

A Semantic Analysis of the Concept of ‘Majority’ (*akthar*) in the Conclusions (*fadhlakas*) of the Qur’anic Verses

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Abstract

This paper explores whether the concept of majority (*akthar*) in the conclusions (*fadhlakas*) of the Qur’anic verses and certain prominent characteristics of this majority refer to the majority of a certain group of people who lived in a certain period, or to a majority in a general sense. These questions were addressed with reference to particular Qur’anic verses related to communities that lived in different periods of human history. The study concentrated on two salient characteristics of the majority described in the Qur’anic verses: people ‘who do not believe’ (*lā yu^ʿminūn*) and ‘who do not think’ (*lā ya^ʿlamūn*). It is important to gain insight into the nature of these descriptions of *akthar* as they are ubiquitous in *fadhlakas* throughout the Qur’an. In this study, an in-depth semantic analysis of the relationship between words and syntax was performed based on the conclusions of Qur’anic verses relevant to the majority and their attributes.

Keywords: Qur’an, semantics, syntax, *akthar*, *fadhlika*, *lā yu^ʿminūn*, *lā ya^ʿlamūn*

Introduction

In this study we address the typical attitudes and behaviours as well as the attributes of the group of people who constitute the majority in the human experience and who take a negative stance against God’s decrees and prohibitions. Does this majority refer to a majority of a certain group of people who lived in a certain period? Or does it refer to a majority in a general sense that encompasses every community to which prophets were sent. We explore these research questions in light of the Qur’an. We run a deep semantic analysis of sample verses regarding this majority and its characteristics. We reveal how thematic words are connected to each other to form a sophisticated semantic web.

We perform our analysis not through translations of the Qur’an but through its original Arabic text, referring frequently to dictionaries and exegeses of the Qur’an. After a brief account of *fadhlika* and semantics as well as the etymology of the word *akthar*, we examine through examples the prominent characteristics of the majority condemned and rebuked by the Qur’an. We first present the derivation of each word regarding the

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characteristics and then analyse it semantically. Each characteristic in the *fadhllaka* also constitutes the keyword in the verse or set of verses. This study is confined to the concept of majority (*akthar*) in the *fadhllakas* of the verses and certain prominent attributes of this majority.

Fadhllaka

Morphologically, *al-fadhllaka* is a noun derived from the word *fadhllaka* meaning ‘summary of an account.’¹ To religious scholars, *fadhllaka* is a conclusion, or summation, of an elucidation.² It means a succinct account, a gist or a précis. Another definition maintains that *fadhllaka* is the declaration that a certain sum total is obtained after the account is audited and submitted.³ In brief, *fadhllaka* is an overarching term denoting a summary drafted to put forward the highlights and outcomes of an event, issue, ‘petition, report or other document.’⁴

As for the functions of *fadhllakas*, the Qur’an has summaries at the conclusion of its verses which either contain the Divine Names or their meanings; or refer the verse to the reason in order to urge it ponder; or they comprise a universal rule from among the aims of the Qur’an so as to corroborate and reinforce the verse.⁵

Semantics

In Izutsu’s (1914–1993) well-known definition, semantics is the analytical study of the key terms of a language that aims to grasp the worldview of a people by analysing its language not simply as a speaking device but more importantly as a mirror reflecting its understanding of its world. In this regard, Izutsu views semantics ‘as a kind of *weltanschauungslehre*, a study of the nature and structure of the worldview of a nation in significant periods of its history, conducted by means of a methodological analysis of the major cultural concepts that the nation has produced for itself and crystallised into keywords of its language.’⁶

The words in the Qur’an derive their concrete meanings from their reciprocal relationship. In other words, these words form various groups among themselves, some small and others big, and they are connected to each other in numerous ways.⁷ With regards to the semantics of the Qur’an, Turkish scholar M. Hamdi Yazir (1877–1942) distinguishes between

1 Al-Zabidi, *Taj al-‘Arus*, entry (f-dh-l-k), vol. 27, p. 293; Abu al-Baqa, *Al-Kulliyat*, p. 697; Ahmad Mukhtar ‘Umar, *Mu‘jam al-Lughā al-‘Arabiya al-Mu‘asira*, entry (f-dh-l-k), vol. 3, p. 1683.

2 Al-Tahanawi, *Istilahat al-Funun*, entry (ḥarf al-fā), vol. 2, p. 1264; Al-Zabidi, *Taj al-‘Arus*, entry (f-dh-l-k), vol. 27, p. 293; Khafaji, *Hashiya al-Shihab*, vol. 1, p. 386.

3 Asim Efendi, *Okyânüs*, entry (f-dh-l-k), vol. 3, p. 107.

4 “Fadhllaka,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition.

5 Nursi, *Sözler, The Words*, p. 505.

6 Izutsu, *İslam Düşüncesinde İmân Kavramı*, p.11.

7 Izutsu, *İslam Düşüncesinde İmân Kavramı*.

man's word and God's word as follows:⁸

Words in our speech are a garment for meanings produced afterwards: The harmony between meanings and words are like the fit of the body into its garment. In God's words, on the other hand, meanings are almost suffused, like the rose-colored skin of a siren's face, with the physical and non-physical texture of words, which thoroughly annotates and expounds the word and strikes a perfect harmony between the phrases. More precisely, the body and the soul display a unique feature in this by which they are intertwined into one.

That is why, should you attempt to replace the words the Qur'an uses to make a point with their synonyms, the purpose cannot be fulfilled entirely, the glimmer in meaning fades, and the Qur'anic style disappears. The harmony between its forms and contents are part of its miracle. Arab scholars express their admiration for the Qur'an's words and discourse texture when they say, 'Forms are molds of contents, whereas contents are ores, and ores are placed in forms that will preserve them.'⁹ Furthermore, 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani (d. 471/1079) states that 'Since forms are envelopes for contents, they firmly follow the order of contents in their positions.'¹⁰ He also adds that 'One cannot talk of a syntax or word order without the words being attached to one another and a bond of meaning is established between them. Therefore, in word order, form is subject to content, and words are ordered in the sentence according to how their meanings are ordered.'¹¹ Only in the Arabic text of the Qur'an is it possible to see this texture and word order. Indeed, it is commanded that 'We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an' (Q. 12: 2).¹²

As Izutsu puts it, 'almost all the words used by the Qur'an were in use in pre-Islamic times one way or another. When Islamic revelation started to use them, the entire system — not the words per se or their meanings but the overall network of connections in which the words were used — felt unheard of, unknown, and hence unacceptably foreign to Meccan disbelievers.'¹³ Thus, the original meanings of the words did not change with the revelation of the Qur'an. What changed was the overall plan, the overall system. And every word found its position in the newly established system.¹⁴ To use an analogy, original meanings of words

8 Yazir, M. Hamdi, *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*, vol. 1, p. 14.

9 Al-Askari, *al-Sina'atayn*, p. 179; Ibn Abi al-Isba', *Tahrir al-Tahbir*, pp. 197, 462.

10 Al-Jurjani, *Dala'il al-Ijaz*, p. 52.

11 Al-Jurjani, *Dala'il al-Ijaz*, pp. 55–56.

12 In this paper, M.A.S. Abdel Haleem's translation (The Qur'an, Oxford University Press, 2004) will be followed.

13 Izutsu, *İslam Düşüncesinde İmân Kavramı*, p. 19.

14 Izutsu, *İslam Düşüncesinde İmân Kavramı*, p. 24.

resemble blood relationship; it is genetical, etymological. Secondary meanings are like in-law relationships formed through marriage.

The semantic analysis in the Qur'anic studies has acquired a different dimension thanks to Izutsu's ethico-religious discourse, although he has been subjected to criticism.¹⁵ One of the recent semantic analyses of the Qur'anic concepts relates to 'trust.'¹⁶ In this paper, the concept of 'majority' was explored in conjunction with its quintessential characteristics in the context of the syntactical and semantic relations of the relevant Qur'anic verses.

Etymological Analysis of the Word *akthar*

The word *akthar* is an elative derived from the root (*k-th-r*).¹⁷ By definition, the past tense verb (*kathur*) denotes excess and increase in number. The usage is as *kathur al-shay'* (It has multiplied), by which numerical superiority of a subject is expressed.¹⁸ In addition, *kathra* is the opposite of paucity, and it can be used not only for excess but also for a person who is abundantly benevolent and generous, excessive accumulation of wealth, a person of many words, a competition for multiplicity and abundance, and a desire to multiply things.¹⁹

Who is *akthar*?

The word *akthar*, which is mentioned in the form of *ism al-tafḍīl* in our semantic analysis, not in the sense of 'many people' or 'many of them,' but in the sense of 'the majority of people' or 'the majority of them,' that is, more than half of them, and we mean this majority. As is known, the minimum plural in Arabic is three. The number two is not plural. Three and more are included in the concept of plural. For example, when we say to a group of 20–30 people that we see, 'there are many people,' we are expressing the truth. However, when we describe the same group with the word *akthar*, we are expressing our intention as a result of a comparison, so that if there are twenty people in that group, the word *akthar*, the majority, means at least eleven people. If there are thirty people, the 'majority' is at least sixteen or more. In our analysis, therefore, we use *akthar* to refer to the cluster of people who constitute the majority of a community or a society whose story is being told in a given context.

