EXPLORING METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF LINGUISTIC IN THE QURAN AND ITS TAFSIR

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Abstract: Tulisan ini menelaah makna bahasa dan teks yang digunakan dalam Al-Qur'an. Dalam mengajarkan Islam, pada dasarnya berdasarkan dua sumber fundamental, yaitu Al-Qur'an dan tradisi Nabi. Bagi muslim, Al-Qur'an adalah Wahyu Ilahi. Al-Qur'an merupakan perkataan dari Tuhan dan kehadiran Ilahi pada ruang dan waktu sejarah. Melalui penyelidikan terhadap interpretasi sejarah berdasarkan aspek linguistik dalam Al-Qur'an, sebuah usaha dilakukan untuk meningkatkan definisi yang jelas mengenai *tafsir* dan bagaimana Al-Qur'an itu diinterpretasikan dalam sejarah Islam.

Berdasarkan pada contoh-contoh tersebut, tulisan ini membahas tentang pendefinisian kembali *tafsir* dilihat dari bentuk khusus yang berhubungan dengan interpretasi Sarjana Muslim sebagai penterjemah dan aturan mendefinisikan karakteristik budaya berdasarkan tafsir dan termasuk penekanan dalam memahami aspek linguistik dan kemanusiaan, serta tahapan interpretasi yang harus dilakukan. Tulisan ini juga bertujuan untuk mendiskusikan metode interpretif dan hubungan dialektika terhadap teks Al-Qur'an dan konteks linguistik Al-Qur'an.

This paper explores the meanings of language and text used in the Holy Scripture (the Quran). In Islam, its teachings are based essentially on two fundamental sources, the Qur'an and the prophetic tradition. For Muslims, the Qur'an is Divine Revelation. It is the very word of God and the presence of the Divine in space and time of the history. Through an examination

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of the historical interpretation based on linguistic aspects of the Quran, an attempt is made to develop a clearer definition of *tafsir* and how the Quran is interpreted in the history of Islam.

Based upon the examples, the paper works toward redefining *tafsir* in terms of specific patterns of relationships with interpretation of the Muslim Scholars as the Muslim interpreter and a critically-selected set of defining characteristics of culture-based *tafsir a*nd including an emphasis on understanding the aspects of linguistic and humanity and the level of interpretation should be done. This paper also aims to discuss on interpretive method and the dialectical relation of the Qur'ānic text and the linguistic context of the Qur'ān.

Key words: Linguistic aspects, humanity, language, the Quran, *tafsir*.

INTRODUCTION

Religion is closely related to interpretation either in conceptual level or historical background. In conceptual level, religion is seen as an "interpretive community," so, basically, the study of religion is the interpretation of interpretation. In the history, religion has been producing diverse interpretations of human beings from their own perspectives. It effects to make kind of clash and even pressure against the opponents and the followers of same religious tradition. For example, the orthodox and the liberal adherents have different interpretation of their own religion (Harvey in Aliade, 1980: 280).

In Islam, its teachings are based essentially on two fundamental sources, the Qur'an and Sunnah. For Muslims, the Qur'an is the revelation of God, the central fact of the Islamic religious experience. It is the very word of God and the presence of the numinous in history (space and time). Qur'anic revelation is not that of the transcendent God, but rather of his Divine Will, which man is to follow: "This is a declaration for mankind, a guidance and admonition for the God-fearing" (QS.3:138) (Esposito, 2001: 3-5).

The Qur'an for Believing Muslims represents unquestionably the very Word of God. It is taken for granted by the conservative *'Ulama* (Muslim Doctors of Law and Sacred Literature) just as well as by the most radical modernists (Baljon, 1968: 1). In some cases, the textuality of the Qur'ān still is debated by the scholars of the

Qur'ān. Although the textuality of the Qur'ān is a discourse taken for granted in western scholarship of the Qur'ān, it was also recognized implicitly in the classical study of the Qur'ān and explicitly in the modern study of the scholarship of the Qur'ān (Abu Zayd, 1998-2001; Wild, 1996).

