Stylistic Analysis of the Story of Prophet Musa and Khiḍr in the Qur'an, Surah Al-Kahf

L. Alfalaq Bangkit Sanjaya¹
Asep Sopian²
Rinaldi Supriadi³
¹²³Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia

¹ laodealfalaq@upi.edu
² asepsopian@upi.edu**corresponding author*
³ rinaldisupriadi@upi.edu

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the stylistics of the story of Prophet Musa and Khiḍr in Surah Al-Kahf, verses 60–82, focusing on morphological and semantic aspects. This study uses a descriptive-qualitative approach and content analysis. The data was collected through documentation techniques from primary sources such as Qur'anic verses and secondary sources such as tafsīr books, dictionaries, and relevant previous studies. The study results show that the morphological aspects of this story include letter omission, the choice of indefinite words, specific word patterns and forms, and shifts in pronouns, which create profound effects and impressions such as urgency, uniqueness, sincerity, brevity, broad meaning, and politeness. Meanwhile, from a semantic aspect, using synonyms, antonyms, and polysemy highlights the precision of word choice and enhances the message's clarity. These stylistic elements contribute to the beauty and persuasive power of the Qur'an, thereby deepening its meaning. This study emphasizes the importance of stylistic analysis in understanding the beauty of language, particularly in terms of word choice.

Keywords: *stylistics, morphology, semantics, the story of Prophet Musa and Khiḍr, Qur'an*

Introduction

Language style plays an important role in shaping meaning and providing depth of interpretation to a text. (Junaidi, 2021). Properly understanding language style can help grasp the intended impression (Ilmi, 2021). The development of linguistic studies has given rise to the field of stylistics, which serves as an analytical tool for examining language style (Nasution, 2022). This approach highlights word choice and uncovers the reasoning behind it and the aesthetic effects it produces (Ranjha et al., 2020). By analyzing phonological, grammatical, lexical, and imagery aspects, stylistics aids in gaining a deeper understanding of text meaning, including cases where linguistic rule deviations occur to create specific effects (Qorny et al., 2023; Ullah et al., 2023).

Over time, stylistics has been applied in Qur'anic analysis to examine meaning and linguistic beauty (Fadila et al., 2024). Although not a literary work, the Qur'an is regarded as a remarkable standard of linguistic beauty (Nasution, 2022). History records that the eloquence of the Qur'an amazed many, including prominent figures during the time of the Prophet Muhammad. One example is 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, who embraced Islam after reading Surah Taha (Ghofur et al., 2021). The linguistic beauty of the Qur'an is not solely derived from religious belief but also from its structure, which possesses extraordinary persuasive power (Qorny et al., 2023). This indicates that

stylistic studies of the Qur'an are highly relevant in understanding its linguistic aspects and the messages it conveys.

However, the beauty of the Qur'anic language is often difficult to explain systematically, making it challenging for many readers to grasp its meaning fully. (Qorny et al., 2023). Misinterpretations can lead to misunderstandings that obscure the intended message of the Qur'an. (Fadila et al., 2024). On the other hand, some Orientalists have highlighted weaknesses in the Qur'anic language, further emphasizing the need for linguistic studies to provide a more objective and systematic understanding. (Rashid & Lodhi, 2019). In this regard, stylistics serves as an approach that can uncover the deeper linguistic aspects of the Qur'an.

This study employs the Qur'anic stylistics theory developed by Syihabuddin Qalyubi (2013). This theory examines the linguistic style of the Qur'an by highlighting language preferences as well as deviations from general grammatical rules. The analysis focuses on five main aspects: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and imagery. This approach aids in a deeper understanding of the text's meaning, including the reasons behind word choices and grammatical deviations to create specific effects and impressions. In previous studies, this theory has been applied to analyze various surahs in the Qur'an, demonstrating its effectiveness in comprehensively uncovering linguistic aspects.

One of the intriguing Qur'anic narratives for stylistic analysis is the story of Prophet Musa and Khiḍr in Surah Al-Kahf (verses 60–82). This story appears only once in the Qur'an (Shihab, 2002). It recounts Prophet Musa's journey in seeking knowledge from a righteous servant named Khiḍr. They experience three extraordinary events that challenge ordinary human comprehension throughout their journey. From a morphological perspective, the verses in this story exhibit unique linguistic features. For example, in verse 82, the word تسطع appears as a shortened form of تستطيع due to the omission of the letter ت. Additionally, from a semantic perspective, word choice has a notable difference. The word عند is used with رحمة, while لدن is paired with علم, despite these two words seemingly having similar meanings. These linguistic phenomena deviate from general linguistic rules but, in reality, hold profound meanings relevant to the context of the events described in these verses, making them an interesting subject for further study (Al-Hilāl, 2022).

In recent years, stylistic analysis, particularly of Qur'anic texts, has been the focus of various studies. Walidah et al. (2020) Examined the stylistics of Surah Al-Najm using Syihabuddin Qalyubi's theory, analyzing semantic and imagery aspects. Their findings highlight a preference for synonym and antonym usage in the semantic aspect, along with diverse rhetorical styles such as isti'ārah (metaphor), majāz (figurative language), and kināyah (metonymy) in the imagery aspect. Meanwhile, Fadila et al. (2024) Analyzed phonological, morphological, and syntactic aspects in Surah Al-Ḍuḥā, identifying a dominance of plosive consonants and the frequent use of fi'il māḍī (past tense verbs) to reinforce the meaning of the verses.

