultimate end of existence. The term also carries a theological sense, denoting the glorification of God and His transcendence above all that is unbefitting His majesty.

## C. The Term *Waḥy* (Revelation)

The general meaning of *waḥy* is the swift and concealed transmission of meaning or message (Ibn Fāris 1983, 6:93). It refers to any form of communication that is delivered rapidly and secretly. The Quran employs this term in various contexts. However, in its specific Qur'anic usage, *waḥy* when not accompanied by a contextual clue is exclusively applied to the unique mode of divine communication with prophets. ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī writes that religious decorum in Islam requires that this expression not be used for anyone other than prophets (Ṭabāṭabāʾī 1973, 12:292).

## D. The Term *Marīḍ al-Qalb* (One Whose Heart is Diseased)

In classical Arabic, *marīḍ* refers to someone who has deviated from physical balance and health (Quran 24:61)[7], and *marīḍ al-qalb* refers to a person suffering from a physical heart condition. However, the Quran assigns a new and metaphorical meaning to this term, introducing it as a Quranic idiom denoting moral and spiritual corruption. For instance, "*There is a sickness in their hearts; then Allah increased their sickness*"[8] *(Quran 2:10),* and "*But as for those in whose heart is a sickness, it only adds defilement to their defilement, and they die while they are faithless*"[9] *(Quran 9:125).*

---

[7]. ﴿لَيْسَ عَلَى الْأَعْمَىٰ حَرَجٌ وَلَا عَلَى الْأَعْرَجِ حَرَجٌ وَلَا عَلَى الْمَرِيضِ حَرَجٌ...﴾ (النور/۶۱)

*"There is no blame upon the blind, nor any blame upon the lame, nor any blame upon the sick ..." (24:61)*

[8]. ﴿فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ فَزَادَهُمُ اللَّهُ مَرَضًا ...﴾ (البقرة/۱۰)

[9]. ﴿وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ فَزَادَتْهُمْ رِجْسًا إِلَىٰ رِجْسِهِمْ وَمَاتُوا وَهُمْ كَافِرُونَ﴾ (التوبة/۱۲۵)

The connection between the literal and Quranic meaning lies in the fact that just as a diseased body is impaired in its functions, a heart afflicted with vices obstructs the attainment of virtues and human perfection (Rāghib Iṣfahānī 1995, 765). Similar semantic transformations occur with Quranic terms such as *qalb salīm* (sound heart), *a'mā* (blind), and *baṣīr* (seeing). These examples represent only a few of the hundreds of Quranic terms that have undergone semantic transformation. Words such as *mu'min* (believer), *kāfir* (disbeliever), *sujūd* (prostration), *ṣiyām* (fasting), *ḥajj* (pilgrimage), *zakāt* (almsgiving), *rasūl* (messenger), and *Imam* (leader) have all experienced a shift in meaning. This transformation is not limited to individual words but extends to statements, contexts, and even the Quran's ontological perspective. For example, martyrdom in the path of God is considered a form of true life (Quran 3:169),[10] while a life devoid of divine connection is described as constricted, regardless of material prosperity (Quran 20:124).[11] Likewise, worldly blessings and children are sometimes portrayed as sources of punishment, and concepts such as blindness, deafness, muteness, happiness, and misery take on meanings that diverge significantly from their conventional usage within the Quranic worldview.

ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī, in his commentary on the term "constricted life" (*ḍank*), explains that human sorrow and joy are shaped by one's worldview. A person who remains committed to the divine covenant and views existence through a theocentric lens perceives goodness in

---

[10]. ﴿وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا ۚ بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ﴾ (آل عمران/۱۶۹)

*"Do not suppose those who were slain in the way of Allah to be dead; no, they are living and provided for near their Lord" (Quran 3:169)*

[11]. ﴿وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَنْ ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَىٰ﴾ (طه/۱۲۴)

*"But whoever disregards My remembrance, his shall be a wretched life, and We shall raise him blind on the Day of Resurrection" (Quran 20:124)*

all things and attains a pure life (*ḥayāt ṭayyibah*). In contrast, one who has severed ties with God lives in a constant state of hardship, sorrow, and suffering (Ṭabāṭabāʾī 1973, 1:128). Such constriction stems from a lack of spiritual fulfillment, anxiety about the future, worldly attachments, and the absence of a secure refuge. As Imam Hussain (a) proclaims in the *Duʿā* of *ʿArafah*: "My God, what has he found who has lost You…"[12] (Qummī 1996, 366).

