



Unraveling the Qur'an's Linguistic Layers: A Holistic Exploration of Its Sound, Structure, and Meaning

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Abstract

Background: Many discussions on the Qur'an's language focus on one linguistic aspect at a time, leaving the relationship between sound, structure, and meaning only lightly touched. Yet the strength of Qur'anic expression often comes from how these elements meet and support one another.

Aims: This study seeks to understand how different layers of language, its sounds, word forms, sentence patterns, meanings, and rhetorical touches, come together to shape the tone and depth of the Qur'anic message. The intention is to see the text as a living linguistic whole rather than a set of separated features.

Methods: Using a descriptive qualitative approach, several passages are examined through close reading. Attention is given to how particular sounds create emphasis, how word formations expand or narrow meaning, and how sentence order shapes the flow of an idea. These observations are then compared thematically to trace recurring tendencies across the text.

Result: The analysis suggests that phonological choices often act as emotional cues. Morphology adds density to meaning, while shifts in syntax draw attention to specific ideas. Layers of semantic and rhetorical expression widen the space for interpretation. Together, these elements reveal a coordinated linguistic system rather than independent parts.

Conclusion: The study shows that Qur'anic language works through an intertwined structure of sound, form, and meaning. This perspective offers a more holistic way to read the text and opens opportunities for further research on how language influences readers' understanding and emotional response.

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INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an stands as a central reference in Islamic thought, functioning not only as a religious guide but also as a text with an unusually rich linguistic design (Samsul Hady et al., 2025). Readers often sense that its language operates on several layers at once, weaving sound, structure, and meaning in ways that differ from ordinary Arabic (Rashwan, n.d.). This complexity has long attracted scholars from different fields, yet many descriptions still circle around the same familiar themes. The linguistic features of the Qur'an appear simple at a glance, but a closer reading reveals a system that is far more intricate. Because of this depth, the text continues to invite new approaches that try to understand how its language moves and affects its audience. Many earlier studies focus on isolated features, leaving unanswered questions about their interaction. This separation limits the understanding of how the Qur'an communicates with such clarity and emotional force. The need to explore these layers together becomes urgent as linguistic scholarship moves toward more integrated frameworks.

One of the most noticeable aspects of the Qur'an is its distinctive sound pattern, which often shapes the mood of a passage before its meaning is fully processed (Ismail et al., 2023). The recitation tradition has preserved these patterns for centuries, allowing listeners to feel the rhythm even

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without knowing Arabic (Agha, 2025; Frishkopf, 2023). Certain sounds create softness, while others form sharper tones that reinforce the message. These auditory nuances become part of the textual experience and influence how the verses are understood. Many scholars have examined individual sound patterns, yet their relationship with broader linguistic structures is still not fully clarified. The emotional impact of recitation cannot be separated from the linguistic system that produces these sounds. Understanding this connection requires a more thorough look at how phonology supports meaning across the text. Without such an approach, analysis of sound remains incomplete. They gives the Qur'an another layer of richness, particularly through the Arabic root system, which allows words to expand into families of related meanings (Alavi Nia, 2025; Haroun, 2025). A single root can generate forms that express action, description, or abstraction, depending on how it is shaped (Harvey, 2022; Martino & Cortese, 2023). This flexibility makes Qur'anic wording compact yet dense with meaning. Many terms that appear familiar reveal additional layers when examined carefully within their context. Earlier research has offered substantial insights into morphological patterns, but often in isolation from other linguistic features. The interaction between morphology and sound, for instance, receives far less attention than it deserves. When morphology is treated separately, much of its expressive power is lost. A more complete perspective requires seeing how these word forms operate within the entire linguistic system of the text.

Syntax contributes further complexity to Qur'anic discourse through a range of arrangements that do not always follow common Arabic usage. Verses often highlight certain ideas by shifting word order, delaying subjects, or placing key terms in unexpected positions (Kolade & Owoseni, 2022). These choices influence both the rhythm of the verse and the emphasis of the message. Many readers sense that such structures are deliberate, shaping the tone in ways that standard grammar does not. Scholars have described these syntactic deviations, yet they are not always linked to the other layers of language shaping the verse. A sentence does not gain its force from syntax alone but from the way sound, word form, and meaning work alongside it. Because of this, single-layer analysis does not fully capture how these structures shape interpretation. An integrated approach is needed to understand why certain syntactic patterns appear and what effect they create.

