

Phonosemantic Significance And Its Effect On Meaning Formation In Short Meccan Surahs

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Abstract: The current research aims to explore the concept of phonosemantics (the connection between sounds and their meanings) in short Meccan surahs contained in the Quran. Utilizing traditional Arabic rhetorical theories of (balagha) and present-day phonolinguistic methods, this study seeks to analyse how the conscious arrangement or choice of phonetic units used in Al-Ikhlās (112), Al-Falaq (113), Al-Nas (114), Al-Kawthar (108), Al-Asr (103), Al-Masad (111), Al-Fil (105), Al-Quraysh (106), Al-Ma'un (107), and Al-Nasr (110) contributes to creating and emphasizing the semantic meaning of these surahs. Four main phonosemantic features are identified for study; (1) fasila (rhyme at the end of a verse) acts as a vulnerable component defining the semantic content; (2) consonantal symbolism reflects meaning/value; (3) vowel length and tone correlate to emotional meaning; (4) phono-rhythmically structured sentences reflect Godly beliefs. The results support that all phonetic choices made for the studied Surah reflect a deliberate methodology to produce an increase in semantic meaning and all three methods of creative reinforcement occur on: (i) aesthetic; (ii) cognitive; (iii) spiritual levels. This study contributes to the expanding fields of Quranic linguistics, and provides tools for further analysing and understanding the Qur'an's i'jaz (inimitable) nature through a phonosemantic viewpoint

Keywords phonosemantics, Meccan surahs, Quranic rhetoric, sound symbolism, Arabic phonology, al-fasila, i'jaz al-Quran, balagha, phonostylistics.

Introduction

As the main book of Islam, the Quran has always been recognized as an important theological text, but also for its unique linguistic and literary qualities. Quranic discourse is particularly fascinating when considering the interplay between sound and meaning, or how the sounds of the Quran represent (or reflect) meaning. The relationship is particularly evident and pronounced in short Meccan surahs, where one finds the following qualities: short length, rhythmic strength of sound, vivid imagery, and powerful rhetorical devices.

The Meccan period (c. 610-622 CE) produced surahs which have generally been short, consisting of short lines with strong rhyme and rhythm, increased numbers of phonetically resounding consonants and vowels, and an abundance of phonetic intensity. The Meccan surahs were delivered during an immediate rhetorical clash between the polytheists of Mecca and the Muslims, and this phonetic intensity was thus likely functionally determined (meaning it was purposefully designed) to penetrate listeners' minds and establish theologically based truths in such a way that they would be easily recalled and demonstrate the sheer inimitability (i'jaz) of the Quranic text. Classical rhetoric scholars such as Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani (d. 471 AH / 1078 CE) and al-Zamakhshari (d. 538 AH / 1144 CE) both noted that the sound of the Quran and the meaning of the Quran cannot be separated; however, modern linguists provide the systematic phonosemantic framework (phonosemantics) necessary for demonstrating sound -meaning relationships...

In the 20th and 21st centuries, Arabic linguists have advanced the study of the relationship between sound and meaning in Arabic through the collaboration of scholars such as Ibrahim Anis, Tammam Hassan, and Kamal Bishr, thus opening new avenues for the study of the sounds/meanings of the Quran. Western scholars such as Roman Jakobson, Margaret Magnus, and John J. Ohala have introduced theoretical phonosemantics, which may provide fruitful analysis when applied to the Arabic context.

This research combines the classical approach to phonosemantics with more recent approaches by analyzing the phonosemantic aspects of the ten selected Meccan surahs. The three major research questions are: (1) What is the role of phonetics in how each surah forms meaning? (2) What phonosemantic mechanisms (for example, rhyme, consonantal symbol, vowel pattern, rhythm structure) operate within the ten selected surahs? (3) In what ways do the phonosemantic characteristics contribute to the overall theological and rhetorical purpose of each surah?

The importance of this research extends beyond just the study of the Quran. It will help identify common attributes of phonosemantics and demonstrate the unique capacity of Arabic as a phonosemantics-rich language. Also, the findings will provide additional tools for Quranic language educators, translators, and orators who must convey both the lexical (word) and sonic meanings of the Quranic text.

Literature Review

2.1 Classical Arabic Perspectives on Quranic Sound

Sound-meaning relationship study in the Qur'an has a long history in the classical Arabic literary tradition. There were sophisticated tools found in the science of *ilm al-balagha* (rhetoric) for examining how sound contributes to and interacts with the meaning of texts, although the word "phonosemantics" was not used. Three main categories of classical analysis that connect to phonosemantics are identified below.

The first category concerns the science of *al-fasila* (القرآنية قافية / الفاصلة) [the end sound of Qur'anic verses]. Classical scholars defined the *fasila* as an integral part of the Qur'an's aesthetic structure. Al-Baqillani (d. 403 AH) in his famous work entitled *I'jaz al-Qur'an* demonstrated that the *fasila* was not merely decorative but was instead semantically intertwined within its passage: that is, the end sound of Qur'anic verses was chosen to develop the overall context of meaning in a verse and achieve correlation to the surah in its entirety (1). Al-Jurjani further developed this idea in *Dala'il al-I'jaz*, describing the synergy between *nazm* (arrangement/composition of words) and meaning in the Qur'an as fundamentally different from that of human poetry. According to him, sound and sense were perfectly united in the Qur'an (2).