One scholar writes that in Islam new meanings arose and names appeared which had different meanings during the Age of Ignorance (ʿAwdah 1985, 23; ʿAskarī 1934, pp. 35-36). Another writes: "Undoubtedly, the Quran was revealed using Arabic vocabulary … but its expressions and meanings are not wholly derived from the lexicon of the *Jāhiliyyah*. The Quran introduced novel usages and assigned words to new meanings that were previously unknown..." (Amīn 1933, 53).

Based on the preceding discussion, the following conclusions can be drawn:

First, the Quran has assigned new and unprecedented meanings to certain Arabic terms. Although this semantic innovation does not apply universally to all words, its extent within the Quranic text is nonetheless significant.

Second, this semantic transformation has occurred within the bounds of rational linguistic conventions and does not contradict communicative norms. In terms of notional indication (*dalālat taṣawwuriyyah*) and conventional usage (*mafād istiʿmālī*), the meaning of a term is governed by linguistic convention rather than the speaker's intention. However, in *dalālat taṣdīqiyyah* (assertive implication) and identifying the speaker's serious intent (*murād jadī*), the possibilities of

---

12. «... [إِلَهِي] مَا ذَا وَجَدَ مَنْ فَقَدَك ...».

figurative usage, metaphor, or restriction may arise, requiring close analysis of contextual clues and discourse structure.

Third, in order to grasp the true meanings of the Quran, one cannot rely solely on lexical or colloquial definitions; attention to its ʿurf khāṣ (specialized usage) is essential. The Quran's language generates meaning beyond Arab rationality or history, and recognizing whether a term is used in its primary or secondary sense is crucial for uncovering the divine intent. Words like *waḥy* (revelation) and *barzakh* (intermediate realm) illustrate this semantic diversity.

## 2. The Principle of Considering Specialized Usage and Quranic Terminology

Although the default assumption regarding language is that words refer to their conventional and conversational meanings, it must be noted that every language possesses its own set of specialized terms and idiomatic usages. While words, at the level of designation (*waḍʿ*), are established independently of context or usage, their actual use—especially in the realms of belief and values—may acquire context-specific connotations or undergo semantic evolution. These additional features may sometimes reflect specific instances or arise from the development of a particular ʿurf khāṣṣ (specialized usage) and semantic transfer. As Saʿīdī Roshan points out (Saʿīdī Rawshan 2004, 25, citing *God and Man in the Qur'an* by Toshihiko Izutsu), the presence of technical idioms in various disciplines has rendered everyday language inadequate for expressing complex intellectual purposes. Consequently, without a proper grasp of the specialized conceptual load of terms used by philosophers, mystics, theologians, or poets, one is likely to misinterpret their intended meanings.

Can expressions such as *fayḍ al-aqdas* (most sacred emanation), *fayḍ al-muqaddas* (sacred emanation), *ḥaḍarāt al-khams* (five divine presences), *maqām al-Aḥadiyyah* (station of Oneness), *maqām al-*

*wāḥidiyyah* (station of unity), *ghayb al-ghuyūb* (the unseen of all unseens),  and other Sufi terms like *ḥāl* (spiritual state, a divinely granted condition of the heart), *maqām* (station, a stable spiritual rank attained through discipline), ghayb (the unseen, hidden reality beyond sensory perception), *ḥuḍūr* (presence, awareness of being before God), and *sirr* (inner secret, the innermost faculty of the soul closest to God), truly be interpreted based solely on their colloquial or literal meanings?