On the other side, the rejection can be seen in the statement which rejects the use word 'text' to refer to the Qur'ān. They argue that none used the word 'text' *(al-nass)* when referring to the words of the Qur'ān except what God used in the Qur'ān. In the history of Islam, none of '*Ulama* (Muslim scholars) called the Qur'ān as the text *(al-nass)*. This is the way which the Western Orientalists used to perceive and analyze the Qur'ān (Imara, 1996, Abu Musa, 1990: 2).

DISCUSSION
A.   Language and Interpretive methods in *Tafsir*

Etymologically, the Arabic word *tafsīr* means exegesis, interpretation or explanation. It is a special term in the sense of interpretation in the Islamic scientific discourse. It is derived from the word *fassara* or *fasara*, technically used in the understanding of exegesis by the Muslims from the 5th century up to now. *Tafsīr* among the Muslims is usually understood as a science in study of the Qur'ān , which aims to get a profound and authoritative understanding within the capacity of human ability (Al-Suyuti, 1998: 15). The word *tafsīr* is explicitly mentioned in QS al-Furqan 25:33 (Al-Zarkashi, 1957: 3). Here, the word *tafsīr* means explanation or exegesis. Besides, there are some who say that the word *tafsīr* has the same meaning as interpretation, *sharh* and *bayān* (explanation) (Abu Zayd, 2000: 232-236).

In the history of Tafsir, especially in the development of interpretive methods, there is transformation of meaning in the language from denotative meaning *(haqīqa)* to metaphorical meaning *(majāz)*. Al-Jāhiz is considered as the first scholar who use term of *majāz* as part of denotative form *(haqīqa)*. The term *kināya* isn't mentioned in the Qur'ān, although its meaning is ever mentioned by the other sentence which means 'to hide' or ' to cover'. It is also close to the form of *tasrīh* (explanative). *Tasrīh* consists of two sides, *zāhir* (exoteric or manifest) and *bātin* (esoteric or hidden) as stated in the Qur'ān *Walā junāha 'alaikum fīmā 'arradtum bihi*

min khitbatin nisā' au aknantum fī anfusikum "(And there is no sin on you if you make a hint of betrothal or conceal it in yourself" (QS al-Baqara 2: 235) (Abu Zayd, 1998: 93-94).

There is also the term *mathal* (parable or similitude) often used by the intrepreters such as Ibn 'Abbās, Mujāhid. Qatāda, and al-Sāidi. This term then is used by the linguists such as Abū 'Ubayda and al-Farrā' when they explains the sentences of Qur'ān. If *mathal* is considered as the synonim of the word *tashbīh*, in the other case it sometimes may be extending to the meaning of *taswīr* (figurative expression).

Besides the term *mathal* as mentioned in *tafsīr* of Ibn 'Abbās, there is also the term *kināya*. Even Ibn 'Abbās ignores the usage of direct expression *(al-ta'bīr al-mubashir)* and uses the metonymic expression *(al-ta'bīr bi al-kināya)*. When he interprets some words such as *al-rafath, al-mubāshara and al-mass*, he explains that the meaning of those words is sexual intercourse *(jimā')* (Al-Tabari, 1971: 504). Hence, Ibn 'Abbās indirectly uses the metonymic statement *(kināya)* and does not use the direct meaning that may hurt feeling of someone and cause embarrassment or if those words are used to express vulgar speech. However, *kināya* is rarely used in the texts of Qur'ān and it is softly different with *mathal* which is often mentioned.

Mujāhid, a pupil of Ibn 'Abbās, uses this method to represent the meaning of Qur'ānic verses from lexical meaning as stated in the Qur'ān: "In fact, you know peoples who breaks the border at saturday. Hence, say to them. Be you as contemptible ape" (QS al-Baqara 2:65). Mujāhid said that they didn't change and become the apes (monkeys), but it is just a parable *(mathal)* given by Allāh for them like a donkey carries the books but, this *Ta'wīl* then was repelled by Imām al-Tabarī (Al-Tabari, 1971: 54).