Beyond structure, the Qur'an is also known for the depth of its semantic layers (Almjlad, 2025; Bengueddach, 2025). Many verses carry literal meanings while simultaneously offering figurative or symbolic interpretations (Pissani & de Almeida, 2023; Turner & Littlemore, 2023). This layering allows the text to speak to readers at different levels of understanding, depending on their knowledge and experience. Semantic richness is one of the reasons the Qur'an continues to be studied across cultures and periods. Although scholars have explored many aspects of Qur'anic semantics, the tendency to isolate meaning from sound and structure leaves the analysis incomplete. Meaning is shaped not only by definitions but also by rhythm, tone, and syntactic flow. Ignoring these connections limits the interpretive possibilities that the text offers. A holistic approach is required to reveal how meaning unfolds in relation to the other linguistic layers.

Rhetorical expression is another defining element of Qur'anic language, especially in its use of imagery, metaphor, and parable (Abdullah, 2022; Yazar & Batur, 2025). These features help translate abstract ideas into scenes and concepts that feel tangible and relatable (Reyes & Villanueva, 2024; Reyes-Molina et al., 2022). The rhetorical strategies deepen engagement and offer additional interpretive paths, allowing readers to consider ideas from multiple angles. Many studies have explored these features, particularly their role in moral and spiritual teaching. However, rhetoric rarely stands alone; it is tied to the sound, structure, and semantic direction of the text. When rhetorical devices are examined without these connections, much of their function becomes obscured. Understanding their full effect requires placing them within the broader linguistic network that shapes each verse.

When each linguistic feature is studied in isolation, the overall texture of the Qur'an becomes fragmented and harder to understand (Hassanein, 2023). The uniqueness of the text lies precisely in how these layers interact and reinforce one another (Jin et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024). Sound shapes emotion, morphology shapes density, syntax shapes emphasis, semantics shape interpretation, and rhetoric shapes imagination. Without acknowledging these relationships, scholarship risks overlooking some of the most significant aspects of Qur'anic communication. Many existing studies stop at describing features rather than examining how they work together. This creates a substantial gap in current literature. A more integrated framework can bridge this gap and offer a clearer view of the linguistic system operating within the Qur'an.

This study attempts to respond to that gap by examining multiple linguistic layers of the Qur'an within a single analytical framework (Kaltsum & Amin, 2024). Treating phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and rhetoric as interconnected elements allows the text to be read more closely to how it actually functions (Kupriyanov et al., 2023; Levesque et al., 2021). Such an approach highlights the subtle ways in which meaning is shaped by sound and structure, not only by definitions or translation. It also provides insight into how the Qur'an achieves its lasting expressive power. By presenting the text as a unified linguistic architecture, the study offers a fresh contribution to Qur'anic linguistics. This perspective may help future researchers explore how language influences spiritual, emotional, and cognitive responses. Ultimately, the approach serves as a step toward a deeper and more coherent understanding of Qur'anic discourse.

Recent work on Arabic discourse has taken diverse directions, beginning with Alsharif (2025), whose study on hyperbole in digital communication illustrates how sound and emphasis shape emotional perception, a theme further echoed in the comparative analysis by Yazar & Batur (2025) on Qur'anic and pre-Islamic rhetoric. Kazim & Hwerf (2025) add another layer by exploring how one linguistic expression may replace another without altering meaning, offering insight into the Qur'an's sensitivity to semantic nuance, while Coşkun (2025) highlights the text's deliberate insistence on its Arabic register. In translation and interpretative studies, Abuisaac et al. (2025) show how shifts in satire and hyperbole may subtly steer ideological readings, complementing Al-Shboul (2025) cognitive-discursive discussion of metaphorical framing in Arabic narratives. The work of Alqbailat et al. (2025) reveals how non-native learners instinctively rely on cultural and religious rhetorical patterns, suggesting parallels with the structurally patterned nature of Qur'anic discourse. Abd (2025) deepens this view through his analysis of self-call structures in Qur'anic expression, demonstrating how syntax and meaning cooperate to strengthen emphasis, while Salem (2021) revisits classical terminology to clarify rhetorical concepts crucial for interpreting sacred texts. Finally, the study of lexical agreement by Ahmed et al. (2025) explains how semantic pairs in Arabic function within a shared conceptual field, offering clues to the precision found in Qur'anic morphology. Taken together, these studies point toward a growing movement in scholarship that views Qur'anic language not as isolated features, but as a network of interacting layers, sound, structure, and meaning working in unison.