Other studies have also focused on stylistic analysis of specific surahs. Ulumuddin (2022) Examined Surah Al-Qiyāmah and found that selecting majhūr (voiced) letters in the surah creates a rhetorical effect that evokes emotions. A study by Fikriyah dan Qalyubi (2020) On Surah Al-Lahab analyzed the five stylistic aspects of the Qur'an, revealing a dominance of plosive consonants aligned with the surah's meaning. Additionally, (Sholihah, 2017) Studied morphological variations in verses about human creation, identifying differences in structural composition that enrich meaning without altering the essence.

Several studies have also analyzed the stylistics of Prophet Musa's story. Mannan (2020) examined word choices related to Prophet Musa's staff in various verses, revealing that terms such as عصا, ثعبان, حيّة, and جانّ carry different nuances depending on their context. Another study by Taufiqurrohman dan Nashoih (2021) investigated language style in the dialogue between Prophet Musa and Khiḍr in Surah Al-Kahf using a pragmatic approach. They identified declarative, imperative, and interrogative patterns in their conversation and repetitions that reinforce meaning through variations in wording and context.

Although the aforementioned studies have explored Qur'anic stylistics using various approaches, stylistic analysis of the story of Prophet Musa and Khiḍr in Surah Al-Kahf remains limited. The study by Taufiqurrohman and Nashoih (2021) examined the linguistic style in their dialogue but primarily focused on speech acts and pragmatics without an in-depth analysis of morphology and semantics. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by analyzing the stylistics of the story of Prophet Musa and Khiḍr through two linguistic categories—morphology and semantics—using Syihabuddin Qalyubi's theory. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of linguistic beauty and meaning in the Qur'anic narrative.

Method

This study employs a descriptive-qualitative approach. Sugiyono (2020) explains that qualitative research aims to understand phenomena in-depth through words based on specific contexts and methods. Descriptive analysis creates a systematic, factual, accurate description, depiction, or illustration of the facts, characteristics, and relationships between the investigated phenomena (Nazir, 2014). In the context of this research, the descriptive-qualitative approach is applied to identify, analyze, and describe linguistic phenomena in Surah Al-Kahf (verses 60–82), which narrates the events between Prophet Musa and Khiḍr, with a focus on morphological and semantic aspects.

The data collection technique in this study utilizes the documentation method, which involves obtaining data through documents in the form of written texts, images, or monumental works (Sinaga, 2023). The sources of data in this study are derived from written sources and are classified into two types:

1. Primary Data Source: Surah Al-Kahf (verses 60–82), which narrates the meeting and dialogue between Prophet Musa and Khiḍr.
2. Secondary Data Sources: Tafsīr books, dictionaries (ma'ājim), and previous studies relevant to Qur'anic stylistics.

The data analysis technique used in this research is content analysis, conducted through the following stages:

1. Data Collection: Identifying and gathering verses from Surah Al-Kahf (verses 60–82) as the main research object.
2. Data Classification: Categorizing data based on morphological and semantic aspects according to the Qur'anic stylistics theory.
3. Data Analysis: Examining the verses' morphological structure and semantic meanings using tafsīr sources and previous studies.
4. Result Interpretation: Interpreting the findings to identify distinctive patterns in the story of Prophet Musa and Khiḍr.
5. Conclusion: Summarizing the research findings based on morphological and semantic analysis.

Through this methodology, the study aims to reveal how morphological and semantic aspects in Surah Al-Kahf (verses 60–82) contribute to the beauty and depth of meaning in the story of Prophet Musa and Khiḍr from the perspective of Qur'anic stylistics.

Results

This section presents the study's findings on the stylistic analysis of the story of Prophet Musa and Khiḍr in Surah Al-Kahf (verses 60–82) based on two main aspects: morphology and semantics.

Morphological Level

According to Qalyubi (2013), stylistic analysis in the morphological aspect focuses on the selection and transformation of word forms from one form to another. This analysis aims to uncover the reasons behind word form changes within the same verse and their impact on meaning. As explained by Ali et al. (2020), morphological studies recognize that words undergo development, either through substitution or transformation. The selection and modification of word forms play a crucial role in a text, as they influence both the coherence of sentence structure and the meaning conveyed (Fajariyah, 2020). The findings of the analysis are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Stylistic Analysis at the Morphological Level

Verse Segment	Verse Location	Analysis Findings
نَبْغ	Verse 64	Omission of the letter ي
عَبْدًا	Verse 65	Use of the indefinite form
أَتَّبِعُكَ	Verse 66	Use of the افتعل pattern
تُعَلِّمَن	Verse 66	Omission of the letter ي
رُشْدًا	Verse 66	Use of the فُعْل pattern (verbal noun)
فَأَرَادَ dan فَأَرَدْتُ , فَأَرَدْنَا	Verses 79, 81, and 82	Variation of subject pronouns
تَسْطِعْ	Verse 82	Omission of the ت *mazīdah*

Semantic Level

In the study of Qur'anic semantics, the meaning of words does not stand alone but depends on various contexts. According to Qalyubi (2009), semantic units in the Qur'an are interconnected, so understanding a word must take into account its relationship with adjacent words. Semantic analysis includes the examination of word choice, sentences, and language as a whole, including lexical aspects such as synonymy, antonymy, and polysemy. The findings of the analysis are presented in the following tables:

Table 2. Word Choice Analysis

Selected Word	Verse Location	Equivalent Word	Meaning
أَبْرَحُ	Verse 60	لَا يَزَالُ	Will not stop
حُقُبًا	Verse 60	أَبَدًا	A long time
تَأْوِيْل	Verses 78 and 82	تَفْسِيْر	Explanation

Table 3. Synonym Usage Analysis

Word	Verse Location	Synonym	Verse Location	Meaning
فَتَى	Verse 60	غلام	Verse 74	Young man
عِنْد	Verse 65	لَدُن	Verse 65	Beside
عِلْم	Verse 65	ذِكْر dan خُبْر	Verses 68 and 70	Knowledge
إِمْر	Verse 71	نُكْر	Verse 74	Something astonishing

Table 4. Antonym Usage Analysis

Word	Verse Location	Meaning	Antonym	Verse Location	Meaning
قَرْیَة	Verse 77	Village	مَدِيْنَة	Verse 82	City

Table 5. Polysemy Usage Analysis

Word	Verse Location	Meaning

| رَحْمَة | Verses 65 and 82 | Revelation, Prophethood, Sainthood, Mercy |
| وَرَاء | Verse 79 | Behind, in front |

Discussion
Morphological Level
Omission of the ي *Sākinah* in the Word نَبْغ

In Surah Al-Kahf (18:64), there is the imperfect verb نَبْغِ, which originally appears as نَبْغِيْ, derived from the root بَغَى, meaning "to seek" or "to desire." In this verse, the word نَبْغ undergoes the omission of the letter ي, as seen in Allah's words:

قال ذلك ما كنا نبغ فارتدا على آثارهما قصصا

"*He (Musa) said, 'That is [the place] we were looking for.' So they returned, retracing their footsteps.*"

The omission of the letter ي in نَبْغ conveys a sense of urgency and haste, reflecting Prophet Musa's eagerness to return quickly to the place where the fish had disappeared—a sign indicating the presence of Khiḍr (Al-Hilāl, 2022). Since Musa had not yet achieved his primary objective, the shortened form emphasizes that the journey was still ongoing.

For comparison, in Surah Yusuf (12:65), the complete form نَبْغِيْ is used:

يأبانا ما كنا نبغ هذه بضاعتنا ردت إلينا

"*Oh, our father, what more could we desire? This is our merchandise returned to us.*"

In this verse, the word نَبْغِيْ remains in its full form because the brothers of Prophet Yusuf had already attained their objective—retrieving their goods. Conversely, in Surah Al-Kahf (18:64), Musa had not yet reached his goal, so the more concise form نَبْغ is used to emphasize the ongoing nature of their journey (Al-Hilāl, 2022). Thus, this omission highlights a sense of urgency and underscores the unfinished purpose of the journey.

Use of the Indefinite Form in the Word عبدا

In Surah Al-Kahf (18:65), Khiḍr is referred to as عَبْدًا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا ("a servant from among Our servants"). Allah says:

فوجدا عبدا من عبادنا آتيناه رحمة من عندنا وعلّمنه من لدنا علما

"*Then they found a servant from among Our servants to whom We had given mercy from Us and had taught him knowledge from Our Presence.*"

The use of the indefinite form (nakirah) in عَبْدًا signifies that Khiḍr is merely one among many of Allah's devoted servants (Al-Hilāl, 2022). According to Al-Zuḥaylī (2016), this form also serves a tafkhīm (exaltation) function, highlighting Khiḍr's special status.

This contrasts with the mention of عَبْدِهِ ("His servant") in Surah Al-Kahf (18:1), which refers to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him):

الحمد لله الذي أنزل على عبده الكتاب ولم يجعل له عوجا

"*All praise is due to Allah, who has sent down the Book upon His servant and has not placed therein any deviation.*"

The use of the definite form (*ma'rifah*) here signifies the great honour bestowed upon Prophet Muhammad, as he is the most perfect servant, to whom the Qur'an was revealed (Al-Zuḥaylī, 2016). According to Shihab (2002), every occurrence of the word عَبْد that is attributed to Allah using a pronoun (*ḍamīr*) refers exclusively to Prophet Muhammad due to the perfection of his servitude and devotion.

Thus, the indefinite form عَبْدًا about Khiḍr conveys a sense of generality. In this context, Khiḍr is merely one among many of Allah's righteous servants, though he possesses a unique distinction in the form of special knowledge granted to him by Allah.

Choice of the افتعل Pattern in اتّبع

In Surah Al-Kahf (18:66), when Prophet Musa asks for permission to follow Khiḍr, he says:

قال له موسى هل أتّبعك على أن تعلّمن ممّا علّمت رشدا

"Musa said to him, 'May I follow you so that you may teach me something of the sound knowledge that you have been taught?'"

In this verse, Prophet Musa uses the verb أَتَّبِعُكَ, derived from the augmented verb (*fi'il mazīd*) اتّبع – يتّبع, which follows the افتعل pattern. This pattern signifies diligence and intense effort in following (Dāwud, 2008).

This contrasts with Surah Al-Baqarah (2:38), where Allah says:

فمن تبع هداي فلا خوف عليهم ولا هم يحزنون

"Whoever follows My guidance, no fear will be upon them, nor will they grieve."

