

# AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIETIES, SPEAKERS AND TYPES OF LANGUAGES IN THE QURÁN

Sanat Md. Nasir

International Islamic University Malaysia

[sanat@iium.edu.my](mailto:sanat@iium.edu.my)

## Abstract

The paper is aimed at providing an analysis of societies, speakers and types of languages found in the Qurán. As with the speakers and types of languages, they are based on all the utterances in inverted commas found in the Malay translations of the Qurán. The concepts of societies analysed are verified from the textual and co-textual reading of the Qurán. The types of speakers and languages are listed statistically so as to be able to determine the inclinations. Discussions on the three concepts are made available by the findings of the analysis. The study hopes to give a better understanding and insights about the great book, i.e. the Qurán pertaining to such concepts.

**Keywords:** societies, types of languages, speakers

## Introduction

Browsing through the internet, the most recent seminar which was held with the theme, “The Qur'an: Text, Society & Culture”, 2016 in SOAS, London and organized by Centre of Islamic Studies from 10 November 2016 to 12 November 2016, could be daunting if not disappointing when one were to benefit from the topics of the papers shown. The conference introduction states:

“The conference series seeks to provide a forum for investigating the basic question: how is the Qur’anic text read and interpreted? Our objective is to encompass a global vision of current research trends, and to stimulate discussion, debate, and research on all aspects of the Qur’anic text and its interpretation and translation. While the conference will remain committed to the textual study of the Qur’an and the religious, intellectual, and artistic activity that developed around it and drew on it, attention will also be given to literary, cultural, politico-sociological, and anthropological studies relating to the Qur’an.”

More promising is its introduction when it touches on:

“... all aspects of the Qur'anic text...” and “...attention will also be given to literary, cultural, politico-sociological, and anthropological studies relating to the Qur’an.”

But, the fact is out of eight panels below, none has to do with societies and speakers even though we have *Panel 4: Narration and Narrative* but the emphasis is on the use of *iltifat*, the patriarchs and daughters in the Qurán. Panel 3 has to do with *Language, Ideas, and Discourse*. The panels and papers presented are as follows:

*Panel 1: Rhyme, Style, and Structure* (chair: M.A.S. Abdel Haleem)

Devin J. Stewart (Emory University), 'Rhyme and Rhythm as Criteria for Determining Qur'anic Verse Endings in the Work of Ibn Sa'id al-Dani and the "Counters"'

Marianna Klar (SOAS, University of London), 'The Structuring Force of Rhyme in The Long Qur'anic Suras'

*Panel 2: Textual History and Chronology* (chair: Bruce Fudge)

Anne-Sylvie Boisliveau (University of Strasbourg), 'Diachronic Composition of the Qur'anic Text: When Argumentative Analysis Helps Chronology'

Adam Flowers (University of Chicago), 'Reconsidering Genre in Qur'anic Studies'

*Panel 3: Language, Ideas, and Discourse* (chair: Dheen Mohamed)

Nathaniel A. Miller (University of Cambridge), 'Quranic *Isra*' and Pre-Islamic Hijazi Imagery of Rule'

Thomas Hoffmann (University of Copenhagen), '*Taste My Punishment and My Warnings* (Q. 54:39): On the Torments of Tantalus and Other Painful Metaphors of Taste in the Qur'an'

*Panel 4: Narration and Narrative* (chair: Marianna Klar)

Jessica Mutter (University of Chicago), 'Dramatic Form and Nested Dialogue: The Use of *iltifat* in the Qur'an'

Hamza M. Zafer (University of Washington), 'The Patriarchs in the Qur'an'

Shawkat M. Toorawa (Yale University), 'Daughters in the Qur'an'

*Panel 5: Law* (chair: Abdul Hakim al-Matroudi)

Joseph Lowry (University of Pennsylvania), 'Legal Language and Theology in the Qur'an: Excuse, Repentance, Forgiveness, and Fulfillment'

A. David K. Owen (Harvard University), 'Certainty in Interpretation: Causal Knowledge in Ibn Hazm's Account of Zahiri Qur'anic Exegesis in *al-Ihkam fi usul al-ahkam*'

