



## **Aesthetics of Artistic Expression in Qur'an**

**Mohammad Reza Aram**

Assistant Professor of Islamic Azad University (Central Tehran Branch, Iran)

Email Address: [moh.aram@iauctb.ac.ir](mailto:moh.aram@iauctb.ac.ir)

### **Abstract**

Art is a powerful tool for communication and the expression of feelings and thoughts. It is an integral part of any religion to beautify and create a sacred environment for the followers. For example, artistic expression based on beliefs can be observed in Christianity, Hinduism and Islam, among other world faiths.

Art has always been part of Qur'anic verses and Islamic texts, expressing faith and belief through different mediums. Looking particularly at Qur'anic arts, this article explores the close connection between beauty and the sacred, between artistic expression and revelation. The holy Qur'an has been approached from many perspectives: linguistic, liturgical, historical, exegetical, sociological, psychological, anthropological, aesthetic etc. People approach sacred texts from their own perspectives, their reading fed by their needs, interests and experiences. This article aims to highlight the artistic approach towards appreciating the Qur'an. This may enable the readers to see how Muslims have explored and experienced the Qur'an through art. Considering the effects and great impact of artistic expression on feelings and thoughts, this study seeks to review different dimensions and aspects of artistic beauty and the Qur'anic concept of it by using descriptive-analytical method and some verses of holy Qur'an.

Therefore, this research revolves around two axes: aesthetics and artistic expression including topics like: Quran artistic expression and its effect on the untranslatability of Qur'an, The Qur'an's superior eloquence and art, The unique literary form of the Qur'an, Musical rhythm of the Qur'an verses, Qur'anic word choice and Qur'an's superior eloquence and flexibility.

**Keywords:** Aesthetics, Qur'an's Literary Form, Artistic Expression, Untranslatability of Qur'an, Eloquence, Rhetoric, Flexibility, Musical Rhythm.



## Introduction

God offered the Qur'an as the Prophet's sign in the same way as He offered signs for all the other prophets. He sent the things most appropriate to the time in which they were sent. Thus Moses had the power to divide the sea with his hand and rod, and to let the rock burst forth with water in the desert, and all his other signs in a time of magic. And Jesus had the power to bring the dead back to life, to make birds out of clay, to cure those who had been blind from birth and the leprous, and all his other signs in a time of medicine. And Mohammad, may God bless him and grant him salvation, had the book and all his other signs in a time of eloquence.<sup>1</sup> The question that needs to be addressed here concerns the reason why a holy book, a composition of language, should be hailed as Islam's (and Mohammad's) strongest argument.<sup>2</sup> The point has sometimes been made that other prophets had more tangible miracles. In the case of Mohammad, however, the miracle was not comparable to Moses' staff or Christ's healing powers, but was simply the expression in language of the Qur'an.

## Quran artistic expression and its effect on the untranslatability of Qur'an

The Qur'an was revealed in the most eloquent, articulate, and elaborate style the Arabic language has known. The Qur'an has without doubt provided a level of linguistic excellence unparalleled in the history of the Arabic language. Theologians explain this phenomenon as God's wisdom in addressing the articulate Arabs through the medium in which they were most adept and with which they felt most comfortable. The effectiveness of the Qur'an was thus ensured by the fact that it represented a level of eloquence unattainable even by their most eloquent speakers. The Qur'an remains a book of inimitable quality, not only from a linguistic, but also from an intellectual, point of view.

The inimitability of the Qur'an is not limited to its content. In fact, the Holy Book of Islam is held by Muslim scholars to be inimitable not only in its content but also in its language. The Qur'an, it has been constantly maintained, embodies linguistic and literary beauty which exceeds anything of human origin. This is borne out by the fact that no-one has ever been able to compose anything remotely

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibn Khaldun, Abdurahman M., *Mokaddimat Ibn Khaldoun*, vol. 3, 1266

<sup>2</sup> On this subject, see Taha Husayn's excellent argument in his *Mir'at al-Islam*, pp. 125 ff., and Sayyid Qutbs *Al-Taswir al-fanni fi l-Qur'an*, chs. 1-3.



resembling it in its linguistic, literary, or conceptual elegance.<sup>3</sup> This point is repeatedly emphasized in the Holy Book itself. Thus the Qur'an says: *If the whole of mankind and the jinn were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed each other up.* (17:88)

Doubtless, Qur'an is divine words but because of being understandable for the mankind, presents its subjects in a way of simplicity and clearness. God almighty in his book says: *"this (holy Qur'an) is a clear statement for mankind"* (3:138); *"So, [O Muhammad], We have only made Qur'an easy in the Arabic language that you may give good tidings thereby to the righteous and warn thereby a hostile people."* (19:97); *"And we have revealed the holy Qur'an easy and simple to be understood and to be guiding to the people"* (54:40).

