

## The Thematic Role of Extraordinary Expressions (Ghareeb Al Qur'an) in Ar Rahman Surah

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### ABSTRACT

The Quran is a Muslim holy book that gives people guidelines and advice for obtaining happiness in this life and the next. The Quran, being a sacred book, includes a wealth of information and scientific truths. The Quran conveys Allah's commandments in the form of words. Non-Muslims as well as non-Arabs sometimes have trouble comprehending its words especially those with extraordinary meaning which is called Ghareeb Al Quran or the extraordinary words. *Gharib Al-Qur'an* is considered by many Islam enemies as a fault in the Qur'an, and that these words have no meaning or function and they are out of context. The study tends to investigate those Ghareeb words and will try to answer the questions: What are the thematic roles of those extraordinary words in the ayahs of the holy Quran? And, how they are affected by other roles in same context? The aim of the study is to explore the thematic roles of the extraordinary words in surah Al Rahman in the Holy Quran with the hypothesis that each Ghareeb lexical word has its own function exemplified by its thematic role affected by the context in which it is created. The researcher has chosen Saeed's model (2009) of thematic role for the purpose of the study's qualitative analysis of the first ten ayahs consisting extraordinary word (s) in ar Rahman surah. The study is wrapped up with the results and conclusions that validate the hypothesis set previously.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Theoretical Background

#### 1.1.1 The Thematic Roles Analysis of Meaning

Due to the overlapping and interference of naming and origin of the term "thematic role" henceforth (TR) has been labeled in many different ways seen in the following table

**Table (1) labels of thematic roles**

| The Author  | The year | The label          |
|-------------|----------|--------------------|
| Gruber      | 1965     | Thematic relations |
| Fillmore    | 1968     | Semantic cases     |
| Chomsky     | 1981     | Theta Role         |
| Nishigauchi | 1983     | Thematic domain    |
| Allan       | 1986     | Participant roles  |
| jackendoff  | 1987     | Thematic relations |
| Givon       | 1990     | Semantic roles     |

|        |      |                |
|--------|------|----------------|
| Dowty  | 1991 | Thematic roles |
| Luján  | 2010 | Semantic roles |
| Gawron | 2013 | Semantic roles |

Dowty (1991:537) points out that “there is perhaps no concept in modern syntactic and semantic theory which is so often involved in so wide a range of contexts, but on which there is so little agreement as to its nature and definition, as THEMATIC ROLE”. It can be noticed from the above table that thematic role is synonymous to semantic role. In fact, thematic role is one division of the study of semantics thematic or as Chomsky (1993:3) puts it: "Thematic roles are semantic roles in any system which takes location and movement through space in the interpretation of a natural language sentences, which is concerned with the assignment of thematic roles".

Akanay and Omachuna (2019:3) define TR as:

The basic idea or information of an encoder in conformity with the action words perform in a given context. It is the actual activity participant carried out in some real/imagined situation, apart from these linguistic encoding of those situation. It is also referred to as the underlying relationship that a patient has with the main verb in a clause.

In other words, the TR notion is based on the assumption that meaning of a sentence cannot be deduced by adding up the meanings of each content word in the sentence. (Finnegan, 1992: 160), i.e., words should not be thought of as containers of meaning. Rather, one should look at the role they play within the situation described in a sentence by every and each word (Yule, 2010: 113).

Akanay and Omachuna (2019:3) identify the characteristics of those TRs as follows:

Completeness; the argument of every verb is assigned a TR

Uniqueness; every argument is assigned a unique TR

Distinctiveness; One TR is assigned to each argument

Independence; each role is given a consistent semantic definition that applies to all verbs and all situations

Nevertheless; there are some cases in which a TR may be assigned to no constituent which leads to open thematic role as in the following example

- a. I throw the ball.
- b. The ball was thrown by me

The 'ball' is assumed to play the role of theme and 'I' is the agent in (a). In (b) 'the ball' should still be theme, and at the same time plays the agent role associated with the occurrence of the verb. The assumption that there is an agent role present in