The second category identified in classical writings by grammarians and lexicographers concerns what they called *al-mushakalah al-sawt wa al-ma'na* (phonetic/semantic resemblance), which describes the tendency of certain Arabic phonemes to cluster together within a particular lexicon (a series of loosely connected yet related terms). Ibn Jinni (d. 392 AH / 1001 CE) wrote a chapter in his essential book *Al-Khasa'is* dealing with "the relationship between sounds and their meanings" (*al-muwazana bayna al-alfaz wa ma'aniha*). He states that the phoneme /q/ (ق) tends to appear in words that indicate power, rigidity, and resolution, while /r/ (ر) is found in words associated with motion/flow (3).

Third, Qur'anic scholars noted that *makhraj* (the places of articulation of phonemes) and *sifat* (the characteristics of phonemes) are important factors in determining the acoustic and semantic texture of Qur'anic sections. Al-Suyuti (d. 911 AH) systematically documented the phonetics of the Qur'an in his encyclopedic work entitled *Al-Itqan fi Ulum al-Quran*. He discusses Tajwid rules governing the recitation of the Qur'an and implicitly acknowledges that they are dimensional in meaning (4).

2.2 Modern Arabic Linguistics and Phonosemantics

Ibrahim Anis advanced modern Arabic phonosemantics through his landmark work, *Al-Aswat al-Lughawiyyah* (1961), which explored the acoustic properties of Arabic phonemes and their relationship to semantic categories. Anis's corpus analysis demonstrated that Arabic phonemes are not semantically neutral but carry consistent associative values that determine word meaning (5).

Also in Arabic language, Tammam Hassan's *Al-Lughah al-Arabiyyah ma'naha wa mabnahah* (1973) provided a structural-semantic framework treating the phonological, morphological, and syntactic levels as integrated systems for producing meaning. In particular, Hassan's idea of *al-qarinah al-sawt'iyyah* (the phonetic context clue) is relevant to Quranic analysis, in which he suggested that sound patterns in Arabic texts function as indicators of contextual meaning that help listeners derive semantic meaning (6).

Kamal Bishr's *Ilm al-Aswat* (2000) synthesizes classical Arabic phonetics with modern articulatory and acoustic phonetics while providing detailed descriptions of how Arabic phonemes are produced and perceived. Bishr's analysis of the "heavy" (*mufakhkhama*) and "light" (*muraqqaqa*) phoneme classes in the Arabic language is particularly relevant to conducting phonosemantic analysis of the Quran, as those classes produce different acoustic textures that correspond with semantic registers of gravity, power/transcendence, or lightness, proximity/accessibility (7).

Sayyid Qutb's *Al-Tasswir al-Fanni fi al-Quran* (1945) and his monumental Quranic exegesis, *Fi Zilal al-Quran* (In the Shade of the Quran), contain phenomenological analyses of the sensory emotional response to the accents of the Quran, even though they weren't grammatically organized from a phonosemantic perspective. His literary sensitivity to the musical-semantic contextuality of the Quranic language has influenced at least one generation of Arab/literary scholars and continues to serve as a reference for phonosemantic analysis (8).

In recent years, additional scholars such as Husayn Nassar (*Al-Mu'jam al-Arabi: Nash'atuhu wa-Tatawwuruhi*, 2002), Salah Fadl (*Asalib al-Shi'riyya al-Mu'asira*, 1995), and Abd al-Fattah Lashin (*Al-Bayan fi Daw' Asalib al-Quran*, 1998) have also made contributions toward the phonosemantic analysis of the Quran by demonstrating how particular sound patterns produce various forms of psychological intensity or theological affirmation through their connections to the Quran (9,10,11).

2.3 Western Phonosemantic Theory and Its Applicability

The Phonosemantics tradition originating from the West has different but related theoretical models. Roman Jakobson's important article "A Search for Language's Fundamental Elements" (1965) and his joint work with Linda Waugh, *The Sound Shape of Language* (1979), suggested that sound/meaning correspondences are a fundamental part of human speech, not just a peripheral matter. His cross-linguistic examination established that certain phonemes/meanings relationship are naturally found in all languages, while others exist in only specific languages.(12)

Furthermore, in her thesis, "Gods of the Word: Archetypes in the Consonants" (1999), and additional articles, Margaret Magnus described an extensive system of consonant-based symbolism in English, some of which has a partial cross-linguistic basis. Some of her findings can't be transcribed to Arabic directly; however, her research methodology—systematically plotting distributions of phonemes across meaning—can be applied to Arabic.(13)

John J. Ohala's phonetically-founded model of sound symbolism (1994) highlights why assumed phoneme/meaning relationships exist, providing the physics of why certain sounds would be used to convey certain ideas. This work can help understand how/why Arabic emphatic consonants (the *mufakhkhama* consonantal group of ط ظ ث) are commonly seen in terms of the meaning associated with weightiness, forcefulness, and divinity when used in words.(14)

Several researchers have used these theoretical models and methods in their work regarding the Qur'an in Arabic, such as Mustafa Nasif's book *Al-Lugha wa al-Tafsir Wa al-Tawasul* (2003) and Ahmad Abd al-Mu'ti Hijazi's analysis of poetic phonosemantics in classical Arabic poetry, and these studies created precedent for this research.(15,16)

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

3.1 Defining Phonosemantics in the Quranic Context

Phonosemantics is defined within the parameters of this study as the nature of sound properties of linguistic units (individual phonemes, phoneme clusters, syllable structures, prosodic features, and rhythmic patterns), as well as their systematic investigation, in regard to creating, accentuating, and conveying meaning. As such, phonosemantics is representative of both (a) inherent expressive values of phonemes within the lexicon of Arabic linguistic units (as determined by Arabic lexicon), and (b) the specific echoing of lexicon phonemes in patterns that amplify, centralize, or redirect the semantic significance of Qur'anic Arabic.