Usage of the *akthar* Form in the Qur'an

The Holy Qur'an presents this majority, which it refers to with the word *akthar* and describes them in their negative characteristics in the *fadhlikas* of the verses as people who do not

15 Albayrak, vol. 14/1: pp. 73–106.

16 Eggen, vol. 13/2: pp. 56–85.

17 Elative: adjective degree of superiority.

18 Al-Zabidi, *Taj al-ʿArus*, entry (*k-th-r*), vol. 14, p. 17; Al-Fairuzabadi, *Al-Qamus al-Muhit*, entry (*al-kathra*) vol. 1, p. 468; Ibn Manzur, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, entry (*k-th-r*), vol. 5, p. 131.

19 Asim Efendi, *Okyânūs*, entry (*k-th-r*), vol. 2, pp. 93–94.

believe (Q. 26: 8, 67, 103, 121, 138, 158, 174, 190; Q. 11: 17; Q.14: 1; Q. 34: 41; Q. 36: 7; Q. 40: 5), who do not know, (Q. 6: 37; Q. 7: 131, 187; Q. 8: 34; Q. 10: 55; Q. 12: 21; Q. 40: 68; Q. 16: 38; Q. 30: 6, 30; Q. 34: 28, 36; Q. 40: 57; Q. 39: 49; Q. 44: 39; Q. 45: 26; Q. 28: 13, 57; Q. 52: 47) who are ungrateful, (Q. 2: 243; Q. 7: 17; Q. 10: 60; Q. 12: 38; Q. 27: 73; Q. 40: 61) who do not think, (Q. 5: 103; Q. 25: 44; Q. 29: 63; Q. 49: 4) who are ignorant, (Q. 6: 111) who are idolaters, (Q. 12: 106; Q. 30: 42) who are disbelievers, (Q. 16: 83) who hate the truth, (Q. 23: 70) who are liars, (Q. 26: 223) and who turn away so they do not hear (Q. 41: 4). This majority is condemned in more than twenty suras of the Qur'an in the form of *akthar al-nās* and *aktharuhum*.

Described in parables across the Qur'an, this majority are peoples of different races, religions, cultures, and colors who lived in different times. Most them have perished because of their rebellious attitude and are threatened with fire in the Hereafter (Q. 40: 6; Q. 26: 91, 94).

The Majority Characterized as *lā yu'minūn*

The most obvious characteristic of the majority condemned and rebuked by the Qur'an has been its disbelief, described with the word *lā yu'minūn*. 'The word *disbelief* along with its derivative *believer* is one of the words whose semantic structures have changed dramatically with the advent of Islam. With Islam its Jahiliyyah senses of *īmān* and *amān*, used for confirmation, were transferred to the semantic domain of believing in God through certain changes in its characteristics and conditions and made specific to the word *believer*.'²⁰

Etymological Analysis of the Word *lā yu'minūn*

The word *lā yu'minūn* is a conjugated form of the root ²-m-n that is *muḍāriʿ* (present tense), active, *ghaib* (third person), plural, and negative. By definition, the *māḍī* verb *amina* (means being protected from fear, being calm and quiet in one's heart). It is the opposite of fear. *Al-amn* and *al-āmin* are nouns meaning fearlessness. These nouns refer to a reliable and trustworthy person who is free from persecution and betrayal as well as fault and flaw. Similarly, it means being strong and powerful. On the other hand, *al-īmān* means confirming what a person says, hence believing. It safeguards the listener against opposition. In confirmation of religion, it safeguards one's self against torment. *āmāna bihi īmānan idhā ṣaddaqaḥ* is a common phrase meaning 'He believed in full acknowledgement when he confirmed it.' In addition, it means trusting and depending, displaying modesty and meekness, and accepting the religion.²¹ *Al-amāna* is the opposite of betrayal, while *al-īmān* is the opposite of disbelief, denial, and refutation of confirmation.²² 'Belief is one's understanding

20 Ibn Faris, *Al-Sahibi*, p. 45.

21 Asim Efendi, *el-Okyânūs*, entry (²-m-n), vol. 3, pp. 593–594.

22 Ibn Manzur, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, entry (²-m-n), vol. 13, p. 21.

and appreciation of truth and submission to it through confirmation of comprehension (*idh^can*), which occurs through verification of the heart, utterance of the tongue and commensurate action. Also, belief is the mind because it is only through the mind that one can know of God's oneness.²³ 'One who believes is called a believer. And linguists as well as others concur that the word *al-īmān* means confirmation (*al-taṣdīq*), which they rest on the verse: *The Bedouins said, 'We believe.'* Say, 'You have not believed,' but say, 'We have submitted to Islam' (*qālat al-a^crāb āmannā qul lam tu^ominū wa lākin qūlū aslamnā*) (Q. 49: 14).

In his book *Al-Ibana*, Al-Ash^cari (d. 324/936) draws attention to the difference between Islam and *īmān* when he states that 'Islam is more comprehensive, more extensive than *īmān*, and not all of Islam is *īmān*.'²⁴ Moreover, he defines *īmān* as 'word and action, which may increase and decrease.'²⁵

In his *Kitab al-Luma^c*, al-Ash^cari says, '*īmān* is confirming God,' which he emphasises to be the only legitimate sense of the word *al-īmān* from a linguistic perspective.²⁶

Asharian theologian Baqillani (d. 403/1013) explains the difference as follows:²⁷

Islam means submitting and surrendering. Every act by which man submits and surrenders to God and follows and obeys His orders is Islam. *īmān*, on the other hand, is merely one of the fundamental elements of Islam. Therefore, *īmān* is Islam, but the entirety of Islam is not *īmān*.

To Ibn Hazm (d. 456/1064), *īmān* and Islam 'are transferred from their original places in the Arabic language and revealed to include all actions of benevolence (*birr*) and obedience.'²⁸

With regard to the semantics of the Qur'an, *īmān* covers such semantic fields as confirmation by heart, declaration through utterance, perception, knowledge of God, and action of knowledge and the heart, namely submission, or complete trust in God. Whether this tree of *īmān*, with its roots inside the depths of the heart, will sprout rests on the health of the roots. The Prophet Muhammad (henceforth the Prophet) accentuates this fact when he says 'Beware, in the body is a piece of flesh which, if sound, the entire body is sound, and if corrupt, the entire body is corrupt. Truly, it is the heart.'²⁹ Further, it is suggested that the heart holds the position of a commander in the human body.

The Holy Qur'an declares that the most prominent attitude and behaviour of this group,

23 Al-Isfahani, *Al-Mufradat*, entry (*ʿ-m-n*), pp. 90–91.

24 Al-Ash^cari, *Al-Ibana*, p. 26.

25 Al-Ash^cari, *Al-Ibana*, p. 27.

26 Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, p. 174; Al-Ash^cari, *Al-Luma^c*, p. 123.

27 Al-Baqillani, *Al-Tamhid al-Awa'il wa Talkhis al-Dala'il*, p. 392.

28 Ibn Hazm, *Al-Fasl*, vol. 3, p. 127.

29 Al-Bukhari, *Iman*, 37, No: 52; Muslim, *Al-Musaqah*, 107, No: 1599; Ibn Majah, *Al-Fitan*, 14, No: 3984.

which it describes and classifies through various qualities, is that they do not believe. The fact that they do not believe is stated in fourteen different verses as (*lā yu^ominūn*) (they do not believe), which is the negative form of the *mu^oḍāri^c* verb *amina*, *mu^ominūn* and *mu^ominīn* (*ism al-fā^cil* form of the verb *amin*). In these verses, the concept of *akthar* is expressed in attribution to the plural pronoun *hum* and the word *al-nās*. The phrase *aktharuhum* means 'most of them' and *akthar al-nās* means 'most people.' Eight of these occur in Sūrat al-Shu^carā^o. The keywords in this group of verses are *mu^ominūn* and *mu^ominīn* derived from the *māḍī* verb *amina*. The pivot of the sura is *īmān*, Islam, piety, and obedience.³⁰ These verses give a sample summary of humanity regarding refusal to heed the divine message from a perspective of obedience and *īmān*. No regard is paid to chronological order. The verses start with the Prophet's propagation of Islam to Meccan idolators followed by the parable of Moses and his people and then the parables of Abraham, Noah, Hud (Ad), Salih (Thamud), Lot and Shuayb (Ashab al-Ayka) and their peoples.³¹ This way of presentation has also been interpreted as a consolation to the Prophet.³² Indeed, the Prophet is reportedly almost driven to taking his own life for the Meccan idolators' refusal to believe in their obstinate and hostile manners. This era of the Qur'an's revelation is the last era of human history. This era is called *qurūn al-ukhrā*, the end of the world starting with the advent of Islam, namely the final era. The others are *qurūn al-ūlā*, or the first era from Adam to revelation of the Old Testament or the death of Pharaoh, and *qurūn al-wusṭā*, or the middle era from revelation of the Old Testament to the advent of Islam.³³

We will study examples of these three eras particularly with reference to the relevant verses in Sūrat al-Shu^carā^o. In all these examples, the *fadhlakas* of the verses state that people who make up the majority do not believe, meaning this disbelieving group will always hold the majority no matter what the era. Although proportions may vary according to era, it is cautioned that this proportion has always been and will always be higher than fifty-one percent, a fact manifestly expressed in the phrases *aktharuhum* and *akthar al-nās*. Regarding this issue, Al-Jurjani notes:³⁴

Syntax is simply ordering words syntactically, observing syntactic rules and principles, knowing the path on which you will not make mistakes if you take it, sticking to the principles specified by scholarship, and avoiding violating any of them. The purpose

30 Hawwa, *Tafsir al-Asas*, vol. 7, p. 3903.

31 The parable of Moses is related in verses 11–68; that of Abraham in 69–104; Noah's people in 105–122; Ad, or Hud's people, 123–140; Thamud, or Salih's people, 141–159; and Ashab al-Ayka, or Shuayb's people, in 176–191.