(b), even if no constituent is actually assigned to that role is based on the intuition that (b) is understood as having some unstated agentive participant. Another case concerns the type of TR is found when a single role can have more than one label. According to Radford (1988, in Saeed 2016:150-151) the roles "patient" and "theme" are the same. While Saeed (2009) considers them different in which "patient" is used to mean the entity is acted upon changed by the verb's action. Whereas "theme" is used to describe the entity that moves( by the cause of the action ) in literal or in a metaphorical space. These two different roles are shown in the following examples given by (Saeed, 2009: 150 – 151):

(a) Fred shattered the rock. (Patient Role)

(b) Fred threw the rock (Theme role )

In addition, TR is considered very important in understanding the unspoken meaning of a sentence, i.e., providing the mechanism of interaction as the central tool in language comprehension (Carlson, 1988: 265) . In other words, it links semantics to syntax by showing the similarities and differences in verb meaning represented in argument expression through emergent generalizations. The importance of the TR can be clarified in the following points :

i) It eliminates the effect of syntactic differences and focuses on the semantic commonality between sentences. For example , in the following three sentences :

- a. My friend hit the door with a stone.
- b. The door was hit with a stone by my friend.
- c. The thrown stone by my friend hit the door.

Though the above three sentences (a),(b) and (c) have different syntactic forms, the main topic for all of them is the hitting process. The sentences consist of three participants, the hitter, the affected entity and the instrument used for performing the action. In sentence (a) and (b) the syntactic direct object and the subject are filled with the affected entity. Furthermore, the agent of the action (the hitter ) is presented as a noun phrase in the syntactic subject of (a) , as a prepositional phrase in (b) and as part of the subject in (c), but still they have same role in all sentences.

ii) Semantic role can help to identify the differences between similar syntactic structures with different semantic interpretation

(a) They broke a chair.

(b) They were sad.

The syntactic structure (3) and (5) are fairly similar and the words 'they' in both sentences are labeled as subject, their semantic roles are different. They in (3) fills the 'agent ' role, whereas they in (5) is an 'experiencer'. Thus ,Thematic roles are considered " as one of the aspects of the semantic interpretation of the elements played by a given noun phrase in a situation described by a sentence; that is to say the meaning of a sentence is obtained through the meaning that is provided by the thematic roles in that sentence "(Maharsi, 2017: 10).

To conclude, knowing these roles would give complete control over the created sentence and all of its components. Exploring theme roles as a major function in language comprehension is important because they provide an interaction mechanism through which meaning can be analyzed. Saeed( 2009: 139) classifies TR into different types as seen the following table with their definitions and examples :

**Table ( 2 ) Types of Thematic Role with Definitions and Examples based on Saeed' Model (2009)**

| <b>TR Type</b> | <b>Definition</b>                                                                                                                          | <b>Examples</b>                                                                                   |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Agent          | The initiator of some action,<br>who is capable of acting with<br>Volition.                                                                | David cooked the rashers.<br>The fox jumped out of the ditch                                      |
| Patient        | The entity undergoing the<br>effect of some action, often<br>undergoing some change in<br>State.                                           | Linda cut back these bushes.<br>The sun melted the ice                                            |
| Theme          | The entity which is moved by<br>An action, or whose location<br>Is described                                                               | Roberto passed the ball wide.<br>The book is in the library.                                      |
| Experiencer    | The entity which is<br>aware of the action or state<br>described by the predicate but<br>which is not in control of the<br>action or state | Kevin felt ill.<br>Mary saw the snake.<br>Lorcan heard the door shut.                             |
| Beneficiary    | The entity for whose benefit the action was<br>performed.                                                                                  | Robert filled in the form<br>for his grandmother.<br>They backed me a cake.                       |
| Instrument     | The means by which an action is performed or<br>something comes about                                                                      | She cleaned the wound<br>with an antiseptic wipe.<br>They signed the treaty with the<br>same pen. |
| Location       | The place in which something is situated or take<br>place                                                                                  | The monster was hiding under the bed.                                                             |

|        |                                                                            |                                                                                                                                |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Goal   | The entity towards which something moves, either literally or figuratively | <p>The band played in a marquee</p> <p>Sheila handed her license to the policeman.</p> <p>Pat told the joke to his friends</p> |
| Source | The entity from which something moves, either literally or figuratively    | <p>The plane came back from Kinshasa.</p> <p>We got the idea from a French magazine</p>                                        |

