

Ta'āruf and Its Relevance to Interreligious Dialogue: A Semantic Analysis of Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt, Verse 13

ABDULLAH MUSLICH RIZAL MAULANA*

Abstract

This article discusses interreligious dialogue as expressed in the Qur'ān, namely al-Ḥujurāt (49) verse 13. Expressed with the term “ta'āruf” (to know one another), this concept can be interpreted as a foundation for modern interreligious discourse, promoting peaceful coexistence and harmony within the Islamic worldview. In this case, the worldview approach serves as a semantic framework to reconstruct conceptual meaning embedded in the Qur'ānic verse, delivering the reader a deeper apprehension of how Muslims should engage with other religions. This article concludes that ta'āruf conveyed the message of interreligious dialogue in Islam built on interrelated conceptions of words based on the root 'a-r-f, resulting in three primary reflections: first, the Qur'ānic verse demands Muslims and all of humanity to carry out dialogue; second, the verse hints that proper knowledge and piety are required before commencing the dialogue, denoting theological and epistemological needs for an interfaith conversation; and third, the verse acknowledges the nature of human creation in diverse social and cultural backgrounds, signifying the foundation of Islamic ethics (akhlāq), which is essential to dialogue.

Keywords

interreligious dialogue, semantics, ta'āruf, Islam, worldview.

Interreligious Dialogue in Islam: Current Trends and Demands

Interreligious dialogue is an activity through which common ground between religions can be found.¹ More recently, interreligious dialogue

* Lecturer in Comparative Study of Religions, University of Darussalam Gontor, East Jawa, Indonesia.

¹ Catherine Cornille, “Conditions for Inter-Religious Dialogue,” in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Hoboken: Wiley, 2013), 20–33, at 25; Aurélia Bardon, Matteo Bonotti, and Steven T. Zech, “Educating Citizens to Public Reason: What Can We Learn from Interfaith Dialogue?” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, May 10, 2022, 1–25, doi:10.1080/13698230.2022.2073104; Darren Cronshaw, “Finding Common Ground: Grassroots Dialogue Principles for Interreligious Learning at University,” *Journal of Religious Education* 69, no. 1 (2021): 127–44, doi:10.1007/s40839-020-00128-0; John-Charles Stay, Tanya van Wyk, and Yolanda Dreyer, “‘Holiness’ and Faith Practice Today: A Contribution towards Interreligious Dialogue,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 40, no. 1 (2019), doi:10.4102/ve.v40i1.2022.

has evolved into a complex interaction that provides understanding through the direct experience of the other. In this sense, dialogue is a genuine, transformative encounter between the participants, seeing and responding to each other as persons or partners.² It aims to unite individuals from various religious backgrounds to establish a more equitable and righteous world, reduce conflict, and foster collaboration based on shared values.³

In the Islamic context, the increasing prevalence of interreligious dialogue can be attributed to various factors aimed at mitigating the unfavourable perception of Islam on a global scale.⁴ In addition, Islam is increasingly being called upon to provide a more comprehensive approach to address the issue of interreligious diversity to better align with the contemporary global community.⁵

However, a significant challenge arises when attempting to establish a common understanding across Islam and different religions. Upon acknowledging that each religion asserts its method of engaging in interreligious dialogue, a multitude of frameworks exist to comprehend religious disparities that may transcend religious demarcations, which potentially emphasize critical aspects of internal religious conflict.⁶ It is

² Aydan Özoğuz and Jean-Paul Willaime, eds., "Foreword: The Role of Religion for Living Together in a Diverse Society," in *Religious Diversity and Interreligious Dialogue* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), vii, doi:10.1007/978-3-030-31856-7.

³ Judith A. Berling, "Developing Pedagogies of Interreligious Understanding," in *Critical Perspectives on Interreligious Education: Experiments in Empathy*, ed. Heidi Hadsell and Najeeba Syeed (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2020), 6.

⁴ Oddbjorn Leirvik, "Religion in School, Interreligious Relations and Citizenship: The Case of Pakistan," *British Journal of Religious Education* 30, no. 2 (2008): 143–54, doi:10.1080/01416200701831069; Louay M. Safi, "Religious Freedom and Interreligious Relations in Islam: Reflections on Da'wah and Qur'anic Ethics," *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 9, no. 2 (2011): 11–16, doi:10.1080/15570274.2011.571422.