Just as every field has its own specialized terminology, the Quran too, in expressing its aims, employs its own technical idioms. Overlooking these idioms and insisting on their conversational meanings often leads to exegetical errors and theological misjudgments. Indeed, some sects, due to neglecting this reality, have fallen into anthropomorphism and have ascribed inappropriate attributes to God and His prophets. In addressing expressions like *ilā rabbihā nāẓirah "looking at their Lord"*[13] *(Quran 75:23), wa-jā'a rabbuka wa al-malaku ṣaffan ṣaffā "and your Lord and the angels arrive in ranks"*[14] *(Quran 89:22),* or terms such as *ghawā,* meaning "*and went amiss*"[15] (*Quran 20:121*) and *tāba,* meaning "*He turned to him*"[16] (*Quran 2:37*), which occur in reference to infallible prophets (a), necessitating consideration of *ʿurf khāṣṣ*, the Quran's specialized and context-sensitive linguistic conventions. Of course, establishing the presence of a specialized usage in these cases requires contextual evidence, and in its absence, such interpretations would violate the rational principles of communication. In the case of the Quran, however, multiple textual indicators justify interpreting such

---

[13]. ﴿إِلى رَبِّها ناظِرَة﴾ (القيامة/٢٣)

[14]. ﴿وَ جاءَ رَبُّكَ وَ الْمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا﴾ (الفجر/٢٢)

[15]. ﴿...فَغَوى﴾ (طه/١٢١)

[16]. ﴿...فَتابَ عَلَيْه...﴾ (البقرة/٣٧)

expressions based on the principle of referring the ambiguous to the clear (*radd al-mutashābihāt ilā al-muḥkamāt*).

## 3. The Principle of Recognizing the Quran's Referential Nature

Language originates from reality; external phenomena that are perceived by the human intellect and reflected in linguistic formulas. Human communication is thus grounded in reality, not fiction. As one scholar notes, "There exists a continuous relationship between language and reality, which is mirrored through human perception and cognition. Therefore, interpersonal communication is fundamentally based on reality" (Saʿīdī Rawshan 2004, 23).

The rational presumption in any utterance is that its meaning refers to something real, unless there is a valid indication to interpret it metaphorically or figuratively. This principle is endorsed by Muslim linguists, legal theorists, and theologians, and is held to be applicable to the Quran as well. Affirming the referential nature of the Quranic language does not entail a denial of metaphor (*istiʿārah*) or allusion (*kināyah*). Rather, it rejects the wholesale symbolic or allegorical interpretation of the Quran, an approach that some have embraced both historically and in contemporary times (Mujtahid Shabistarī 2000, 368).

The Quran is neither a historical record nor a collection of fictional tales, but a divine scripture revealed to clarify truth and guide humanity. Its verses, whether on knowledge, laws, or narratives, convey real truths, including supra-empirical realities like prophetic miracles, which cannot be dismissed as fiction. Difficult passages should not be reduced to allegory or poetic imagination, for the Quran is a book of wisdom whose narratives recount real past events for guidance, not artistic effect, and it firmly rejects any notion of fabrication.

> *"Relate to them truly the account of Adam's two sons. When the two of them offered an offering, it was accepted from one of them and not accepted from the other. [One of them] said,*

*'Surely I will kill you.' [The other one] said, 'Allah accepts only from the Godwary'*[17] *(Quran 5:27)*; "*You will suppose them to be awake, although they are asleep. We turn them to the right and to the left, and their dog [lies] stretching its forelegs at the threshold. If you come upon them, you will surely turn to flee from them, and you will surely be filled with a terror of them*"[18] *(Quran 18:18)* and "*Then We will surely recount to them with knowledge, for We had not been absent*"[19] *(Quran 7:7)*

One scholar affirms that Quranic narratives reflect actual reality and serve as the ultimate historical proof due to the Quran's preserved divine origin, and he stresses that describing them as "artistic" should not imply fantasy but rather the truthful and methodologically sound presentation of reality (see Quṭb 1993, pp. 255-259; Saʿīdī Rawshan 2010, 216).

Ayatullah Murtiḍā Muṭahharī writes on this matter:

…It is impossible that the Prophets, in the logic of prophethood, for a reality, God forbid, would present an unreal matter or a falsehood, even in the form of a parable. In worldly literature, such things are frequent, whether from the speech of animals or by using allegory. The Quran, the Prophet (s), the Imams (a), and those trained in this school would never, for a sacred purpose, use an unholy matter, for example, a void, false, or unreal thing, even in a parable. This is why we have no doubt that all the Quranic stories, just as the Quran has conveyed them, reflect exact reality. The story