### 1.1.2 The Meaning of the Extraordinary Expressions

#### (Ghreeb Al-Qur'an)

The word " *Ghreeb* " literally is translated to "strange, obscure, and unknown" in a difficult-to-understand manner. In this sense, a few Qura'nic terms are " *Ghreeb* ". Though the term " *Ghreeb* " does not relate to any unknown terms., many non-Muslims or non-Arab find difficult to understand it due to different factors such as their habits, mental backgrounds, linguistic development, cultural context and other factors. Sherine Emara(2013:91)clarifies this fact by commenting that

Non-Arabs and Non-Muslims have a different attitude. They failed to appreciate it, and, consequently, criticize it severely. In a confounded attack against the Qur'an, enemies of Islam unjustifiably claim that using what they consider obscure or strange words is one of the many errors or faults found in the Qur'an. They even go to the extent of saying that this practice of using obscure or strange words is similar to black magic in which tricks are performed by saying some very strange words that do not make any sense even to the black magicians who compose them.

Salih (2008:para2) justifies this by saying : because of the Arab black magicians' habits of using foreign or twisted phrases, or even coining new ones, that have no meaning other than to make an impact on their gullible audience. Ghreeb expressions looked upon as part of these utterances .Burman (2007: 33), on the other hand, accuses the ghareeb expressions of making the Quran hard to be translated as when he states :

There is no clearer sign of the potential difficulties for the Qur'an's translators than the existence in the Islamic world of a whole genre of lexicons of the so-called "strange" or" foreign" words in the Qur'an. For as Muslims realized early on, there were a number of words in their sacred text that were not part of ordinary Arabic discourse, some of them deriving from rare Arabic or Semitic roots, some of them traceable to even more exotic languages, such as Persian .

But the truth lies in the fact that.the Glorious Qur'an is universally recognized as the ultimate standard of eloquence and rhetoric. As a result, the oddity of its words does not imply that they are incoherent or out of context (Al-Tamimi, 1313 A H:37) .Al-Rafii adds that

Describing words as being strange does mean that these words are improper, abnormal or atypical in view of the fact that the Qur'an is too impeccable to describe as such. A strange word here refers to fine words whose interpretation is dubious in a way that it is not equally known to its users and others.

( cited in (Mizwara;2000:166)

In other words , Extraordinary words were utilized in the Prophet's era and may nowadays no longer be used . Thus, the ordinary reader may have difficulty comprehending them. So, the words themselves do not have any inherent obscurity. It has something to do with the readers' linguistic skills. Remoteness from language, either because it is the mother tongue or because it is far in time from the original language. (Khalifa ; n.d.)

## **2 Research Methodology**

The current research is a qualitative study that can be defines as “a form of systematic empirical inquiry into meaning” (Shank; 2002:. 5). Systematic means organized and ordered ,i.e., " following rules agreed upon by members of the qualitative research community"(ibid.). Empirical implies that this sort of inquiry is based in the world of experience. Inquiry into meaning means how others interpret their own experiences.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000:3) share the view and conclude that qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach: “This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them". i.e., it is content analysis which is " any technique used for making inferences through identifying specified characteristics of messages objectively and systematically “(Gall and Borg;2007:).

The data used for the analysis is the first 10 ayahs of Al Rahman surah that have extraordinary words. Since the meaning of a word depends on the relations it holds with the before and after components in the sentence, the unit of analysis has taken two dimensions in this study. With the macro level analysis, the unit of analysis is the ayah itself which is considered an utterance with one or more sentences. And within the micro level of analysis, the unit will be the word itself. Therefore; the researcher will have the following steps for the analysis:

1. Writing the ayah in Arabic with its translation done by Ali Yousif translation of the Holy Quran (1999).
2. Assigning a number to each ayah as it appears originally in the holy Quran.
3. Underlying and italicizing the Gareeb Expressions in the Ayah
4. Giving the Interpretation of the whole ayha
5. Identifying the thematic role of the Gareeb expressions term in the Ayah.