Another important point to consider here is that the miracle of the Qur'an is the Arabic language itself. So when the Qur'an is translated into another language, although the general meaning becomes apparent, the actual miracle is lost. We should express that regarding to the various views on the

linguistics of Qur'an and by interpreting a number of relevant verses prove that the language of Qur'an is *Lesan Arabi Mobin* "and this Qur'an is [in] a clear Arabic language" (16:103) and this language is different from that Arabic language spoken in the Arab countries. Although the basic frame is the same but the literature and the writing style of Qur'an is unique and includes divine and celestial characteristics which distinguishes it from the current Arabic language.

The implication of this is that there is no link between the Qur'an and the Arabic language; however this seems impossible because the Qur'an is made up of the Arabic language. On the other hand, every combination of Arabic words and letters has been used to try and imitate the Qur'an. Therefore, this leaves only one conclusion; a Divine explanation is the only coherent explanation for this impossible Arabic literary form – the Qur'an. Hence, it logically follows that if the Qur'an is a literary event that lies outside the productive capacity of the Arabic language, i.e. impossibility, then by definition, it is a miracle.

It should be mentioned that according to the

<sup>3</sup> A number of excellent works were devoted entirely to this aspect of the Qur'an, e.g., al-Suyuti, *al Itqan*, and al-Baqillani,

*I'jaz al-Qur'an*, Beirut, 1979.



Qur'an's inimitable eloquence which is based upon the eloquent use of language to please and persuade, its perfect choice of words expressions with the best of verbal forms, accuracy of meaning, apt selection of pronouns and rhetorical devices and interrelation between style, structure and meaning, so these also prove that Qur'an cannot be translated accurately in regard to the truth which it embodies. The other important characteristics of this language, namely the rhythm and rhyme of Qur'an also proves the untranslatability of the Qur'an.

Moreover, the artistic literary beauty of the Qur'an cannot be apprehended in the translation of the meanings of this Glorious book. The Arabic reader or the one listening to the reading of the Qur'an recognizes its poetical effect although the Qur'anic verses do not conform to any known patterns of poetry. But they produce the same effect as poetry, to a superlative degree. Every verse is complete and perfect by itself. It often rhymes with the preceding verse and contains one or more religious or moral meanings embedded in literary expressions or articulations of sublime beauty. The momentum it generates is so mighty

that the recitation impels the audience irresistibly to move with it, to expect the next verse and to reach the most intense quiescence upon hearing it. Then the process starts again with the next verse and the next one and so on.

### **The Qur'an's superior eloquence and art**

The sole elaborate form of artistic expression available to the pre-Islamic Arabs was the art of the spoken word.<sup>4</sup> Eloquence and the ability to compose articulate prose or poetry were foremost among the traits of a worthy bedouin.<sup>5</sup> That is reason we say that God sent the Qur'an as the Prophet's sign most appropriate to the time in which they was sent. And based on this, works on the inimitability of the Qur'an have mostly focused on the literary beauty of the Holy Book, its conceptual strength and precision.

All arts exercise an ennobling and humanizing influence on those who appreciate it. The aesthetic values of Islam sprang from the deepest emotion caused by the Qur'an and the meanings involved. "Al tawhid" sees absolute beauty only in God and in His Revealed Will in the Qur'an, His own words.

<sup>4</sup> Ibrahim Anis, *Fi l-lahajat al'arabiyya*, Cairo, 1962, ch. 2, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> Vicente Cantarino, *Arabic poetics in the golden age*, Leiden,

1975, p. 17.



Accordingly a new art befitting this view was to be created.<sup>6</sup>

God, the Most Exalted says: *“He Who has made everything which He has created most good: He began the creation of man with (nothing more than) clay.”* or *“Who perfected in the fairest (shape) everything He created; and He began the creation of man of clay.”* (32: 7)

In accordance with the above-cited, the ideology of a monotheist includes:

1- The creation of whole creatures is most good and in the fairest shape: *“He Who has made everything which He has created most good”* (32: 7)

2- The creator is superior and He is the best creators: *“So blessed is Allah, the best of creators”* (23:14)

3- Qur'an, as a scheme for the human life, is the best: *“And follow the best of what was revealed to you from your Lord”* (39:55)

4- Creation of human being is perfect and without any flaw or defect: *“We have certainly created man in the best of stature”* (95:4)

Based on these ideologies, mankind should do their best: *“Who created death and life to try you, whichever of you is fairest and best in deeds; and He*

*is The Ever-Mighty, The Ever-Forgiving”* (67:2)

There is a very fantastic verse that depicts the perfect eloquence and the beauties of expression and sense attractions in Qur'an: *“and for you there is in them beauty, adornment, when you bring them [home] to rest, [when you] return them to their resting places in the evening, and when you drive them forth to pasture, when you bring them out to the grazing pastures in the morning.”* (16: 6)

It should be mentioned that choosing only one verse in order to demonstrate the art beauties of Qur'an is an inequity to the other verses. Because all the verses of the Qur'an are a manifestation of art and aesthetic, and otherwise we would be applied to this verse that *“As We have sent down on the dividers, those who divided (Scripture into arbitrary parts), Who have made the Qur'an into parts. (i.e. believed in a part and disbelieved in the other).”* (15:90-91)

The all verses of Quran are manifestation of the literary beauty of God's Words. God talks with his mankind through inside of these verses and by his elocution and rhetoric expression, disclose the statements beauties of Qur'an and depicts the art of selection of letters and words in the phrase in order

<sup>6</sup> Al-Faruqi, I.R., *Al Tawhid: Its implication for Thought and Life*, Herndon Virginia, The International Institute of Islamic Thought, Page | 5  
[www.academicpress.org](http://www.academicpress.org)

1992, pp.195-216



to create the best expression.