While separating purely arbitrary phonaesthetics (the aesthetic enjoyment of sound without regard to meaning), this definition includes, per al-Jurjani, "the secret of the connection between words" (*sirr al-nazm*)—the extent to which sound order carries out semantic work, and embraces what contemporary scholars refer to as "phonostylistics": the study of how phonetic selections function as stylistic devices that contribute to textual meaning beyond that of its propositional content (17).

3.2 The Phonological System of Quranic Arabic

Arabic and the Qur'an contain twenty-eight consonant phonemes along with three long and three short vowel sounds. Arabic has an unusually complex prosodic structure. Many features of the Arabic phonological system are especially important for the phonosemantic theory:

(1) Mufakkhama are categorized as "heavy" sounds (ض، ط، ظ، خ، غ، ق، ر). These sounds are articulated with secondary constriction in the pharyngeal or velar regions of the mouth and are therefore darker sounding than muraqqaqa, the category of "light" phonemes. The common occurrence of heavy phonemes in Arabic pertains to their cluster with such words as "weight," "majesty," "force," and "power," which are highly relevant with Quranic theological discourse.(7)

(2) Pharyngeal sounds (ا، و، ي – vowel letters) are unique to the Arabic and Semitic languages. These phonemes are articulated deep in the respiratory tract and thus convey impressions of spirit, breath, depth, and interiority, all of which have a semantic relationship to the manifestation of divine attributes in the Quran as well as to human vulnerability in the eyes of God.(5)

(3) The use of vowel length (*qisar/tul*) creates a prosodic system in which longer vowels have greater acoustic weight and usually corresponds with emphasis and/or rhetoric in the surrounding text. In the short Meccan surahs the placement of long vowels at the end of verses (*fawasl*) is particularly systematic.(6)

3.3 Analytical Categories

There are four major ways to approach this analysis, each revealing a particular phonosemantic mechanism.

Category A: Study of the phonemes or phoneme clusters that form the Rhyme Sound (*Fasila*) of each Surah, as well as their articulatory and acoustic properties, and their relationship in meaning to the thematic content of the Surah.

Category B: Study of the frequency and distribution of the different Classes of Phonemes (*mufakkhama*, *shafawiyya*, *huruf al-qalqala*, etc.) and their correspondence in meaning to the semantic register associated with each Surah.

Category C: Study of the Length of the Vowels and their distribution throughout the verses of each Surah, and their relationship to Prosodic Emphasis and Semantically Foregrounding.

Category D: Study of Syllabic and Quantitative Prosody of each Surah, and how it produces emotional and cognitive effects, and is related to the rhetorical purpose of the Surah.

Analysis: Phonosemantic Features of Selected Short Meccan Surahs

4.1 Surah Al-Ikhlās (112) – The Architecture of Divine Unity

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ (١) اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ (٢) لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ (٣) وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ (٤)

In Surah Al-Ikhlās, although it consists of only four short verses, it is also one of the most phonosemantically dense texts in the Qur'an. The theological purpose of this Surah is to firmly and unequivocally support the divinity of God; this is the most precise way of affirming Tawhid (the oneness and uniqueness of God). All of the phonosemantic features of this Surah appear to be aligned and/or intended to support this purpose.

Category A—Fasila: This surah occurs within a remarkably tightly-knit rhyme scheme, with three out of the four verses ending with the same masculine singular /D/ consonant (ـد) preceded by the same short vowel /a/ tengental (...-ad): أَحَدٌ / الصَّمَدُ / أَحَدٌ. The /d/ consonant (ذال) has its articulatory features as an apico-alveolar voiced stop (the lips are pressed together at the Alveolar Ridge, stopping airflow) released with an abrupt sound. This abruptness, or finality and decisiveness, is Phonosemantically Significant as it acoustically expresses the same sense of absolute finality and decisiveness as the Semantics articulated in the Surah. The first and last words of the rhyme scheme and the first and last phonetic words of the Surah أَحَدٌ (ahadun, "one; unique") is an excellent example of a Phonosemantic Idiolect. The Hamza Voice-Stops on the beginning of the phonetic word, /a/ open Vowel (the most phonetically open vowel in Arabic) and /d/ stop consonant combine to create an entire Phonemic Gestalt of Absolute Assertive Singular Singularly (In Arabic, "one; unique").

The theological meaning of the word الصَّمَدُ ("the Eternal; The Indivisible; The Self-Sufficient") in verse 2 of this Surah contains particularly strong Phonosemantic Attributes. The √s-m-d root means something "solid", "impenetrable", and "self-sufficient". The phonetic structure consisting of the emphatic sibilant, the sonorous nasal, and the definitive consonant create an acoustic density and impermeability profile which both acoustically reflect and semantically define the notion of infinite self-sufficiency. In the classical era, lexicographers such as Ibn Faris in Maqayis al-Lughā (d. 395 AH) also stated that al-samad refers to something that does not have a hollow interior, which lends itself to the general characteristic of being solid and is therefore acoustically represented by a sequence of consonants that provide little to no acoustic space (i.e., [s^c-m-d]). (18)