## **3. Data Analysis**

### 3.1 The Thematic Role Of Ayah (3)

**He has taught him speech (and intelligence)**

{ عَلَّمَهُ الْبَيَانَ }

Al-bayan refers to Allah's teaching the Qur'an that is, teaching the Muslims how to recite it by making it easy for them to speak and pronounce letters with the various parts of the mouth, such as the alveolar bridge, the tongue and the lips, in other words, He taught him how to utter the words. (Ibn-Kathir, 2003: 5). The sentence consists of three thematic roles. First, the agent which refers to Al mighty Allah, the doer of the action of teaching. Second the Muslim which is shown through the attached pronoun to the verb "taught" has a beneficiary role since he/she benefits from the action performed. And as for the Gareeb word (البيان) which has a conceptual meaning, the Patient role is taken place because it is an entity affected by the action.

### 3.2 The Thematic Role Of Ayah (5)

**The sun and the moon follow courses (exactly) computed**

{ الشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ بِحُسْبَانٍ }

(بِحُسْبَانٍ) means that both the sun and the moon move in their orbit in perfect succession, according to precise calculation that is never delayed nor disturbed confirmed in Yasin Ayah(30): "It is not for the sun to overtake the moon, nor does the night outstrip the day. They all float, each in an orbit" (Ibn-Kathir, 2003: 5) The sentence consists of two thematic roles. First, the implicit agent refers to Al mighty Allah, the doer of the action of Sun and Moon precise and calculated movement. Second, the Theme which refers to the entity of the Sun and the Moon moving in their path. We can rephrase the sentence in the following way: Allah moves the sun and the moon precisely.

### 3.3 The Thematic Role Of Ayah (7)

**And the Firmament has He raised high, and He has set up the Balance (of Justice)**

{ وَالسَّمَاءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ الْمِيزَانَ }

‘ووضع الميزان’ And the heaven He has raised high, and He has set up the balance’. meaning the justice, as He said in another Ayah: (al-Hadeed:25) (Indeed, we have sent Our Messengers with clear proofs, and sent down with them the Book and the balance that mankind may keep up equity) (Khan and al-Hilali (trans), 2011) (Ibn-Kathir, 2003: 7). The sentence has two thematic roles which can be clarified by the following rephrasing: Allah created the scale of Justice. Al mighty Allah is the agent, i.e., the doer of the action of creating the balance. The balance itself is the theme that has been affected by the action.

### 3.4 The Thematic Role Of Ayah (8)

**In order that ye may not transgress (due) balance)**

{ أَلَّا تَطْغَوْا فِي الْمِيزَانِ }

The sentence consists of one thematic role. The experiencer which refers to the Mankind as shown in (تطغى) as it is mentioned in the previous ayah (خلق الانسان). In addition, this verb is an attribute held by mankind. The syntactic Parsing I'rab of term (ألا)

تَطْعُوا) *alla Tatgau* is divided into two morphological segments. A particle of interpretation (أ) and prohibition particle (لا). The prohibition particle (حرف النهي) is used to form a negative imperative and places the following verb into the jussive mood (مجزوم). (تَطْعُوا) *Tatgau* is divided into two morphological segments. A verb and subject pronoun. (تَطْعُ) is imperfect verb (فعل مضارع) second person masculine plural and is in the jussive mood (مجزوم) The verb's triliteral root is (طغي) , The suffix (الواو) is an attached subject pronoun (Dukes, 2009: 7). The balance has the patient function

### 3.5 The Thematic Role Of Ayah (12)

Also corn, with (its) leaves and stalk for fodder, and sweet-smelling plants { وَالْحَبُّ ذُو الْعَصْفِ وَالرَّيْحَانُ }

And also grain, with (its) 'Asf, and Rayhan. Ali bin Abi Talhah said that Ibn Abbas said that in, (وَالْحَبُّ ذُو الْعَصْفِ) 'And also grain, with (its) 'Asf ', 'Asf ' means husk straw." Al-Awfi reported from Ibn Abbas, "'Asf is green leaves cut from the stem, so it is called 'Asf when it dries out."