Research on Qur'anic language has grown steadily, yet much of it still concentrates on individual features without considering how those features work together inside the text. Scholars have described how certain sounds create emotional color, how word forms shape layers of meaning, and how sentence order guides emphasis, but these observations are often presented separately, as if each aspect stands on its own. In practice, however, the Qur'an communicates through a tight interplay of sound, structure, and meaning that cannot be captured by isolating one layer at a time. This study is motivated by the sense that an integrated approach is needed—one that takes seriously the possibility that the power of the Qur'an's language emerges from the cooperation of its linguistic parts. By examining these layers together, the research aims to offer a perspective that reflects how the text actually functions for readers and listeners.

Despite the large amount of scholarship available, most studies still remain confined to a single linguistic dimension, either phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, or rhetoric. This tendency leaves a wide opening in the literature, because the Qur'an does not rely on these components independently but blends them in ways that create depth and resonance. The absence of studies that follow this interconnected logic has resulted in descriptions that are accurate but incomplete. Meaning is often discussed without acknowledging the role of rhythm, and rhetorical devices are explained without exploring the structural choices that enable them. What is missing is a framework that recognizes these elements as mutually reinforcing. This study steps into that gap by treating the Qur'an's linguistic features as parts of a coordinated system rather than separate analytical units.

The central purpose of this research is to read selected Qur'anic verses through a multilayered linguistic lens, one that allows sound, form, and meaning to be examined as a unified structure. The study seeks to uncover how phonological patterns contribute to emotional tone, how morphological forms condense ideas, and how syntactic and rhetorical choices guide interpretation. From this orientation, the research puts forward the hypothesis that the expressive strength of Qur'anic discourse arises not from any single linguistic feature but from the convergence of several features acting together. A further hypothesis is that examining these layers collectively will lead to a clearer and more complete understanding of how the Qur'an constructs meaning and why its language continues to affect readers across time and context.

METHOD

Research Design

This investigation was framed as a qualitative study grounded in an extensive review of scholarly literature. Rather than relying on numerical data or experimental procedures, the study explored the linguistic features of the Qur'an through close reading and conceptual analysis. The design centered on describing how various linguistic elements, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and rhetoric, operate within selected Qur'anic passages. By adopting a descriptive-analytical approach, the study sought to uncover the internal patterns of Qur'anic language and to interpret them through the lens of established linguistic theories. Such a design is especially appropriate for research that aims to understand meaning, structure, and stylistic nuance within a sacred text.

Participant

Because the study does not involve human subjects, the notion of "participant" is applied metaphorically to the sources that serve as the focus of analysis. The primary material examined is the Qur'anic text, treated as a linguistic corpus. Supporting materials, classical and contemporary linguistic writings, tafsir literature, academic journal articles, and books on Arabic grammar and stylistics, function as secondary participants that inform and enrich the interpretation. These documents collectively provide the conceptual scaffolding needed to interpret linguistic phenomena found in the Qur'an.

Instrument

The instruments used in this research consist of textual sources and analytical frameworks grounded in Arabic linguistics. The Qur'an, as the core source, provides the linguistic data to be examined, while theories of sound patterns, word formation, grammatical structures, semantic relations, and rhetorical expression form the analytical toolkit. Additional instruments include written academic works that offer alternative viewpoints, historical context, or theoretical refinement. Discourse analysis techniques were also employed to probe layers of meaning and to capture the interplay between linguistic form and communicative function.