In this verse, Allah speaks to Prophet Adam using the base verb تَبِعَ – يَتْبَعُ, which conveys a general sense of following and obedience. However, in Surah Al-Kahf (18:66), the use of اتّبع is more appropriate because it reflects the great effort and patience required of Prophet Musa in seeking knowledge from Khiḍr (Al-Hilāl, 2022).

The long and arduous journey undertaken by Prophet Musa demonstrates that this learning process was neither easy nor without trials (Shihab, 2002). Therefore, the افتعل pattern in اتّبع emphasizes Musa's dedication, patience, and utmost effort in his pursuit of knowledge.

Omission of the First-Person Pronoun ي in the Word تُعَلِّمَنِ

In Surah Al-Kahf (18:66), the word تُعَلِّمَنِ undergoes the omission of the ي *mutakallim* (first-person pronoun), so it is not written in its full form as تُعَلِّمَنِي. Allah says:

قال له موسى هل أتّبعك على أن تعلّمن ممّا علّمت رشدا

"Musa said to him, 'May I follow you so that you may teach me (a portion of) the sound knowledge that you have been taught?'"

The omission of ي here indicates that the knowledge Prophet Musa would learn from Khiḍr was not extensive. It also reflects a sense of urgency and brevity in his request. In contrast, in Surah Yusuf (12:37), Prophet Yusuf says:

ذلكما ممّا عَلَّمَنِي رَبِّي

"That is part of what my Lord has taught me."

In this verse, the ي is not omitted because the knowledge in question is vast—namely, the interpretation of dreams, which Allah granted him (Al-Hilāl, 2022).

A similar case is found in Surah Al-Kahf (18:24), where the word يَهْدِيَنِ undergoes the omission of ي when Prophet Muhammad seeks certainty of revelation regarding the story of the People of the Cave (Al-Zuḥaylī, 2016). In contrast, in Surah Al-Qaṣaṣ (28:22), يَهْدِيَنِي is written in full because, in that context, Prophet Musa is asking for complete guidance (Al-Hilāl, 2022).

Thus, the omission of ي is often used to emphasize certainty, decisiveness, and brevity in meaning.

Choice of the *Maṣdar* Form رُشْدًا

In Surah Al-Kahf (18:66), when Prophet Musa asks Khiḍr for permission to follow him, he uses the word رُشْدًا, which is the *maṣdar* (verbal noun) of رَشَدَ – يَرْشُدُ, meaning guidance or sound judgment:

قال له موسى هل أتَّبعك على أن تعلِّمن ممّا علّمت رُشْدًا

"Musa said to him, 'May I follow you so that you may teach me (a portion of) the sound knowledge that you have been taught?'"

In the context of this story, this *maṣdar* form is preferred over رَشَدًا, even though both share a similar root meaning. According to Al-Zuḥaylī (2016), رُشْد encompasses all forms of goodness, both worldly and spiritual. In this verse, the choice of رُشْدًا indicates that the knowledge Prophet Musa seeks from Khiḍr is not limited to faith and worship but also includes wisdom in worldly matters.

Conversely, رَشَدًا is more specifically associated with guidance in matters of the afterlife. This distinction is evident in Surah Al-Kahf (18:10), where the youths of the cave (*Aṣḥābul-Kahf*) pray for divine guidance:

إذ أوى الفتية إلى الكهف فقالوا ربنا آتنا من لدنك رحمة وهيِّئ لنا من أمرنا رَشَدًا

"(Remember) when the youths sought refuge in the cave and said, 'Our Lord, grant us mercy from Yourself and guide us rightly in our affair.'"

In this supplication, رَشَدًا is used to emphasize guidance specifically in faith and spiritual salvation (Al-Hilāl, 2022). Thus, رُشْدًا is broader in meaning than رَشَدًا, as it encompasses guidance in all aspects of life.

Variation of Subject Pronouns in the Word أراد

In Surah Al-Kahf (18:79, 81, and 82), there are variations in the use of *ḍamīr* (subject pronoun) when Khiḍr explains his actions to Musa.

In verse 79, when Khiḍr explains his reason for damaging the boat, he attributes the harmful action to himself, saying:

أمّا السفينة فكانت لمسكين يعملون في البحر فأردتُ أن أعيبها

" As for the boat, it belonged to poor people working at sea, so I intended to damage it."

Here, he uses فَأَرَدتُّ (so I intended), showing politeness by not associating harm directly with Allah (Al-Zuḥaylī, 2016).

However, in verse 81, when explaining the reason behind the killing of the boy, Khiḍr says:

فأردنا أن يبدلهما ربّهما خيرا منه زكوة وأقرب رحما

"So we intended that their Lord should replace him with one who is purer and more affectionate towards his parents."

Here, Khiḍr uses فَأَرَدْنَا (so We intended), uniting his will with Allah's. This indicates that Khiḍr executed the action, but Allah was the one who would replace the child with a better one (Shihab, 2002).

In verse 82, when explaining his reason for repairing the wall, he says:

فأراد ربّك أن يبلغا أشدّهما ويستخرجا كنزهما رحمة من ربّك

"So your Lord intended that they reach maturity and retrieve their treasure as a mercy from your Lord."

Here, Khiḍr uses فَأَرَادَ رَبُّكَ (so your Lord intended), attributing the act entirely to Allah, since it was a purely benevolent deed (Al-Zuḥaylī, 2016).