32 Al-Alusi, *Al-Ruh al-Ma^cani*, vol. 10, p. 58.

33 Yazir, *ibid*, 'Al-Qasas, 28:43', vol. 5, p. 3739.

34 °Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, *Dala'il al-Ijaz*, p. 81.

of syntax is to identify different ways of expression by studying every topic of word order.

Indeed, there are two well-known interpretations of using *ism al-tafdīl* to show possession. In one, it should be part of *muḍāf ilayh*:³⁵ *Yūsuf aḥsan al-nās* (Joseph is the most beautiful of man), for example. In the other, an exception can be made to *muḍāf ilayh* by referring to an absolute excess: *Yūsuf aḥsan al-nās ikhwatih* (Joseph is the most beautiful of his brothers), for example.³⁶ Grammatically, the words *al-nās* and *hum* and are *muḍāf ilayh*. Considered in this sense, the phrase *aktharuhum* refers not only to the majority in them, namely the peoples whose parables are narrated, but also to many nations that went astray although prophets were sent to them. The phrase *akthar al-nās* means ‘most people’ and thereby manifestly has a general reference. Indeed, as suggested by its etymology, the word *akthar* signifies a numerical majority, and this fact will be seen more clearly in the examples below from various periods of human history.

The Disbelieving Majority of the *qurūn al-ukhrā* (final era)

Despite Muhammad’s propagation of Islam in its first years in Mecca, the Meccans remained intransigent, causing extreme distress for the Prophet. Referring to his distress, the Qur’an says, ‘Perhaps you will grieve yourself to death over their disbelief’ (Al-Shu’ara, 26: 3). Following this verse, it is ordained that

*Do they not see the earth, and how many types of beautiful plants We grow in it [in pairs]³⁷? There truly is a sign in this, though **most of them do not believe**: your Lord alone is the Almighty, the Merciful (Q. 26: 7–9).*

awalam yaraw ilā al-arḍ kam anbatnā fihā min kull zawj karim (7) inna fī dhālik laāya wa mā kāna aktharuhum mu’minīn (8) wa inna rabbak lahuw al-‘azīz al-raḥīm (9)

The keyword in these verses is the word ‘*īmān*’ (belief), which is synonymous — in its sense of ‘knowing, understanding, comprehending, and thinking God’s oneness’ — with the phrase

³⁵ *muḍāf ilayh* gr. [in phrases] the modifier, or the noun who which the *muḍāf* (modified) is attached. [It is the genitive case. It is called an ‘al-Muraakab al-Idafiy,’ or an additional phrase. *Muḍāf* has the sense of added, joined, attached, or bound, and is the modified, grammatically [in noun phrases]. It is the noun added, hence complemented, it. (Devellioğlu, Ferit, *Ottoman Turkish Encyclopedic Dictionary*)

³⁶ Ibn al-Hajīb, *Al-Kafiya fī ‘ilm al-Nahw*, p. 42; Abu al-Fida’, *Al-Kunnash*, vol. 1, pp. 343–344; Al-Fayyumi, *Al-Misbah al-Munir*, vol. 2, p. 710; Yazir, *ibid.*, ‘Ya Sin, 36:7,’ vol. 6, p. 4009.

³⁷ The phrase [in pairs], which is not available in M.A.S. Abdel Haleem’s *The Qur’an* (Oxford University Press) was inserted to Q. 26: 7 because this particular phrase served to indicate semantic links in our subsequent analysis.

awalām yaraw (Do they not see?) — in the semantic field that can be defined in 'Do owners of clear minds not look in transcendent contemplation and reflection and understand?'³⁸ Similarly, the clause (*kam anbatnā fihā min kull zawj karim*) is synonymous — in the sense that 'what noble kinds of thing We grow in it [in pairs], for they 'provide signs indicating God's omnipotence'³⁹ — with the word *īmān* in the semantic field of 'knowing, understanding, comprehending, and thinking God's oneness.' In the same vein, the word *kam*, meaning many, plenty, connotes 'abundance in numbers.'⁴⁰ The word *kull* denotes 'completion and abundance in the sense that all the parts of a thing are brought close and added to each other.'⁴¹ Both words along with their connotations share the semantic field of *abundance*. Moreover, the word *kull* is the *muḍāf* of the phrase meaning 'countless beautiful pairs' due to indefinite forms of the words *zawj karim* and is thus closely packed in the semantic pattern. Indeed, syntactically, if the word *kull* is added to an indefinite noun, 'the meaning extends to all the parts of the *muḍāf ilayh*, specific or general, big or small, few or many.'⁴²

Furthermore, the clause *kam anbatnā fihā min kull zawj karim* connotes 'abundance and encompassment, as it alludes to the sense that no one but He, the Knower of the invisible, knows their number,' and is thus semantically connected to the word *akthar*.⁴³ The demonstrative pronoun *dhālik* in the following clause, *inna fī dhālik laāya* (There truly is a sign in this), has a strong semantic connection with 'the countless proofs presented' in the previous sentence and the sense of abundance in the word *akthar*, and existence of 'proofs and signs that every one of the noble pairs are proofs to draw lessons from'⁴⁴ in the word *laāya* at the end. Likewise, in its reference to 'the proofs showing God's oneness, vastness of His Grace, immensity of His power, and existence of the hereafter, hence the entailment of *īmān*,⁴⁵ the clause 'inna fī dhālik laāya' is connected through semantic bonds to the word *īmān* in its sense of 'knowing God's oneness and confirming Him.' And the content is concluded in the clause '*wa mā kāna aktharuhum mu'minīn*,' though most of them do not believe, and in this sophisticated mesh of interlocking words, it is ruled that the majority are not believers. This is one of the many unique examples of patterns of words and content in the field of semantics. It is the manifestation of the Qur'anic notes *ḥukman 'arabiyyan* (Q. 13: 37), *qurānan 'arabiyyan* (Q. 20: 113; Q. 39: 28; Q. 41: 3; Q. 42: 7; Q. 43: 3), and *lisānan 'arabiyyan* (Q. 46: 12). It is virtually impossible to see in the translations of the Qur'an the sophisticated pattern of words

38 Al-Samarqandi, *Baḥr al-Ulum*, vol. 2, p. 550; Al-Qushayri, *Lataif Al-Isharat*, vol. 3, p. 7.

39 Al-Baydawi, *Anwar al-Tanzil*, vol. 4, p. 134.

40 Al-Isfahani, *Al-Mufradat*, entry (*k-m*), p. 726.

41 Al-Isfahani, *Al-Mufradat*, entry (*k-l*), p. 719; Asim Efendi, *el-Okyânüs*, entry (*k-l*), vol. 3, p. 339.

42 Ibn Malik, *Tashil al-Fawa'id*, p. 158.

43 Al-Zamakhshari, *Al-Kashshaf*, vol. 3, p. 301.

44 *Ibid.*

45 Yazir, *ibid.*; 'Al-Shu'ara, 26:8', vol. 5, p. 3620.

and meanings we have studied through the Arabic text.

As mentioned above, Prophet Muhammad was persistent in his preaching of Islam and was eager for everyone to believe. However, he was particularly upset by the stubbornness of the Meccans. One of the most prominent among the stubborn against this right was his own close and own uncle, ʿAbd al-ʿUzza b. ʿAbd al-Muttalib (Abu Lahab). His other uncle Abbas had not yet converted to Islam and was among those who supported the infidels. He had financial means and was one of the ten Meccan polytheists who paid for the Battle of Badr. The Prophet resented this even more and ate himself up. As a consolation to the Prophet against this and similar rebellious behavior of the non-believers, and as if to point to the unity of destiny, the Prophet said, ‘Look, you are not the only one who has been battered, opposed, persecuted and beaten in this mission, and you are not the only one who has suffered from your closest relatives, nor is it only your relatives and the tribe you live in who have inflicted this torment and suffering on you. Look what Joseph’s brothers did to him: ‘This, O Messenger, is from the unseen events which We have made known to you by revelation. Otherwise, you were not present with them when they gathered together to plot and decide their plans. Remember this: Most people do not believe, even if you desire it with great strength’ (Q. 12: 102–103).

The incident between Joseph and his brothers is one of the most beautiful parables that the Qur’an informs us about in the unseen. It is the strongest and the most accurate account of what the Prophet’s relatives did to their own Prophet. Near the end of the Sura, the address is turned to the Prophet and the parable is concluded by saying, ‘Remember this: Most people do not believe, even if you desire it with great strength’ (Q. 12: 103). By saying this, knowledge of truth and a knowledge of the unseen is foretold and it is warned that the majority of people do not and will not believe. The majority who will not believe means, firstly, the polytheists of Mecca, who were both the contemporaries and the enemies of the Prophet. Secondly, the majority of all mankind who will come until the Day of Resurrection, in terms of the generality of his Prophethood.

A hadith in Bukhari and Muslim confirms that the majority of the past nations did not believe: ‘I was shown the past nations. I saw the prophets with a small group of three or five people. I saw the prophets, and they were accompanied by one or two people. And I saw the prophets and there was no one with them.’⁴⁶ In another hadith: ‘Such prophets have come and gone, but only one or two people have been their ummahs, even though they persistently preached the Truth throughout their lives.’⁴⁷ It is evident from the hadiths of Bukhari and Muslim that those who believed in the prophets who served as messengers in various eras were in the minority. The example verses in Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ follow a narrative sequence starting from the last era and moving back to the first era.