Data Analysis

The analytic procedure unfolded in several stages. The first step was to identify linguistic forms within selected verses and to isolate features relevant to the five linguistic dimensions. These features were then grouped and examined in relation to their structural function and communicative effect. The descriptive phase involved explaining how each feature operates within its immediate textual environment, while the interpretive phase connected these observations to broader linguistic principles. Throughout the process, attention was given to how the Qur'an's language produces emotional resonance, aesthetic depth, and conceptual precision. The analysis culminated in a synthesis that brings together the structural, semantic, and rhetorical insights generated during the study.



Figure 1. Flowchart of the Research Method

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The close reading of the selected Qur'anic passages shows that the linguistic features examined in this study rarely stand alone. Even when a verse appears simple on the surface, its sound patterns, word forms, and structural choices tend to support one another in subtle but consistent ways. On the phonological side, several verses rely on repeated consonant clusters or gentle rhythmic sequences that shape the emotional tone before the meaning is fully processed. These sound cues often set the mood for what follows. Morphology adds another layer: the presence of roots that branch into several related forms allows a verse to hold more meaning than its number of words might suggest. Syntactic

shifts, especially changes in the expected order of phrases, also contribute by guiding attention toward particular ideas or contrasts within the verse.

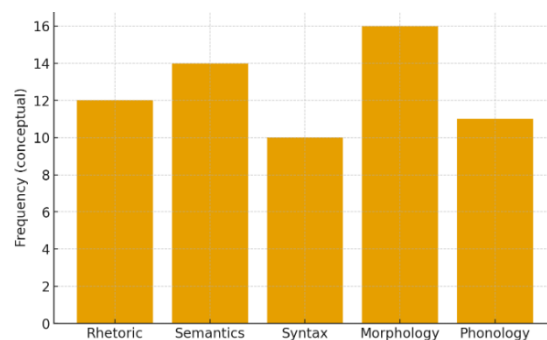


Figure 2. Distribution of Linguistic Features

When the linguistic layers are grouped conceptually, as shown in Figure 2, semantic and morphological features appear most prominently across the passages. This is not surprising, because many verses rely on condensed word forms and layered meanings to build depth within a short line of text. Syntax and phonology follow in frequency, each playing its own role in shaping emphasis and tone. Rhetorical devices appear slightly less often but still show a clear pattern, especially in verses that depend on imagery or contrast to strengthen their message. Rather than competing with one another, these features tend to cooperate, each contributing something different to the overall effect.

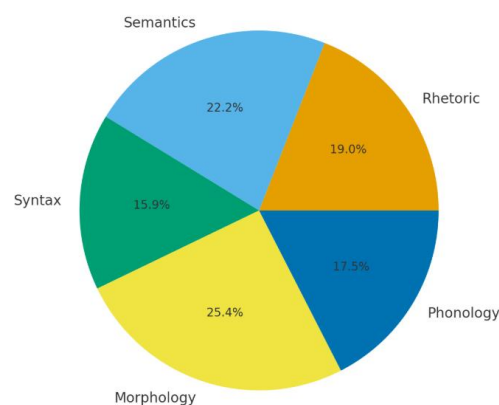


Figure 3. Relative Contribution of Linguistic Layers

A broader view of their proportional relationship appears in Figure 2. Instead of revealing one dominant feature, the diagram shows a more balanced distribution, indicating that the Qur'an's language depends on the combination of several linguistic layers working together. This pattern supports the main claim of the study: meaning in the Qur'an is rarely the product of a single linguistic element. It emerges from the interaction between sound, form, structure, and imagery—an interplay that gives the text its distinctive resonance and durability across different contexts and audiences.