Ramon Harvey (Ebrahim College), 'Interpreting Indenture (*mukataba*) in the Qur'an: Q. 24:33 Revisited'

*Panel 6: Contemporary Approaches* (chair: Devin Stewart)

Ulrika Mårtensson (Norwegian University of Science and Technology), 'Disciplining' 'Abd al-Aziz Duri's Hijazi-Iraqi Historiographical Model: Implications for Current Qur'an Research'

Joseph Lombard (American University in Sharjah), 'Decolonialising Qur'anic Studies'

*Panel 7: Theology and Tafsir* (chair: Johanna Pink)

Hannah Erlwein (SOAS, University of London), 'A Reappraisal of Classical Islamic Arguments for God's Existence: Fakhr al-Din al-Razi's *Tafsir* as a Case in Point'

Aisha Geissinger (Carleton University), 'al-Maturidi's Exegetical Use of Variant Readings: The Strange Case of "harf Hafsa"'

*Panel 8: Political Dimensions of Interpretation and Translation* (chair: Helen Blatherwick)

Walid Saleh (University of Toronto), 'The Political in *tafsir*: Q. 43:44 as an Example'

Noureddine Miladi (Qatar University), 'The Representation of the Qur'an in the British Media'

Burçin K. Mustafa (SOAS, University of London), 'The Translation of Ambiguous Qur'anic Terms in the Realm of Doctrine Propagation'

Johanna Pink (University of Freiburg), 'Contested Form, Contested Meaning: Literal, Literary and Exegetical Translations of the Qur'an in Contemporary Indonesia'

Since none on the societies and speakers as listed above, we venture to elucidate the concepts of society and speakers as our operational definitions. The common concept of a society as widely understood is:

*"...a group of people involved in persistent [social interaction](#), or a large [social grouping](#) sharing the same geographical or social territory, typically subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations. Societies are characterized by patterns of relationships ([social relations](#)) between individuals who share a distinctive [culture](#) and [institutions](#); a given society may be described as the sum total of such relationships among its constituent members. In the [social sciences](#), a larger society often evinces [stratification](#) or [dominance](#) patterns in subgroups."*

**Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia**

The above concept of society is mundanely people and about people. We try to open this exigency meaning by encompassing people of the earth, the skies and those in between and the heaven and hell. The concept is also beyond people, i.e. the iblees and shaitans (satans), and the angles. The verses aptly state such narrations in this regard as found in (Q.S. At-Talaq:12), (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 30,34-36) and (Q.S. Al-A'raf: 22).

*It is Allah who has created seven heavens and of the earth, the like of them. [His] command descends among them so you may know that Allah is over all things competent and that Allah has encompassed all things in knowledge. (Q.S. At-Talaq:12)*

*And [mention, O Muhammad], when your Lord said to the angels, "Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority." They said, "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?" Allah said, "Indeed, I know that which you do not know." (Q.S. Al-Baqarah:30)*

*And [mention] when We said to the angels, "Prostrate before Adam"; so they prostrated, except for Iblees. He refused and was arrogant and became of the disbelievers. (Q.S. Al-Baqarah:34)*

*And We said, "O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise and eat therefrom in [ease and] abundance from wherever you will. But do not approach this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers." (Q.S. Al-Baqarah:35)*

*But Satan caused them to slip out of it and removed them from that [condition] in which they had been. And We said, "Go down, [all of you], as enemies to one another, and you will have upon the earth a place of settlement and provision for a time." (Q.S. Al-Baqarah:35)*

*So he made them fall, through deception. And when they tasted of the tree, their private parts became apparent to them, and they began to fasten together over themselves from the leaves of Paradise. And their Lord called to them, "Did I not forbid you from that tree and tell you that Satan is to you a clear enemy?" (Q.S. Al-A'raf: 22)*

The verses above mention that it is Allah who has created seven heavens and of the earth, the like of them, that he creates man to be a successive authority on earth, He asked the angels to prostrate before Adam so they prostrated, except for Iblees, that He said to Adam to dwell with his wife in paradise, and that man and satan stay as enemies.