The Qur'an consists of verses which vary in length depending on their theme and the occasion for which they were revealed. What is most interesting about Qur'anic verses is the superb selection of words, a selection which helps to induce varying reading speeds, which render these verses most effective. On this particular point, Taha Husayn wrote: For example, those verses dealing with the dialogues that took place between the Prophet and the pagans as well as those dealing with legislation require the type of low reading speed appropriate to explanation and recapitulation. On the other hand, those verses in which the pagans are warned of the fate that awaits them require a higher speed appropriate to censuring and warning.<sup>7</sup>

By pondering on the verses of Qur'an, eventually, three following important nuances can be deduced:

1- God is who has created these beauties and elegancies, and he is the artist that has made the art in a most good shape and in brief, He is the creator of art.

2- The creator of these graces in the creatures has devoted the recognition of these beauties to the mankind.

*“And in the earth there are signs for those who are sure, as also in your own selves: Will ye not then see?” (51:20-21)*

*“ So let man look into what he was created from.” (86:5)*

*“Do they not look at the sky above them?- How We have made it and adorned it, and there are no flaws in it?” (50:6)*

3- He looked from the perspective of human at the beauty of creation and nature and sees the delicacy and harmony of the creation on the behalf of mankind, and emphasizes it so others can enjoy it: *“So Supremely Blessed be Allah, the best of the creators.” (23:14)*

### **Two types of artistic creation of God:**

1- The configuring art in the creation.

The Quran has so affected the Muslim mind that it became obvious constitutive of the Islamic esthetics.

Thus we can see how important was the Quran for the artistic feelings and more generally the Muslim consciousness.

The followings are some examples of how the Qur'an combines words, sounds, meaning, order<sup>8</sup>, unsurpassed eloquence and a unique literary form to

<sup>7</sup> Taha Husayn, *Mir'at al-Islam*, p. 129.

<sup>8</sup> For more information on the rhetorical features in the Qur'anic



show the beauty of His configuring art in the creation: *and the moon. Each running (on a fixed course) for an appointed term. Verily, He is the All-Mighty, the*

- *He it is Who created for you all that is on earth. Then Oft-Forgiving. (39:5)*
- *He Istawa (rose over) towards the heaven and made them seven heavens and He is the All-Knower of everything. (2:29)*
- *Do they not look at the camels, how they are created? And at the heaven, how it has been raised up? And at the mountains, how they are rooted and fixed firm? And at the earth, how it is spread out? (88:17-20)*
- *And the heaven (is also a sign). We have built it with (Our) Hands (i.e., Capability) and surely We are indeed extending (it) wide. And We have spread out the earth, how Excellent Spreader (thereof) are We! And of everything We have created pairs, that you may remember and would be mindful. (the Grace of Allah). (51:47-49)*
- *Who has created the seven heavens one above another, you can see no fault in the creations of the Most Beneficent. Then look again: "Can you see any rifts?" (Surat Al-Mulk, verse 3)*
- *And indeed We have adorned the nearest heaven with lamps, and We have made such lamps (as missiles) to drive away the Shayatin (devils), and*
- *He has created the heavens and the earth with truth. He makes the night to go in the day and makes the day to go in the night. And He has subjected the sun*

---

discourse see: H. Abdul-Raof, Exploring the Qur'an, al-Maktoum Institute Academic Press, 2003, p. 265-398; H. Abdul-Raof, Qur'an Translation: Discourse, Texture and Exegesis, Curzon Press, 2000, p 95-137; F. Esack, Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Problems and Prospects, The Muslim World, 1993, Vol. 83, No. 2, p. 126 -128; Muhuddin Darwish, Irab-ul-Quran; Ibn Kathir, Tafseer al-Qur'an, Darusalaam, Riyadh, 2001; Dr Wahba Zuhayli, al-Tafseer al-Muneer; Al-Qurtubi, Tafsir al-Qurtubi Arabic; al-Jami li-Ahkam

al-Qur'an; Tafsir al-Jalalayn, Classical Commentary of the Qur'an (Arabic & english); Imam at-Tabari, Tafsir al-Tabari: Jami' al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an; Ahmad al-Hashimi, Jawaher al-Balaghah; 'Abd al-Fatah al-Qadhi, al-Wafi fi Sharh al-Shatibiyyah fi al-Qira'at al-Sab', karangan.

<sup>9</sup> Tabatabaie, Sayyid Mohammad Hussein, *Al-Mizan fi tafsir al-Qur'an*, Dar Ihyat Al-Turath, Beirut, 2006, Vol. 1, p. 157.