This variation demonstrates linguistic politeness and careful speech: harm is attributed to humans, pure goodness to Allah, and actions with mixed aspects are expressed in the plural form (Shihab, 2002).

Omission of the ت *Mazīdah* in the Word تَسْطِعْ

In Surah Al-Kahf (18:78 and 18:82), there is a difference between تستطع and تسطع, where the letter ت is omitted in verse 82. The omission of letters in Arabic often indicates something lighter or less complex. In this context, تستطع is used while the explanation is still ongoing:

<div dir="rtl">سأنبّئك بتأويل ما لم تستطع عليه صبرا</div>

"I will inform you of the interpretation of what you could not bear patiently."

Meanwhile, تسطع is used after the explanation, marking the end of the conversation and the separation between Musa and Khiḍr (Al-Hilāl, 2022). Khiḍr says:

<div dir="rtl">ذلك تأويل ما لم تسطع عليه صبرا</div>

"This is the interpretation of what you could not bear patiently."

The word تسطع carries the same meaning as تستطع (to be able), just as استطاع and اسطاع both mean أطاق (to be able) (Al-Zuḥaylī, 2016). Since Khiḍr has already explained the events, the lighter form تسطع is used, similar to the variation found in:

<div dir="rtl">فما اسطاعوا أن يظهروه وما استطاعوا له نقبا (18:97)</div>

Which indicates different levels of difficulty (Ālu-Shaikh, 2004). According to Al-Biqāʿī, the omission of ت in verse 82 reflects Musa's deeper understanding of the events compared to earlier (Shihab, 2002).

Thus, the omission of the letter ت here creates a sense of ease and conveys something lighter or less complex compared to its original form.

Semantic Level
Word Choice
The Word أَبْرَحُ

The word أبرح in Surah Al-Kahf (18:60) originates from برح, which means "to vanish" or "to disappear." In the context of this verse, لا أبرح means "I will not stop walking" until reaching the intended destination (Al-Farrāʾ, 2017). Allah says:

<div dir="rtl">وإذ قال موسى لفته لا أبرح حتّى أبلغ مجمع البحرين أو أمضي حقبا</div>

"And [mention] when Musa said to his servant, 'I will not stop [travelling] until I reach the junction of the two seas, or I will continue for a long period.'"

Linguistically, برح is often used in negated sentences to emphasize the continuity of action, similar to ما زال - لا يزال, which also means "to continue" or "not to stop" (Al-Aṣfahānī, 2013). An example of this is in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:217):

<div dir="rtl">ولا يزالون يقاتلونكم حتّى يردّوكم عن دينكم إن استطاعوا</div>

"And they will not cease fighting you until they turn you back from your religion if they are able."

The key difference is that لا أبرح indicates an action that can stop once the goal is achieved, whereas لا يزال denotes an action that is difficult or impossible to stop. The use of لا أبرح also reinforces Musa's determination and persistence in his journey ('Āshūr, 1997). Thus, لا أبرح is the most appropriate choice in this context.

The Word حُقُبًا

The word حُقُبًا in Surah Al-Kahf (18:60) means "a very long period of time." Allah says:

<div dir="rtl">وإذ قال موسى لفته لا أبرح حتّى أبلغ مجمع البحرين أو أمضي حقبا</div>

"And [mention] when Musa said to his servant, 'I will not stop [travelling] until I reach the junction of the two seas, or I will continue for a long period."

This word is the singular form of أَحْقَاب, which is used in Surah An-Naba (78:23) to describe the long and unending torment of the inhabitants of Hell (Al-Hilāl, 2022).

According to Al-Zuḥaylī (2016), حُقب can mean 70 or 80 years, while in the Qays dialect, it refers to one year (Ālu-Shaikh, 2004; Al-Ṭabarī, 2007). Al-Aṣfahānī (2013) states that الحُقْبَة refers to an indefinite time.

In the context of Surah Al-Kahf (18:60), حُقُبًا signifies Prophet Musa's determination to continue his journey until he reaches his destination, even if it takes an extended but finite period. This differs from its plural form, أحقاب, which in Surah An-Naba (78:23) emphasizes the eternal nature of Hell's punishment (Shihab, 2002).

A word with a similar meaning to حُقب is أبدا, which appears more frequently in the Qur'an and conveys a more absolute sense of eternity, as in Surah An-Nisa (4:169):

إلّا طريق جهنّم خلدين فيها أبدا وكان ذلك على الله يسيرا

"Except for the path of Hell; they will abide therein forever. And that, for Allah, is [always] easy"

In this verse, أبدا is used to describe the eternal punishment of disbelievers. The word أبدا signifies an endless period and is often paired with خالدين to reinforce the idea of perpetual existence (Al-Hilāl, 2022; Al-Zuḥaylī, 2016).

Thus, the word حُقب is chosen in the context of Prophet Musa's journey to indicate a long but finite duration, unlike أبدا, which is more suited for describing an infinite period.