46 Bukhari, Tib 17, No: 5705, 41, No: 5752, Rikak 50, No: 6541; Muslim, Īmān 374, No: 220.

47 Muslim, Īmān 332, No: 196.

The Disbelieving Majority of the *qurun al-wusta* (middle era)

Your Lord called to Moses: 'Go to those wrongdoers, the people of Pharaoh. Will they not take heed?' (Q. 26: 10–11).

After years of declaring his message and struggling with Pharaoh and his subjects, Moses and his followers left Egypt upon a divine decree only to be chased by Pharaoh and his army. Finally, they got to the sea:

*and We revealed to Moses: 'Strike the sea with your staff.' It parted — each side like a mighty mountain — and We brought the others to that place: We saved Moses and all his companions, and drowned the rest. There truly is a sign in this, though **most of them do not believe**: your Lord alone is the Almighty, the Merciful (Q. 26: 63–68).*

faawḥaynā ilā mūsā an idrib bi^ʿaṣāk al-baḥr fanfalaq fakāna kull firq kaal-ṭawd al-^ʿazīm (63) wa azlafnā thamma al-ākharīn (64) wa anjaynā mūsā wa man ma^ʿah ajma^ʿīn (65) thumma aghraqnā al-ākharīn (66) inna fī dhālika laāya wa mā kāna aktharuhum mu^ʿminīn (67) wa inna rabbak lahuw al-^ʿazīz al-raḥīm (68)

By this point, Moses had performed nine miracles for Pharaoh and his people to believe,⁴⁸ but disbelievers still maintained their numerical superiority. The miracle of parting of the sea referred to in this verse is one of the last miracles performed by Moses. The keyword in the verse is the word *īmān*. In its senses of 'having a heart protected from fear, being calm and peaceful, being strong and powerful, confirming what a person says, safeguarding one's self against torment, and knowing God's oneness,' the word *īmān* is synonymous with the sense of 'indicating God's oneness and might' in the verse *faawḥaynā ilā mūsā an idrib bi^ʿaṣāk al-baḥr fanfalaq fakāna kull firq kaal-ṭawd al-^ʿazīm* (Q. 26: 63). In fact, the word *faawḥaynā* (We revealed) is derived from the root *w-ḥ-y* in the form of *if^ʿāl*, in the past tense mood, in the *al-mutakallim* (first person) and *ma al-gayr* (plural of first person). It means 'to indicate, to communicate rapidly, to know God's oneness through the mind, and to demand that something be understood and appreciated,'⁴⁹

In addition, in the statement *an idrib bi^ʿaṣāk al-baḥr fanfalaq* (*We revealed, 'Strike the sea with your staff.' It parted*), the order and juxtaposition of the words '^ʿaṣā' and *fanfalaq*

48 Al-Isra, 17:101; An-Naml, 27:1. (The miracles performed by Moses: staff, white hand, famine, flood, locusts, ants, frogs, blood, parting of the sea).

49 Al-Isfahani, *Al-Mufradat*, entry (*w-ḥ-ā*), pp. 858–859; Asim Efendi, *el-Okyânûs*, entry (*w-ḥ-ā*), vol. 3, pp. 945–946.

are synonymous with *īmān* in its sense as ‘proofs indicating God’s supreme might’ and ‘being strong and powerful, confirming what a person says, having a heart protected from fear, being calm and peaceful.’ Indeed, there is direct manifestation of divine might here, evidenced by the staff and the parting of the sea. The purpose is to safeguard believers against fear and to support and confirm the prophet they believe, while instilling fear, the opposite of belief, in disbelievers and declaring that they are not safe from torment and ruin. The reason is that neither the staff nor water can essentially change nature directly. That a thing made of a dead piece of wood becomes a living animal or that a dead piece of wood parts the sea, which becomes a dirt road, cannot be explained away by means of extant laws of nature. This is an extraordinary event because ‘Divine might is inherent; its relationship with its creation is legitimate.’⁵⁰ Here the veil of laws is broken, and divine power becomes manifest. Similarly, by alluding to the proof of might we have discussed, the clause *inna fī dhālika laāya* shares senses with the word *īmān* in ‘knowing and appreciating God’s oneness.’ This clause also maintains the semantic connection with the proof of ‘many beautiful plants’ stipulated in the eighth verse as a sign of power. Finally, the issue is concluded in this group of verses as ‘**most of them do not believe**’ despite so many proofs for existence of God.

The Disbelieving Majority of the *qurūn al-ūla* (first era)

The people of Noah, too, called the messengers liars. Their brother Noah said to them, ‘Will you not be mindful of God? I am a faithful messenger sent to you: be mindful of God and obey me.’ (Q. 26: 105–108).

kadhhabat qawm nūḥ al-mursalīn (105) idh qāl lahum akhūhum nūḥ alā tattaqūn (106) innī lakum rasūl amīn (107) fattaqū allāh wa aṭīūn (108)

At this juncture, we should remind the fact that the statement ‘*Will you not be mindful of God? I am a faithful messenger sent to you: be mindful of God and obey me,*’ has also been repeated by other prophets preaching the truths, namely Hud, Lot, Salih and Shuaib. With regards to the semantics of the Qur’an, these verses bear a magnificent pattern of expression, both forming a strong mesh between verses and establishing like a lanyard a close connection with the whole of the sura. In fact, the words of obedience, i.e. *alā tattaqūn* - (*Will you not be mindful?*), *rasūl amīn* (*a faithful messenger*), *fattaqū* (*be mindful*), *aṭīūn* (*obey me*), which denote trust and belief, another aspect of both piety and belief, display a firm pattern of discourse riveted to the keyword *īmān* as its synonyms. In semantics, ‘No keyword stands on its own, nor does it develop in isolation of other keywords of varying significance. Every

50 Nursi, *Sözler; The Words*, p. 573.

keyword is accompanied by another keyword, and together they form a sophisticated mesh of keywords and discourse called a semantic field.⁵¹ For example, the phrase *alā tattaqūn* (*Will you not be mindful?*) is derived from the root *w-q-ā* in the form of *ifti^cāl*, in the present tense mood, active, second person and in the plural negative. The keyword here in this particular context is the word *īmān*. The word *alā tattaqūn* is synonymous with *īmān* in the sense of 'fearlessness and safety from prosecution and betrayal as well as fault and flaw' as it is derived from the root verb *waqā*, which literally means 'protecting and securing something and being protected from something.'⁵² Furthermore, *aṭī^cūn* is a word in the imperative from the *if^cāl* form derived from the root *t-w-^c* and literally means 'to surrender, to obey, to be strong enough.'⁵³ It is synonymous with the word *īmān* in the sense of 'confirming the words of a person, believing, and accepting religion.'

Further, we see in *rasūl amīn* (*a faithful messenger*) a word specifically chosen by the Qur'an within the context of the topic that cannot be replaced with a synonym. This word is *amīn*, a characteristic of a peaceful person whose heart is free from fear and worry, and *al-amīn* is the characteristic of a reliable and trustworthy person who is safe from prosecution and betrayal as well as fault and flaw.⁵⁴ Therefore, it is difficult to find an equally encompassing synonym meaning the 'opposite of fear, betrayal, disbelief, refusal to acknowledge.'⁵⁵ On the other hand, if the meaning is conveyed through a synonym, the utterance will be wanting, hence the texture will be distorted, fluency will disappear, and expressions will falter/lose their glimmer. The word *amīn* is derived from ²*m-n*, the same root as the *mu²minīn* and *yu²minūn* in the *fadhlakas* and is a characteristic of prophets who represent supreme safety and reliability. In this regard, the word *amīn* is a perfect synonym of *īmān*, which seems to suggest a unity of substance and soul. It does not seem possible to separate one from the other.

As a result, his people give the following response to Noah's effective, eloquent call for truth:

*So they said, 'Noah, if you do not stop this, you will be stoned.' He said, 'My Lord, my people have rejected me, so make a firm judgement between me and them, and save me and my believing followers.' So We saved him and his followers in the fully laden ship, and drowned the rest. There truly is a sign in this, though **most of them do not believe**: your Lord alone is the Almighty, the Merciful (Q. 26: 116–122).*

51 Izutsu, *Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology*, p. 280.

52 Asim Efendi, *Okyânūs*, entry (*w-q-ā*), vol. 3, pp. 950–951.

53 Al-Isfahani, *Al-Mufradat*, entry (*t-w-^c*), p. 529–530.

54 Asim Efendi, *Okyânūs*, entry (²*m-n*), vol. 3, p. 593.

55 Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-^cArab*, entry (²*m-n*), vol. 13, p. 21.

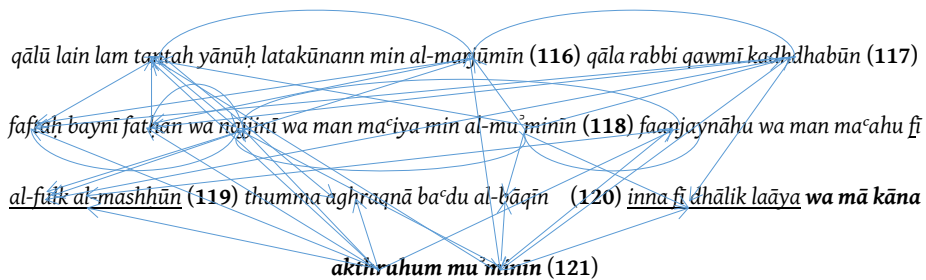


Figure 1: The sophisticated semantic web of the syntax of Sūrat al-Shu'arā' (116–121).