⁵ Tijani Ahmad Ashimi, "The Importance of Peaceful Co-Existence with Other Religions in Islam (with Particular Reference to Christianity)," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* 4, no. 10 (2020): 232–37; Mohammad Fazlhashemi, "Occidentalism," in *Religious Stereotyping and Interreligious Relations*, ed. Jesper Svartvik (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Abdullah Muslich Rizal Maulana, "Sulha Theological Foundation: Tracing Key Concepts of Reconciliation in Worldview of Islam," *Dauliyah Journal* 4, no. 1 (2019): 16–39.

⁶ Kate McCarthy, "Reckoning with Religious Difference: Model of Interreligious Moral Dialogue," in *Explorations in Global Ethics: Comparative Religious Ethics and Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Sumner B. Twiss and Bruce Grelle (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998), 74; Abdullah Muslich Rizal Maulana, Muttaqin Muttaqin, and Alif Nur Fitriyani, "Paguyuban Sumarah and Intertituality: An Enquiry to the Practice of Interreligious Ritual Participation in Sujud Sumarah," *Walisongo: Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 29, no. 1 (2021): 27–54, doi:10.21580/walisongo.29.1.7364; Angela Ilić, "Looking Through a Veil: Challenges and Perspectives of Interreligious Dialogue in Serbia," *Interdisciplinary*

widely acknowledged that a significant obstacle in the realm of interreligious dialogue is balancing between a participant's steadfast dedication to their religious beliefs while maintaining a receptive attitude towards alternative perspectives.⁷

Consequently, the inquiry pertains to how entire religious systems embrace such a "dialogue," as it is imperative to thoroughly examine the inherent disparities among religions, encompassing distinct *weltanschauung* or worldview(s). These variations necessitate a more comprehensive evaluation before engaging in dialogue, which acknowledges that a component of contemporary religious inquiry affirms the centrality of religion as the foundational element of one's worldview.⁸ A worldview may benefit individuals who have presented their depiction of the world in familiar cultural terms, yet it may also be a burden since its exclusivity hinders mutual understanding and communication between or among persons who adhere to different worldviews.⁹ The preceding scenario indicates that interreligious dialogue primarily pertains to theological conditions, implying the need for reflection on core religious identities. In particular, scriptures must be thoroughly examined to achieve a framework for carrying out dialogue. This is the responsibility of each religious tradition whose

Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society 6, no. 2 (2020): 413–28, doi:10.30965/23642807-00602009; Marianne Moyaert, ed., *Interreligious Relations and the Negotiation of Ritual Boundaries: Explorations in Interrituality* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019); Marianne Moyaert and Joris Geldhof, eds., *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue: Boundaries, Transgressions and Innovations* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

⁷ Marianne Moyaert, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue: From Soteriological Openness to Hermeneutical Openness: Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue," *Modern Theology* 28, no. 1 (2012): 35, doi:10.1111/j.1468-0025.2011.01724.x; Moyaert, "Interreligious Dialogue and the Value of Openness; Taking the Vulnerability of Religious Attachments into Account: Interreligious Dialogue and the Value of Openness," *The Heythrop Journal* 51, no. 5 (2010): 730–40, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2265.2010.00574.x; Moyaert, "The Theology of Religions and the Tension between Openness and Closedness," in *Fragile Identities: Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 47–84; Riffat Hassan, "Messianism and Islam," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 22, no. 2 (1985): 291.

⁸ Thomas F. Wall, *Thinking Critically about Philosophical Problems* (Boston, MA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2001), 506; Ninian Smart, *Worldview Crosscultural Explorations of Human Belief*, 3rd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's, 2000), 166.

⁹ Bert Olivier, "Worldviews: A Blessing or a Curse?" *Koers - Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 77, no. 1 (2012): 1–8, doi:10.4102/koers.v77i1.24.

adherents are expected to comprehend their faith in a proper life-related context before joining the dialogue.¹⁰

In addition to the longstanding Islamic tradition of embracing the diverse perspectives of non-Muslim communities,¹¹ numerous verses in the Qur'ān also contribute to the ease with which Islamic theology accommodates interreligious dialogue. Such verses related to how Muslims should engage with the particular and distinguished conditions for dialogue are 2:136, 256; 3:64; 5:5; 6:108; 10:99-100; 18:29; 22:40; 45:14; 49:13; 60:8-9; 64:12; and 109:1-6. These verses directly address the importance of understanding one another, the relationship between religious worshippers—particularly People of the Book (Ahl al-Kitāb)—and the method of dialogue. The method of dialogue in Islam is conceptually tied to its notion as a missionary religion, which indicates that Muslims must convert individuals and encourage them to abandon their former faith.¹² At first look, this philosophy of dominance appears to contradict the mutuality-based idea of dialogue.¹³ However, the Qur'ān itself advocates Muslims to engage in discussion with the People of the Book impartially and equitably. Muslims are obligated to acknowledge their shared belief in God's unity, while at the same time, the Qur'ān explicitly denounces any deviation from the faith. To avoid this misunderstanding, recognizing the essence of Islam as a missionary religion would reveal that calling for Islam (*da'wah*) entails learning how to construct a distinctive approach to discussion and argumentation. Muslims must enable their partners to communicate with and listen to each other in interreligious dialogue and must approach their partners