The Word تَأْوِيْل

In Surah Al-Kahf (18:78, 82), the word تأويل is used in the context of Khiḍr's explanation of his actions to Prophet Musa:

سأنبّئك بتأويل ما لم تستطع عليه صبرا

"I will inform you of the interpretation of what you could not bear patiently." (18:78)

ذلك تأويل ما لم تسطع عليه صبرا

"That is the interpretation of what you could not bear patiently." (18:82)

The word تأويل derives from آل – يأول – أول – أولا, meaning to return or to lead back to something. In the Qur'an, it is used to refer to meaning, explanation, the true nature of something, or the eventual outcome of an event (Shihab, 2002). Linguistically, تأويل signifies the final consequence or deeper meaning of an affair. In technical usage, تأويل refers to shifting the apparent meaning of a word to another meaning based on strong evidence or revealing the hidden significance of an ambiguous expression (Dāwud, 2008).

The word تأويل differs from تفسير, which means explicit explanation and originates from الفَسر, meaning to uncover what is hidden. The Qur'an frequently uses تأويل, whereas تفسير appears only once in Surah Al-Furqan (25:33). تأويل is often associated with interpreting hidden meanings, such as dream interpretation and scriptural exegesis (Dāwud, 2008).

The key distinction between the two is that التفسير clarifies a text explicitly, while التأويل unveils hidden wisdom or shifts the meaning from its apparent sense to a metaphorical or deeper interpretation. In Islamic jurisprudence, المفسَّر refers to something clear and explicit, whereas its opposite, المجمل, denotes something general that requires further explanation (Al-'Askarī, 2013).

Thus, in the context of Prophet Musa and Khiḍr's story, the word تأويل is chosen to indicate the deeper reality and hidden wisdom behind Khiḍr's actions—damaging the boat, killing a child, and rebuilding a wall without compensation—which seemed perplexing to Prophet Musa but carried profound meaning.

Synonym

Synonyms are linguistic forms that have similar or identical meanings to other forms (Qalyubi, 2009). Lexically, synonyms indicate a similarity in meaning between two words, not through direct repetition of the word itself but rather through the repetition of its meaning (Walidah et al., 2020). Abu Hilāl Al-'Askarī argues that if two words have the same meaning or object, each word must have specific characteristics that differentiate it. If there were no differences in meaning or function between them, one of the words would become redundant. The following discussion explores the use of synonyms in the story of Prophet Musa and Khiḍr.

The Words نُكُر and إمُر

The word إمر means something great and dreadful, whereas نكر refers to something severe and repugnant to the heart (Al-Zuḥaylī, 2016). Both words are used to describe astonishing and shocking events.

In the Qur'an, إمر appears only once, in Surah Al-Kahf (18:71), to describe Khiḍr's act of making a hole in the boat:

<div dir="rtl">فانطلقا حتّى إذا ركبا في السفينة خرقها قال أخرقتها لتغرق أهلها لقد جئت شيئا إمرا</div>

"So they set out, until when they boarded a boat, he made a hole in it. [Musa] said, 'Have you made a hole in it to drown its people? You have certainly done something grave.'"

Meanwhile, نكر appears four times in the Qur'an, including in Surah Al-Kahf (18:74), where it describes the killing of the child:

<div dir="rtl">فانطلقا حتى إذا لقيا غلما فقتله قال أقتلت نفسا زكية بغير نفس لقد جئت شيئا نكرا</div>

"So they set out, until they met a boy, and he killed him. [Musa] said, 'Have you killed a pure soul for no [wrongful] killing? You have certainly done something terrible.'"

According to Dāwud (2008), نكر is more severe than إمر because it denotes something evil and irreparable, such as Khiḍr's killing of the boy. In contrast, إمر describes a major incident whose consequences are not necessarily catastrophic, as Khiḍr's act of making a hole in the boat did not necessarily mean it would sink.

Al-Zamakhsharī (2013) further explains that إمر signifies something dreadful or a great calamity, whereas نكر implies an act of evil or immorality. Some scholars argue that killing is less severe than sinking a ship, while others believe the opposite, as murder is final and irreversible (Shihab, 2002).

Thus, the use of these two seemingly similar words in different contexts is precise, as each conveys a distinct impression in line with the nature of the actions being described.

The Words غُلَام and فَتَى

In the verses narrating the story of Prophet Musa and Khiḍr, two words are frequently used to refer to a young boy or youth: فتى and غلام. While both words share a similar meaning, they have important differences in their contextual usage. The word فتى refers to a young man who has reached maturity but without any connotation of sexual desire, whereas غلام refers to a boy ranging from childhood to puberty, with a possible connotation of physical maturity (Al-Zuḥaylī, 2016).

One example of فتى appears in Surah Al-Kahf (18:60), where Yusha' bin Nun is mentioned as Prophet Musa's devoted servant during his journey:

<div dir="rtl">وإذ قال موسى لفته لا أبرح حتى أبلغ مجمع البحرين أو أمضي حقبا</div>

"And [mention] when Musa said to his young servant, 'I will not stop [travelling] until I reach the junction of the two seas, or I will continue for a long period.'"

In this verse, Yusha bin Nun is referred to as فتى, indicating that he is a mature young man who has reached a level of responsibility and plays a significant role in Musa's journey. The word فتى is also often used as an expression of honour, as seen in a hadith of the Prophet, which recommends using فتى instead of عبد ('abd, meaning "slave") to refer to a servant (Shihab, 2002).