According to the Qur'an, Noah lived nine hundred and fifty years⁵⁶ and continued his mission of guidance for a long time so that his people would believe. In the end, the number of believers was low enough to go into the vessel built by Noah himself. The Qur'an does not refer to any figure about this fact, but the most optimistic figure given in exegeses is not more than eighty.⁵⁷ The rest of the people drowned. The ones who drowned, i.e. who refused to believe, were a rebellious group that made up the majority. They died an exemplary death.

The focus word in this group of verses is *īmān*. The word *īmān* in this context is synonymous with the preceding phrase *lain lam tantah* in several semantic fields. The word *lam tantah* is a present tense, active voice, negative verb for the second person derived from the root *n-h-ā*. It literally means 'to stay back, (for something) to come to the boil, to rush news (to somebody), and to forbid somebody from something as well as mind and perception since they keep their owner from ugly acts, a water pond, the watermark of a spring, and a swell of water.'⁵⁸ In its sense that 'Belief is mind because knowing oneness of God is only possible through mind,'⁵⁹ the word *īmān* is synonymous with mind and perception because *al-nuhya*, a derivation of *n-h-ā*, forbids the owner from ugly acts. The majority seems to be saying 'Noah, if you persist in calling on us through your reasonable behaviours to have us quit our present understanding and perceive the belief you preach, we will deny you of your right to life. We will drown you.'

The word *al-marjūmīn*, on the other hand, is a plural, definite, *ism al-ma'rūf* word derived from the root *r-j-m* meaning to slaughter, to stone to death, to cast aspersions at a person's honor and to accuse of lying, to swear, to pelt, to erect signs or marks of stone on a grave, to curse and rail against a close friend, to charge an enemy, and to quit something completely.

56 'Indeed, We sent Noah to his people, and he remained among them for a thousand years, less fifty. Then the Flood overtook them, while they persisted in wrongdoing.' Al-Ankabut, 29: 14.

57 Ibn Abu Hatim, *Tafsir*, vol. 9, p. 3043, No. 1720; Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim*, vol. 3, p. 388.

58 Asim Efendi, *Okyânūs*, entry (*n-h-ā*), vol. 3, p. 944; Al-Isfahani, *Al-Mufradat*, entry (*n-h-ā*), pp. 826–827.

59 Al-Isfahani, *Al-Mufradat*, entry (*ʿ-m-n*), p. 90.

Al-rajam denotes wells, particularly wide circular ones, or furnaces (floor furnaces, ovens, kilns and water springs), or brothers. *Al-rajma* means grave and *al-rujum* means the stones placed on a grave, which act as a roof. *Al-marājim* denotes bad, ugly language. *Al-murājama* means 'to squabble, to snipe, to drop insinuations, to taunt.' *Al-murajjam* means 'suspicious and confused news or talk which is impossible to verify because it is uttered in doubt and conjecture.'⁶⁰

The senses of the word *al-marjūmīn* in Q. 26: 116 as 'a circular well, bad and ugly language, and suspicious and confused news or talk' form a firm semantic bond with the senses of the word *lam tantah* as 'a water pond, to rush news (to somebody), and a swell of water.' Similarly, the word *al-rajam* establishes semantic bonds not only with wells and furnaces (floor furnaces, ovens, kilns, and water springs) but also with *faftah* and *fathan* and with *al-fulq*. The words *faftah* and *fathan* share the root meaning 'water originating from a source.'⁶¹ Not only is the relationship with water and vessels clear in the word *al-fulq* but also they form a sophisticated network in the semantic fields of 'swelling of the sea'⁶² and 'the fact that the furnace is indeed an oven and is aboard a vessel along with a tank where water is accumulated.'⁶³ Moreover, sense of the word *al-rajam* the 'brothers' is in a firm semantic bond with *idh qāl lahum akhūhum nūh* ('Their brother Noah said to them,' Al-Shu'ara, 26: 106). Similarly, the word *rajm* is an antonym of the word *īmān* in that the former means 'to expel, to dismiss, to curse, to quit something' and the latter 'confirming what a person says and obey him.' Further, in its sense as 'to stone somebody and to erect signs or marks of stone on a grave,' the word *rajm* alludes to idols erected such as *wadd*, *suwa*, *yauq* and *nasr* (Q. 71: 23) and attests to the fact that his people stoned Noah physically and psychologically on their idol's behalf.

In its sense as 'opposite of disbelief, denial, and refutation of confirmation,'⁶⁴ the word *īmān* has an opposite relationship with the clause *kadhhabūn* ([they] have rejected me) — in the sense as 'to disbelieve and slander and to refute the truth.'⁶⁵ Also, the word *najjinī* in *wa najjinī wa man ma'īya min al-mu'minīn* is an imperative derived from the root *n-j-w* that means 'to leave something behind, to save oneself from, to rescue, to find safety from flood waters, to sit at a high place, and an elevation that stands out in its surrounding area.'⁶⁶ Its sense 'to save oneself from' is synonymous with *īmān*'s sense as 'to have a peaceful heart and

60 Asim Efendi, *Okyânūs*, entry (*r-j-m*), vol. 3, pp. 459–460.

61 Ibn Faris, *Maqayis al-Lugha*, entry (*f-t-h*), vol. 4, p. 469.

62 Asim Efendi, *Okyânūs*, entry (*r-j-m*), vol. 3, p. 108.

63 Yazir, *ibid.*, 'Hud, 11:40', vol. 4, p. 2782; See: Al-Azhari, *Tahdhib al-Lugha*, entry (*t-n-r*), vol. 14, p. 192.

64 Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-ʿArab*, entry (*ʿ-m-n*) vol. 13, p. 21.

65 Al-Isfahani, *Al-Mufradat*, entry (*k-dh-b*), p. 704.

66 Al-Isfahani, *Al-Mufradat*, entry (*n-j-w*), pp. 792–793; Asim Efendi, *Okyânūs*, entry (*n-j-ū*), vol. 3, pp. 934–935.

to be safe and secure. In addition, the word *najjinī* is connected to *faftah* and *fathan*, which derive from *f-t-h* and mean ‘consolation from worry, grief, and anxiety; aid and triumph’⁶⁷ and ‘water originating from a source,’ respectively, through the semantic bonds of ‘to save oneself from’ and ‘to find safety from flood waters.’⁶⁸ Moreover, the root meaning of *faftah* and *fathan*, namely ‘water originating from a source,’ share the same semantic field as the root meaning of the word *lam tantah*, namely ‘swelling of a lake or water.’ Similarly, in its sense ‘to find safety from flood waters,’ the word *najjinī* is synonymous with the sense ‘the watermark of a spring, and a swell of water’ of the root *n-h-ā*.

Furthermore, the word *najjinī* has a direct semantic connection with to save in the clause *faanjaynāhu wa man ma‘ah* (*We saved him and his followers*). Through their senses as ‘to sit at a high place, and an elevation that stands out in its surrounding area,’⁶⁹ the phrase *fi al-fulk al-mashhūn* (in the fully laden ship) and the word *najjinī* suggest a ship of salvation during the flood and that it ran aground atop Judi,⁷⁰ hence a semantic connection. Also, derived from the root *‘-r-q*, the word *a‘raqnā* is in the past tense, the *if‘āl* form, the active voice, and the first-person plural. It means ‘the highest point reached, that is the thing is completely submerged in water.’⁷¹ In this sense, the word *a‘raqnā* shares a semantic field with the root meaning of *lam tantahi*, namely ‘the watermark of a spring, and a swell of water.’ Therefore, it suggests that those drowned failed to turn Noah from his cause and got completely submerged in water, which reached its highest mark. The word *al-bāqīn* is opposite of *īmān* in that the former means ‘maintaining the original state in disbelief and rejection’⁷² while the latter means ‘accepting and confirming God’s oneness.’ The part ‘*inna fi dhālik la‘āya*’ suggests that there are lessons to be learned from the fact that Noah’s followers are spared through special deliverance and his opposers are drowned and destroyed in an unprecedented, exemplary flood people. This incident is also an exceptional case of God’s might. In terms of indicating God’s oneness, it is semantically related to *īmān* through ‘knowing and understanding.’ Thus, the parable of Noah’s people is concluded in the *fadhla* ‘***There truly is a sign in this, though most of them do not believe.***’

Deriving from *k-th-r*, the word *akthar* connotes ‘countless multitude, a lot in number, and a river’⁷³ and thus forms a strict mesh of discourse with the words *lam tantahi*, *faftah*, and

67 Al-Isfahani, *Al-Mufradat*, entry (*f-t-h*), pp. 621–622.

68 Ibn Faris, *Maqayis al-Lughah*, entry (*f-t-h*), vol. 4, p. 469.

69 Al-Isfahani, *Al-Mufradat*, entry (*n-j-w*), pp. 792–793; Asim Efendi, *Okyânūs*, entry (*n-j-w*), vol. 3, pp. 934–935.