One of the oldest works strengthening the relationship between development of the terms of *balāgha* and discussions of Islamic theology is *Tafsīr* of Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān (d.150 H). Muqātil discussed about *majāz* in the perspective of terminology. This work explains some words and sentences and the letters of the Qur'ān as well. He tries to concise the direction of meaning of those words, sentences and letters on the bases of the Qur'ānic verses. It implies that Muqātil seriously studied and explained the meaning of

the texts in their various forms and patterns. It means that the idea about the transformation the meaning of the text from one meaning to the other meaning was existing in his ideast (Abu Zayd, 1993: 97).

Muqātil recognizes that sometimes one word has certain aspects of meanings. He also awares that another side and meaning are coming from the one word. When he refers them to the denotative meaning *(ma'nā haqiqi)*, he said, "This is denotative meaning". It means that the word has one meaning popular which can be spontaneously understood when it is recited. For example, the word *maut* (death) is used for five meanings; sperms, deviation from *tauhīd* (Islamic monotheism), the barren land, land whose little plants, and loss of soul.

From these five meanings, the first four is used for secondary meaning *(al-ma'nā al-far'ī)* and the fifth meaning is the primary meaning *(al-ma'nā al–aslī)*. Muqātil insists that the death in the sense of separating soul from the body is used in the Qur'ān: "Actually, you will die and they will as well" (QS al-Zumar 39: 30) and "Each soul will feel the death *(maut)*" (QS 'Ali 'Imran 3:185) (Ibn Sulayman, 1975: 226-228). Therefore, the last meaning of those is the primary meaning of word *maut*, while the others are secondary meanings.

It is undeniable that scientific characteristics possessed by Abū 'Ubayda and al-Farrā' have influenced their focus of study to the language style of Qur'ān. Beside that the works of both of them have exposed the existence of external factors especially understanding about the textuality of the Qur'ān caused of the gramatical mistakes *(lahn)* at the official circles of caliphs from non-Arab descendants. It has implications for the methods of interpreters in their interpretative works which tends to more discuss, in the large portion, the textuality of Qur'ān from side of the sentence structure analysis (*i'rāb*), discussions of rhetoric *(Mabāhith balāghiyya)* and linguistic styles (*uslūbiyya*). These methods are quitely different with the methods of the early interpreters.

The science of *nahw* (grammar) in perspective of classic Muslim scholars is also discussed by Abū Ubaida in his work, *Majāz al-Qur'ān* (Metaphor of the Qur'ān). For him, *majāz* is the way of Arab people to express their aims and purposes and to explain the

linguistic styles in the sentence in form of *taqdīm* (bringing a word or phrase forward) *ta'khīr* (placing a word or phrase back), *hdhf* (deleting a word or phrase) etc. Study of metaphor, according to Abū 'Ubayda expresses all discussions of language including the study of linguistic style (*uslūb*). For example, when Abū 'Ubayda describes the meaning of the Qur'ānic verse *Wasal al-qarya* ("And ask for the little village, literally") (Abu Ubayda, N.Y: 47). He explains that in metaphorical meaning it means that they need to ask for the people of the town. Although he doesn't explain in detail about the differences between denotative and metaphorical meanings, actually his analyses about the Qur'ānic verses categorized as *majāz* was a valuable efforts in developing metaphorical discourses in the Qur'ān.

Al-Farrā' does not use the term *majāz* as used by Abū 'Ubayda. He prefers to choose the verb *tajawaza* which means to exceed. For instance, the word he chooses in interpreting the verse of the Qur'ān *Famā rabihat tijāratuhum* "(hence their trade would not profit" (QS al-Baqara 2:16). He perceives that the word *ribh* has exceeded the real expression (*haqīqī*) of the text. This is inferred by the meaning *tajawwaza fi al kalām* which means *takallama bi al-majāz* (speaking by using metaphorical form). For example, when he explains about that verse, al-Farrā' says that if there is someone states that how is possible the merchandise get the profit, it should be the people (trader) who get this profit. Hence, al-Farrā' argues that in the 'Arabic words there is an expression 'your merchandise has profit' or 'your merchandise is loss' and both of them are right because both of profit and loss is occurred equally in the merchandise.