*have prepared for them the torment of the blazing Fire. 67:5) above you seven strong (heavens), And have made (therein) a shining lamp (sun), And have sent down*

- *Tell me! Have you considered what you sow in the ground? Is it you that make it grow, or are We the Grower? Were it Our Will, We could crumble it to* *from the rainy clouds abundant water, That We may bring forth thereby grain and vegetation, And gardens of thick growth. (78:6-16)*

*dry pieces, and you would be regretful (or left in wonderment). (Saying): "We are indeed Mughramun (i.e. ruined or lost the money without any profit, or punished by the loss of all that we spend for cultivation, etc.)! Rather, we have been deprived. Have ye observed the water which ye drink? Is it you who cause it from the rainclouds to come down, or are We the Causer of it to come down? If We willed,* *Who hath created, and further, given order and proportion, And Who has measured (preordainments for each and everything even to be blessed or wretched); then guided (i.e. showed mankind the right as well as wrong paths, and guided the animals to pasture), And Who bringeth out the (green and luscious) pasture, Then makes it dried up, dust-colored. (87:2-5).*

*We verily could make it bitter (and undrinkable), why then do you not give thanks (to Allah)? Have* *2- The art of word order and miracle of verbal expression.*

*you considered the fire which you strike? Is it ye who grow the tree which feeds the fire, or do We grow it? We have made it a memorial (of Our handiwork), and an article of comfort and convenience for the denizens of deserts. (56:63-73)* *The Qur'an has its own unique form so it cannot be described as the normal rhymed prose that is evident in other works of Arabic literature. The Qur'an is also seen as the artistic model having attained the literary perfection (ijaz). The Qur'an (39:23) says:*

- *Have We not made the earth a resting place? And the mountains as stakes? And We have created you in pairs, And made your sleep [a means for] rest, And have made the night as a covering (through its* *"God has sent down the best speech, a mutashabih book (kitabān mutashabihan)". The word mutashabih here means resembling one another in verbal expression."*

*darkness), And have made the day for livelihood and as a means of subsistence, And We have built* *Taha Husayn, a prominent Egyptian litterateur, says: "But you know that the Qur'an is*





not prose and that it is not verse either. It is rather Qur'an, and it cannot be called by any other name but this. It is not verse, and that is clear; for it does not bind itself to the bonds of verse. And it is not prose, for it is bound by bonds peculiar to itself, not found elsewhere; some of the binds are related to the endings of its verses, and some to that musical sound which is all its own. It is therefore neither verse nor prose, but it is "a Book whose verses have been perfected and expounded, from One Who is Wise, All-Aware"; We cannot therefore say it is prose, and its text itself is not verse. It has been one of a kind, and nothing like it has ever preceded or followed it."<sup>10</sup>

### **The unique literary form of the Qur'an**

The Qur'an is a 'sea of rhetoric'. The Qur'an exhibits an unparalleled frequency of rhetorical

features, surpassing any other Arabic text, classical or modern.<sup>11</sup> The use of rhetoric in the Qur'an stands out from any other type of discourse.<sup>12</sup>

Understanding the unique literary form of the Qur'an provides an essential insight into its miraculous nature. Classical scholars such as al-Baqillani and al-Rummani view the Qur'an as having its own unique literary form.<sup>13</sup>

This view is also supported by western scholarship which can be found in the writings of famous orientalist such as Arthur J. Arberry, Professor Bruce Lawrence and D.J. Stewart.<sup>14</sup>

What makes the Qur'an a miracle, is that it is impossible for a human being to compose something like it, as it lies outside the productive capacity of the nature of the Arabic language. The productive capacity of nature, concerning the Arabic language, is that any grammatically sound expression of the

<sup>10</sup> The influential Egyptian Litterateur born in 1889 and died in 1973. Lecture entitled, Prose in the second and third centuries after the Hijrah, delivered at the Geographical Society in Cairo 1930, Dar al Ma-arif.

<sup>11</sup> H. Abdul-Raof, Exploring the Qur'an, Al-Maktoum Institute Academic Press, 2003

<sup>12</sup> Esack, Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Problems and Prospects, The Muslim World, 1993, Vol. 83, No. 2. p. 126 -128.

<sup>13</sup> Abd al-Jabbar, I'jaz al-Qur'an, Cairo, 1960, p. 224; Ali Ibn Isa al-Rummani, Thalath Rasa'il Ijaz al-Qur'an, Ed. M. Khalaf Allah & M. Sallam, Cairo, 1956, p. 97; Hamd Ibn Mohammad al-Khatibi, al-Bayan fi I'jaz al-Qur'an, Ed. Dr 'Abd al-Alim, Muslim University, Aligarh, India, 1953, p. 36; Abu Bakr

Mohammad Ibn Tayyib Baqillani, al-I'jaz al-Qur'an. Ed. A. Saqr, Dar al-Ma'arif, Eqypt, pp. 86-89; A'isha 'Abd ar-Rahman, at-Tafsir al-Bayani li-Qur'an al-Karim, 3rd ed, Cairo, 1968.