Among the man or people themselves as societies, the Qu'ran mentions in various verses such as in (Q.S. Al-'Ankabut: 14), (Q.S. Al-Haqqah:6-8), (Q.S. Al-A'raf: 73-74), (Q.S. Al-Shu'ara: 160-172), (Q.S. Al-Hijr: 73-77), (Q.S. At-Tawbah: 70), (Q.S. Taha: 40), (Q.S. Al-Hajj: 44), (Q.S. Shaad: 13), and (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 50).

*And We certainly sent Noah to his people, and he remained among them a thousand years minus fifty years, and the flood seized them while they were wrongdoers. (Q.S. Al-'Ankabut: 14)*

*And as for 'Aad, they were destroyed by a screaming, violent wind. Which Allah imposed upon them for seven nights and eight days in succession, so you would see the people therein fallen as if they were hollow trunks of palm trees. Then do you see of them any remains? (Q.S. Al-Haqqah:6-8)*

*And to the Thamud [We sent] their brother Salih. He said, "O my people, worship Allah ; you have no deity other than Him. There has come to you clear evidence from your Lord. This is the she-camel of Allah [sent] to you as a sign. So leave her to eat within Allah 's land and do not touch her with harm, lest there seize you a painful punishment. And remember when He made you successors after the 'Aad and settled you in the land, [and] you take for yourselves palaces from its plains and carve from the mountains, homes. Then remember the favors of Allah and do not commit abuse on the earth, spreading corruption." (Q.S. Al-A'raf: 73-74)*

*The people of Lot denied the messengers. When their brother Lot said to them, "Will you not fear Allah ? Indeed, I am to you a trustworthy messenger. So fear Allah and obey me. And I do not ask you for it any payment. My payment is only from the Lord of the worlds. Do you approach males among the worlds? And leave what your Lord has created for you as mates? But you are a people transgressing." They said, "If you do not desist, O Lot, you will surely be of those evicted." He said, "Indeed, I am, toward your deed, of those who detest [it]. My Lord, save me and my family from [the*

*consequence of] what they do." So We saved him and his family, all, Except an old woman among those who remained behind. Then We destroyed the others. (Q.S. Ash-Shu'ara: 160-172)*

*So the shriek seized them at sunrise. And We made the highest part [of the city] its lowest and rained upon them stones of hard clay. Indeed in that are signs for those who discern. And indeed, those cities are [situated] on an established road. Indeed in that is a sign for the believers. (Q.S. Al-Hijr: 73-77)*

*Has there not reached them the news of those before them - the people of Noah and [the tribes of] 'Aad and Thamud and the people of Abraham and the companions of Madyan and the towns overturned? Their messengers came to them with clear proofs. And Allah would never have wronged them, but they were wronging themselves. (Q.S. At-Tawbah: 70)*

*[And We favored you] when your sister went and said, 'Shall I direct you to someone who will be responsible for him?' So We restored you to your mother that she might be content and not grieve. And you killed someone, but We saved you from retaliation and tried you with a [severe] trial. And you remained [some] years among the people of Madyan. Then you came [here] at the decreed time, O Moses. (Q.S. Taha: 40)*

*And the inhabitants of Madyan. And Moses was denied, so I prolonged enjoyment for the disbelievers; then I seized them, and how [terrible] was My reproach. (Q.S. Al-Hajj: 44)*

*And [the tribe of] Thamud and the people of Lot and the companions of the thicket. Those are the companies. (Q.S. Sad: 13)*

*And [recall] when We parted the sea for you and saved you and drowned the people of Pharaoh while you were looking on. (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 50) **(Sahih International)***

The said societies in the given verses are the people of Noah, the tribes of 'Aad, the tribe of Thamud, the people of Lot, the people of Abraham, the people of Madyan, and the people of Pharaoh. In the same vein, they were speakers and hearers in their respective societies. We have here Lot and Salih being the Messengers as speakers and in due course as hearers.