Therefore, the meaning can be understood. By using this kind of majāz, an audience or a reader can easily understand the meaning of this expression; it is the profit of a trader through his merchandise (Al-Farra', 1955: 14-15). Besides, al-Farrā' has also ever mentioned the term *majāz mursal* when he gives commentary on the verse *Kuntum ta'tūnanā 'an al-yamīn* "(You used to come to us from the right side"(QS al-Sāffāt 37:28). In his commentary, al-Farrā' explains that the word *al-yamīn* in this verse means *al-quwwa* (energy or capability) or *al-qudra* (power). It is similar when he gives an interpretation for the verse *Uli al-aid wa al-absār* (These

who have hands and sights) with power. For him, the word *al-aid* in denotative meaning is hand and in *majāzi* is power and capability.

The interpretative method of Abū 'Ubayda and al-Farrā' are able to show their influences in 'Arabic literature and their good position among the interpreters of the Qur'ān before and after their era. On the base of their initiatives, the scholars of the Qur'ān actually didn't face the problem again to understand the parables and metaphor of the sentences of the Qur'ān. With these results, they have the chance to develop new discourses in the language and give new contributions unknown before.

B.   Qur'ānic Texts in Linguistic Context

Actually, the scholars of the Qur'ān give notices and boundaries for linguistic approaches to *tafsīr*. Imām al-Qurtubī says that in Qur'ānic interpretation an interpreter should refer back to 'Arabic when encountering words such as *mubham* (unclear), *mubaddal* (subtituded or exchanged), *ikhtisār* (summarizing), *hadhf* (Omiting), *idmār* (ellipsis), *taqdīm* (preceding) and *ta'khīr* (putting back). Then, whoever doesn't master the external side of *tafsīr* and draws the conclusions about the verses caused by superficial understanding of 'Arabic, he would make many mistakes and he will be categorized as a person who interprets the Qur'ān with subjective reason (Al-Qurtubi, 2000: 34). On the other side, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya further warns that it is forbidden for whoever understanding speech of God by interpreting the Qur'ān and they only use only *nahw* (grammar) and *i'rāb* (analyses of the word and sentence) in their interpretation because it will become the source of mistakes (Al-'Ak, 1996: 148-149).

Besides, *nahw* and *i'rāb* are needed in interpretation of the Qur'ān. Both are sciences of 'Arabic for knowing the accuracy of words and sentences that function to produce meaning of the text, the structures and practical sides of wording. *Nahw* and *i'rāb* are included in the sciences of *tafsīr* because not only they clarify the meaning of the Qur'ān, but they also set the recitations of Qur'ānic reciters *(al-qurra')* in right way. Besides, both are also able to widely open the meanings of the Qur'ānic verses.

For that reason, many of Muslim exegetes rely on *nahw* and *i'rāb* in *tafsīr*. For the application of *tafsīr* by using the method of

i'rāb, Imām al-Suyūtī gives some requirements for interpreters and their interpretation to perform the following. *First*, understanding what will be described in *i'rāb* whether it is *mufrad* (singular) or *murakkab* (compound or complex). *Second*, depending on 'Arabic language and not going out of its rules. *Third*, avoiding the complicated language and using the best one. *Fourth*, filling all things which are contained in the words clearly. *Fifth*, paying attention to *rasm* (style of writing) of the text. Sixth, not going against basic principles of 'Arabic without proper reason. *Seventh*, discussing main ideas and additional ones. *Eight*, avoiding to add unnecessary words into the Qur'ān (Al-Suyuti, 2003: 179-182).