<sup>14</sup> Arthur J. Arberry, The Koran, Oxford University Press, 1998. p. x; Bruce Lawrence, Journal of Qur'anic Studies, Vol VII, Issue I, 2005. Approximating Saj' in English Renditions of the Qur'an: A Close Reading of Suran 93 (al-Duha) and the basmala p. 64; Devin J. Stewart, Saj' in the Qur'an: Prosody and Structure, in The Koran: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies, Edited by Colin Turner, Vol. II.



Arabic language will always fall with-in the known Arabic literary forms of prose and poetry. All of the possible combinations of Arabic words, letters and grammatical rules have been exhausted and yet its literary form has not been matched linguistically. The Arabs, who were known to have been Arabic linguists par excellence, failed to successfully challenge the Qur'an. Forster Fitzgerald Arbuthnot, who was a notable British Orientalist and translator, states: "...and that though several attempts have been made to produce a work equal to it as far as elegant writing is concerned, none has as yet succeeded." <sup>15</sup>

We find that the construction of the Qur'an is not just straightforward speech. This is due to the use of rhyme, rhythm, depth of meaning and unique stylistic features abundant throughout the Qur'an. This is summarised by the famous Arabic literary scholar Arthur J. Arberry, "For the Koran is neither prose nor poetry, but a unique fusion of both." <sup>16</sup> Qur'an is a masterpiece of rhymed prose and disciplined rhythm. It is regarded as the Prophet

Mohammad's miracle, a text of such astounding beauty and wisdom that no one will ever be able to match its eloquence.

The inimitable nature of the Qur'an was recognized by generation after generation of scholars. Al-Tabari (d. 923) dealt with this subject in his voluminous study of the Holy Book. <sup>17</sup> Al-Zamakhshari elaborated on this theme in his famous *al-Kashshaf*, <sup>18</sup> as did Baydawi in his *Tafsir*. <sup>19</sup> Al-Baqillani, a prominent scholar, wrote a book which he devoted entirely to this subject and to which he gave the title *I'jaz al-Qur'an* (The Inimitability of the Qur'an). <sup>20</sup> Here he wrote: "The Qur'an is so wonderfully arranged and so marvellously composed, and so exalted is its literary excellence that it is beyond what any mere creature could attain." <sup>21</sup>

Al-Jawziyya, also a noted scholar, added that: "Whoever knows Arabic and is acquainted with lexicography, grammar, rhetoric, and Arabic poetry and prose recognizes ipso facto the supremacy of the Qur'an." <sup>22</sup>

<sup>15</sup> F. Arbuthnot, *The Construction of the Bible and the Koran*, London, 1885, p 5.

<sup>16</sup> Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran*, Oxford University Press, 1998. p. x.

<sup>17</sup> Abu Jafar Mohammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Tafsir al-Qur'an*.

<sup>18</sup> Mahmud ibn Umar al-Zamakhshari, (d. 1143).

<sup>19</sup> Nasr al-Din al-Baidawi (d. 1286)

<sup>20</sup> Al-Baqillani, *al-I'jaz al-Qur'an*, p. 45

<sup>21</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Kitab al-Fawai'id al-mushawwig ila 'ulum al-Qur'an wa'ilm al-bayan*, Cairo, 1909, pp. 7, 246.

<sup>22</sup> Ibn Khaldun, Abdurahman M., *Mokaddimat Ibn Khaldun*, vol. 3, 338



Ibn Khaldun also dealt with certain aspects of the style of the Qur'an: "The inimitability of the Qur'an consists in the fact that its language indicates all the requirements of the situation referred to, whether they are stated or understood. This represents the highest degree of speech. In addition, the Qur'an is perfect in the choice of words and excellence of arrangement."<sup>23</sup>

### **Musical rhythm of the Qur'an verses**

In the selection and arrangement of letters in the words and arrangement of words in Qur'anic sentences and the fit between the literal and spiritual expressions of Qur'anic verses there is such harmony that itself is a beautiful melody and is called musical rhythm of the Qur'an verses. This explosive verbal expression of the verses extremely affects the audiences and readers. God, the most exalted, says: *"Allah has sent down the best statement, a Book (this Qur'an), its parts resembling each other in goodness and truth, oft-repeated. The skins of those who fear their Lord shiver from it (when they recite it or hear it). Then their skin and their heart soften to the remembrance of Allah. That*

*is the guidance of Allah. He Guides therewith whom He pleases and whomever Allah sends astray, for him there is no guide."* (39:23).

The rhythmic patterns of speech found in Qur'anic recitations are yet another remarkable aspect of the language of the Qur'an. These patterns are a reflection of the special array of words and arrangement of phrases found in the Book. In the view of many scholars such verses combine the characteristics of both poetry and prose.<sup>24</sup> Unlike some poetry, the verses of the Qur'an do not have one single rhyme, thus there is more room for flexibility and freedom of expression. The Qur'an does, however, reflect certain aspects of poetry, especially with respect to its use of words with identical numbers of syllables. This 'music' is more noticeable in short verses than it is in long ones.<sup>25</sup> Sayyid Qutb cites sura 53 (*al-Najm*) as an excellent example of prose rhythm produced by words similar in length and all ending in the same sound, in this case the long a<sup>26</sup> There is another type of internal rhythm which is inherent in the structure of the single sentence. This is seen when the length of words varies within the same sura. A good example

<sup>23</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Kitab Ta'wil mushkil al-Qur'an*, Cairo, 1954, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Al-Taswir al-fanni fi l-Qur'an*, p. 34.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



of this is sura 19 (*Maryam*), which begins with short words and phrases, then changes to longer ones. Furthermore, the rhythms of the various segments are enhanced by the use of two main rhymes throughout the entire sura. These rhymes end either

in *nun* or *mim* preceded by either *ya'* or *wa'w*.