¹⁰ Kelebogile T. Resane, "The Church and the Parachurch: Can the Two Dialogue in Order to Agree?" *Verbum et Ecclesia* 41, no. 1 (2020), doi:10.4102/ve.v41i1.2099; Wolfram Weisse, "The European Research Project ReDi: Religion and Dialogue in Modern Societies; An Overview," *Religion & Education* 46, no. 1 (2019): 1–19, doi:10.1080/15507394.2019.1577709; Paul Marshall, "The Ambiguities of Religious Freedom in Indonesia," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 16, no. 1 (2018): 85–96, doi:10.1080/15570274.2018.1433588.

¹¹ Vincent J. Cornell, "Theologies of Difference and Ideologies of Intolerance in Islam," in *Religious Tolerance in World Religions*, ed. Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2008), 274–96; Mohammad Elius et al., "Muslim Treatment of Other Religions in Medieval Bengal," *SAGE Open* 10, no. 4 (2020): 215824402097054, doi:10.1177/2158244020970546; Issa Khan et al., "A Critical Appraisal of Interreligious Dialogue in Islam," *SAGE Open* 10, no. 4 (2020), doi:10.1177/2158244020970560; Douglas Pratt et al., eds., *The Character of Christian-Muslim Encounter: Essays in Honour of David Thomas* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

¹² Md. Sanaullah, "Interfaith Dialogue in Islam: A Scriptural Scrutiny," *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 19, no. 3 (2014): 89, doi:10.9790/0837-19348691.

¹³ Maurice S. Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue* (New York: Harper, 1960), 57.

with tolerance, candour, sincerity, love, respect, and kindness rather than expecting others to embrace their views and opinions.¹⁴ Even though *da'wah* and dialogue are connected, each has a unique domain for implementation, carrying a correct balance of commitment and openness.¹⁵ The available arguments consequently acknowledge that, from a theological standpoint, Islam completely supports interreligious dialogue.¹⁶

As a result, this article discusses the concept of *ta'āruf* (knowing one another) found in the Qur'ān (49:13) through a semantic analysis to reveal an advanced argument for interreligious dialogue in the Islamic worldview. In essence, this verse suggests that humanity is not homogenous. Indeed, we share a common ancestry. However, we also own distinct identities as various ethnic groups, civilizations, and religious communities. Through semantic analysis, the verse argues that humanity is united in its pursuit to understand and fulfil God's plan as well as in its fundamental nature and composition.¹⁷

The research for this article is qualitative and was carried out through content analysis to infer a particular context of sources as a reference to the research question.¹⁸ After reading the relevant verses of the Qur'ān as well as other texts on Islam and religious dialogue, the author discovered contextual messages within the Qur'ānic verse, leading to the concluding results.

The Semantic Approach and the Islamic Worldview

Semantically approaching the Qur'ān entails enquiring about the Islamic worldview or Islamic weltanschauung construed within the scripture.

¹⁴ Ahmet Kurucan and Mustafa Kasim Erol, *Dialogue in Islam: Qur'an - Sunnah - History* (London: Dialogue Society, 2012), 20; Abdullah Muslich Rizal Maulana, "Semantic Reinterpretation of the Prophet Muhammad's Obligatory Properties for Da'wah Advancement in the Interreligious Context," *Jurnal Manajemen Dakwah* 4, no. 1 (2018): 1–22, doi:10.14421/jmd.2018.41-01.

¹⁵ Moyaert, "Recent Developments in the Theology of Interreligious Dialogue"; Moyaert, "The Theology of Religions and the Tension between Openness and Closedness"; Moyaert, "Oneself as Another: The Frailty of Religious Commitments and Its Impact on Interreligious Dialogue," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 86, no. 4 (2010): 355–77, doi:10.2143/ETL.86.4.2062420.

¹⁶ Sanallah, "Interfaith Dialogue in Islam," 88.