On the other hand, in Surah Al-Kahf (18:74), the word غلام is used to describe the boy whom Khiḍr killed:

فانطاقا حتى إذا لقيا غلاما فقتله قال أقلت نفسا زكية بغير نفس لقد جئت شيئا نكرا

"*So they set out, until when they met a boy, he [Khiḍr] killed him. [Musa] said, 'Have you killed a pure soul for no [wrongful] killing? You have certainly done something terrible."*

In this verse, the boy who was killed by Khiḍr is referred to as غلام, indicating that he was still young and likely had not reached full maturity. The word غلام in the Qur'an can also refer to a newborn baby, as seen in Surah Maryam (19:7-8), where it is used to describe the birth of Prophet Yahya:

يزكريا إنا نبشرك بغلم اسمه يحيى لم نجعل له من قبل سميا. قال رب أنى يكون لي غلم وكانت امرأتي عاقرا وقد بلغت من الكبر عتيا

"*O Zechariah, indeed We give you good tidings of a boy whose name will be Yahya. We have not assigned to anyone before this the same name. He [Zechariah] said, 'My Lord, how will I have a boy when my wife has been barren and I have reached extreme old age?'"*

Similarly, in Surah Al-Ḥijr (15:53), the word غلام is used when the angels bring the glad tidings of Prophet Ishaq's birth to Prophet Ibrahim. Based on these contexts, it can be concluded that غلام refers to an age range from infancy to adolescence.

Dāwud (2008) explains that the key difference between غلام and فتى is that غلام encompasses children up to adolescence, whereas فتى refers to a youth who has matured and is ready for responsibility. Al-Zamakhsharī (2013) adds that فتى can also mean a servant or a student who loyally follows his teacher.

Thus, the precise usage of these two words in the Qur'an reflects distinct nuances, accurately conveying differences in meaning according to their respective contexts.

The Words عِنْد and لَدُن

In the Arabic language, the words عند and لدن both mean "beside" or "from the side of." However, they have different contextual meanings. In Surah Al-Kahf (18:65), من عندنا is used for رحمة (mercy), referring to Allah's visible blessings, such as revelation and prophethood. Meanwhile, من لدنا is used for knowledge, indicating a special, hidden knowledge that cannot be comprehended through ordinary understanding—known in Sufism as '*ilm ladunī* (Al-Zuḥaylī, 2016).

فوجدا عبدا من عبادنا آتيناه رحمة من عندنا وعلّمناه من لدنا علما

"*Then they found a servant from among Our servants to whom We had given mercy from Us and had taught him knowledge from Us.*"

According to Al-Hilāl (2022), من لدنا signifies a special gift granted to a servant who is close to Allah, whereas من عندنا is more general, encompassing all of humanity. Al-Biqā'ī and Ṭabaṭaba'ī emphasize that عند refers to something clear and apparent, while لدن conveys the depth and exclusivity of divine, hidden knowledge (Shihab, 2002).

Thus, the use of عند for رحمة highlights the clarity of Allah's blessings, while لدن for knowledge signifies the inner, esoteric nature of divine wisdom, which is granted only to chosen servants.

The Words ذكر, خبر ,عِلْم and

In the story of Prophet Musa and Khiḍr, the Qur'an uses three different terms for "knowledge"—علم, خبر, and ذكر—each applied according to the context of the events that unfold.

The term علم in Surah Al-Kahf (18:65) refers to *'ilm ladunī*, a special divine knowledge that Allah directly bestows upon Khiḍr without the need for learning or intermediaries. This knowledge is profound and granted only to Allah's chosen servants (Shihab, 2002).

فوجدا عبدا من عبادنا آتيناه رحمة من عندنا وعلّمناه من لدنا علما

"*Then they found a servant from among Our servants to whom We had given mercy from Us and had taught him knowledge from Us.*"

Meanwhile, in verse 68, the term خبر is used to describe deep awareness of the true nature of something.

وكيف تصبر على ما لم تحط به خبرا

"*And how can you be patient with what you do not encompass in knowledge?*"

Unlike علم, which has a general meaning, خبر is more specific, denoting a detailed and thorough understanding. This is evident in the word خبير, which means "an expert or one with deep experience" and corresponds with Allah's attributes, such as عليم (the All-Knowing) and قدير (the Omnipotent) (Al-'Askarī, 2013).

On the other hand, the term ذكر appears in verse 70 when Khiḍr tells Prophet Musa that he will eventually explain his actions if Musa remains patient.

قال فإن اتّبعتني فلا تسئلني عن شيء حتّى أحدث لك منه ذكرا

"*He said, 'If you follow me, do not ask me about anything until I mention it to you.'*"

The term ذكر is chosen because it refers to knowledge that arises after forgetfulness or neglect. This aligns with Prophet Musa's repeated failure to keep the agreement not to ask questions before Khiḍr explained (Al-'Askarī, 2013).

Thus, the use of these three terms is highly precise, as each carries a distinct nuance that aligns with the context of the story.

Antonym

Antonyms are words that have opposite meanings and show a contrastive relationship between them. For example, the words "buy" and "sell" form an antonymic pair, and the relationship between them is called antonymy (Walidah et al., 2020).

The Words مدينة and قرية

In Surah Al-Kahf (18:77), the place visited by Musa and Khiḍr is initially referred to as قرية, meaning "village." However, in verse 82, when Khiḍr explains his actions, the term changes to مدينة, meaning "city."