70 Judi: The mountain on which Noah’s ark runs aground (Al-Jawhari, *Al-Sihah*, entry (*j-ū-d*), vol. 2, p. 461).

71 Ibn Faris, *Maqayis al-Lughah*, entry (*‘-r-q*), vol. 4, p. 418.

72 Al-Isfahani, *Al-Mufradat*, entry (*b-q-ā*), p. 138; Ibn Faris, *Maqayis al-Lughah*, entry (*b-q-ā*), vol. 1, p. 276.

73 Al-Isfahani, *Al-Mufradat*, entry (*k-th-r*), p. 703; Asim Efendi, *Okyânūs*, entry (*k-th-r*), vol. 3, p. 94.

fathan as well as with *najjinī* and *faanjaynāh* and with the phrases *fī al-fulk al-mashhūn* and *a'raqnā* in the semantic field of 'water and types of water.' Further, the statement *wa mā kāna aktharuhum mu'minīn* summarises an incident from the first era of humanity and concludes that the majority does not believe during the ten-century period despite all the effort. An example from semantics is thus displayed in which words are intertwined in a sophisticated mesh and woven by unbreakable bonds of meaning.

So far, we have studied examples of the majority, narrated in its characteristic of *lā yu'minūn*, in the three eras of humanity. We have observed that although prophets promised their peoples that they would be safe and secure in both this world and the next if they believed, they received affirmation only from a tiny minority. The result of these examples and other pieces of news reported by the Qur'an is that disbelievers always outnumbered believers in every era of history. The suggestion is that this majority will always maintain its numerical superiority as long as the cited attitudes and behaviours as well as certain unethical characteristics are present.

The Majority Described as *lā ya'lamūn*

Another characteristic of the majority condemned and rebuked by the Qur'an with respect to the concept of '*akthar*' is ignorance, expressed in the clause *lā ya'lamūn* (*They do not know*). The concept is stated as *aktharahum lā ya'lamūn* nine times in eight suras (Q. 7: 131, Q. 8: 34; Q. 10: 55; Q. 28: 13, 57; Q. 52: 47). and as *akthar al-nās lā ya'lamūn* eleven times in seven suras (Q. 7: 187; Q. 12: 21, 40, 68; Q. 16: 38; Q. 30: 6, 30; Q. 34: 28, 36; Q. 40: 57; Q. 45: 26). The fact that this majority is ignorant, or unenlightened to be more specific, is thus highlighted a total of twenty times.

According to Izutsu:⁷⁴

In the Qur'an, the word [*ilm*] is placed in the new conceptual sphere of Divine Revelation and associated with other words than those it used to be associated with in Jahiliyyah, it is now knowledge derived from the Revelation of God, that is, information given by no other than God Himself; it has an objective validity because it is based on the 'Truth' (*Haqq*), the Divine *Haqq* which is the only Reality in the full sense of the word. Compared with the absolute reliability of this source, all other sources are essentially and by nature unreliable.

In this regard, the Qur'an speaks of the knowledge considered sound during the Jahiliyyah as '*But they have no knowledge of this; they are only guessing*,' (Q. 45: 24) thereby stressing that what they know is pure conjecture. In another verse, it says, in a sharper tone,

74 Izutsu, *İslam Düşüncesinde İmân Kavramı*, p. 68.

‘They have no knowledge whatsoever of that. They do nothing but lie,’ (Q. 43: 20) and warns that revelation is the reliable source.

In the Qur’an, this revelation-science relationship and reality is mentioned five times in four different suras. And three of them are addressed to the Prophet: ‘After this knowledge has come to you’ (Q. 2: 145; Q. 3: 61; Q. 13: 37). The other two verses (Q. 2: 120; Q. 18: 43) are also mentioned in the same sense with a slight difference in wording. According to the commentators, the meaning of knowledge in these verses is ‘revelation,’⁷⁵ ‘Prophethood,’⁷⁶ ‘the explanation necessary for knowledge,’⁷⁷ ‘the revelation to the Prophet by Allah of the information about those who pursue falsehood and seek to establish it, and who are stubborn against the truth,’⁷⁸ ‘the manifestation of the truth of what was said to the Prophet and the complete establishment of the knowledge of the Divine address in the Prophet’s heart,’⁷⁹ ‘the transmission of a news or a word in its entirety, that is, in its original, essence, and truth.’⁸⁰

Etymological Analysis of the Word *lā ya‘lamūn*

Derived from the root *‘l-m*, which literally means ‘to know,’ the word *lā ya‘lamūn* is in the present tense, active, third person, plural and negative. *Ma‘rifā*, or perception, can be defined as in ‘My *ma‘rifā* is by contemplating and assessing a work or a thing,’ and *‘ilm* (knowledge), which is more comprehensive than perception, is judged⁸¹ to be true *ma‘rifā*. The opposite of *ma‘rifā* is disbelief and the opposite of *‘ilm* is ignorance. Also, because *ma‘rifā* means knowing through contemplation, it is unapt to ascribe to God the statement *ya‘rifuh allāh* (God perceives it). Rather, it should be said, *ya‘lamuh allāh* (God knows it) because *‘ilm* — whether unmediated (like divine knowledge) or mediated (like human knowledge) — simply means knowing the essence of something. According to another interpretation, *‘ilm* is used for knowing with circumspection and discernment as in awareness and lucidness. *‘ilm* is also defined as believing firmly and approving heartily and as knowing oneself. In the same vein, *‘ilm* is used for establishing something and protect it rigorously. *‘ālim* or *‘alīm* is a person endowed with knowledge. ‘*al-ta‘līm*’ or ‘*al-i‘lām*’ means teaching. ‘*al-ta‘allum*’ means learning and denotes knowing gradually. ‘*al-‘alam*’ is used for a partition separating one piece of land from another or for a mark, standard, or flag, or for an honorable lord of a people. ‘*ma‘lam*’ denotes a piece of work or mark indicating a thing in the sense of *mazannah*,⁸² while ‘*al-‘ālam*’

75 Baydawi, *Anwar al-Tanzil*, vol. 1. p. 103.

76 Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, vol. 4, p. 112.

77 Zamakhshari, *Kashshaf*, vol. 1, p. 368.

78 Tabari, *Jami‘ al-Bayan* (M. Shakir), vol. 3, p. 187.

79 Qushayri, *Lata‘if al-Isharat*, vol. 1, p. 247.

80 Ibn Abi Hatim, *Tafsir*, vol. 2, p. 666.

81 Judge, or translation of *tansis* here, means ‘to assess records and their details thoroughly’ or ‘to defend a case by providing evidence from the Qur’an or hadith’.

82 *mazannah*: a place where something is believed to be, or that which is not definite.

is used for creation. The reason why *al-ʿālam* (universe) is used for all creation apart from God is because it is a means of knowing Him.⁸³

Izutsu states that '[T]here is no room for doubt that the word *ilm*, when it is used in the capacity of a key-term in the Qur'an, means the knowledge derived from the absolutely reliable source.'⁸⁴ The word *ilm* is shifted in the Qur'an from its sense of knowing, the opposite of ignorance, to a framework that is more comprehensive but precise in meaning. As we will see in the verses below, what is meant by knowledge (*ilm*) and knowing here is to know the Supreme Creator, to comprehend the signs indicating Him, and to walk from the sign to the signified. Its senses as mark, work, symbol, and sign denote knowing and choosing consciously and willingly the true path to God's oneness and reaching God's oneness from the signs on the road. This meaning is now forged into a new shape that will remain the same forever and preserve the senses it embodies, because it comes from the most reliable source.

Our first example is a verse from Sūrat Yūnus, which includes objective signs proving God's existence and oneness, His supreme might, and the fact that He is the sole owner of everything.

Be aware! Everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to God. God's promise is true, but most people do not know this (Q. 10: 55).

alā inna lillāh mā fī al-samāwāt wa al-arḍ alā inna waʿd allāh ḥaqq wa lākinna aktharuhum lā yaʿlamūn (55)

Viewed from the semantics of the Qur'an, this verse displays a sophisticated discourse architecture. The keyword in the verse is *ilm*. The word *alā* (Be aware) is synonymous with the sense 'knowing with circumspection and discernment' and scrutinizing something in full concentration and awareness of the verb *ʿalim*. Similarly, the word *lā yaʿlamūn* ([they] do not know) has semantic bonds with the clause *alā inna lillāh mā fī al-samāwāt wa al-arḍ* (*Everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to God*) in one sense of *ʿalima* namely, 'sign, work, or mark indicating a thing.' Here, the heavens and the earth are proofs of God's existence and power in all their contents. Al-Baydawi (d. 685/1286) argues that this statement is a declaration of God's power regarding punishment and reward.⁸⁵ The fact that the earth and the heavens are proofs is stated at the beginning of the sura as follows:

83 Asim Efendi, *Okyânūs*, entry (*ʿ-l-m*), vol. 3, pp. 519–520; See Al-Isfahani, *Al-Mufradat*, entry (*ʿ-l-m*), pp. 580–582; Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-ʿArab*, entry (*faṣl al-ʿyn*), vol. 12, pp.416–417.

84 Izutsu, *İslam Düşüncesinde İmân Kavramı*, p. 70.

85 Baydawi, *Anwar al-Tanzil*, vol. 3, p. 116.

It is He who made the sun a shining radiance and the moon a light, determining phases for it so that you might know the number of years and how to calculate time. God did not create all these without a true purpose; He explains His signs to those who understand. In the succession of night and day, and in what God created in the heavens and earth, there truly are signs for those who are aware of Him (Q. 10: 5–6).