---

[17]. ﴿وَاتْلُ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ ابْنَيْ آدَمَ بِالْحَقِّ إِذْ قَرَّبا قُرْباناً فَتُقُبِّلَ مِنْ أَحَدِهِما وَ لَمْ يُتَقَبَّلْ مِنَ الآخَرِ قالَ لَأَقْتُلَنَّكَ قالَ إِنَّما يَتَقَبَّلُ اللَّهُ مِنَ الْمُتَّقِينَ﴾ (المائدة/٢٧)

[18]. ﴿وَ تَحْسَبُهُمْ أَيْقاظاً وَ هُمْ رُقُودٌ وَ نُقَلِّبُهُمْ ذاتَ الْيَمِينِ وَ ذاتَ الشِّمالِ وَ كَلْبُهُمْ باسِطٌ ذِراعَيْهِ بِالْوَصِيدِ لَوِ اطَّلَعْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَوَلَّيْتَ مِنْهُمْ فِراراً وَ لَمُلِئْتَ مِنْهُمْ رُعْباً﴾ (الكهف/١٨)

[19]. ﴿فَلَنَقُصَّنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ بِعِلْمٍ وَ ما كُنَّا غائِبِينَ﴾ (الأعراف/٧)

that the Quran narrates, does not require confirmation from worldly histories; rather, worldly histories must be confirmed by the Quran (see Muṭahharī 2002, pp. 12, 123-124).

Therefore, in interpreting the Quran, it must be acknowledged that its content is true and real, even if expressed in varied styles or lacking confirmation from human history. The Quran should never be seen as imaginary or merely artistic, though the use of literary devices is recognized in its proper context.

## 4. The Principle of Recognizing the Qur'an's Conventional Language and Its Adherence to Norms of Communication

Colloquial language refers to the everyday spoken language used within a society for communication and mutual understanding. As one scholar notes, it is the language of the general public across various social strata, whether adults or children, urban or rural dwellers, literate or illiterate, used for expressing themselves and comprehending one another (see Mūsawī Ardabīlī 1999, 11).

Since comprehension begins with familiarity with the speaker's language and its governing rules, understanding the foundational linguistic norms is essential. Linguists hold that rational minds intuitively rely on certain linguistic conventions when interpreting speech. During actual usage, people adhere to rhetorical conventions, and in the exegetical phase, they refer to general principles of communication and reasoning. These principles shape both the expression and comprehension of meaning. Consequently, the apparent meaning of a statement is deemed binding unless compelling contextual evidence suggests otherwise. Engaging with an audience using a language that diverges from the common vernacular is generally deemed inappropriate (Nawrūzī 2021, pp. 82-83).

Given that the Quran is a universal book of guidance and its stated purpose is to awaken heedless hearts (Quran 54:17, 22, 32, 40),[20] enable reasoned living (Quran 12:2[21]; 43:3[22]), Attaining Quranic Insight (Quran 41:3)[23], it is natural that the language of revelation would adopt a form accessible to all. The Quran's use of phrases such as *"a clarification of all things"*[24] *(Quran 16:89), "This is an explanation for mankind, and a guidance and advice for the God wary"*[25] *(Quran 3:138)*, and *"in a clear Arabic language" (Quran 26:195)*[26] affirms this point. Moreover, taking into account the condition of the audience is a fundamental rule in effective communication. Therefore, the language of revelation must be compatible with human capacity for understanding and comprehension. For this reason, the Quran has been revealed in a manner that corresponds to human perception. Moreover, it would be unreasonable to assume that rational individuals rely on common linguistic conventions for communication, while the Author

---

[20]. وَ لَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَّكِرٍ (القمر/۱۷و۲۲و۳۲و۴۰)

*"Certainly We have made the Quran simple for the sake of admonishment. So is there anyone who will be admonished?" (Quran 54:17, 22, 32, 40)*

[21]. ﴿إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ﴾ (يوسف/۲)

*"Indeed We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran so that you may apply reason" (Quran 12:2)*

[22]. ﴿إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ﴾ (الزخرف/۳)

*"We have made it an Arabic Quran so that you may apply reason" (Quran 43:3)*

[23]. ﴿كِتَابٌ فُصِّلَتْ آيَاتُهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ﴾ (فصلت/۳)

*"[this is] a Book whose signs have been elaborated for a people who have knowledge, an Arabic Quran" (Quran 41:3)*

[24]. ﴿...تِبْيَانًا لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ...﴾ (النحل/۸۹)

[25]. ﴿هَذَا بَيَانٌ لِلنَّاسِ وَهُدًى وَمَوْعِظَةٌ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ﴾ (آل‌عمران/۱۳۸)

[26]. ﴿بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُبِينٍ﴾ (الشعراء/۱۹۵)

of the Quran, who stands at the pinnacle of reason, would disregard those very principles.