Similarly, Qatadah, Ad-Dahhak and Abu Malik said that 'Asf means straw (Ibn-Kathir, 2003: 8-9). The sentence consists of one thematic role which is the experiencer played by the word al asf described as a predicate. The sentence can be rephrased as "you can see the grains with asif and rayhan" .

### 3.6 The Thematic Role Of Ayah (19)

**He has let free the two bodies of flowing water, meeting together**

{ مَرَجَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ يَلْتَقِيَانِ }

Ibn Kathir Explains Maraja as when the two seas, or let them loose, according to Ibn Abbas. Allah's statement (يلتقيان) 'meeting together', Ibn Zayd said, "He prevents them from meeting by the dividing barrier He placed between them to separate them." The two seas are the fresh and salty waters, the former coming from running rivers (Ibn-Kathir, 2003: 13). Allah said in (al-Furqan: 53) (And it is He Who has let free the two seas (kinds of water), one palatable and sweet, and the other salt and bitter, and He has set a barrier and a complete partition between them) (Khan and al-Hilali (trans), 2011) The sentence consists of two thematic roles. First, the agent which refers to the two seas . Second, the patient which is shown in the two seas affected from the action performed (release).

### 3.7 The Thematic Role Of Ayah (20)

**Between them is a Barrier which they do not transgress.**

{ بَيْنَهُمَا بَرْزَخٌ لَا يَبْغِيَانِ }

(لَا يَبْغِيَانِ) Between them is a barrier which none of them can transgress. meaning, He has placed a barrier of land between these two types of waters, so that they do not transgress upon each other, which would spoil the characteristics they were created with (Ibn-Kathir, 2003: 13).The sentence consists of two thematic roles. First the location which refers to the place between two seas (بينهما برزخ) and the attached suffix (هما) refers to the two seas. Second, the patient is two seas which affected from the action of transgress.

### 3.8 The Thematic Role Of Ayah (23)

**And his are the Ships sailing smoothly through the seas, lofty as mountains**

{ وَلَهُ الْجَوَارِ الْمُنشَآتُ فِي الْبَحْرِ كَالْأَعْلَامِ }

And His are “Al-Jawar Al-Munsha’at” meaning the ships that float, in the seas. Mujahid said, "Whatever ship hoists a sail, it is from “Munsha'at”, if it does not hoist a sail, it is not from the Munsha'at."

Qatadah said, "Al-Munsha'at means created." Others said that it is Al-Munshi'at meaning, "launched." like “A`lam”: This means, they are like mountains with their great size, and it also refers to the trade and commercial services they make possible, transporting cargo from one area to another and from one province to another. Ships provide various benefits for people, including transporting different types of goods they need (Ibn-Kathir, 2003: 15).

The sentence consists of two thematic roles. First the agent which refers to Al mighty Allah, the one who's the owner of Ships as it appeared in (وله). Second the theme role which is shown through (الجوار المنشآت) elevated ships since they're entity is moved by Allah's orders and affected from the action performed.

### 3.9 The Thematic Role Of Ayah (29)

**every day in (new) Splendor doth He**

{ ...كُلَّ يَوْمٍ هُوَ فِي شَأْنٍ }

Whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth begs of Him. Every day He is (engaged) in some affair. In this Ayah, Allah affirms that He is Rich, Free of all wants for anyone else and that all creatures stand in need of Him, in all conditions and situations. They all seek His help willingly or unwillingly. Every day, He is engaged in some affair. Al-A`mash reported from Mujahid, from `Ubayd bin `Umayr, (كل يوم هو في شأن) (Every day He is (engaged) in some affair) (Khan and al-Hilali (trans), 2011), He said, "Of His affairs is that He answers the supplicant, or gives to the one requesting, or removing adversity, or cures the one seeking to be cured, Freeing the Jailed and...etc" (Ibn-Kathir, 2003: 18)

The sentence consists of two thematic roles. First the agent which refers to Al mighty Allah, as in (هو) refers to him. Second the Beneficiary because Allah's (engaged in some affair) (في شأن) and the reason's is Allah's order or his Mercy, because his affairs either forgive sins or sent down mercy on his servants. It is beneficiary role since he/she benefits from the action performed.