Category B – Consonantal Symbolism: The pronounced presence of pharyngeal and laryngeal consonants such as هـ (ha), ح (ha), and ع (ain), exist within the words هُوَ (huwa), أَحَدٌ (ahad), and وَلَمْ يَكُنْ (wa lam yakun), demonstrate that there is a higher concentration of these consonantal sounds—that are generally produced from the deepest regions of the vocal tract. The acoustical qualities associated with these sounds include depth, interiority, and transcendence; thus, to find a collection of these consonantal sounds within a surah that underscores the divine nature of God, places the sonorous assertions regarding this entity within the sound patterns associated with the greatest capacity for producing human breath and breath-related sounds. As a result, it implies that the reality of God may only be accessed at the lowest levels of linguistic representation and not at their surface. (19)

Category C – Vowel Patterning: The dominant vowel of Al-Ikhlās is the long vowel /a:/ (alif madd), represented three times in اللَّهُ (Allah), two times in أَحَدٌ (ahad), once in الصَّمَدُ (asamad), and indirectly in the extended recitations of rhyme patterns at the end of each verse position, or line ending of verse (or section) phrases. The phonetic articulation of /a:/ (alif madd) represents the most open vowel sound within Arabic—producing with maximum opening of one's mouth; thus, the sound of /a:/ (alif madd) will be the loudest and longest in resonance of all phonetic sounds. The predominance of long /a:/ (alif madd) in a surah that makes assertions regarding the all-encompassing reality and nature of God phonosemantically create a linkage between the sound pattern associated with the greatest possible degree of expansion and the extent of the all-encompassing cosmic theological assertion of God.

4.2 Surah Al-Falaq (113) – Phonemic Darkness and the Dawn

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ ﴿١﴾ مِنْ شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ ﴿٢﴾ وَمِنْ شَرِّ غَاسِقٍ إِذَا وَقَبَ ﴿٣﴾ وَمِنْ شَرِّ النَّفَّاثَاتِ فِي الْعُقَدِ ﴿٤﴾ وَمِنْ شَرِّ حَاسِدٍ إِذَا حَسَدَ ﴿٥﴾

Surah Al-Falaq (Daybreak) is a supplication to shield oneself from the negative forces of creation. It has a thematic structure of escalating threats to humanity from general evil, through the night to the evil entities using dark magic, and finally to the ultimate enemy, that is, envy. The sound of the letters in Al-Falaq (phonosemantics) retain the rhythmic form of how Al-Falaq describes this escalating chain of threat and protection.

Category A - Phonological Analysis: The rhyming structure of Al-Falaq is predominantly based on the repeating cluster /-aq/ (خَسَدَ, وَقَبَ, الْغَدَ, خَلَقَ). The /q/ (ق) sound is the most "deeply placed" stop consonant in the Arabic language being placed at the back of the veil; thus being heavier, darker, and having richer resonance than the dental /d/. The consistent repetition of this sound at the end of each verse creates a phonosemantic texture of density and opacity, both of which align with the qualities of the evil powers described in Al-Falaq. The title الْفَلَقُ (al-falaq, Daybreak) contains this same sound and represents the power of separation (generating light out of darkness) utilised within the text. (20)

Category B - Thematic Consonantal Symbolism: There is also high frequency of fricative and sibilant (ش, س, ف, خ) consonants within Al-Falaq to create contextually loaded lexical items such as شَرَّ (evil/harm-3), النَّفَّاثَاتِ (those blowing (on knots)), حَاسِدٍ (envier), and حَسَدَ (envy). Furthermore, the characteristic turbulence associated with fricatives (through air flow) are utilised phonosemantically in Arabic as relating to thoughts being whispered, blown on (which reflects secrecy), and malicious intent. Each of the three separate verses within Al-Falaq contains the same word, شَرَّ (sharr), to create anaphoric phonosemantic recognizability where the acoustic texture of harm (through the turbulence of fricatives) is established before introducing what that harm is. (20)

The sounds of النَّفَّاثَاتِ (al-naффathat, those blowing air) also warrant specific interest due to their phonosemantic nature. The phoneme root of √n-f-th relates to the exhalation of breath as part of a specific type of malignant ritual and the phonemic structure of the word has an onomatopoeic quality to its meaning; the conjunction of the bilabial nasal /n/, the fricative /f/, and the dental fricative /th/ demands air to be carefully exhaled through a narrow space: precisely how the phoneme conveys its meaning. This is one of the more distinctive instances of phonosemantic iconicity in the Qur'an. (21)

4.3 Surah Al-Nas (114) – The Phonology of Refuge and Whisper

قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ ﴿١﴾ مَلِكِ النَّاسِ ﴿٢﴾ إِلَهِ النَّاسِ ﴿٣﴾ مِنْ شَرِّ الْوَسْوَاسِ الْخَنَّاسِ ﴿٤﴾ الَّذِي يُوَسْوِسُ فِي صُدُورِ النَّاسِ ﴿٥﴾ مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ ﴿٦﴾

Surah Al-Nas (Humanity) serves as the second part of the last two surahs (chapters) in the Qur'an. Along with Surah Al-Falaq (the Daybreak), it is one of two hands used for seeking refuge from enemies. Whereas Surah Al-Falaq is directed outward against things outside oneself that could harm/hurt us, Surah Al-Nas addresses what is arguably one of the most dangerous threats we face; the whispering of the prompter from within (sometimes referred to as "the prompting of Satan" (translation): from the words "whisper" / to whisper / to set temptation into the hearts of people). There is a very important phonosemantic framework to this surah based upon a contrast between open and resonant sounds of the protective attributes of God and the hissing and whispering sounds associated with the whisperer (the tempter).