In the semantical practices of *tafsīr*, the interpreters of the Qur'ān are supposed to understand the principles of Qur'ānic semantic for the Qur'ānic verses such as the regulation in *muhkam* (the verse whose clear meaning) and *Mutashābih* (the verse which is difficult to understand), *muqaddama* (the preceded) and *muakhkhara* (the put back), *'am* (the general) and *khāss* (the particular), *mujmal* (the global) and *mubayyan* (the detail), *mutlaq* (the absolut) *muqayyad* (the limited), *mantūq* (the explicit) and *mafhūm* (the implicit) of the Qur'ān (Arkoun, 1997: 14; Al-Suyuti, II, 2003: 15-64).

Text of the Qur'ān in linguistic definition contains collections of letters, words, sentences, paragraphs and its vowel points. According to this definition, the Qur'ān isn't out of the formation of culture as we see from the character of used language. Relation between text and context is dialectical. The text produces the context and the context produces the text. The meaning of it emerges from their dialectic relationship (Halliday and Hasan, 1994: 64). According to Arkoun, interrelation between language and culture in frame of linguistic context is what he called as logo-sphere *(al-dāira al-lughawiyya)* where the humans reconstruct, observe, and convey the meanings and significances which are suitable to their historicity (Arkoun, 1987: 147). Thus, there are two basic aspects of the formation process of the text. They are process of revelation *(al-tanzil)* and process of Interpretation *(al-ta'wīl)*. From here Abū Zayd directs his analyzes to the stages of the context *(mustawiyāt al-siyāq)*. They are very important in the study of the Qur'ān and linguistic for the text.

The Qur'ānic interpreter performs interpretative analyses in the boundaries of the sciences of the Qur'ān and language. To understand the Qur'ān, he must rely on the prophetic tradition and to understand the linguistic, he must rely on the authoritave linguists. An interpreter of the Qur'ān has to start from these sciences. The sciences of the Qur'ān are strongly related to the text because those sciences discuss several aspects of the text. The sciences of language (linguistics) with its branches are very important for the study of linguistic texts. This science must be mastered by *mufassir* (interpreter) or other scientists. It isn't only for the Qur'ān. Besides, the other sciences also need this science (Abu Zayd, 1994: 18-19). In the theory of language, the text is put in a system of linguistic signs, which are agreed on by the society in order to understand what the text produces, by itself.

Scholars of the Qur'ān assert that the sciences about the language, which have to be known by mufassir such as morphology, semantic, semiotic, and etymology, are urgently needed. All these sciences deal with words. He also must study about the rules of *nahw* and *i'rab*. He also must understand *balāgha* with its branches *ma'āni, bayān,* and *badī'* (Abu Zayd, 1994: 18-19). With these sciences, the reader will be able to understand the meaning of the text. With these sciences, he will move from the level of the reader to the level of interpreter.

Further, the context of linguistic brings us to discuss the grammatical meanings. In interpretative works, there are meanings which stop at this boundary. The analytic of the linguistic context is not only limited to the linguistic elements. It is not only limited to the components of the sentences *('anāsir al-jumla)* or to the meanings of the text and its styles. Besides, the interpreter must expose the hidden meaning *(al-maskut 'anh)* in the structure of discourse. Abū Zayd perceives that this level as wider level to expose the context concerning the external factors with the linguistic context which is mentioned *(al-mantūq)* (Abu Zayd, 1995: 108-109).

It could be seen in the example of how the Qur'ān inform in the *sura al-Jinn*. This *sura* explicitly explains about *jinn (jann)*. In fact, the existence of genie did not need affirmation from the Qur'ān. Abū Zayd perceives that the existence of genie in the Qur'ānic text is a kind of cultural reasoning. The Qur'anic concept of the Jinn is

quite different from that existing among Arabs and other semiotic people. So, the text is in harmony with the cultural reasoning by the spoken meaning *(al-ma'nā al-malfūz)*. Through the analyses of linguistic at the level of thought, which exposes other levels of the hidden meaning, the context of linguistic explains more than the spoken text because the language is the part of cultural and social structures (Abu Zayd, 1995: 108-109).