¹⁷ Mahmoud Ayoub, "The Need for Harmony and Collaboration between Muslims and Christians," in *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue by Mahmoud Ayoub*, ed. Irfan A. Omar (New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 9.

¹⁸ Diane M. Badzinski, Robert H. Woods Jr., and Chad M. Nelson, "Content Analysis," in *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in The Study of Religion*, ed. Steven Engler and Michael Stausberg, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2022).

The whole projection of the Islamic way of life is related to the Qur'ān.¹⁹ Interestingly, some verses were revealed in a specific context of history. For example, when the Companions needed a legal explanation, they would ask the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be on him) who would, in turn, pray to Allah to respond to this request. Alternatively, other verses have no specific background of revelation, such as verses related to the stories of other prophets, previous revelations, and the Day of Judgement.²⁰ As the reflection on verses is not limited to the historical context, the Qur'ān comprehension is always associated with a rational human approach to maintaining the sustainability of the scripture. This preservation method is known by the legal maxim “consideration is given to the general meaning of terms and not the specificity of their cause.”²¹ Apprehending the general context of “words/utterances” means that they may be applied in many situations rather than strictly associated with a particular event. Based on this principle, the cognitive process of analysing verses in the Qur'ān is characterized by the constant utilization of semantic ideas and necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the verses while actively avoiding biases or preferences. Furthermore, the principle under discussion highlights the significance of employing rational thought in comprehending the theological aspects of Islam, thoroughly analysing scripture before formulating concepts and values that align with the intellectual tradition of Islam.²²

Upon seeing the correlation between the teachings of the Qur'ān and the development of intricate systems of thinking, we deliberately acknowledge the interconnectedness of the Qur'ān and the Islamic worldview. Izutsu has written many works on this topic.²³ For him, the Islamization of *jāhiliyyah* society and the reconstruction of an old Arabic civilization to be more sophisticated via the Qur'ān correspond to what may be appropriately referred to as the Qur'ānic worldview, which is, in

¹⁹ Alparslan Açıkgenç, *Islamic Science: Toward a Definition* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1996).

²⁰ 'Alī b. Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī al-Nīsābūrī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, ed. Kamāl Basyūnī Zaghlūl (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1991); Ibn Jamā'ah Saḥal, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl: Asānīduhā wa Atharuhā fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Mecca: Umm al-Qurā, 1986), 1–5.

²¹ Muḥammad 'Abd al-'Azīm al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: 'Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1943), 1:103–9; Mannā' al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāḥith fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 2000), 78–81.

²² Abdullah Muslich Rizal Maulana et al., “Reconsidering Manifestation and Significances of Islamic Philosophy,” *Aqlania: Jurnal Filsafat Dan Teologi Islam* 12, no. 1 (2021): 25–52, doi:10.32678/aqlania.v1i12.3633.

²³ Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an* (Petaling Jaya: Islamic Book Trust, 2008), 11.

and of itself, merely a portion of that larger worldview represented by the classical Arabic language.²⁴

The writings of al-Aṣfahānī (d. 1108 CE) and al-Attas (b. 1931) may be compared further following the preceding argumentation. Despite his consistency in admitting the richness of the Qur'ānic meaning, al-Aṣfahānī referred to his semantic concept of the subject as one favoured in the pre-Islam era. This projection is evident when reading his parable of fruit and peel, where al-Aṣfahānī allegorized that the words of the Qur'ān are the core of the Arabic language and meanings, implying that the scripture is generous in transmitting the legal system through poetry and rhetoric.²⁵ Meanwhile, al-Attas executed a more philosophical elaboration, arguing that understanding the Qur'ān requires comprehending the structural system behind it. According to him, shifting thought systems involves a transformation in the fundamental elements and characteristics of the worldview along with their value system. Otherwise, in the process of interaction, people will tire themselves out and become uncreative and frightened.²⁶

These illustrations emphasize that the semantics of the Qur'ān are genuinely interrelated with the construction of the Islamic worldview. More specifically, al-Attas considers revelation the foundation of the intellectual activities of Muslims. This structure implies that the Qur'ān performs its duties as not only the holy text but also the motor of the Arabic scientific revolution.²⁷ Commentating on al-Attas's conception of worldview, Acikgenç presents a framework of five fundamental principles that delineate the qualities of a worldview. These principles are based on an individual's awareness of human cognition and encompass life, the world, man, value, and knowledge. Hence, any theory or concept originating from a particular worldview must align with the aforementioned framework.²⁸

From Semantics to Worldview: Interpreting the Qur'ān

Semantics is the “science of meaning” that involves an understanding of the constituent elements or organization of a functional language.