With regard to the language aspect, the panel deals with imagery of rule and metaphor. Of course, this is not the intention of this paper to dwell on those concepts about language. The concept of language is specified in this paper, i.e. with regard to language types and functions. We do concur with the fact that the only language used in the Qur'an is Arabic as enjoined in these verses (Q.S. Yusuf:2), (Q.S. Taha: 113), (Q.S. Az-Zumar: 28) and (Q.S. Al-Ahqaf: 12).

*Indeed, We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an that you might understand. (Q.S. Yusuf:2)*

*And thus We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an and have diversified therein the warnings that perhaps they will avoid [sin] or it would cause them remembrance. (Q.S. Taha: 113)*

*[It is] an Arabic Qur'an, without any deviance that they might become righteous. (Q.S. Az-Zumar: 28)*

*And before it was the scripture of Moses to lead and as a mercy. And this is a confirming Book in an Arabic tongue to warn those who have wronged and as good tidings to the doers of good.*

*(Q.S. Al-Ahqaf: 12). **(Sahih International)***

If it were in different languages, by using language types approach, the results would be still valid. What we need is the appropriate language type that can discern and analyse the data and come up with the intended results.

We normally associate language types in linguistics based on genealogical perspectives and structural forms. And thus, we have terms such as Indo-European

languages, Austronesian languages, etc., and inflective, isolative and agglutinative respectively (Voegelin & Voegelin: 1977). However, we don't find one based on worship or *ibadah*. If one could care to gloss through the writings on the ontological perspectives of the Qur'anic concept of language, one wouldn't be furnished with such succinctness and deliberateness as to define language types with respect to worship. In their deliberations, we will encounter such definition on language as language is referred to in verse (30:22) of chapter (30) *sūrat l-rūm* (The Romans):

*“And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed in that are signs for those of knowledge.” (Sahih International)*

On the other hand, we will find in the Qur'anic verses such these: *Qaulan Ma'rufa* (speaking nicely) (Q.S. An-Nisa: 8):

*“And when [other] relatives and orphans and the needy are present at the [time of] division, then provide for them [something] out of the estate and speak to them words of appropriate kindness.”*

(Q.S. An-Nisa: 8) (Sahih International)

and *Qaulan Shadida* (speak the truth) (Q.S. An-Nisa: 9):

*“And let those [executors and guardians] fear [injustice] as if they [themselves] had left weak offspring behind and feared for them. So let them fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice.” (Q.S. An-Nisa: 9) (Sahih International)*

We call the above verses as **Rabbani Type of Language** whereby the speakers speak good to the hearers. This is in line with the injunction stipulated in the Qur'an as follows:

*“And let there be [arising] from you a nation inviting to [all that is] good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and those will be the successful.” (Q.S. Al-Imran:104)*

*You are the best nation produced [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah. If only the People of the Scripture had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them are believers, but most of them are defiantly disobedient. (Q.S. Al-Imran:110) Sahih International*

The verses above insist there be people who invite to do good and enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah.

On the contrary, we have verses that depict those speak anachronism, slanted logic and in delusion.

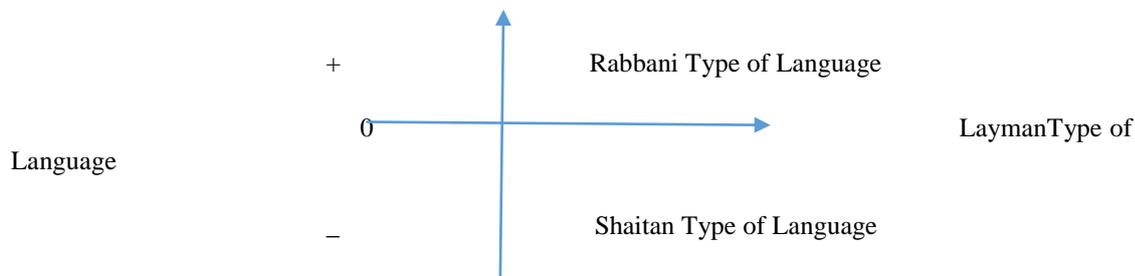
*“Those who disbelieve in God and His messengers, and seek to make distinction among God and His messengers, and say, “We believe in some and reject some,” and wish to follow a path in between; ...” (Q.S. An-Nisa:150)*