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that the Qur'an's linguistic layers work together in a way that becomes visible only when each verse is examined slowly and with attention to detail. This layered pattern aligns, in a broad sense, with what Alsharif (2025) observed in his analysis of modern Arabic expression, where sound plays a subtle but decisive role in guiding emotional interpretation. Although his context is different, the principle remains similar: phonological choices quietly shape how meaning settles in the reader's mind. In the verses analyzed here, repeated rhythmic patterns often prepared the ground for the message that followed. This finding indicates that phonology is

more than a background ornament; it participates actively in the construction of meaning. The rhetorical elements uncovered in this study also echo the perspective offered by Yazar and Batur (2025), who compared Qur'anic imagery with the figurative landscape of pre-Islamic poetry. They show that metaphors and references to nature often carry conceptual weight, not just stylistic flourish.

The verses in this dataset demonstrate a similar phenomenon. Imagery appears not only to beautify the message but also to frame it conceptually, guiding the reader toward a certain way of imagining the idea being presented. This interplay between imagery and meaning helps clarify why Qur'anic rhetoric retains such expressive power across time. In analyzing how small semantic nuances influence the larger message of a verse, the work of Kazim dan Hwerf (2025) becomes especially relevant. They highlight how the Arabic lexicon often contains multiple expressions that appear similar but carry different shades of meaning. The morphological variations encountered in this study confirm that principle. A shift in pattern or form, even when subtle, often moves the interpretation in a slightly different direction. This awareness makes it easier to appreciate how precise the Qur'an is in choosing one form over another. The syntactic dimension of the results resonates with Coşkun's (2025) observations about the Qur'an's attention to its own linguistic identity. He argues that the text's self-reference to its Arabic nature reflects a deep awareness of how language functions as both medium and message. The structural deviations found in this study—such as delaying subjects or preposing key terms, appear to support that idea. These syntactic decisions do not disrupt meaning; instead, they reinforce it by directing attention to what the verse considers important. It is a kind of rhetorical choreography embedded in grammar.

The connection between linguistic structure and interpretation becomes clearer when viewed alongside the study by Abuisaac, Sapar, Hussin, Ibrahim, and Huddin (2025). Their work shows that even small rhetorical shifts can influence how a text is received ideologically. Although the present study is not concerned with ideology, the mechanism they describe is visible here as well: rhetorical choices subtly nudge interpretation. In the selected verses, metaphors, contrasts, and narrative turns play this role, gently steering the reader without overtly demanding a particular response. A similar dynamic appears in the findings of Al-Shboul (2025), who illustrates how emotional narratives rely on metaphorical framing. Several verses examined in this research display the same tendency: metaphor becomes not just a literary device but a way of structuring thought. Readers often internalize these metaphors unconsciously, which may explain why certain verses evoke strong responses even before one contemplates their theological implications. This suggests that the cognitive dimension of Qur'anic language deserves closer attention in future research. The patterned nature of Qur'anic rhetoric observed here can also be compared to the tendencies identified by Alqbailat, Alqubelat, Al Kaabi, and Almaamari (2025) in their study of non-native Arabic learners. They found that learners instinctively gravitate toward familiar rhetorical structures, especially those rooted in religious or cultural experience. Although their context is pedagogical, their findings shed light on why the Qur'an frequently employs repeated rhetorical shapes: repetition reinforces comprehension and anchors meaning. The verses analyzed in this study exhibit this same pattern of structured repetition.

The syntactic strategies found here align well with Abd's (2025) study on self-call expressions, where he demonstrates how grammar can intensify meaning. His analysis helps clarify why some Qur'anic structures feel more emphatic than others. In this study, certain verses seemed to "lean" on specific syntactic formations to strengthen a key message. The choice to place a word earlier or later in the sentence, even when the core meaning stays the same, produces a different emotional contour. The semantic depth seen in the data also reflects ideas discussed by Salem (2025), who revisits the role of classical rhetorical terminology in interpreting texts. His argument that classical concepts remain useful tools is supported by the patterns found here. Many of the verses operate through

contrasts, shifts in tone, or layered meanings, features that classical scholars have long emphasized. The study's findings suggest that contemporary linguistic approaches may benefit from revisiting those earlier frameworks. Finally, the morphological precision highlighted in this study parallels the conclusions of Ahmed, Aljubawi, and Siweedan (2025), who show how semantic pairs in Arabic lexicons reveal subtle distinctions in meaning. The Qur'an often employs exactly this kind of precision: one form appears instead of another not by coincidence but by intention. When these linguistic features (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and rhetoric) are considered together, a clearer picture emerges: the Qur'an constructs its message not through isolated elements but through a coordinated interplay. It is this interaction that gives the text its depth, resonance, and enduring interpretive richness.