Huwa al-ladhī jaʿala al-shamsa dīyāʿan wa al-qamara nūran wa qaddarahu manāzila litaʿlamū ʿadada sinīna wa al-ḥisāba mā khalaqallahu dhālika illā bi-l-ḥaqqi yufaṣṣil al-āyāti li qawmin yaʿlamūn (5) Inna fī ikhtilāf al-layli wa al-nahāri wa mā khalaqa allāhu fī al-samāwāti wa al-arḍi laāyātīn liqawmin yattaqūn (6)

The phrase *alā* is used twice in Sūrat Yūnus in question (Q. 10: 55). This time attention is directed to another fact concerning this word and the next, and it is stated that *alā inna waʿd allāh ḥaqq* (*Know that God’s promise is true*). There is also a hint at the possibility of a very important piece of information in the repetition of *alā*; it warns about being careful and keeping in mind. What is meant by ‘purpose’ is that God is powerful enough to send down torment on disbelievers and to reward believers in this world and the next.⁸⁶ The sentence is synonymous with the word ‘*ʿalim*’ due to its connotation of God’s power and definite proof of the fact that the hereafter will be coming. Definiteness here stems from (a) the word *alā* at the beginning, (b) the fact that it is a nominal sentence that starts with *inna*, meaning ‘truly,’ used for emphasis, and (c) the fact that the promise is emphasised still further by the *ḥaqq* (true). Thus, the word *ʿilm* shares another common semantic field in its connotation of definiteness, thereby revealing a firm texture of discourse among words. Finally, the clause *wa lākinna aktharuhum lā yaʿlamūn* (**but most people do not know this**) strengthens the texture of words even further, gives the final judgment, and summarises the content in the *fadhla* through words and phrases that support one another. The intricate design of the earth and the heavens as well as what they hold is highlighted by means of an intertwined semantic texture.

Another example of the sophisticated texture of keywords and discourse in the semantic field can be seen in Sūrat al-Ghāfir.

*The creation of the heavens and earth is greater by far than the creation of mankind, though **most people do not know it**. The blind and the sighted are not equal, just as those who believe and do good works and those who do evil are not equal: how seldom you reflect! (Q. 40: 57–58).*

lakhalq al-samāwāt wa al-arḍ akbar min khalq al-nās wa lākinna akthar

86 Al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, vol. 17, p. 265; Abu Hayyan, *al-Bahr al-Muhit*, vol. 6, p. 73.

al-nās lā ya^clamūn (57) *wa mā yastawī al-a^cmā wa al-ba^cṣīr wa al-ladhīn āmanū wa
^camilū al-ṣāliḥāt wa lā al-musī^r qalīlan mā tatadhakkarūn* (58)

The above two verses display a case of two keywords and discourse form that are firmly intertwined in meaning. The first is the word *lā ya^clamūn*, the *muḍāri^c*, active, third person, plural, and negative conjugation of verb *alima*, while the other is *tatadhakkarūn*, the *muḍāri^c*, active, second person, plural, positive conjugation of the past tense verb *dhakkara*. In hinting at the existence and power of the Supreme Creator, the word *lā ya^clamūn* is synonymous with *khalq al-nās* (creation of man), an example of subjective and objective proofs, and *lakhalq al-samāwāt wa al-arḍ* (creation of the earth and the heavens). The word *la ya^clamūn* is also semantically connected, compatible, and consistent with the preceding and succeeding texture of words. *ilm* also has a close semantic connection with the allusion 'The blind and the sighted are not equal.' 'A person with a blind heart who does not recognise God,' at the beginning or at the end despite the signs, the allusion says, 'will not be equal to a person with a discerning heart who knows God.'⁸⁷ Accordingly, the word *al-a^cmā* is an antonym of the verb *alima* in its sense as 'unrecognising/unknowing the truth,' while it is a synonym of the word *al-ba^cṣīr* in its sense as 'knowing and seeing the truth' *al-ba^cṣīra* is a noun derived from the root *b-ṣ-r*. 'It means understanding of the heart. Seeing means understanding what something is, knowing, and becoming learned in something as well as profound belief, interior knowledge, discernment, lucidness, proof and evidence.'⁸⁸ Moreover, it is culmination of *basīra* (foresight), *ilm* (knowledge), and *ma^crifa* (perception).⁸⁹ The verse immediately segues from the allusion to reality and states that 'those who believe and do good works and those who do evil are not equal,' thereby highlighting what needs to be known and clearly revealing that what is meant by *ilm* is reaching the truth. The clause *āmanū* (*They believed*) displays an example of synonymity with both *ba^cṣīra* (foresight) and *ilm* (knowledge). The word *tatadhakkarūn* in 'How seldom you reflect!' shares the same semantic field as knowledge, foresight, and belief. Indeed, the verb *dhakara* the word *tatadhakkarūn* means 'keeping something in mind, memorizing acquired information and knowledge, keeping something at hand in the heart and the tongue, remembering after forgetting or never forgetting, knowing forever, and reminiscing, and in its noun form as *al-dhikrā*, the hereafter and remembering the hereafter.'⁹⁰

The verse also suggests rational proofs of existence of the hereafter.⁹¹ At the beginning

87 Yazir, *ibid.*, 'Ghafir, 40: 58', vol. 6 p. 4175.

88 Asim Efendi, *Okyanūs*, entry (*b-ṣ-r*), vol. 1, p. 768; Al-Zabidi, *Taj al-^cArus*, entry (*b-ṣ-r*), vol. 10, p. 198–199; Al-Isfahani, *Al-Mufradat*, entry (*b-ṣ-r*), pp. 127–128.

89 Al-Askari, *al-Furuq al-Lughawiya*, p. 102.

90 Asim Efendi, *Okyanūs*, entry (*dh-k-r*), vol. 1, pp. 867–868; Al-Isfahani, *Al-Mufradat*, entry (*dh-k-r*), pp. 328–329; Al-Zabidi, *Taj al-^cArus*, entry (*dh-k-r*), vol. 11, p. 380.

91 Al-Maturidi, *Tawilat Ahl al-Sunna*, vol. 9, p. 44; Al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb*, vol. 27, p. 526.

of the sura, attention is called to the existence of those who fight against this proof among others ('None disputes the signs of Allah except the disbelievers, so do not be deceived by their prosperity throughout the land') (Q. 40: 4), and it is stressed that a day of great gathering will come and those who deserve it will be punished ('The Day when they shall come forth from death') (Q. 40: 16). The word 'tathakkur' in the verse connotes activity of memory and remembering that keeps happening forever in the subjective world. We may recall what we have forgotten dozens of times every day; we give life to a dead idea by remembering it, thus witnessing resurrection after death, which we perform through our will. It can be claimed that every remembering (tathakkur) is a resurrection (ba^ʿth). Similarly, the word tatadhakkarūn is firmly connected not only to the knowledge of the purpose and the signified, proofs of subjective and objective proofs presented so far, through contemplation and reflection but also to willful remembering of the connotations of knowledge (ʿilm), foresight (baṣīra), and belief (īmān). Moreover, the texture of words and discourse that strengthens the contents of the verses displays inimitability of expression and radiance of meaning. Despite such clear and emphatic narration, the majority failed to infer what needed to be known from hints or suggestions or obvious allusions and failed to get to the essence of knowledge.

Another example of the semantic texture describing the circumstances of the majority that lack the knowledge of truth is from Sūrat al-Aʿrāf:

They ask you [Prophet] about the Hour, 'When will it happen?' Say, 'My Lord alone has knowledge of it: He alone will reveal when its time will come, a time that is momentous in both the heavens and earth. All too suddenly it will come upon you.' They ask you about it as if you were eager [to find out]. Say, 'God alone has knowledge of [when it will come], though most people do not realize it' (Q. 7: 187).

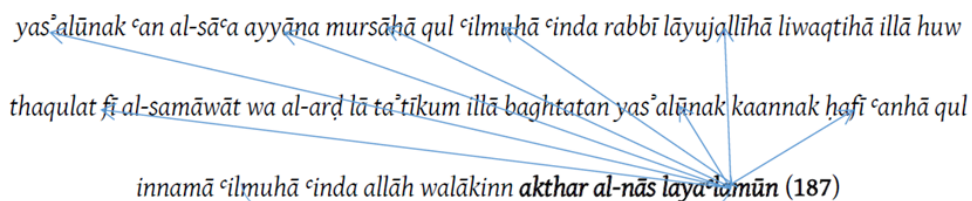


Figure 2: The sophisticated semantic web of the syntax of Sūrat al-Aʿrāf (187)

The keyword in this verse is ʿilm. Seekers of knowledge ask him about the Hour, that is, they want to know as expressed in yasʿalūnak (They ask you). The word lā yaʿlamūn in the fadhla is derived from s-ʿ-l, the root of the word yasʿalūnak, and shares the semantic field of

'learning something from somebody or a means of learning or knowing' with the word '*su'āl*.'⁹² In addition, the word *ilm* is an antonym of the word *ayyāna* (when),⁹³ which connotes 'an unknown time,' and a synonym of *mursāhā* in the semantic field of the coming of that time and 'revealing itself and ensuring that it will become manifest.'⁹⁴