*“Even if we sent down to them a physical book, written on paper, and they touched it with their hands, those who disbelieved would have said, “This is no more than clever magic.” (Q.S. Al-Anām:7)*

*“Some of them listen to you, but we place veils on their hearts to prevent them from understanding, and deafness in their ears. Thus, no matter what kind of proof they see, they cannot believe. Thus, when they come to argue with you, the disbelievers say, “These are tales*

from the past." (Q.S. Al-Anám:25)  
[http://submission.org/friday\\_definitions\\_disbelievers.html](http://submission.org/friday_definitions_disbelievers.html)  
 "And he presents for Us an example and forgets his [own] creation. He says, "Who will give life to bones while they are disintegrated?" (Q.S. Ya-Sin:78) **Sahih International**

They speak that they believe in some and reject some, treat as clever magic, tales from the past or illogical. These lines of thinking only boil down to another type of language, we can call it as Shaitan Type of Language with a – value, i.e. sin. This type of language is in opposite pole to that of Rabbani Type of Language mentioned above with a + value, i.e. reward. In between, there is another type which has no value, neither reward nor sin. This is where when someone wants to pass water, he will tell his friend that he is going to the toilet. The act of speaking without any tacit reason is considered using Layman Type of Language. Its value is 0. But, if he says to his roommate "If anyone calling me, please tell him that I'm in a restroom' the act of saying will automatically be the Rabbani Type of Language. These types of languages can be graphically drawn below:



**Diagram: Language Types Based Ibadah**

At the outset, it looks superfluous to say that such research on societies, speakers and language types has ever been undertaken. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. The recent seminar dealt with is the proof. The other proof is when typed in *Research on the societies, the speakers and language types in the Qu'ran* in the Google engine, none has a satisfactory response. We assume not much work has been done on this topic.

At this juncture, we are in limbo as to know exactly what societies, speakers and language types are to be found in the Qurán. Knowing them will make us more articulate and having better perspectives of the relationships between the created and the Creator, Allah. This is especially so, when tongues are not being disciplined to bear only the Rabbani type.

The research is aimed at analysing the societies, speakers and language types that are to be found in the Qurán. To meet this purpose, we assigned 13 Malay language option undergraduate students at the Kulliyyah of Languages and Management, International Islamic University Malaysia to assist us in collating various data on societies, speakers and language types in the Qurán based on all the translated Malay quoted speaker-hearer dialogues. The collating was done qualitatively and the results are tabulated quantitatively.

**Finding and Discussion**

There are 43 societies collated from the data. They can be sub-classified into various categories.

1. The Unseen Category consists of those in heaven, those as souls, those in hell, those in hereafter, the angels, the satans, the jinns, those in graves, and the people in Mahshar. 9 (20.93 %)

2. The Seen Category consists of mankind, the messengers, the unbelievers, Quresh unbelievers, the unknowledgeables, the unbelievers cum unknowledgeables, the hypocrites, the transgressors, the boasters, the Jews and Christians, the Jews/ the Israelis, the Christians/ the followers of Jesus, the followers of Muhammad/the believers/Muslim society/ Muslims who fought in war, the people of Lot/ Sodom, the people of Noah/Rasib, the people of Abraham/Kaldan , the people of Madyan/ Shuaib, the people of Pharaoh/Egypt, the people of 'Aad, the tribe of Thamud, the people of Saba', the people of Ethiopia, the people of Rome, the companions of the cave, the people of Mecca, the Muslims of Mecca, the unbelievers of Mecca, the hypocrites of Mecca, the Quresh people of Mecca, the believers of Mecca, the people of Medina, the unbelievers of Medina, the Muslims of Medina/ Ansaris, and the farmers.34 (79.07%).