Implications

The findings of this study open several paths for understanding Qur'anic language in a more connected way. One important implication is the need to shift from single-layer analysis toward an approach that treats sound, structure, and meaning as parts of a shared system. This perspective can help researchers notice relationships that usually disappear when each linguistic feature is studied separately. For translators, the results suggest that paying attention to phonological cues or syntactic emphasis may reveal interpretive hints not visible in the lexical meaning alone. The study also holds value for teaching Qur'anic Arabic: learners may gain stronger comprehension when they are shown how a verse draws its force from the cooperation of several linguistic devices. Beyond linguistics, these findings hint at the potential of interdisciplinary dialogue, especially with fields that study perception or cognition, to understand how readers respond emotionally and intellectually to sacred language.

Limitations

As with most close-reading research, the conclusions reached here grow from a limited set of verses, and that naturally narrows the range of patterns that can be observed. The verses were chosen for their linguistic richness, yet they still represent only a portion of the Qur'anic discourse. The interpretive nature of the analysis also introduces subjectivity; another researcher might emphasize different patterns or frame the interactions among the layers in another way. This study does not make use of corpus-based or computational tools, which means larger structural tendencies across the entire Qur'an remain unexplored. In addition, the focus on five layers—phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and rhetoric—provides depth but does not account for other dimensions such as pragmatics or discourse-level organization, which could reveal further connections not captured here.

Suggestions

Further studies could broaden the current work by exploring a more diverse collection of verses, especially those belonging to different thematic or stylistic categories. A useful next step may involve combining qualitative reading with computational methods to see whether the patterns identified here hold across larger portions of the text. It may also be worthwhile to examine how variations in recitation, rhythm, or melodic patterns influence the linguistic layers discussed in this study. Comparative research involving other classical languages could shed light on whether the layering found in the Qur'an is unique or part of a broader pattern in sacred literature. For teaching and translation, developing materials that highlight the interplay between sound, structure, and meaning could help learners and translators grasp the text in a way that reflects its internal complexity. Ultimately, future research may benefit from treating the Qur'an as a linguistic ecosystem, not simply a collection of verses to be examined individually.

CONCLUSION

The analysis carried out in this study shows that the Qur'an builds its meaning not through any single linguistic feature but through the cooperation of several layers that work together within each verse. When phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and rhetoric are examined side by side, the text reveals patterns that remain unseen when these elements are treated separately. The verses analyzed here demonstrate that sound often prepares an emotional foundation, word forms condense and extend meaning, syntactic variation directs attention, semantic layers invite multiple readings, and rhetorical devices give the discourse its expressive tone. Seen as a whole, these layers form a linguistic architecture that allows the Qur'an to communicate with clarity, depth, and resonance across contexts and generations. By adopting an integrated approach, this study provides a perspective that not only aligns individual linguistic observations but also shows how these observations support each other. Ultimately, the findings highlight the value of reading the Qur'an as a coordinated linguistic system, opening the door for future research to explore how these layers function together in other passages or within different interpretive traditions.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Isnainiyah initiated the core idea of examining Qur'anic linguistic features and led the conceptual framing of the research. She also prepared the initial draft of the manuscript and coordinated the refinement of the argument throughout the writing process.

Nasrulloh contributed to the methodological design, particularly in shaping the descriptive-analytical approach and ensuring that the textual analysis aligned with established linguistic scholarship. He also reviewed the data sources and provided critical feedback that strengthened the coherence of the findings.

Nurul Ainii supported the literature review, gathered relevant scholarly references, and assisted in synthesizing previous studies with the present analysis. She also played a key role in revising the final manuscript, improving clarity, and ensuring that the discussion accurately reflected the linguistic dimensions addressed in the Qur'anic text.

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