Similarly, *ilm* is a direct synonym of the phrase *ilmuhā* — his knowledge, and has a strong, intricate semantic connection with the clause *lā yujallihā* (*My Lord alone has knowledge of it*). The word *lā yujalli* is derived from the root *j-l-ā* in the taf'īl form, present tense, active, third person, singular and negative. It means 'to discover and expose something, to make obvious, to explain,'⁹⁵ which makes it synonymous with *ilm*. The word *thaqulat*, which means 'physical or psychological burden,'⁹⁶ also shares the same semantic field as *ilm* with its sense here. It means that 'Neither the inhabitants of the skies nor the inhabitants of the earth can tolerate the fear of knowing the exact time of it. The issue of discovering and identifying the exact time of the Judgment Day is such a heavy topic that only God can know it.'⁹⁷ The statement *yas'alūnak kaannak ḥaḥḥā* *anhā* also shares senses with *alima* in a sophisticated way. The clause *yas'alūnak* (they ask you) is repeated in the verse, thereby connecting the end with the beginning and emphasising the fact that an unknown thing of great interest is asked of an authority. It also suggests that suspicion and disbelief prevail. The clause *kaannak ḥaḥḥā* *anhā* also shows exaggeration.⁹⁸ The word *ḥaḥḥā* is an *ism al-fā'il* derived from the root *h-f-ā*. The word *ḥaḥḥā* means 'to study and learn a subject carefully, to master a subject, to be very generous to somebody, to feel relieved, to ask persistently, to push forward, and to ask again and again.'⁹⁹

Accordingly, the word *alima* is synonymous with the clause *kaannak ḥaḥḥā* *anhā* in the sense that 'It is as if you talked much about the hour of the judgment day, studied and researched it thoroughly, and found it about after a long time of inquiry, or you were supposed to know it because you are a prophet and is therefore fully aware of it, or you were obliged to declare it.'¹⁰⁰ Through the declaration *innamā ilmuhā ind allāh* (*God alone has knowledge of [when it will come]*), the semantic connection between *ilm* and *ilm al-sā'a* (knowledge of

92 Al-Fairuzabadi, *Basā'ir*, entry (*as-suāl*), vol. 3, p. 162; Asim Efendi, *Okyânūs*, entry (*s-2-l*), vol. 3, p. 239.

93 Al-Zamakhshari, *Al-Kashshaf*, vol. 2, p. 183; Al-Baydawi, *Anwar al-Tanzil*, vol. 3, p. 44.

94 Asim Efendi, *Okyânūs*, entry (*r-s-ū*), vol. 3, p. 823; Al-Baydawi, *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 44.

95 Asim Efendi, *ibid.*, entry (*j-l-ā*), vol. 3, p. 785; Al-Baydawi, *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 44; Al-Nasafi, *Madarik al-Tanzil*, vol. 1, p. 622; Al-Zabidi, *Taj al-Arus*, entry (*j-l-ā*), vol. 37, p. 372.

96 Asim Efendi, *ibid.* entry (*th-q-l*), vol. 3, p. 154; al-Isfahani, *ibid.* entry (*th-q-l*), p. 174; Al-Zabidi, *ibid.*, entry (*th-q-l*), vol. 28, p. 157.

97 Yazir, *ibid.*, 'Al-A'raf, 7:187' vol. 4, p. 2345.

98 Al-Zamakhshari, *Al-Kashshaf*, vol. 2, p. 183.

99 Asim Efendi, *ibid.* entry (*h-f-ā*), vol. 3, p. 794; al-Isfahani, *ibid.* (*h-f-ā*), pp. 245–246.

100 Yazir, *ibid.*, 'A'raf, 7:187' vol. 4, p. 2345.

the last Hour) is strengthened further. The cases for the ignorance of the group making up the majority are summarised at the end in **‘most people do not realize it,’** that is, this majority does not know the fact that this knowledge is held at the God’s throne and believe it to be a thing knowable by humans. Consequently, a sophisticated texture of words and discourse is revealed as an example of semantics.

In this part of our study, we have focused on the lack of knowledge of the majority, whom the Qur’an condemns and rebukes in various suras with the attribute ‘they do not know.’ This majority is a community that has blinded themselves to the knowledge that Allah has given them and condemned themselves to blindness just like the blind. They did not recognize the Prophet who was sent to them, nor the message he brought, nor their Creator who created them out of nothing, and they turned away and showed a rebellious attitude. When they remained ignorant of the knowledge of truth and reality and did not recognize the prophet and revelation, they remained on foot on the path to attain perfection through knowledge. In the end, everything depends on knowledge. The ignorant cannot explain anything to anyone. A happy future cannot be imagined without knowledge. If man, who is given the opportunity to intervene in things, is ignorant and without knowledge, he will only spoil them. Without thought and contemplation, which are considered an important depth of the human being, knowledge cannot be transformed into consciousness. It cannot move from the known to the unknown. When the Qur’an describes such people who are characterized by lack of knowledge and ignorance, the Qur’an identifies them as included in the concept of *akthar* by saying, ‘but most people do not know the truth.’ And it emphasizes that they always remain in the majority.

As it is known, the only creature among the created beings who has the glory and honor of knowledge is the human being. The ability to do knowledge in the form of a kernel was given to human being in the first moments of his creation as a human being, and the sprouting and fruiting of this kernel was entrusted to man himself with his will and choice. As Bediuzzaman said: ‘The natural duty of man is to perfect himself through learning, which means that man has come to this world to perfect himself through knowledge and prayer. Everything depends on knowledge in terms of nature and will.’¹⁰¹ As seen in our analysis, the opposite of knowledge is ignorance. In the Qur’an, the word ‘knowledge’ has been transferred from the meaning of knowing, which is the opposite of ignorance, to a much wider and inclusive framework that expresses certainty in terms of meaning. As seen in the verses we have given as examples, the meaning of knowledge and knowing here is to know the Almighty Creator, to comprehend the evidence pointing to Him, and to walk from evidence to conclusion. In other words, knowledge is the knowledge of the truth that is beyond doubt. Furthermore, the Qur’an explains the difference between the ignorant and the learned, and between those who have knowledge and those who do not, with the representation ‘The blind

101 Nursi, *Sözler, The Words*, p. 378.

and the seeing are not the same' (Q. 40: 58). In the representation, despite the evidence, it is said at the beginning and at the end, 'The blind-hearted, who do not recognize the truth, and the people of knowledge, who have clairvoyance, who are the seekers of the truth, are not equal.'

In the analysis of the examples we have analyzed, we have seen that each word, selected according to the integrity of the subject, forms a strong word texture both with the key word and with other words in the sentence. As Izutsu says, words form various large and small groups among themselves and are connected to each other in various ways. We have tried to identify this network of words on the Qur'anic text and to show the meaning connections between the words in a figure. When we look carefully at this complex network map, we observe that different words form a harmonious unity around the same meaning. If we think of the key word in which the subject is fleshed out as a pool in terms of the meaning it covers, the other words used in the expression of the subject are like water arcs that feed this pool and are constantly flowing. Being able to see this mutually supportive relationship of meaning between the words of the Qur'an and the interwoven fabric of words and phrases to this extent must be thanks to semantic study.

Conclusion

In this study we analysed the common human characteristics related to the concept of *akthar* in the *fadhlikas* of verses in terms of the semantics of the Qur'an. We did not elaborate on each verse due to their multitude. The examples we have picked correspond to the three eras of human history according to the Qur'an. They warn that the typical reactions of this majority will not change throughout the future course of events.

The characteristic of this majority that the Qur'an dwells on most is that it does not believe in God and prophets. The first concrete example of this fact is seen in Sūrat al-Shu'arā³ in Noah and his people. Noah's almost ten centuries long struggle for declaring religion was concluded in the drowning of the disbelieving majority in the flood. According to resources, the number of the believing survivors is eighty at most, a fact requiring further remarks. The Qur'an issues its judgment succinctly: 'But most of them do not believe' (Al-Shu'ara, 116–122). The keywords in this group of verses are intricately linked to the words around them through firm semantic bonds. Every word is steeped in the common meaning and a sophisticated network of words and discourse has thus been created. In addition to Noah from the first era, Sūrat al-Shu'arā³ narrates the parables of Abraham, Hud, Lot, Salih, and Shuayb and their peoples and avers that the majority in none believed.

The Qur'an narrates the struggle between Moses and Pharaoh from the middle era and reiterates its judgment that 'But most of them do not believe.' For the final era which starts with its revelation, the Qur'an gives the Prophet's struggle with idolators and rules that the

majority of them did not believe either. God presented all kinds of objective and subjective proofs that spoke to reason for them to believe. Yet most people failed to get from the signifier to the signified.

Another salient characteristic of the majority we have analysed is that they have no knowledge. Knowledge here refers to absolute knowledge of God. In the Qur'an the word *ilm*, like the word *īmān*, is a word situated in a field composed of the idea of revelation and endowed with a new position, which is repeated nine times in eight suras as *wa lākinna aktharahum la ya'lamūn* and eleven times in seven suras as *wa lākinna akthara annāsi la ya'lamūn*.

The judgement about the majority with the above-mentioned characteristics is made in the *fadhlakas*. Such conclusive judgment is significant because it is mentioned in the Qur'an which focuses mostly on the attributes without reference to particular names. This suggests that the verdict may apply to people bearing these attributes irrespective of time and place.

The semantic analysis of the chosen verses suggests how thematic words are connected to each other to form a sophisticated semantic web. If you were to replace the words the Qur'an uses to make a point with their synonyms, the glimmer in meaning would fade.

The characteristics we have explored are not the exhaustive list of characteristics of the majority deserving condemnation. The Qur'an also rebukes them because they do not reason, they are ungrateful, they are defiantly disobedient, they attribute an equal partner unto God, they reject God, they dislike truth, they are liars, they turn away from truth, they do not listen to truth, and they are rebellious. Detailed analysis of each of these characteristics can be undertaken in a book-length study.

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