²⁴ Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 9.

²⁵ Al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī, *Mufradāt Alfāḍ al-Qur'ān* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 2009), 55.

²⁶ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Aspect of the Worldview of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1995), 3–4.

²⁷ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), ch. 10.

²⁸ Açıkgenç, *Islamic Science*, 20–29.

Semantics is categorized alongside semiotics, encompassing syntax, while pragmatics establishes traditional distinctions within the philosophy of language, explicitly ascribing meanings to intricate and straightforward linguistic expressions.²⁹ From a philosophical standpoint, the field of semantics aims to establish a comprehensive understanding of the nature of truth inside language. It involves providing a detailed analysis of how words and the structure of sentences contribute to different forms of truth conditions.³⁰ Semantics has played an essential role in human society since ancient age. According to Borchert, the theory of semantics was first defined by Parmenides (d. ca. 450 BCE), implying that semantics has played an essential role in human society for millennia. One of the core tenets of early semantics was: “Only what was true was expressible,” meaning that an argument or statement is false if and only if it contains a wrong name.³¹ Another modern semantics scholar, Davidson, has emphasized that truth is always the quality of utterances. We are compelled not to relegate language to wordless eternal characteristics like propositions, declarations, and affirmations, but to connect language with instances of truth in a paradigm that invites theory formation.³²

Parallel to Western semantic theories, *‘ilm al-dalālah* in Islam is frequently applied to the Qur’ān. The word *dalālah* is constructed from the stem *d-l-l* and means “to conclude or show something.”³³ In Islamic history, semantics came in response to the commencement of the Qur’ān, uncovering the details of the new style of Arabic inherited within, highlighting both literature (*adab*) and language (*lughah*).³⁴ Semantics is closely associated with “linguistic exegesis (*tafsīr lughawī*), principally undetached from commentaries of the majority of Muslim scholars.³⁵

Notably, there has been a concerted endeavour to not only elucidate the profound significance of lexical units in the Qur’ān but also to explore the scientific framework underlying Islamic intellectual

²⁹ Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 266–67.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 437.

³¹ Donald M. Borchert, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York, NY: Thomson Gale, 2006), 8:751.

³² Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 43–44.

³³ Muḥammad b. Mukrim b. Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma’ārif, 2008), 1413–14.

³⁴ Ali Mahdi Khan, *The Elements of Islamic Philosophy, Based on Original Texts* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1999), 8.

³⁵ Musā‘id b. Sulaymān b. Nāṣir al-Ṭayyār, *al-Tafsīr al-Lughawī li ‘l-Qur’ān al-Karīm* (Riyadh: Dār Ibn Jawzī, 2002), 184.

discourse. Let us reconsider the notion that semantics will always be linked to rational analysis, implying that cognitive processes preceded by language are undertaken to arrive at a conclusion. Jackendoff carefully addressed this issue and then offered further discussion concerning semantics, stating,

In particular, we have found it helpful to think of brain processing in terms of the construction of representations within representation modules and the coordination of these representations by interface modules. Thus particular mental functions are to be localised in particular representation or interface modules. In addition, we have taken care to ask how the information that appears in working memory (in speech perception and production) is related to long-term memory knowledge of the language, lexicon and grammar.³⁶

Jackendoff summarizes three critical points associated with this direct relation: that language permits us to acquire collective knowledge only by language allowing people to communicate with each other; that the measure of acquired knowledge is limited to a certain extent; and that the range of things that the thought process can apply is always “inside” the language itself.³⁷ The first principle posits that each language has distinct qualities, as the true intention of a language can only be discerned through a comprehensive understanding of that particular language.

Secondly, language is the only modal quality of awareness that allows both the relational form of thought and its abstraction.³⁸ According to Jackendoff, it may be argued that language is intrinsically linked to the process of conceptual reasoning in epistemology. Consequently, both *a priori* and *a posteriori* preferences are consistently taken into account as factors influencing decision-making. In this context, the linguistic structure will facilitate the connection between the two options. Humans lack any modality for the abstraction of experience apart from language. In other words, humans can only attain consciousness and awareness of their surroundings, environment, facts, beliefs, and claims through the use of language. In short, a language “enhances the experience of the thought.”³⁹ However, it is imperative to acknowledge that consciousness alone is insufficient. According to Jackendoff, this heightened awareness enables us to direct our focus