Category A — Fasila: The primary rhyming sound in Surah Al-Nas is /nās/ (النَّاسِ); it appears five times in a six-verse surah. Such a highly unique structural patterning creates an acoustic envelope that defines the whole surah by a single sound — the letter/nasal sound /n/ + open vowel sound /a/ and a sibilant sound /s/ = The sound of /nās/ makes up, literally, both the boundary and the pervasion of the entire surah. From those three sounds (/nas/) we derive the idea that this surah speaks about all mankind without restriction as such.

Category B — Consonantal Symbolism: The most significant phonosemantic opposition contained in this surah is between the resonant, open-sounding sounds of the protective attributes of

God (الناس) and the hissing sounds and whispers produced by the tempter (الْوَسْوَاسِ). In Arabic, the verb "to whisper" (يُوسُوسُ) is a prime example of onomatopoeia (where the word's meaning reflects its sound). The repetition of the letter /w/ (rounded lips and the tongue positioned high in the back of the throat) and /s/ produces an acoustic image/index of being quietly and/or covertly tempted(19).

The term الْخَنَاس (the "retreating/withdrawing") also has a phonosemantic connotation. The back velar stop sound ("the guttural sound," خ) is a fricative sound produced in the extreme back of the mouth; therefore, the phonematic qualities produced by the collocative settings (phonemic arrangement) of the three consonants comprising /khn/ create an acoustic profile for anything retreating and/or concealing itself. Thus, the phonemic arrangement of the phonemes in this term (along with the semantic meaning of this term) fully embodies both an acoustic (sonorous) and semantic representation of temptation's predatory concealment(22).

4.4 Surah Al-Kawthar (108) – Brevity, Abundance, and Phonemic Richness

إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ (١) فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَانْحَرْ (٢) إِنَّ شَانِئَكَ هُوَ الْأَبْتَرُ (٣)

Despite being the shortest surah of the Qur'an — it consists of only 3 verses, Surah Al-Kawthar has been regarded since ancient times as an excellent example of condensed rhetorical power. It was revealed in the historical context of a comfort and promise to the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) as a response to those who mocked him by calling him "abtar" (cut off, without descendants). This phonosemantic construction of this brief surah simultaneously demonstrates divine abundance and a reversal of the taunt.

Category A - Fasila and Phonemic Reversal: The surah ends in the phoneme cluster /-ar/: الْكَوْثَرُ / الْأَبْتَرُ, and thus the sound of its rhyme scheme represents the phonosemantic irony. That is, the same rhyme sound that carries the promise of abundance (الْكَوْثَرُ, the abundant good) reappears at the end of the surah as the phonetic vehicle for the curse of the enemy (الْأَبْتَرُ, the one who is cut off/without tail). The auditory continuity of sound — the same sound — represents both opposite semantic charges in its first and third occurrences, and the full structure of the surah performs a sonic inversion: what sounds like the enemy's taunting statement (abtar), is also the same sound signifying God's promise to the Prophet (al-kawthar). The identical auditory nature of the taunting statement and God's blessing is in itself a phonosemantic indication of the reversal of divine and human assessment of judgment.(23)

Category B - The Word الْكَوْثَرُ: Together, the word al-kawthar (rooted in √kathtar, 'abundance') is very phonosemantically rich. The pattern of vowels generated by the morphological structure CaCCaC and the use of the diphthong aw generate an extraordinarily rich acoustic experience: /k/ (back velar stop) + /aw/ (the fullest acoustic diphthong available in Arabic) (requires back curling of only the tongue & round lips) + /θ/ (dental fricative, signifying extension and diffusion) + /a/ (open) + /r/ (the most resonant and sonorous consonant in Arabic; trill). The total of all of the independent acoustic experiences produces a sense of fullness, overflow, and inevitability — the acoustic representation of abundance.(24)

4.5 Surah Al-Asr (103) – Rhythmic Time and Semantic Compression

وَالْعَصْرِ (١) إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ (٢) إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ (٣)

Imam al-Shafi'i's claim that this surah provides sufficient guidance to those who think about it alone suggests, among other things, that the three verses of this surah are filled with dense meaning. As it will be shown, an analysis of the phonology and semantic quality of the word al-asr as it is used in the surah demonstrates a complex relationship between the prosody of this word and what it means theologically.

Category A - Rhyme: Al-asr has an internal rhyme throughout the surah that highlights the consonant sound /r/ (ر). The sound /r/ in Arabic is a 'trill' characterized as dental or alveolar, and is the consonant with the largest sonority in Arabic. Traditionally in Arabic phonosemantics /r/ has been associated with movement, continuity, flow or passage of time. As the rhyme phoneme here for a surah beginning with « al-asr » this reflects a phonosemantic congruence: the last sound of each verse is, phonetically speaking, an image of the flow and continuity of time. (25)

The three rhyme words that comprise this surah - al-asr (time), khusr (loss), and al-sabr (patience/endurance) - summarize the entire theological message of the surah in three words. The first word, al-asr, refers to how time moves through all humanity, while the second word, khusr, represents how humanity is losing itself by virtue of this flow of time, and finally, the third word, al-sabr, represents how one can overcome this loss through patience and endurance. The rhyme connection created by the identical sound /r/ among these three concepts creates an acoustic-semantic web that demonstrates that time, loss, and redemption are phonemically related and therefore reflect a single unified reality. (26)