The Qur'an makes extensive use of illustrations, imagery, and metaphor, thus adding beauty, life, and colour to plain words. In fact, the ubiquity of figures of speech in the Qur'an has led Sayyid Qutb to conclude that 'the use of imagery and figures of speech is the Qur'an's preferred style.'<sup>27</sup>

Wherever the meanings of the verses are about the heaven and its blessings, the letters and words in the verses are calm, sedate, friendly and soft such as silk. "And the Garden will be brought nigh to the Righteous, - no more a thing distant.(50:31)

Conversely, in the story of Abraham, the Qur'anic verses carefully depict a calm, peaceful, and patient personality. This careful and accurate delineation of personality is effected largely through dialogue which skillfully brings out the traits of such personalities. The dialogue, in turn, is rendered even more effective by a very careful choice of words.

On the other hand, when it has connotations of hell

and burning, the letters and words in the verses are intensity, rough, tough and harsh. Doomsday is one of the frequent themes of the Qur'an. The description of the horrors of that day is also presented through figures of speech:

• *The terrible calamity! (Al-Qari'ah, "The (Day) of Noise and Clamour"), What is the terrible calamity! And what will make you comprehend what the terrible calamity is? It is a Day whereon mankind will be like moths scattered about, And the mountains will become as carded wool. (75:1-5)*

• *For the convulsion of the Hour will be a terrible thing! The day ye shall see it, each mother giving suck shall forget her suckling-babe, and each pregnant female shall deliver her load. Thou shalt see mankind as in a drunken riot, yet not drunk. (22:2)*

*When the earth is shaken with its (final) earthquake. And the earth throws up her burdens (from within), And man cries (distressed): "What is the matter with it?" That Day it will declare its information (about all what happened over it of good or evil). (99:1-4)*  
*On the Day when We will say to Hell: "Are you filled?" It will say: "Are there any more (to come)?" (50:30)*

<sup>27</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Al-Taswir al-fanni fi l-Qur'an*, p. 34.



- *The Hour has come near, and the moon has split [in particular word that has been chosen to prove two]. (54:1)* Qur'an's superior eloquence and its flexibility.
- *When the great event inevitable comes to pass, Qur'an on the subject of life style emphasizes on the There is, at its occurrence, no denial, Abasing (one life style with full of goodness and abundance party), exalting (the other), (56:1-3)* (تكاثري) instead of piling up worldly things (كوثرى).
- *By those (angels) who pull out (the souls of the disbelievers and the wicked) with great violence, Sura al-Kuwthar is an example of how the Qur'an (Surat An-Nazi'at, verse 1)* combines words, sounds, meaning and order to achieve its communicative goal, the result of which
- *But when there comes the greatest Overwhelming is sublime rhetoric, unsurpassed eloquence and a Calamity, The day when man will call to mind his unique literary form. (whole) endeavour, And Hell-fire shall be made Observing Quantity and neglect (disregard) Quality apparent in full view for (every) one who sees, So in the life style is a negative consequences of as for he who transgressed, And preferred the life of modern world. Qur'an in the Sura al-Kuwthar this world (by following his evil desires and lusts), prohibit merely observing Quantity and piling up Verily, his abode will be Hell-fire. (79:34-39)* worldly things and on the other hand express the
- *So the roots of the people who did wrong were cut importance of Quality which is full of compassion, off. (6:45).* blessing and goodness. God says: "the vain effort of

Further examples of the fit and harmony between the literal and spiritual expressions of Qur'anic verses are too many and varied to list and are beyond the scope of this article, but can be found in a multitude of other works on this subject.

*piling up worldly things" (102:1).*  
The educational modern technology regards simplicity and severity in teaching, and balances each of them. Qur'an refers to balance in this verse: "and be moderate in your walking". (31:19)

### **Qur'anic word choice and Qur'an's superior eloquence and flexibility**

God almighty regards simplicity and taking easy in teaching. He says in his book:

"(o' messenger) we have made this Qur'an easy in

There are many examples in the Qur'an of a

your tongue in order that people understand the



meaning and be reminded by it”.