As predicted, the seen category is very much above the unseen, four-folds. This shows the emphasis of the Qurán is on the worldly societies, i.e. the messengers as part of them, the very people ordained by Allah to serve mankind and jinn. However, 11 of this category are concentrated to the Messenger Muhammad. This is again a testimony that the focus narrated in the Qurán is on the people of Muhammad in Arabic in order for them to understand.

With regard to the speakers, there are 24 of which contributed to the 2,172 (100.00%) quoted expressions. The highest speaker is the Messenger, Muhammad, (27.66%), followed by Allah, (23.35%), the unbelievers, (10.04%), Moses, (4.83%), the believers, (4.68%), Abraham, (4.09%), the angels and Noah, (3.94%), the unbelievers of Mecca, (2.30%), the brothers of Joseph, (1.78%), the hypocrites and Joseph, (1.71%), the Quresh unbelievers of Mecca and Jinns, (1.12%), the Jews, (1.04%), the Jews of Medina and Salih, (0.97%), Hud and Pharaoh, (0.89%), the Jews and Christians, Moses and the inhabitants of hell, (0.74%), Zakaria, (0.52%), and the believers of Medina, (0.30%).

The Messenger Muhammad being the highest speaks the fact that he was the central figure to the mankind and the jinns to propagate Islam and thus the communications ensued. The Qurán in fact took its form and meaning to and through him, of course not to side-lining the Jibril. However, Allah spoke the second highest but the fact stays that even next to His Messenger, Muhammad, he only carried the order from Him. Allah is the Author of the Qurán and thus has the leverage upon His Messenger. His words are the words of Allah. Pertaining to the least to speak, the believers of Medina, one has to reflect that being the believers, they didn't put up disparaging questions to merit being mentioned in the Qurán. They didn't create issues and frustrate His Messenger. But, they did ask questions to the Messenger out of ignorance but with much respect and love.

As to the language types employed, the findings mention that out of 2,172 (100.00%) total expressions, the highest is rabbani language type, (73.07%), the second highest is the satanic language type, (26.93%). None for the layman type. The scenario is so and as expected. The Qurán only narrates and mentions the dos and

don'ts as good tidings and admonitions from Allah and His Messengers. They are purely rabbanis. As explicitly stated in the Qur'anic verse (Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 119):

*Indeed, We have sent you, [O Muhammad], with the truth as a bringer of good tidings and a warner, and you will not be asked about the companions of Hellfire.*(Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 119) **Sahih International**

As opposed to the rabbanis, there are satanic expressions but negligible in number, just a quarter, that show such expressions have to be frowned for the sake of their speakers here in this world and in the Hereafter not to be punished. Among the interlocutors as mentioned are the unbelievers, the Jews and Christians, the satans, and the hypocrites.

*Indeed, those who disbelieve in the message after it has come to them... And indeed, it is a mighty Book. Falsehood cannot approach it from before it or from behind it; [it is] a revelation from a [Lord who is] Wise and Praiseworthy. Nothing is said to you, [O Muhammad], except what was already said to the messengers before you. Indeed, your Lord is a possessor of forgiveness and a possessor of painful penalty.* (Q.S. Fusshilat: 41-43)

*But the ones who strove against Our verses, [seeking] to cause failure - those are the companions of Hellfire. And they who disbelieved and denied Our signs - for those there will be a humiliating punishment.* (Q.S. Al-Haj: 51& 57)

As mentioned, that there is none for the layman type. This is a fact. We are either up or down the ladder of value. There is no stop but dynamic in the nature of language use. It is just a theoretical and conceptual construct. We mince no words.

## Conclusions

This paper concludes that with respect to the category of societies, the unseen and the seen, the seen category is very much above the unseen, four-folds. This shows the emphasis of the Qur'an is on the worldly societies. The highest speaker is the Messenger, Muhammad as he was the central figure in the scene to propagate Islam to the mankind and the jinns. The least to speak were the believers of Medina as they didn't dispute the verses of the Qur'an. Among the language types, the highest is the rabhani language type followed by the satanic language type. This is so as the Qur'an only narrates and mentions the dos and don'ts as ordained by Allah through His Messengers.

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