
Language and Divine Discourse: A Linguistic and Persuasive Analysis of the Selected Verses of the Holy Quran

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Abstract

This study explores the various persuasive strategies and linguistic features used in the Holy Quran to convey the Almighty's divine discourse. Although many studies have examined the various verses of the Holy Quran from different perspectives, no one has analysed its text, especially from a discourse perspective. This study exclusively focuses on analysing linguistic features and persuasive strategies employed in the selected verses of the Holy Quran. The study is qualitative and grounded in an interpretivist paradigm. The study employs a discourse-analytical approach and textual analysis to examine selected verses of the Holy Quran. The study's findings reveal that Pharaoh's use of language as Master of the Land of Egypt, as noted in selected verses of Surah As-Zukhruf, is relevant to the role of language as an instrument of power and control. Pharaoh's use of rhetorical questions, language of intimidation, as well as descriptors and modifiers in speeches, becomes the dominant discourse, with an arsenal of oppressive tactics and strict control structures, to define and manipulate the discourse through intimidation and control.

Keywords: Religious Discourse, Quranic Verses, Linguistic Features, Persuasive Strategies, Discourse Analysis

Introduction

It is pertinent to note that language is the main vehicle of religious communication, providing tools of information and structure for persuasion and guidance. Language plays a critical role in religious practices, as it is the primary medium through which religious beliefs, values, and narratives are conveyed (Chilton & Schäffner, 2012). Moreover, religious language often exhibits distinct features and patterns that set it apart from other forms of communication, such as the use of metaphors, repetition, and specific lexical choices (Cameron, 2017). In Islam, the Holy Quran is viewed as the literal word of Allah. Allah revealed the Holy Quran through language that is both composite and comprehensive. The Quran has been described as a discursive text in a structured hierarchy (Abdul-Raof, 2019). According to, Razaq (2023), one of the unique characteristics of the Quran is the absolute authority of its producer. Authorial control and authority are linguistic features distinct to the Quranic language. Such features make the Quran a valuable text for the study of language from discourse and analytic perspectives, rather than the literary perspective. Scholars of Quranic discourse have noted that the rhetoric of the divine is a hallmark of Quranic communication (Cotter & Robertson, 2016). The scholar Mir (1986) says that the message has been captured and analysed as a discourse of counterargument, narrative, and exhortation designed to shape thought and action. The Quran's use of discursive repetition, mirroring, analogy, and the shifting of pronouns as persuasive tools has been described by Abdel-Raof (2003), who says that such strategies emphasize the intellectual and emotional persuasion of the Qur'an as a text. These instruments of persuasion are beyond the mere decoration of the text; rather, they are the dominant means of communication of the text to the underlying theology. From a discourse perspective, Khan

(2016) notes that the Quran engages different types of audiences through changes in خطاب (address), modality, and evaluative stance. Khan (2016) reflects the dynamic relationship of the eternal speaker and the temporal addressees. This relationship is interactive, from a discourse perspective, and constitutes the persuasive power of Quranic discourse. The reason, the moral, and the spiritual consciousness are the three factors that contribute to the Quran's persuasive power. The Quran is an applicable discourse. This study attempts to analyse selected translated verses from Surah As-Zukhruf from the perspective of CDA. The study first presents translations of verses 51, 52, and 53 from Surah As-zukhruf and subsequently treats these translations as excerpts. Finally, the selected excerpts are analysed from the perspective of CDA with utmost care.

Literature Review

The legal and stylistic components of the Holy Quran, paired with the art of persuasion as a scholarly viewpoint, have existed for some time as a predominantly classical Arabic rhetoric (balāghah) and modern linguistics phenomenon. In ancient times, Quranic studies would focus primarily on the theological interpretation and sometimes of course, would discuss stylistic features but that discussion would be for the praising of the beauty of the text. Now, the research has a more linguistic and discourse-based focus, examining the construction of meaning and the art of persuasion in the text. One of the prominent findings in the discourse of the Quran is from Mir (1986), who focuses on the concept of nazm (arrangement) in the Quran. He suggests that the individual verses of the Quran are not separate statements and that they form coherent units of discourse where the thematic and structural components of persuasion are dominant. Therefore, it can be said that for Mir (1986), the discourse of the Quran is coherent, and persuasive force is added to the voice of the discourse as a divine prophetic voice. This, in turn, shapes the reader's interpretation.