One can not find even one example for strictness, pedantry and severity in the subject under discussion, during Prophet’s guiding life. On the contrary, He behaved so flexibly that occasionally caused “something” in the heart of His loyal disciples. All these were, because of the influence of culture and verses of the Quran in the Prophet's life.<sup>28</sup>

Another example for the frequency of rhetorical devices of Qur’an and word order and meaning in Qur’an is the corresponding usage of encouragement and punishment. Qur’an is full of encouragements in which the believer, patient, beneficent and pious because of their goodness has been designed to be encouraged and living in happiness and bounty in the proximity of those who are pure and close to the divine presence. God says: *“such believers will be rewarded an excellent chamber in the garden for their patience and steadfastness in their faith and therein they shall receive greeting and respect”* (25:75)

On the other hand we find out some verses speaking of unbelievers who are subjected to live in affliction

and pain. God the most exalted has said in his book:

*“As to the disbelievers, I will chastise them with a severe chastisement in this world and in the hereafter; and they shall have not protectors and helpers”* (4:173).

And there are also many other examples in the Qur’an of a particular word being used rather than another word with a similar meaning that phonetically enhances the description in the text during its recitation. It should be mentioned that the words of the Qur’an are such that they cannot be replaced by something else.<sup>29</sup> For instance, Allah says in Surah al-Hajj, verse 31:

*“Hunafa’ Lillah* (i.e. worshipping none but Allah), not associating partners (in worship) to Him; and whoever assigns partners to Allah, it is as if he had fallen from the sky, and the birds had snatched him, or the wind had thrown him to a far off place.”

Here (hunafa’ lillah) means, sincerely submitting to Him alone, shunning falsehood and seeking the truth. Allah then says “not associating partners unto Him”. Then Allah gives a likeness of the idolator in his misguidance and being doomed and being far away from true guidance, and says: whoever assigns

<sup>28</sup> Al-Tabari, 1/11; al-Khuaei, 172-173.

<sup>29</sup> Mohammed Abdul Halim, Understanding the Qur’an: Themes



partners to Allah, it is as if he had fallen from the sky, and the birds had snatched him, or the wind had thrown him to a far off place.”

This whole passage conjures up a vivid scene of a person falling down from the sky from a great height about to be violently broken into pieces or he may be swept away by the wind or thrown into a bottomless depth. What is striking is the rapid and violent movement, with scenes happening in quick succession and then disappearing completely.

The interesting point to note here is that the verse ends with the word saheeq, rather than an alternative word, baeed. Both of these have a very similar meaning: remote, distant and faraway. However, the word saheeq is used because it ends in the letter qaf, which is a ‘heavy’ letter in the Arabic alphabet as opposed to the ‘lighter’ daal at the end of the word baeed. In this case the verse ends on a much harder note, which strengthens and underlines the stark events being portrayed in the verse.

The verse represents a very accurate picture and apt description of one who associates partners with Allah. He falls from the sublime height of faith to land in utter destruction. Finishing the verse with the letter qaf shows the severity of the matter, and that

when the person is thrown to the faraway place the landing is not soft, rather he is smashed on the ground with a crack. This type of example highlights further the unique inter-relationship between the precise choices of Qur’anic words, their resonance and how this affects the meaning of a particular verse.<sup>30</sup>

And one of the Qur’an’s superior eloquence is that Qur’an demonstrates its higher frequency of rhetorical features by using the antiphrasis in the verses. Antiphrasis is a figure of speech that is used to mean the opposite of its usual sense, especially ironically. For example:

*“Then pour over his head the torment of boiling water. Taste you (this)! Verily, you were (pretending to be) the mighty, the generous!” (44: 48-49).*

The use of dialogue makes the scenes more vivid and closer to life. This is an art in which the Qur’an excels, and an art in which it is remarkably innovative. It is clearly a form of literary composition which the Qur’an introduced to the language.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Qur’an is a literary and linguistic

<sup>30</sup> Hamza Andreas Tzortzis, *The Qur’an’s Challenge: A Literary*  
Page | 15  
[www.academicpress.org](http://www.academicpress.org)

& Linguistic Miracle. 2014.



miracle. It has challenged those who doubt its Divine author-ship and history has shown that it is indeed a miracle as there can be no natural explanation to comprehensively explain its unmatched unique expression. As tangible signs, Qur'anic verses are expressive of an inexhaustible truth. They signify meanings layered within meanings, light upon light and miracle after miracle.

Moreover, from literary, structural, and stylistic points of view, the Qur'an added immeasurably to the beauty of the language, introducing new styles, forms of expression, figures of speech, and structures.<sup>31</sup>

By pondering on the above-cited verses of Qur'an, it can be deduced that the artistic beauty of the verses itself, is not the main purpose for the descending of Qur'an, rather it is a method to guide the mankind. Therefore when God depicts the beauties of creation by his miraculous and astounding words, then he asserts that these signs all implicate the Resurrection, Reckoning Day, responsibility of human actions and the explanation of truth and falsehood and Doomsday. That is the reason after referring to the graces of creatures, God

says: *"Indeed, the Day of Judgement is an appointed time"* (78:17). It means along with the freshness and the blessings and the beauty of creation, there is separation and that is the Judgement Day; separation from all interests and all the ones that we have been accustomed to them. As God, the Most Exalted says: *"Verily the Day of Sorting out is a thing appointed."* (78:17).

Briefly, the art of rhetoric and beautiful expression in the Qur'anic verses doesn't have any purpose unless to guide the mankind and not to focus only on the beauties of art itself. And ultimately, art is the speech language of God with humans and God through the art addresses the human and gives the best appropriate and competent response to the all feelings, emotions and innate sense of humans' worship.