From the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that the Quran adheres to rational conventions of linguistic communication and employs the established methods of human discourse in conveying its message, without introducing an entirely novel linguistic framework, though its levels of meaning may differ in depth. Therefore, exegetes must take this principle into account when engaging with the text.

It is worth noting that the theory of the Quran's conventional or customary language (*ʿurfī*) has long been a subject of discussion among Islamic scholars. Hadith scholars and literalists have traditionally held that the Quran uses the language of common discourse. Ibn ʿArabī, when asked why the Quran uses conventional language, replied, "Since the Quran was revealed in Arabic, it must encompass all the features of the Arabic language" (Ibn ʿArabī 1985, 2:68).

Among Shīʿī scholars, most Usūlīs uphold this view. As the late Ayatullah Khūʾī writes in *al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*: "The language of the Quran is the same as the language of rational understanding and communication. God has not chosen any language other than this to convey His message to people" (Khūʾī 1988, 281). He further adds: "The Quran is a book whose outward meaning is simple and accessible to the general public familiar with Arabic. What is understood from its surface expression, just as in ordinary and customary speech, is generally what God intended, and it can be relied upon in practice. When deriving rulings, ethical obligations, and similar matters, one may depend directly on the apparent meanings of the Qurʾan" (ibid, 329).

Therefore, there is no disagreement regarding the fundamental notion that the Qurʾan operates within the bounds of conventional linguistic usage. However, differing interpretations have been offered concerning the nature and intended meaning of this "conventionality":

**a.** That the Quran adopts the cultural framework and expressions familiar to the people to whom it was revealed; **b.** That it employs the vocabulary and idioms of the Arab people; **c.** That it aligns with the functional rules and characteristics of language use in everyday communication. Based on the Quranic verses and narrations, the third theory appears to be the most accurate. That is, although the Quran possesses distinctive features in terms of content, purpose, and specialized terminology, it nonetheless does not significantly differ from conventional language in its linguistic structure and adherence to rational communicative principles (Akhawān Ṣarrāf 2004, 64).

In other words, while interpreting the concept of *"lisān al-qawm"* (the language of the people) and the Quran's alignment with common discourse, one must proceed with careful attention. The Quran shares the clarity and communicative virtues of ordinary language, yet it is free from its defects. Human language is naturally constrained by limited knowledge and communicative capacity, making it prone to shortcomings. In contrast, God possesses absolute knowledge and power, and His speech is free from the imperfections inherent in human linguistic conventions (Āryān 2009, 1).

In our view, the Quran's use of conventional language signifies its adherence to rational linguistic principles and accepted communicative norms, which are essential for understanding its apparent meanings. While it occasionally employs specialized expressions requiring expert interpretation, the Quran fundamentally speaks in the language of common discourse, yet remains free from the flaws and limitations of ordinary speech shaped by cultural or environmental influences.

## 5. The Principle of Acknowledging the Polyfunctional Nature of the Qur'anic Language

One of the notable features of the Quranic language is its polyfunctionality. This refers to the inclusion of various rhetorical and

literary devices that serve to enhance communication depending on the context. As previously explained under the principle of "referential veracity," the fundamental basis of any language is its correspondence to reality. In other words, language originates from and is grounded in reality, and human communication operates on this basis. The general approach of the Quran also adheres to this principle. However, since language reflects meaning and meaning can manifest in diverse forms, sometimes direct speech is more effective, while at other times indirect expression may be more appropriate.