With respect to the material of the Qur'ān, it can be said that the Qur'ān is a message *(risāla)* using the language in oral form in its revelation and written form after its codification into a *mushaf.* It is living and playing role in dialectic relation between its text and its society. Although it is revealed by God and called the word of God, but it is a text (language) which is recognized, understood and used by human beings in time and place which can move and change. The Qur'ān doesn't change, but its meanings and interpretations can change on the bases of different dialectic relations between the Qur'ān and society. So, it can be said that the Qur'ān is a linguistic fact and it has special styles. When it becomes a linguistic fact, it certainly has rules concerning linguistic aspects and it implies that it can be understood and analyzed by linguistics.

Generally, in the studies of interpretation, *nahw (*grammar and syntax) is needed to explain the differences between the statuses of words in sentences; *sorf* (morphology) is to explain the form of words; *ma'āni* (semantic*)* is to explain the specialty of the sentence form from the meaning it refers to; *badī' (rethoric)* is to explain the beauty of figures of speech; *qirā'a* (Qur'ānic recitations) which discusses the way to pronounce the verses in the Qur'ān (Al-'Arid, 1992: 5). All those sciences relate to the level of linguistics, while *hadith (prophetic tradition)* and *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation) relate to the dimension of time.

The texts in Qur'ānic language have a special meaning due to the Qur'ānic characteristics which is a tool of communication between God and His creatures, especially with human, Whereas the language in its ordinary and common terms is a means of communication among the people. Therefore it can be said that Qur'ānic language refers to: (1) Divine aspects. It is the aspect concerning with the reality of God, such as God's names and characteristics in a*l-asmā' al-husnā* (99 of God's attributes), etcetera;

(2) the supernatural aspect. It is the area behind the human world conveyed and described by God through His revelation, such as those concerned with heaven-hell, life after death, spirit, resurrection day, etc; (3) metaphysical aspects, which are the essence of meaning beyond physical things. Human beings cannot reach this aspect but it can only be understood, thought, and realized; (4) natural and physical aspects which include two things: the human world which consists of human nature and the infra-human world which consists of the world of animals, plants, physical nature with its rules and characteristics (Dahlan, 1997: 198-199). Referring to the aspects stated above, it can be said that the Qur'ān could not be understood comprehensively if its understanding is only based on the linguistics principles as such.

CONCLUSION

The text of the Quran could be understood and interpreted Through linguistic context. As a text, it uses language as a tool to convey its content. However, understanding the Qur'ān is different from other literary works and any other text in terms of special characteristics and functions. This specialty is caused by character of linguistic essences in the Qur'ān having different function from others in communication among the humans. This difference relies on the ultimate and universal meaning, the particular function, and beyond the time and place. If the linguistic study of the Qur'ān which only relies on the linguistic principles in interpretation of the meaning of the Qur'ān, it will face many difficulties and limitations. The limitation of linguistic symbols also can be seen in the using the pronoun "He" or "We" for God. It semantically and grammatically refers to plural or singular physical meaning. However, it refers to a metaphorical meaning, not a physical meaning.

Language is a symbol that must refer to something. Linguistic reference, which relates to the natural and physical aspects, can be drawn to a certain symbol and it can be easily understood by human's reason. To overcome the language stagnation, establishment of metaphorical and analogical language is needed for those aspects related to divinity, metaphysic, and supernatural. The Qur'ān has thought the humans about these kinds of language. The Qur'ān says "the likeness of those who take (false

deities as) *auliyā'* (protectors, helpers) other than Allāh is the likeness of a spider who builds (for itself) a house; but verily, the frailest (weakest) of houses is the spider's house-, if they but know" (QS al-'AnkAbūt 29:41). Here, analogy and metaphor establish a bridge between the limited human reason and the unlimited aspects of the divine, metaphysic, and super natural which also go beyond time and place.

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