Another scholar, Abdul-Raof (2003), examining the context and rhetoric in relation to the Quran's discourse and language, contends that the persuasive techniques employed in the Quran are tied to linguistic elements, including metaphor, repetition, parallelism, and pronoun shift (iltifāt), which are described in numerous ways. These devices, Abdul-Raof (2003) argues, serve to foreground important theological points and explain the responsive relationship between the transcendent author and the mortal recipients of the message. In a subsequent study, Abdul-Raof (2019) applies text-linguistic methodologies to Quranic discourse, using the principles of cohesion, intentionality, and rhetoric to explain one key element of the text's persuasive power. Khan (2016) analyses the stylistic attributes of the Holy Quran and states that interchanges in خطاب (address), modality, and evaluative language are instrumental in the Quran's communication to a multiplicity of constituent parts. Stylistic flexibility, in Khan's (2016) view, explains the persuasive power of Quranic discourse, addressing the cognitive, affective, and conative elements of the audience.

Research Methodology

This study utilises a qualitative research method and an interpretivist perspective, focusing on the linguistic and persuasive characteristics of selected verses from the Holy Quran. The study employs a discourse-analytical approach to explore the persuasive function of Quranic discourse above the sentence level. The data set consists of deliberately chosen Quranic verses selected for their rhetorical richness and the presence of rhetorical devices, such as repetition, metaphor, rhetorical questions, shifting of the addressee (iltifāt), modality, as well as evaluative. The analysis is centred mainly on the Arabic text of the Quran and the most accurate, dependable English translations to aid comprehension of the text and its verses. Analysis of the verses is done using their immediate context to facilitate coherence and to prevent context-void readings/interpretations. To analyse the verses, the researcher employs the techniques of careful reading, hand-coding of the linguistic and persuasive elements, and interpretive discourse analysis of the persuasive devices. To add credibility and transparency

to the study, the Quran was treated with due respect as a sacred text, which strengthened its trustworthiness.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Overview of the Section

This section presents the analysis of some selected translated verses from Surah *As-Zukhruf*. The researcher first present translations of verses 51, 52, and 53 from Surah *As-zukhruf* and subsequently treat these translations as excerpts. Finally, the selected excerpts are analysed from a CDA perspective with utmost care.

Translation of verses 51, 52 and 53 from Surah *As-Zukhruf*

“And Pharaoh sounded to his nation, saying, Do I not own this city (Egypt) and do not these rivers flow beneath me? Do not you see? Am I not better than this mean man? Isn't visible to you? Why is he not dressed in golden costumes, and why is he not accompanied by a dignified angel? So he intimidated his people, and they obeyed him. They were truly the transgressed people” (Quran Surah *As-zukhruf* 43: 51-53).

Analysis and Discussion

Excerpt 01

“And Pharaoh sounded to his nation, saying, Do I not own this city (Egypt) and do not these rivers flow beneath me?”

Analysis:

The above excerpt is in question form. The very first word of CDA is “critical,” which relates to questioning and not taking things for granted. By starting his discourse with the question, Pharaoh seeks to trigger the reasons, emotions, and intellects of his subjects. The interrogative form is used as a means of persuasion. Through persuasion, Pharaoh tries to establish his hegemonic discourse. The possessive verb “own” conveys material power and political authority, through which Pharaoh presents sovereignty as an unquestionable reality. The word “own” also shows dominance. The phrase “rivers flow beneath me” metaphorically suggests Pharaoh's control over natural resources. Thus, through questioning, persuasion, positive verbs, and metaphorical descriptions, Pharaoh is trying to construct a suppressive discourse.

Excerpt 02

“Do not you see? Am I not better than this mean man? Isn't visible to you?”