### 3.10 The Thematic Role Of Ayah (33)

**If it be ye can pass beyond the zones of the heavens and the earth, pass ye! not without authority shall ye be able to pass**

{ إِنْ أَسْتَعْثِمْتُمْ أَنْ تَنْفُذُوا مِنْ أَقْصَارِ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْأَرْضِ فَانْفُذُوا لَا تَنْفُذُونَ إِلَّا بِسُلْطٰنٍ }

The meaning of this ayah is “you will never be able to escape Allah's orders and decrees, because it encompasses you. You will never be able to avoid or avert His rule and judgments over you, you are surrounded by it wherever you be”. This is also about the Gathering when the angels, comprising seven lines in every direction, will surround the creatures. None of the creatures will be able to escape on that Day, (الا بسلطان) (except with authority), meaning, except with the commandment from Allah (Ibn-Kathir, 2003: 21).

In Surah al-Qiyamah (10 & 12) (On that Day man will say: "Where (is the refuge) to flee" ) and (Unto your Lord will be the place of rest that Day) (Khan and al-Hilali (trans), 2011) The sentence consists of three thematic roles. First, the agent which refers to Al mighty Allah, the speaker. Second the experiencer, Mankind and Jinn which is shown through the ayah (الانس والجن). If you able to escape from Allah's judgment to outside of his control is Source role since it moves from direction ( اقطار السماوات ) (والارض) to outside of it. The third one is patient, since the Mankind and Jinn are affected from Allah's order and judgment as in (لا تتفنون الا بسلطان)

#### 4. Results and Discussions

The analysis shows many thematic roles have taken places in the data as seen in table (2) below

**Table (2) A Breakdown Table of the Thematic Role Analysis of the Data**

| NO. of Ayah | The Word                    | The Thematic Role |
|-------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| 3           | Implicit ( Allah )          | Agent             |
|             | Him (the Muslim)            | Beneficiary       |
|             | Speech                      | Patient           |
| 5           | Implicit (Allah)            | Agent             |
|             | Computed                    | Patient           |
| 7           | Attached pronoun (Allah)    | Agent             |
|             | Balance                     | Theme             |
| 8           | Balance                     | Patient           |
| 12          | Straw (asif)                | Experiencer       |
| 19          | The release of the two seas | Experiencer       |
| 20          | Barrier                     | Location          |
|             | Transgress                  | Patient           |
| 23          | Implicit(Allah)             | Agent             |
|             | Ships                       | theme             |
| 29          | Implicit(Allah)             | Agent             |
|             | Splendor doth He            | Beneficiary       |
| 33          | Implicit(Allah)             | Agent             |
|             | Beyond the zones            | Experiencer       |
|             | Not without authority       | Patient           |

Each thematic role has its own function as clarified in the following points:

1. Out of the nineteenth instances of thematic roles in the ten Ayahs, the agent which constitutes six expressions refers to Al mighty Allah the creator and the doer of everything.
2. The function of the thematic role beneficiary occurs twice : the first one refers to the benefit that mankind get from learning how to speak; and second to the God's mercy which all mankind get benefit from .

3. The ability of Allah to move entity is shown with the thematic role of theme in setting the balance (justice ) in life ,and in situating the ships inside the sea.
4. The Patient role is found in five instances, and they all refer The entity undergoing the effect or change done by Allah .
5. The Straw , the release of the seas , as well as the zones beyond are all experiencers for they have descriptive images
6. The only locative role in the data is the barrier (البرزخ). The interval place between death and the day of resurrection.

## 5. Conclusion

For Muslims, the Sacred Quran is the only true source of authority, and the marvels and inspiration that flow from its holy verses are limitless. , i.e., describing its words as ghareeb does not imply that they are inappropriate, aberrant, or atypical. Ghareeb words refer to fine words whose meaning is ambiguous in such a way that it is not universally understood by its users and others. Each ghareeb word in the data has its own function connected to the interpretation of a verb in a sentence and to the numerous elements that perform the various roles allocated to them by their thematic roles which complete the overall meaning of the ayahs . Thus, the results of the study validate the hypothesis which reads" each Ghareeb lexical word has its own function exemplified by its thematic role affected by the context in which it is created ".

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