The Quran might reflect a concrete object, an abstract notion, or even the implications and associations of a concept. These varying functions of language explain why the Quran, in its unmatched eloquence, makes masterful use of rhetorical devices. It uses *ḥaqīqah* (literal usage of a word in its originally assigned meaning) and *majāz* (figurative use, or usage in a non-primary meaning) to the highest degree (Muẓaffar 1980, 1:42). It beautifully employs *istiʿārah* (metaphor, i.e., transferring a word from its literal meaning to another due to resemblance) (Hāshimī 2018, 208). The Quran also utilizes *kināyah* (indirect reference, where a term is used in its literal meaning but implies another related concept, e.g., saying "his hand is tied" to imply helplessness). Moreover, it frequently uses *tamthīl* (analogy or parable), which conveys meanings indirectly through illustrative comparisons (see Ibn Qayyim Jawziyyah 1981, 18). Thus, the Quranic language is not confined to a single mode of expression; rather, it dynamically adapts to serve the multifaceted objectives of divine guidance.

The polyfunctional nature of Quranic language reflects the eloquence of its divine source, employing diverse expressive modes suited to subject and audience, thereby enriching its meanings. Exegetes must remain attentive to these features, for neglecting them may obscure the intended divine message. For instance, in the verse, *"Do*

*not keep your hand chained to your neck, nor open it altogether, or you will sit blameworthy, regretful"*[27] *(Quran 17:29),* if one fails to perceive its figurative implication, the intended meaning may be missed. Likewise, in the verse, *"The example of those who were charged with the Torah, then failed to carry it, is that of an ass carrying books. Evil is the example of the people who deny Allah's signs, and Allah does not guide the wrongdoing lot"*[28] *(Quran 62:5),* if the analogy and comparison are not acknowledged, the verse becomes difficult to comprehend. Dozens of such examples exist throughout the Quran.

Indeed, if one were to deny the presence of figurative expressions in the Quran, how could the verse *"O sister of Aaron! Your father was not an evil man, nor was your mother unchaste"*[29] *(Quran 19:28)* be understood? How could Mary be considered the sister of Aaron despite the historical gap between them? It becomes clear that this is an idiomatic expression, not to be interpreted literally. Moreover, in its treatment of modesty and sexual matters, the Quran consistently avoids direct language, employing euphemistic expressions such as *"...you have touched women..."*[30] *(Quran 4:43),* *"And if you divorce them before you touch them..."*[31] *(Quran 2:237),* and *"It is made lawful to you to go into your wives on the night of the fast..."*[32] *(Quran 2:187).* These are clearly not intended in their literal, lexical sense, but rather convey the figurative meaning of conjugal relations. Awareness of such

---

27. ﴿وَ لا تَجْعَلْ يَدَكَ مَغْلُولَةً إلى عُنُقِكَ وَ لا تَبْسُطْها كُلَّ الْبَسْطِ فَتَقْعُدَ مَلُوماً مَحْسُوراً﴾ (الإسراء/٢٩)

28. ﴿مَثَلُ الَّذينَ حُمِّلُوا التَّوْراةَ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَحْمِلُوها كَمَثَلِ الْحِمارِ يَحْمِلُ أَسْفاراً بِئْسَ مَثَلُ الْقَوْمِ الَّذينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآياتِ اللَّهِ وَ اللَّهُ لا يَهْدي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمينَ﴾ (الجمعة/٥)

29. ﴿يا أُخْتَ هارُونَ ما كانَ أَبُوكِ امْرَأَ سَوْءٍ وَ ما كانَتْ أُمُّكِ بَغِيًّا﴾ (مريم/٢٨)

30. ﴿...لامَسْتُمُ النِّساءَ...﴾ (النساء/٤٣)

31. ﴿وَ إِنْ طَلَّقْتُمُوهُنَّ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ تَمَسُّوهُنَّ...﴾ (البقرة/٢٣٧)

32. ﴿أُحِلَّ لَكُمْ لَيْلَةَ الصِّيامِ الرَّفَثُ إِلى نِسائِكُمْ ...﴾ (البقرة/١٨٧)

subtleties opens new exegetical horizons for the exegete and protects against superficial or misleading readings.

## 6. The Principle of Considering the Multidimensional Nature of the Quranic Language

Language is a reflection of truths embedded in the human mind, manifested through declarative and performative propositions. The referents of these expressions range across diverse domains such as scientific, philosophical, rational, and emotional. While declarative (informative) statements are descriptive by nature, they often lack emotional engagement and may fall short in addressing philosophical or rational subjects with the needed flexibility. On the other hand, performative (non-informative) statements, though emotionally impactful, may lack factuality and rational persuasiveness.