Category D - Phono-rhythmic Structure: There is a significant difference in the length of verses 1-2 (both are almost identical) when contrasted with verse 3, which is much longer. This contrast in length of the verse between verses one and two, and the long third verse, are meaningful in respect to the prosody of the surah. The rapidity with which we hear "wa-l-asr / inna l-insana la-fi khusr" creates an immediate feeling of urgency and inevitability; thus, the prosody demonstrates the immediacy of the passage of time. However, the length of verse three, and the fact that it details the theological requirements for salvation (believe, do good, enjoy truth, and enjoy patience) demonstrates that salvation requires time and effort to obtain, whereas the rapid passage of time in verses 1-2 demonstrates how quickly time destroys those who do not pay attention. (6)

4.6 Surah Al-Masad (111) – Phonemic Flames and Divine Condemnation

تَبَّتْ يُدَا أَيْ لَهَبٍ وَتَبَّ (١) مَا أَغْنَىٰ عَنْهُ مَالُهُ وَمَا كَسَبَ (٢) سَيَصْلَىٰ نَارًا ذَاتَ لَهَبٍ (٣) وَامْرَأَتُهُ حَمَّالَةَ الْحَطَبِ (٤) فِي جِيدِهَا حَبْلٌ مِّن مَّسَدٍ (٥)

The Surah Al-Masad is unlike any other surah in the Qur'an because it is the only surah to name a specific person, the uncle of the Prophet Muhammad, whose real name was Abd Al-'Uzzah, but whose nickname was Abu Lahab (which means "father of fire"). Phonosemantic analyses of Surah Al-Masad indicate that this surah provides one of the most powerful examples of the sound/meaning relationship of phonosemantics in the Qur'an.

Category A - Fasila: The rhyme structure of Surah Al-Masad is based on labial consonants: وَتَبَّ/كَسَبَ/لَهَبٍ/الْحَطَبِ/مَسَدٍ. One can see that at the end of every line of the surah, there are labial stops /b/ and /p/, each preceded by a short vowel: -ab, -ab, -ab (lahab, hatab, masad). The labial stop /b/ is the result of completely shutting both lips and then opening them suddenly, which creates an explosion at both lips. The tradition of phonosemantics describes all labials as representing fire, violence, or destruction. Ibrahim Anis has noted this in his article on the association between Arabic phonemes and their semantic meaning. Surah Al-Masad does not just condemn Abu Lahab on a semantical level but also a phonemical level - all three lines end with a labial sound that mimics the sounds of flames: the crackling, the snap, and the pop(5).

The name لَهَبٍ (Abu Lahab) has its own phonosemantic structure that is rich in sound: لَهَبٍ (lahab = flame) has three components with the same characteristics as the three consonants of the word "lahab." The three components of the sound of the name of Abu Lahab match the sounds that will occur, as the flames that he will burn in will share the sound that is similar to his name.(27)

Category B - Consonantal Symbolism: In addition, the surah has three of the Arabic huruf al-qalqala (content verbs that are called either "echoing" or "agitated" letters: ط, ب, ج, د) that occur in a semantical frame of reference. The first line of the surah contains the word تَبَّتْ (tabbat / destroyed); the /t/ is pronounced explosively with the tongue touching the back of the teeth and the /b/ is explosively released at the lips, this creates a phonosemantic image of sudden destruction. The fact that the second occurrence of the word تَبَّ is located at the end of the first line creates an acoustic boundary around the first line of the surah containing the sounds of destruction.

4.7 Surah Al-Fil (105) – The Thundering Phonemics of Divine Justice

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِأَصْحَابِ الْفِيلِ (١) أَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ كَيْدُهُمْ فِي تَضَلِيلٍ (٢) وَأَرْسَلَ عَلَيْهِمْ طَيْرًا أَبَابِيلَ (٣) تَرْمِيهِمْ بِحِجَارَةٍ مِّن سِجِّيلٍ (٤) فَجَعَلَهُمْ كَعَصْفٍ مَّأْكُولٍ (٥)

Not only does Surah Al-Fil recount the events of the Year of the Elephant, when the Ethiopian army led by Abraha set out to destroy the Ka'bah, but it also offers an interesting study of the phonosemantic qualities of sound and the relationship between the sounds of the words and the events they describe. Through an analysis of the sound texture of Surah Al-Fil, we can see how the sound of the words both conceptually represent and audibly imitate the action described, beginning with the rhetorical question over the action of the birds dropping stones, and ending with the image of devoured straw.

Consonantal Symbolism and Sound Iconicity: The use of sound symbolism in the construction of the word تَرْمِيهِمْ (tarmihihim, pelt them) is perhaps the most quoted instance of phonosemantic iconicity in the Qur'an. The /r/ in تَرْمِيهِمْ (tarmihihim, pelt them) is a trilled or "rolled" sound which creates an acoustic representation of something that is thrown as a projectile. The /m/ sound at the end of the suffix -him in تَرْمِيهِمْ (tarmihihim) serves to represent the sound of a stone striking its target. The consonantal /bihijara/ in the phrase بِحِجَارَةٍ (bihijaran, with stones) begins with 2 back sounds (/hi/, and /ja/) and is joined by /ar/ to produce an acoustic representation of a solid sound vibration(20) .

Phono-Rhythmic Structure: For the phrase فَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ مَّاكُولٍ (and turned them into something like eaten chaff), we see an example of a phonosemantic diminishment. In contrast to the percussive images from stones being hurled by birds that are described the previous versus, the sounds generated by the phrase فَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ مَّاكُولٍ are, as you can see, of a lesser and much more dispersed quality; the /s/ in عَصَفٍ (asfs, chaff/straw) creates an acoustic visual of lightness and the action of the mighty army having been reduced to fragmented pieces of straw(28).