Analysis

King Pharaoh seeks further behavioural dominance through the continued use of the question form brought up in the previous example. “Do not you see?” is meant to incite some sort of mental, cognitive, or internal awareness in the audience, compelling them to see, or think, that he is better than them. It is an audience-response eliciting question that is meant to make them wonder and reflect on what should be a sufficiently given answer to a posed question. In essence, he seeks to persuade them in some form to accept the position that there is nothing evident in the question and that what he is presenting or offering, is, in fact, evident (to some). In the example given, “Am I not better than this mean man?” (referring to Moses), he makes a direct comparison that makes him (Pharaoh) apparently and politically superior to everyone in the room (including the audience and Moses). The use of the adjective “mean” in isolation serves to diminish, drift, and displace, to some extent, the character that the “mean” is referring to, elevating Pharaoh to the centre of the image or context. In saying “mean man” in reference to Moses, Pharaoh seeks to strengthen and consolidate the image that he wishes to project of himself, an image that places him in the family of a main, dominant, and ultimate ruler. Reducing Moses to a “mean” man constructs an image of Pharaoh as the main superpower in that edifice of the moment.

The final question, 'Is it not visible to you?' reinforces the notion that Pharaoh's supremacy is so self-evident that it is indefensible not to take note of it. Here, he is strengthening the

hegemonic discourse surrounding him, indicating that the absence of acknowledgement towards the Pharaoh is the result of utter ignorance and unawareness. It is imbued with exasperation, as if, to him, the greatness of the Pharaoh must not require justification. With this technique, he uses his presumed greatness to dominate the audience and coerce them into compliance with his rule. Pharaoh utilises these questions to shape a discourse declaring the fact of his supremacy, reiterating the absence of competing arguments to reinforce the totality of his control.

Excerpt 03

“Why is he not dressed in golden costumes, and why is he not accompanied by a dignified angel?”

Analysis

In this passage, the Pharaoh poses two more questions to consolidate his dominance while diminishing the stature of the person he is referring to, probably Moses. The construction of these questions brings the conversation to a more material and grandiose level, where the Pharaoh’s presumed wealth is positioned against the other figures’ presumed poverty. The phrase, “Why is he not dressed in golden costumes?” uses the depiction of “golden costumes” to represent a leader’s wealth, power, and authority. Pharaoh here suggests that a leader, an authoritative figure, must, to assert his status, be dressed in such royal garments. By putting this postulation in a rhetorical form, he belittles the other person, suggesting that he does not possess the outward evidence of power and status. It suggests that the presence of gold, as he chooses to enhance the description, is synonymous with power, leadership, and virtue. The Pharaoh’s implication illustrates to the audience that in losing sight of power and gold, they lose sight of a leader, in fact, anyone deserving of leadership. Moreover, it suggests that without gold and power, one cannot possess authority.

The second question, “Why not accompany him with a dignified angel?” continues this same strategy, pairing off the magnificence of Pharaoh himself with the deficiencies of the other figure. By mentioning an angel, Pharaoh is referring to the support of the heavenly and the idea that a proper leader would not only be dressed in gold but would also have the support of the supernal authority. He is therefore stating that such a question is meant to eliminate the person in question, because a leader would have to be supported by an indirect superpower. In a position contrary to this, Pharaoh presents himself as one with heavenly grace and earthly opulence, thus justifying his kingship, while the other, he says, is devoid of both heavenly and earthly opulence and authority. Through these questions, Pharaoh is also questioning the other’s right to be and further asserting himself as one who should be accepted without question. The other figure's lack of opulence and heavenly support, when juxtaposed with Pharaoh's supposed superiority, is the primary rhetorical strategy at work here to minimise the other figure's worth.

Excerpt 04

“So he intimidated his people; they obeyed him. They were truly the transgressed people.”