³⁶ Ray Jackendoff, *The Architecture of the Language Faculty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 180.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 196.

towards our ideas. The ability of humans to comprehend and grasp an object is contingent upon their conscious attention and focus. So it is argued that the ideal means of achieving a thorough comprehension of an object is through the use of a flawless timepiece.⁴⁰

Furthermore, language enables us to critically analyse an additional characteristic of an object or concept that is readily observable. The idea of the “valuation of the percept” refers to the cognitive process through which individuals identify and assign significance to items based on their memories and perceptions. Sometimes, we perceive something irrational in our dreams, such as Barack Obama with bald hair, for example, when he has curly hair. We can only comprehend the truth by language. “Curly” will be identified differently than “bald,” and so on. The semantic structure will analyse the meaning of the sentence “the curly Barack Obama” as the truth corresponded to reality, in coherence with the memories within that “I remember that US President Barack Obama has curly hair, he is not bald.”⁴¹

The aforementioned explanation will serve as our foundation, particularly when it is integrated with the analytical framework derived from the Qur’ān. Initially, upon recognizing the capacity of language to facilitate the acquisition of collective knowledge, it becomes apparent that a comprehensive understanding of language is necessary to grasp the conceptual dimension of words. Hence, when it comes to engaging with the Qur’ān, a complete grasp of the Arabic language is essential for anybody seeking to comprehend its meaning through semantic analysis. Subsequently, the comprehension of language as the only modality of consciousness allows us to condense and relate the whole of our object; to reach the correct understanding of verse 13 of al-Ḥujurāt, we are required to master the whole branches of sciences related to the subject. Understanding the Qur’ān requires expertise in many disciplines utilized in it, including exegesis (*tafsīr*), causes of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), and correlation between verses (*tanāsuh al-āyāt*). In Islam, an exegete must fulfil several provisions before engaging in Qur’ānic studies to prevent error or fallacy in commenting on the Scripture. For example, Mannā’ al-Qaṭṭān (d. 1999) documented nine requirements for exegetes based on the writings of earlier scholars.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid., 199.

⁴¹ Ibid., 202–5.

⁴² Al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāḥith fi ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, 321–23.

Interreligious Dialogue in the Islamic Worldview: Applying *Ta'āruf* in Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt, 13

The Qur'ān stands apart among the texts of theistic religions because it presents its perspective on the world by emphasizing the belief in one God and acknowledging the existence of multiple religions. Moreover, it considers religious diversity as a manifestation or indication of God's existence, ranking it second in significance after the creation of the universe.⁴³ The Qur'ān portrays religious plurality as a sacred enigma that must be acknowledged as an inherent reality to facilitate harmonious interactions between different communities in the public domain, as it articulates Islamic beliefs about the existence of others through an ethical framework, aiming to establish a practical model for an ideal society.⁴⁴ Through the semantic analysis of Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt 13, the notion of *ta'āruf* may be comprehended as further argumentation for interreligious dialogue in the Islamic worldview. The verse reads as follows: "People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognise one another. In God's eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all-knowing, all-aware."⁴⁵

In this verse, our primary objective is to analyse and elucidate many significant terms closely linked to the concept of interreligious dialogue. After exploring some references, Ibn Manẓūr's *Lisān al-'Arab* seems to provide the most comprehensive and fruitful source of analysis. The conception of words available in *Lisān al-'Arab* provides all-inclusive dimensions of meaning embedded within the term, not only defining its "literal apprehension" but also the appropriate context of word usage.

The notion of *ta'āruf* will be our first word in focus. It is derived from the root 'a-r-f, which means "to know, to recognize."⁴⁶ Following semantic structure, the analysis regarding *ta'āruf* will be done in two forms: its lexical form and its conceptual meaning.⁴⁷ First, the word

⁴³ Mahmoud Ayoub, "Religious Pluralism and the Qur'an," in *Contemporary Approaches to the Quran and Sunnah*, ed. Mahmoud Ayoub (Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2012), 45, doi:10.2307/j.ctvk8w26p.

⁴⁴ Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 35.

⁴⁵ Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴⁶ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, 2897.