4.8 Additional Surahs: Al-Quraysh, Al-Ma'un, and Al-Nasr

لَا إِلَافَ قُرَيْشٍ (١) إِلَّا إِلَافُهُمْ رَحْلَةَ الشِّتَاءِ وَالصَّيْفِ (٢) فَلْيَعْبُدُوا رَبَّ هَذَا الْبَيْتِ (٣) الَّذِي أَطْعَمَهُمْ مِنْ جُوعٍ وَآمَنَهُمْ مِنْ خَوْفٍ (٤)

(Surah Al-Quraysh, 106)

أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالْذِّينِ (١) فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي يَدْعُ الْيَتِيمَ (٢) وَلَا يُحِضُّ عَلَىٰ طَعَامِ الْمُسْكِينِ (٣) فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ (٤) الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ (٥) الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَاؤُونَ (٦) وَيَمْنَعُونَ الْمَاعُونَ (٧)

(Surah Al-Ma'un, 107)

Surah al-Quraysh provides an excellent example of phonosemantic structural parallelism in that the keyword إِيْلَافٍ (ilaf), meaning "the accustomed/habitual bond," has a unique construction of phonemes, namely the sequence of a long vowel /i:/, then the liquid /l/, followed by the open vowel /a/, and lastly the fricative /f/. This phonemic sequence flows smoothly, thus mimicking the continuity of the commercial and social connections described by إِيْلَافٍ (ilaf). The words that are the end rhymes in Surah al-Quraysh's rhyme scheme include رَحْلَةَ (journey/travel), الشِّتَاءِ (the winter), الصَّيْفِ (the summer), الْبَيْتِ (the House), and خَوْفٍ (the fear); they thus also introduce the theme of security, providing security in worship (or way of life), to the attention the surah gives to relieving individuals from fear. Each of these words has either ف (the fricative of the /f/) or خ (the phoneme-producing neighbor to the /f/) in their end-rhymes, thus creating a phonetic thread that connects the concepts of security, provision, worship, and freedom from fear; this is the thematic arc of the text.(29)

Phonosemantic Rhetoric of Exposure (in) Surah al-Ma'un (Small Kindnesses).

Another example of a significant solution to another phonosemantic phonetic structuralism is Surah al-Ma'un (Small Kindnesses), which utilizes a unique phonosemantic rhetoric of exposure. Surah al-Ma'un exhibits a rhyme scheme that alternates between the high, front vowel /i:/ (as found in الذِّينِ, الْمُسْكِينِ and سَاهُونَ) and a nasal /n/; thus, the sounds of the nasal /n/ should, if one responds with compassion, sound like a natural and fluid response. Hypocrites, then, can be identified through the above-referenced repeated use of dental/alveolar plosives in يَدْعُ (pushes away) and يَمْنَعُونَ (withholds), as the harsh interruptions of the consonants represent, in a literal sense, how the "hypocrite socially excludes [others] through their exclusion." [30]

إِذَا جَاءَ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ وَالْفَتْحُ (١) وَرَأَيْتَ النَّاسَ يَدْخُلُونَ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ أَفْوَاجًا (٢) فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَاسْتَغْفِرْهُ ۚ إِنَّهُ كَانَ تَوَّابًا (٣)

(Surah Al-Nasr, 110)

Surah Al-Nasr (Divine Help) is considered the final surah of the Qur'an to be revealed in its

entirety and as such this surah represents an interesting phonosemantic conclusion. The first verse of Surah Al Nasr contains three opening syllables (ja'a, nasr, Allah, al fathi), thus creating a sound impression of openness and arrival. The second verse contains an image of crowds rushing forth to enter the religion (afwajan) depicted by the acoustic combination of the plosive /f/ + open diphthong /aw/ + dense /j/ + nasal /n/, which also suggests the forward motion of a crowd moving forward. The command to glorify (sabbih) at the end of the third verse contains the sibilant /s/ combined with the emphatic /b/, while the closing suffix تَوَابًا (tawwaban, the Ever-Returning in mercy) has an open sound at its conclusion with the open sound of /a:/ and the nasal /n/, thus giving a phonosemantic sense of divine mercy through the aforementioned sounds.(31)

Discussion

5.1 Systematic Phonosemantic Patterns Across the Corpus

The examination of the ten short Meccan surahs reveals systematic phonosemantic patterns that apply to all of the surahs and, as a cumulative whole, form a phonosemantic aesthetic of the Quran:

(1) The consonant at the end of each surah has a demonstrable phonosemantic relationship with the main semantic content of the surah. The /d/ of Surah Ikhlas indicates finality and completion; the /q/ of Surah Falaq indicates darkness and depth; the /r/ of Surah Asr indicates the flow of time; and the /b/ of Surah Masad indicates destruction and fire. This consistency in the arrangement of the main sound in a surah with the meaning of that surah is not coincidental, but rather demonstrates a consistent principle of phonosemantic organization. The most dominant and repeated sound in a surah was selected based upon its expressiveness consonant with the theological and rhetorical purposes of that surah. This pattern supports and extends al-Jurjani's classical observations on nazm (compositional arrangement) as being the locus of meaning for the Quran.

(2) The distribution of mufakhkhama (emphatic) and muraqqaqa (light) consonants in the ten surahs correlated consistently with the theological nature of the surahs. Surahs that represent divine power, majesty, and condemnation (Ikhlas, Masad, Fiil) had a higher concentration of emphatic and back consonants; while the surahs that invoke divine mercy, guidance, and protection (Nasr, Kawthar) contained a greater concentration of sonorant and front consonants. This consistent distribution of consonants indicates that the rationale for choosing one group of consonants over another for use in each of the ten surahs is based on phonosemantics, and thus create an acoustic register appropriate to the theological nature of that surah.