Analysis

The speaker's choice of language regarding the Pharaoh and his people shows a vivid manipulation and control of power. In the sentence, 'So he intimidated his people,' the Pharaoh's power rests not just on persuasion and reasoning, but on the manipulation of the people based on fear and oppression of the people. In 'the people would fear his commands,' the speaker's use of the phrase fear his commands demonstrates the use of utter and absolute control of the people. Whatever the goals and aims of the powerful speaker are, most hegemonic discourses rely on the emotionally and psychologically repressive control of the masses. The phrase 'they obeyed him' demonstrates the lack of people and the Pharaoh's control within the system. There is fear of the people and of the obeying; there is control through the system's goals. Obedience to the system's goals and aims is the end state. There is no evidence to support the system's

goals. These systems' goals are, absolutely, supported by the people, and based on slavery to the system. Pharaoh's control demonstrates the denial of the people's freely chosen goals.

The expression "They were truly the transgressed people" suggests that the people have done wrong by obeying Pharaoh, even though he employed intimidation tactics to secure their obedience. The description transgressed means that the people have sinned by submitting to Pharaoh's oppression. This phrase further legitimises the pharaoh's position by implying that he is correct in everything he does, suggesting that the moral failure is the people's, thus shifting the blame to the oppressed and exonerating the pharaoh. This is how Pharaoh is able to construct a narrative where oppression is the primary means of control, and the primary means of securing obedience as a moral failing is further oppression.

Findings and Conclusion

The use of language by Pharaoh as Master of the Land of Egypt, as noted in the selected verses of Surah As-Zukhruf, is relevant to the use of language as an instrument of power and control. Pharaoh's use of rhetorical questions, language of intimidation, as well as descriptors and modifiers in speeches, becomes the dominant discourse, with an arsenal of oppressive tactics and strict control structures, to define and manipulate the discourse through intimidation and control. The depth and richness of the language of the Qur'an provide a unique insight into the various and flexible manifestations of power and influence in the society of Pharaoh. The words of Pharaoh in the rhetorical questions of "Do not you see?" and "Am I not better than this mean man?" are simply statements of control and dominance. In the questions, Pharaoh employs a style of composition and idiomatic language found in the Qur'an, and uses rhetorical questions to compel and dominate the discourse of power, leading to alignment of the power with the dominant narratives of Pharaoh. The use of rhetorical questions in the Qur'an's discourse is a unique way of capturing the control and power of dominant authoritative discourse, and such a style of language use in culture and society, in a passive manner, captures power.

As reflected in the Quran's linguistic depth, it is noted that Pharaoh employed both strategies of general superiority. The statement, 'I own this city, and the metaphor, 'rivers flow under me,' projects control over the civics and the metaphysics of nature. Such powerful imagery, that is, the fusion of the above-quoted into one linguistic unit, gives expression to the totality of Pharaoh's oppression as an enemy, and his presumption to be God. The use of language as a means of manipulation and control, in the supreme use of the Quran's language to express a psychological, spiritual, and divine reality, rather than the sociopolitical realm, is unique. The Quran illustrates that Pharaoh's dominance was not based on the principles of mutuality, as evident in, 'So he intimidated his people, and they obeyed him.' This statement illustrates the oppression inherent in domination, and the depth of the language employed reveals the Quran's understanding of man's psychology in all its aspects. The linguistic representation of the phenomenon of fear that Pharaoh employed to control his subjects demonstrates the depth of the Quran's understanding of the complexities of social relationships and the interrelation of power. The last phrase, "They were truly the transgressed people," shows how Pharaoh constructs a moral order in which the people have the onus of obedience. He uses blame as a deflection tool to justify his rule with a "sophisticated" apolitical narrative, illustrating the moral and just end of the Qur'an by showing the audience the many ways the power of language can be exerted in redefining an order of justice.

To conclude, we can say that the language of the Qur'an, from the last phrase of the Pharaoh example, is an illustration of power relations one cannot ignore. The power relations are not just in the authoritative structure of a system but in the relations of the human spirit. In the richness of the Qur'an, one can learn how to read the power relationships of a system. The breakdown of the relations of power in the example of Pharaoh reveals the message of the Qur'an: the language of a text is not merely for the mere ordering of events, but for ordering the human spirit within the structure of power relations, emancipating or subjugating. The

Qur'an, in this sense, is an unparalleled text to examine the power of language, the power to construct and the power to destroy.

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