⁴⁷ Ray Jackendoff, *Semantic Structures* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 7.

ta'ārafū is a form of *fi'l muḍāri' mabnī li 'l-ma'lūm*.⁴⁸ This means that *ta'ārafū* performs as a verb whose subject is known.⁴⁹ Since the term is preceded by “*Yā ayyuhā 'l-Nās*” (O mankind), the agent responsible for executing this action is the human species. The conditions prepared before *ta'ārafū* are mentioned: God has brought forth humanity through the amalgamation of distinct genders, namely male and female, and many collectives. Given the inherent nature of human beings, it can be inferred that humans naturally seek knowledge about one another. Individuals of the human species endeavour to establish interpersonal connections, employing various means to engage in dialogue and launch a discussion. In Arabic, *ta'ārafū* means “to know one another (*'arafa ba'duhum ba'd*).⁵⁰

Preliminary comprehension does not allow for a definitive conclusion concerning interreligious dialogue. Accordingly, it is vital to bear in mind that the semantic approach entails establishing connections between significant terms within a specific chain pattern, so projecting its underlying worldview. Hence, our research will establish a relationship between words and the particular meaning that is inherently associated with them. Once more, in accordance with Izutsu's perspective, our primary objective is to demonstrate the necessity of doing a thorough and rigorous investigation into the broader cultural context of a specific period and its inhabitants to achieve a more scholarly comprehension of the relational aspect of a word's meaning through semantical analysis. Ultimately, the semantic significance of a term can be understood as a concrete manifestation or encapsulation of the cultural essence. It accurately depicts the basic psychological and behavioural tendencies of those who use the word as part of their lexicon.⁵¹

Izutsu's suggestion works perfectly in our following comprehension, as the dimension of *'a-r-f* is a substantially inherent meaning of *'irfān* which is similar to knowledge (*'ilm*). *'ilm* in this context refers to one of God's characteristics as “The Knower (*al-'Ālim*). Accordingly, the notion of *'ilm* is classified as the gift of God which subsequently gives rise to the fear of God (*khashyah*). In one of the Prophetic traditions, it was narrated

⁴⁸ Aḥmad Mukhtār 'Umar, *al-Mu'jam al-Mawsū'ī li Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm wa Qirā'ātihi* (Riyadh: Mu'assasat al-Turāth, 2002), 313.

⁴⁹ Yahya Ababneh, *al-Naḥw al-'Arabī fī Ḍaw' al-Lughāt al-Sāmiyyah wa 'l-Lahjāt al-'Arabiyyah al-Qadīmah: Dirāsah Muqāranah* (Irbid: Dār al-Kitāb, 2018), 137.

⁵⁰ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, 2898.

⁵¹ Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an*, 24.

by Ibn Mas'ūd that Prophet Muḥammad said that proper knowledge is not obtained by speaking a lot, but by fearing (*khashyah*) God.⁵²

The knower then would only do what he knows or understands. When people know (*'alima* or *'arafa*) something, they become entangled with this knowledge as it serves not only as a means of acquiring information but also as symbolic indicators, signs or *'alāmāt* (sing. *'alāmah*). *'Alāmāt* should be understood as the signs or *āyāt* of the power and greatness of God.⁵³ In other words, the fear that appears in the soul of Muslims is in the case of realizing God and his weakness before Him. Fear (*khashyah*), as a consequence of knowledge (*'ilm*), is obedience and submission to God, so one would not violate His order. In the case of interreligious dialogue, in expectations arising from this notion, dialogue is necessary and should be engaged following the signs of God (*'alāmāt*). Muslim researchers or academicians must properly realize, know, and understand that this dialogue is part of practising the knowledge gifted by God. The rule intended is provided in the Qur'an immediately after the notion of *ta'āruf*: "Surely the noblest of people before God are the most reverent." Reverence (*taqwā*) should be understood as the sign required before engaging in interreligious dialogue.

It is also interesting to know that the verse also mentions "*atqākum*" (the most reverent of you) immediately after "*akramākum*" (the noblest of you). The root of the former is *t-q-y*, literally meaning fear (*khawf*), which has the same connotation as *khashyah*.⁵⁴ Thus, fear is insufficient to prove our knowledge in front of God and engage in dialogue, because the term *taqwā* is also related to the term *waqā*, meaning that *taqwā* or reverent is not only about fear but also about "safeguarding," "maintaining," "defending," "protecting," and "ensuring" God. In response, God will also ensure His servant. God will keep him safe from any harm as long as the servant "protects" Him by countering sins with good deeds. In short, the conception of Islam put humankind in the proper position from the beginning: if they do good deeds, then God will imbue them with protection and affection. Otherwise, if they sin, God will repay the bad. As we follow the scripture concerning the notion of tribes and plurality, this verse implies that the dignity of the people (*karāmah*) does not depend on their ancestry, colour, or gender, but only on the relation between them and God. In conclusion, applying interreligious dialogue in the name of harmony and tolerance will imply

⁵² Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, 3083.