---

<sup>31</sup> Rashida Begum Alam, *The Islam Guide, An Insight into the Faith, History and Civilisation*, Exhibition Islam, 2007, pp. 191-  
Page | 16  
[www.academicpress.org](http://www.academicpress.org)





## Bibliography

1. A'isha 'Abd ar-Rahman, *Al-Tafsir al-Bayani li-Qur'an al-Karim*, 3rd ed, Cairo, 1968.
2. Abd al-Jabbar, *I'jaz al-Qur'an*, Cairo, 1960.
3. Abdul-Raof, *Qur'an Translation: Discourse, Texture and Exegesis*, Curzon Press, 2000.
4. Ahmad al-Hashimi, *Jawaher al-Balaghah*, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah, Lebanon.
5. Al-Tabari, Abi Ja'far Muhammad B. Jar'r , *Jāmi` al-bayān `an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān (Tafsīr al-Tabarī)* , Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, Beirut, 1997.
6. Al-Baqillani, Abu Bakr Mohammad Ibn Tayyib, *al-I'jaz al-Qur'an*, Ed. A. Saqr, Dar al-Ma'arif, Egypt, 1977.
7. Al-Baydawi, Abdallah Ibn 'Umar, *Anwar at-Tanzil wa-Asrar at-Ta'wil*, Riyadh, Dar at-Tiba'ah, 1997.
8. Al-Faruqi, I.R., *Al Tawhid: Its implication for Thought and Life*, Herndon Virginia, The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1992.
9. Ali Ibn Isa al-Rummani, *Thalath Rasa'il Ijaz al-Qur'an*, Ed. M. Khalaf Allah & M. Sallam, Cairo, 1956.
10. Al-Khuie, Sayyed Abulqasim, *Al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Mussat Ihya Athar al-Imam Khuie, Qum.
11. Al-Zamakhashari, Mahmud Ibn Umar, *Al-Kashshaaf'an Haqa'iq at-Tanzil*, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyah, Beirut, Lebanon.
12. Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran*, Oxford University Press, 1998.
13. At-Tabari, *Tafsir al-Tabari: Jami` al Bayan fi Ta'Wil al Qur'an*;
14. Bruce Lawrence, *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, Vol VII, Issue I, 2005.
15. Esack, *Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Problems and Prospects*, The Muslim World, 1993.
16. F. Arbuthnot, *The Construction of the Bible and the Koran*, London, 1885.
17. H. Abdul-Raof, *Exploring the Qur'an*, al-Maktoum Institute Academic Press, 2003.



18. Hamd Ibn Mohammad al-Khatibi, *al-Bayan fi I'jaz al-Qur'an*, Ed. Dr 'Abd al-Alim, Muslim University, Aligarh, India, 1953.
19. Hamza Andreas Tzortzis, *The Qur'an's Challenge: A Literary & Linguistic Miracle*. 2014.
20. Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, Abu Jafar Mohammad, *Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, Beirut, 1997.
21. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an*, Darusalaam, Riyadh, 2001.
22. Ibn Khaldun, Abdurahman M., *Mokaddimat Ibn Khaldoun*, Ed. Darweesh al-Jawydi, al-Maktaba al-Asriyah, Sidon-Beirut, 1995.
23. Ibn Qayyum al-Jawziyya, *Kitab al-Fawai'id al-Mushawwig ila Ulum al-Qur'an wa'ilm al-Bayan*, Cairo, 1909.
24. Ibn Qutayba, *Kitab Ta'wil Mushkil al-Qur'an*, Cairo, 1954.
25. Ibrahim Anis, *Fi l-lahajat al'arabiyya*, Cairo, 1962.
26. Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti's *al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, Dar al-Nadwah al-Jadidah, Beirut, n.d.
27. Mohammed Abdul Halim, *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes & Styles*, I. B.Tauris Publishers, 1999.
28. Qurtubī, Mohammad ibn Ahmad, *Tafsir al-Qurtubi: classical commentary of the Holy Quran*. Front Cover, Dar al-Taqwa, 2003.
29. R. Ettinghausen, "The character of Islamic Arts", in *The Arab Heritage*, ed. Faris, Princeton Univ. Press, 1944.
30. Rachida El Diwani, *Transcendence in Islamic Art*, Alexandria University, Alexandria, Egypt, Fulbright Visiting Specialist, Oct 22 – Nov 12, 2005.
31. Rashida Begum Alam, *The Islam Guide, An Insight into the Faith, History and Civilisation*, Exhibition Islam, 2007.
32. Sayyid Qutb, *Al-Taswir al-fanni fi l-Qur'an*, Cairo, 1963.
33. Tabatabaie, Sayyid Mohammad Hussein, *Al-Mizan fi tafsir al-Qur'an*, Dar Ihya' Al-Turath, Beirut, 2006.



34. Taha Husayn, *Mir'at al-Islam*, Cairo, 1959.
35. Vicente Cantarino, *Arabic poetics in the golden age*, Leiden, 1975.