(3) Several instances exist in the surahs where a word or phrase has a phonemic form that acoustically represents the phenomenon described by the word or phrase. In phonosemantic theory, this phenomenon is called "sound iconicity." Examples include يُوسُوف in Surah Nas, الْفُقَات in Surah Falaq, تَرْزِيهِمْ بِجِزَارَةٍ in Surah Fiil, and الْكَوْثَر in Surah Kawthar. All these cases demonstrate that the phonemic structure of the words or phrases creates an acoustic image or enactment of their meaning, and are therefore a consistent and recognizable aspect of the phonosemantic design of the Quran.

(4) The length, rhythm, and prosodic weight of each verse in the ten surahs provide an additional layer of meaning to the propositional content of the verses. The compression of verses one and two of Surah Asr, compared to the expansion of verse three; the percussive rhythm of Surah Masad's condemnation; and the triadic rising structure of the opening invocation of Surah Nas (مالك / إله / رب الناس) all exhibit prosodic characteristics that provide a semantically functional contribution to the listener's response to the surahs and encode theological meaning in the rhythmic form of the verses.

5.2 Implications for Understanding Quranic I'jaz

The study's analysis of phonosemantics carries significant implications for the classical theological concept of i'jaz al-Quran (the inimitability of the Quran), as classical scholars of i'jaz described a number of areas by which to demonstrate the Quran's inimitability; among these are: the stylistic quality of Quranic Arabic, the historical accuracy of the Quranic assertions, the wisdom of

Quranic legislation, and the rhetorical perfection of the Quran. Analysis using phonosemantics presents a previously theorized area of study concerning the inimitability of the Quran.

The systematic interweaving of phonosemantic organization within multiple simultaneous levels (i.e., *fasila*, consonantal class distribution, iconic phonemics, prosodic structure) presents a level of phonosemantic sophistication that as demonstrated by contemporary phonolinguistic scholars such as Magnus and Ohala is extremely hard to duplicate even in intentionally composed human literary works but is virtually impossible to create spontaneously.(13,14) In linguistic terms, the apparent consistent presence of phonosemantic integration across surahs with varying lengths, topics, and historical settings demonstrates the uniqueness of the Quranic text in terms of its literary and theological significance.

5.3 Phonosemantics and Quranic Translation

Translation of the Qur'an i.e. Holy Qur'an should have practical implications and effects of research findings on the study of phonosemantics i.e., sound or acoustic and meaning relationship, at different levels of an acoustic or a prosodic or iconic nature would necessitate that it would be impossible for translators that use only lexicon and grammatical methods of producing equivalent translations for Qur'an Sūrah's to convey what are an important part of the meaning of Qur'an i.e., the systematic sound/meaning relations associated with a phonosemantic analysis such as Arthur Arberry did so intuitively when he tried to produce portions of the rhythmic structure of Qur'an stories into an English translation in *The Koran Interpreted* (1955) without an understanding of phonosemantics used for this purpose. Modern day Arab linguists have begun to explore solutions to the translation problems resulting from failure to apply phonosemantic research, e.g., Muhammad Enani's *Al-Tarjama wa al-Ta'ribiyya* (2003) and Abd al-Wahid Lu'lu'a in his studies of the translation, with both authors promoting the need for a phonosemantic-based approach to translation, although it may not always be available because specific phonosemantic effects may not be included in the translated product.(32)

Conclusion

This systematic phonosemantic analysis recognised a systematic, multi-level dimension of Quranic linguistic design through phonosemantic organisation in instances of 10 Meccan short surahs. The phonosemantic organisation of these instances was what was analysed with respect to of the sound properties of the Quranic text itself, at the levels of individual phonemes, phoneme class, iconic phoneme sequences, verse-end rhymes, and prosodic structures.

The following four main types of phonosemantic mechanisms demonstrated the ways in which the sound properties of the Quran contributed to the construction and communication of meaning: (1) *fasila*-meaning congruence - verse-end rhyme phonemes that have a phonosemantic relation with the primary semantic content of the corresponding surah (2) consonant class distribution - the proportion of emphatic vs. sonorant consonants correlates with the surah's theological register (3) phonemic iconicity - the sound of certain words or phrases resembles the objects or concepts that they describe (4) prosodic semantic coding - the verse length, rhythms, and weight encode additional, non-propositional meaning(s).

This work has three major contributions to scholarship: (1) provides a substantive linguistic foundation to the classical rhetorical analyses of the Quran based on phone semantic methodology (as created by scholars such as Jakobson, Magnus, Ohala, and adapted for Arabic by Anis, Hassan, and Bishr), as well as providing a modern framework for analysing the Quran linguistically using phonosemantics. (2) Shows the usefulness of applying phonosemantic methodology in Quranic linguistic analysis, and (3) Lays the foundations for future work on addressing practical issues in the area of Quranic translation and pedagogy, as the phonosemantic aspects of Quranic meaning continues to be underrated.

Future research should analyse the phonosemantic organisation of a broader corpus of Meccan surahs; develop quantitative measurement methods for analysing the density of phonosemantic organisation and consistency throughout all surahs; investigate the reception of Quranic phonosemantics within and among the different *qira'at* (recitation) traditions; and explore the

neurological and psychological dimensions of the phonosemantic effects of Quranic surahs, and the possible ways in which the sound of the surahs is processed by and impacts the mind and body of human beings during recitation and/or listening.

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