⁵³ Ayoub, "Religious Pluralism and the Qur'an," 45.

⁵⁴ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, 1169–70.

good in faith and society as long as the signs or rules of God (*'alāmāt*) are adhered to.

In addition, a word should be said about the main conditions of interreligious dialogue in the Islamic worldview. Mainly, this relates to the construction of “identity and openness” as inseparable from interreligious dialogue. Nevertheless, our inquiry seems complete when we compare the current notion with the semantic conception of humans in the Qur'ān. The concept of humans, according to the Qur'ān, adds the theological foundation of interreligious dialogue. People who do good will harvest excellence. In other words, God will judge without recourse. The justice of God is related to human conduct so that everyone will have rights according to their portions.

However, so many events in our world seem “unjust.” For example, some students bribe their teachers to pass and people manipulate the government budget to loot what is not theirs. Conversely, some people are gifted with intelligence, so they do not necessarily study as hard as others. Some people are poor but satisfied with their situation. The concept of justice in Islam is not merely understood as a concern for justice, peace, and genuine respect for people, but indeed also should be analysed from the Arabic word *'adl* from the root *'a-d-l*. Islamic community, in this sense, should be understood as a moderate one (*ummah wasaṭ*), which implies that the salvation of a religious community is determined by its adherence to a shared standard of righteousness and ethical behaviour, rather than the specific denomination it identifies with. This opens up the potential for establishing universal principles of ethical and moral conduct, which could contribute to the development of a genuinely diverse global society in the present day. In addition, the idea of justice can be utilized as a universally applicable socio-ethical guideline to promote the overall well-being of humanity.⁵⁵

As mentioned above, God carries the responsibility of being a judge (*ḥākim*). Interestingly, the justice of God is always related to the nature of man which, according to the Islamic worldview, is based on humanity's “nature (*fiṭrah*).” This word is derived from its root *f-ṭ-r*. When *fāṭir* means Creator,⁵⁶ it means that God also decides the nature of human beings. Hence the *ḥadīth* “No child is born except on the *fiṭrah*” means that, in Islam, humans are naturally inclined to serve God. In other words, this nature means that humans were created as God's servants, as

⁵⁵ Asma Afsaruddin, “The Hermeneutics of Inter-Faith Relations: Retrieving Moderation and Pluralism as Universal Principles in Qur'anic Exegeses,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 37, no. 2 (2009): 331–54.

⁵⁶ Qur'ān 35:1.

revealed in the following Qur'ānic verse: "I did not create jinn and mankind, save to worship Me" (51:56). The other concept of creation as *fiṭrah* may be derived from verses mentioning words from the root *kh-l-q* that will give rise to the triangular framework of *khāliq-makhlūq-akhlāq* or the Creator (God)-creature-(human, animal, plant, etc.,)-ethics.⁵⁷ The dimension of *khalaqa*, as such, refers to the nature of humans as one of His creatures who relate themselves to others reasonably and ethically.

To conclude, the concept of *fiṭrah*, again as the original entities of humans implying deeper reflection on conditions, should be engaged with before doing interreligious dialogue. Muslims must not forget or put aside their substance as creatures of God. Muslims are conceptually obligated to fulfil their essence as creatures by nature. This rational reflection on the semantics of the Qur'ān supports interreligious dialogue, with a balance between commitment and openness towards other religions.

Conclusion

This article argues that the concept of *ta'āruf* effectively communicates the idea of interreligious dialogue in Islam, founded on interconnected understandings of words derived from the root *'a-ra-fa*. This comprehension is made plausible through semantic analysis following the theoretical framework of worldview. As a result, verse 13 of al-Ḥujurāt in the Qur'ān suggests the need for Muslims to engage in dialogue with all of humanity, regardless of their background. Furthermore, the verse suggests that one must possess adequate understanding and devotion before engaging in the dialogue, indicating the theological and epistemological prerequisites for an interfaith conversation. Finally, the verse recognizes the inherent diversity in human creation across various social and cultural contexts, highlighting the fundamental role of Islamic ethics (*akhlāq*) in fostering meaningful dialogue.

It should be realized that semantics is only a tiny part of Qur'ānic studies. A better understanding of the notion in a worldview of Islam may be related to another verse substantively containing interreligious dialogue in general or applied to another discipline of Islamic studies, such as *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth*. Comparative and historical analyses may also be beneficial in strengthening the arguments of this article.

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⁵⁷ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, 1243–48.