فانطلقا حتى إذا أتيا أهل قرية استطعما أهلها فأبوا أن يضيّفوهما

"*Then they set out until, when they came to the people of a village, they asked its people for food, but they refused to offer them hospitality.*" (18:77)

وأمّا الجدار فكان لغلمين يتيمين في المدينة وكان تحته كنز لهما وكان أبوهما صالحا

"*And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city, and beneath it was a treasure belonging to them, and their father had been a righteous man.*" (18:82)

According to Al-Hilāl (2022), قرية refers to a small settlement, whereas مدينة denotes a larger region. Al-Zuḥaylī (2016) explains that these terms can sometimes be used interchangeably.

Shihab (2002) suggests that this shift in terminology is intentional to create different impressions. The use of قرية when describing the inhospitable villagers carries a tone of

reproach, whereas مدينة is used to honour the righteousness of the orphans' father and the sanctity of their preserved wealth.

Polysemy

Etymologically, polysemy comes from the words *poly* (many) and *sema* (sign). In Arabic linguistic studies, polysemy is known as *mushtarak al-lafẓ*. It refers to using a linguistic form, such as a word or phrase, with multiple meanings (Qalyubi, 2009).

The Word وراء

In Surah Al-Kahf (18:79), when Khiḍr explains the reason behind his act of damaging the boat, he says:

أمّا السفينة فكانت لمسكين يعملون في البحر فأردتُ أن أعيبها وكان وراءهم ملك يأخذ كل سفينة غصبا

"As for the boat, it belonged to poor people who worked at sea, so I intended to damage it because before them was a king who seized every good boat by force."

The word وراء has a dual meaning—it can signify both "behind" and "in front"—because it originates from الموارة, meaning "concealment" (Shihab, 2002). In this verse, the phrase وراءهم, which translates to "behind them," actually means "ahead of them," similar to its usage in Surah Al-Jāthiyah (45:10), where وراءهم جهنّم ("behind them is Hell") refers to Hell awaiting them in the future (Al-Zuḥaylī, 2016).

Al-Ṭabarī (2007) mentions that some linguists classify warā' as a contronym (a word with opposite meanings). They support this with a line of poetry: ودوني تميم، والفلاة ورائيا (Before me are Banu Tamim, and behind me is the desert.)

Al-Farrā' (2017) explains that in the context of time, something yet to come can be referred to as "behind", while something currently faced is "ahead." For example, one might say, "Behind you is winter," or "In front of you is winter," both meaning that winter is approaching (Al-Farrā', 2017).

In this verse, the word خلف is not used. خلف in Arabic specifically means "behind" in the sense of delay or being left behind. It appears 20 times in the Qur'an, such as in Surah Al-Ḥashr (59:15) and Surah An-Nisā' (4:9), where it denotes something that follows afterwards (Dāwud, 2008).

On the other hand, وراء means "concealment" or "barrier" and appears 24 times in the Qur'an (Dāwud, 2008). It has several meanings:

1) Delay in time (e.g., Surah Maryam 19:5)
2) Delay in place (e.g., Surah Al-Aḥzāb 33:53)
3) "In front" (e.g., Surah Al-Kahf 18:79, as explained by Abu Ḥayyān)
4) A sense of excess or abundance (e.g., Surah Al-Mu'minūn 23:7)

In conclusion, خلف specifically means "behind," whereas وراء has a broader range of meanings, encompassing delays in time, place, quantity, and even "in front." This makes warā' the most precise choice in this context (Dāwud, 2008).

The Word رحمة

In Surah Al-Kahf, the word رحمة carries various meanings. In verse 65, رحمة is interpreted as revelation, prophethood, or the status of a wali (saint), according to the majority of scholars (Al-Zamakhsharī, 2013). Meanwhile, in verse 82, رحمة signifies mercy and compassion. Other scholars view it as encompassing all of Allah's blessings (Al-Zuḥaylī, 2016).

فوجدا عبدا من عبادنا آتيناه رحمة من عندنا وعلّمناه من لدنا علما

"*Then they found one of Our servants, to whom We had granted mercy from Us and whom We had taught knowledge from Our Presence.*" (18:65)

فأراد ربّك أن يبلغا أشدّهما ويستخرجا كنزهما رحمة من ربّك

"*So your Lord intended that they reach maturity and extract their treasure as a mercy from your Lord.*" (18:82)

The usage of رحمة for all these meanings is precise, as Allah's mercy is vast and encompasses all things (Al-Hilāl, 2022).

Conclusion

Based on the stylistic analysis of the story of Prophet Musa and Khiḍr in Surah Al-Kahf, verses 60-82, it is found that the choice of diction and variation in word forms in the Qur'an have specific effects that carry profound meanings. From a morphological perspective, phenomena such as letter omission, indefinite forms, verb derivation patterns, and pronoun variations create certain effects and impressions, such as urgency, exclusivity, earnestness, conciseness, broad meaning, and politeness. Meanwhile, from a semantic perspective, using synonyms, antonyms, and polysemy demonstrates the accuracy of word choice and clarifies the conveyed message.

This study demonstrates that stylistics is an effective tool for understanding the beauty and depth of textual meaning, especially in the Qur'an. The variation in word choices within the text creates an aesthetic effect while reinforcing the moral message. However, this research is limited to morphological and semantic aspects without covering phonology, syntax, and imagery. Therefore, further studies are recommended to explore other aspects of understanding the Qur'anic linguistic style.

Acknowledgement

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