The distinctive feature of the Quranic language lies in its ability to combine the strengths of both types of propositions while avoiding their weaknesses. The Quran's declarative statements are not only descriptive but also emotionally stirring, while its performative statements are both motivational and grounded in truth, offering intellectual satisfaction.

In its treatment of rational and scientific themes, the Quran demonstrates a remarkable literary mastery that captivates readers across different levels, presenting its discourse in a manner that remains engaging and inexhaustible. This multidimensionality is among the many manifestations of the Quran's inimitability (*Iʿjāz*) (Nawrūzī 2021, 85). Recognizing this feature is essential in exegesis, for neglecting the multiple dimensions of Quranic propositions may result in overlooking profound layers of meaning and divine guidance contained in its verses (see Maʿrifat 1990, 383).

## Conclusion

Based on the discussion presented in this article, it can be concluded that the language of the Qur'an is integrative and multidimensional. The Qur'an employs words both in their conventional and customary meanings, as well as in refined and transformed senses. In most cases, it relies on common usage, while still incorporating specialized terminology and distinct conceptual frameworks.

Though its communication aligns with principles of rational discourse, it is not devoid of technical expressions or context-specific connotations. In delivering its intended messages, the Qur'an makes use of literal language alongside metaphor, allegory, and analogy in the most effective and elevated manner. It also employs both declarative and performative statements depending on context, all the while maintaining its commitment to truth and avoiding exaggeration or deviation.

In short, all the rhetorical virtues are embodied in the Quranic language, while it remains free of linguistic deficiencies. For any exegete, attentiveness to these various dimensions is essential. Failure to appreciate any of these layers can lead to misinterpretation and, consequently, the loss of many of the Quran's spiritual and intellectual insights. Similarly, rigidity or neglect of any particular dimension risks distorting the overall message and undermining the richness of the Quranic text.

## References

Qarai, Ali Quli. Trans. (2005). *The Quran: With a Phrase-by-Phrase English Translation* (2nd ed.). London: ICAS Press.

Akhawān Ṣarrāf, Zahrāʾ. (1383Sh/2004). ʿUrfī būdan-i zabān-i Qurʾān. *Faslnāmah-yi Bayyināt*, 42, 64-79.

Al-ʿAk, Khālid ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. (1414AH/1993). *Qawāʿid al-tafsīr fī bayān dalālāt al-naẓm al-Qurʾānī*. Beirut: Dār al-Nafāʾis.

Amīn, Aḥmad. (1933). *Fajr al-Islām*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah.

Āryān, Ḥamīd. (1388Sh/2009). *Darāmadī bar zabān-i Qurʾān*. Qum: Muʾassasah-yi Imam Khomeini.

ʿAskarī, Abū Hilāl. (1353AH/1934). *Al-Awāʾil*. Beirut: Manshūrāt Wizārat al-Thaqāfah.

ʿAwdah, Khalīl. (1405AH/1985). *al-Taṭawwur al-dilālī bayna lughat al-shiʿr al-jāhilī wa lughat al-Qurʾān al-karīm*. Jordan: Maktabat al-Manār.

Bābāʾī, ʿAlī-Akbar, et al. (1388Sh/2009). *Ravish-shināsī-yi tafsīr-i Qurʾān*. Qum: Pazhūhishgāh-i Ḥawzah wa Dānishgāh.

Fayḍ Kāshānī, Muḥammad Muḥsin. (1406AH/1985). *Al-Wāfī*. Isfahan: Imam Amir al-Muʾminīn ʿAlī (a) Library.

Fīrūzābādī, Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb. (1415AH/1995). *Al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ*. Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah.

Ḥājī Khalīfah, Muṣṭafā ibn ʿAbdullāh al-Qusṭanṭīnī. (1413AH/1992). *Kashf al-ẓunūn ʿan asmāʾ al-kutub wa al-funūn* (6th ed.). Beirut: Maktabat Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah.

Hāshimī, Aḥmad. (1397Sh/2018). *Jawāhir al-Balāghah*. Qum: Markaz-i Mudīriyyat-i Ḥawza-hā-yi ʿIlmiyyah.

Ibn ʿArabī, Muḥyī al-Dīn. (1405AH/1985). *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (2nd ed.). Egypt: Al-Hayʾat al-Miṣriyyat al-ʿĀmmah li-l-Kitāb.

Ibn Fāris, Aḥmad ibn Fāris ibn Zakariyyā. (1404AH/1983). *Muʿjam maqāyīs al-lughah*. Qum: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah.

Ibn Manẓūr, Muḥammad ibn Mukram. (1406AH/1985). *Lisān al-ʿArab*. Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī.

Ibn Qayyim Jawziyyah, Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr. (1981). *Al-Amthāl fī al-Qurʾān al-Karīm*. Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah.

Izutsu, T. (1964/2019). *God and man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic worldview* (2019 ed.). Tokyo: Keio University Press.

Jawādī Āmulī, ʿAbdullāh. (1390Sh/2011). *Tafsīr-i Tasnīm* (6th ed.). Qum: Intishārāt-i Uswah.

Khū'ī, Abū al-Qāsim. (1408AH/1988). *Al-Bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. Beirut: Dār al-Zahrā'.

Makārim Shīrāzī, Nāṣir. (1373Sh/1994). *Tafsīr-i Nimūnih* (18th ed.). Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah.

Maʿrifat, Muḥammad Hādī. (1411AH/1990). *Al-Tamhīd fī ʿUlūm al-Qur'ān*. Qum: Mu'assisat al-Tamhīd.

Mujtahid Shabistarī, Muḥammad. (1379Sh/2000). *Naqdī bar qirā'at-i rasmī az dīn*. Tehran: Nashr-i Ṭarḥ-i Naw.

Mūsawī Ardabīlī, Sayyid ʿAbd al-Karīm. (1378Sh/1999). Mushkil-i mā dar fahm-i Qur'ān. *Nāmih-yi Mufīd*, 8, 4-24.

Muṭahharī, Murtaḍā. (1381Sh/2002). *Sayrī dar sīrah-yi nabawī*. Tehran: Intishārāt-i Ṣadrā.

Muẓaffar, Muḥammad Riḍā. (1400AH/1980). *Al-Manṭiq*. Beirut: Dār al-Taʿāruf.

Nawrūzī, Muḥammad Javād. (1400Sh/2021). *Ravish-i maʿnā-shināsī-yi Qur'ān*. Qum: Nashr-i Iram.

Qummī, Shaykh ʿAbbās. (1375Sh/1996). *Mafātīḥ al-Jinan*. Qum: Intishārāt-i Fāṭimah al-Zahrā'.

Quṭb, Sayyid Muḥammad. (1413AH/1993). *al-Taṣwīr al-fannī fī al-Qur'ān al-karīm* (14th ed.). Dār al-Shurūq.

Rāghib Iṣfahānī, Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad. (1416AH/1995). *Al-Mufradāt fī gharīb al-Qurʾān*. Beirut: Dār al-Qalam.

Ṣadr, Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir. (1410AH/1990). *Durūs fī ʿilm al-uṣul (al-ḥalaqat al-ūlā)*. Qum: Mu'assasah al-Nashr al-Islāmī.

Saʿīdī Rawshan, Muḥammad Bāqir. (1383Sh/2004). *Taḥlīl-i zabān-i Qur'ān*. Qum: Pizhūhishgāh-i Farhang wa Andīshah-yi Islāmī.

Saʿīdī Rawshan, Muḥammad Bāqir. (1389Sh/2010). *Zabān-i Qurʾān wa masāʾil-i ān*. Qum: Pizhūhishgāh-i Ḥawzah wa Dānishgāh.

Suyūṭī, J. d. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. (1414 AH/1994). *Al-Itqān fī ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān*. Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr.

Ṭabāṭabāʾī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn. (1393AH/1973). *Al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (3rd ed.). Qum: Muʾassisih-yi Maṭbūʿāt-i Ismāʿīliyān.

Tahānawī, Muḥammad Aʿlā ibn ʿAlī. (1375Sh/1996). *Kashshāf-i iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn wa al-ʿulūm*. Beirut: Maktabat Lebanon Nāshirūn.