Reflections of Qur'anic Variant Readings on Meaning Structures: A Morphological and Semantic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how variant readings (qirāʾāt), transmitted within the sound tradition of the Qur'an, reflect upon the semantic universe and morphological structure of the text through an interdisciplinary lens. The study first establishes a theoretical framework based on literal–figurative meaning layers and the root–pattern system. Then, a five-fold analytical criteria set is developed, encompassing conformity to the rasm al-ʿUthmānī, depth of morphological impact, level of semantic deviation, contextual coherence, and reliability of transmission. Using a combination of qualitative content analysis and descriptive statistical methods, 120 qirāʾāt variants from selected verses are examined, and the findings are converted into descriptive scales using SPSS software. The results demonstrate that even a minor change at the level of a single letter or diacritic can reshape the macro-level focus of address, thematic emphasis, and theological tone. Variants with high morphological impact and high semantic deviation generally conform to the rasm but exhibit moderate reliability of transmission. In contrast, non-rasm (shādhdh) variants, while offering cognitive interpretive diversity, often show weaker contextual coherence. Ultimately, the findings affirm that Qur'anic semantics is not static but rather dynamic and multilayered. The proposed criteria and measurement tools offer researchers an objective means of analysis, bridging classical transmission criticism with modern linguistic approaches.

Keywords: Authenticity, meaning, morphology, rasm, readings, semantics

Introduction

The variant readings of the Qur'an preserve subtle nuances at the phonetic and lexical levels while simultaneously offering remarkable depth in its semantic layers. This diversity extends beyond the observable differences in recitation found in classical qirāʾāt codices; it plays a decisive role in shaping the thematic structure, discursive coherence, and linguistic functionality of the text. For instance, certain variant readings may not alter the core message of a verse, yet they can redirect emphasis through a different word choice or grammatical inflection, thus affecting the reader's perception and comprehension of the text. Consequently, although the traditional discipline of qirāʾāt has primarily focused on phonological and methodological aspects, it has often fallen short of providing a systematic analysis of the Qur'an's semantic dimensions (Yaşar,2006). Filling this gap will provide a significant contribution both to the classical textual tradition and to contemporary academic disciplines. In the first phase of the study, the alternative readings found in qirāʾāt codices will be examined through a linguistic lens. This lens will carefully analyze how each variant, based on its lexical form, introduces shifts in recitation practice and enables nuanced deviations within the semantic structure of the text. During the semantic analysis phase, selected verses—encoded along the axes of "explicit meaning" and "implicit meaning"—will be examined in light of their frequency of usage within context, as well as their discursive connections to the preceding and following textual segments. In

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this way, not only the nuances of meaning at the lexical level but also their impact on the thematic cohesion of the entire text will be revealed. Furthermore, this analysis will serve as a bridge between classical exegetical approaches and modern interpretive practices, offering insights relevant to contemporary tafsīr and translation methodologies. The second phase of the study will focus on morphological analysis (Uzun, 2018). Differences observed among variant readings in root-pattern combinations, affixation, letter alternations, and prosodic features offer critical insights into the morphological structure of the text. In some cases, a slight alteration in an inflectional morpheme can subtly shift the predicate or emphasis of a sentence, thereby signaling a new layer of meaning that warrants semantic investigation. During the morphological tagging process, each variant word form will be systematically classified, taking into account its phonetic, morphological, and diachronic dimensions. The resulting data will be correlated with semantic findings, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the structural and functional coherence of the Qur'anic text.

The simultaneous implementation of these two analytical frameworks allows for a holistic understanding of the role that variant readings play within the semantic universe of the Qur'an. Correlations between semantic and morphological data will reveal how these variants align with or diverge from the text's core thematic structures. Accordingly, it becomes clear that the study aims to develop an original methodological model that contributes not only to Qur'anic studies literature but also to the broader fields of linguistics and semantic analysis. This model will foster an interdisciplinary dialogue ranging from classical codicological studies to contemporary cognitive linguistics.

From a methodological standpoint, qualitative content analysis and morphological tagging techniques were employed in tandem. The selected verses were chosen with reference to both the transmission chains (isnāds) dating back to the Prophet's time and the recorded variants in later manuscript traditions. Semantic coding and morphological classification procedures were independently replicated by multiple experts to ensure reliability. Coding consistency was assessed using quantitative metrics such as Cohen's kappa coefficient, and each step was subjected to iterative review. As a result, both the validity and reliability of the study's findings have been maintained at a high standard.

This study aims to uncover, in depth, the nuanced contributions of variant readings to the semantic domains of the Qur'an. By simultaneously analyzing both semantic and morphological dimensions, it seeks to reinterpret the interactions between classical and contemporary interpretive trajectories. The findings are expected to foster a more precise and nuanced approach not only within the academic community but also in Qur'anic recitation and translation practices. In doing so, the study aspires to open new horizons in both scholarly literature and field applications.

Conceptual and Terminological Framework

The Science of Qirāʾāt: Definition and Scope

The science of qirāʾāt is a comprehensive discipline that examines the various modes of vocalization, pronunciation rules, and phonetic differences in the recitation of the Qur'anic text, transmitted gradually through a continuous and reliable chain of narration. It also explores how these differences reflect upon and shape the semantic landscape of the Qur'an (Oral, 2015). Etymologically, the term *qirāʾa* is derived from the verb *qaraʾa*, meaning "to read" or "to recite." At the lexical level, it refers to the procedural and formal variations in the transmission of the Qur'an through multiple chains of narration. From a scholarly perspective, *qirāʾa* encompasses both the phonetic dimension—including variations at the level of letters and syllables—and prosodic features such as emphasis,

elongation (*madd*), assimilation (*tashdīd*), and vowel modulation (*imāla*). In this sense, the science of *qirāʾāt* relies on systematic methodologies aimed at preserving the most authentic oral face of the Qur'an, which has been transmitted through continuous narration, and at determining the contextual validity and extent of various modes of recitation. Relevant disciplines include philology, phonetics, morphology, historical textual criticism, and the methodology of ḥadīth sciences, since *qirāʾāt* fundamentally refers to an oral tradition that predates the codification of the Qur'anic text and is established through chains of transmission.

The history of the science of qirāʾāt dates back to the earliest centuries of Islam. The process began with the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) reception and recitation of the revelation and continued through the preservation of various dialectical and phonetic features among the companions (ṣaḥāba), the following generation (tābiʿūn), and their students. Initially, the transcription of these readings became systematized during the period of Caliph ʿUthmān with the production and dissemination of multiple copies of the Mushaf. However, since written transmission could not fully capture the subtle nuances of pronunciation, the oral chains of transmission (isnād) assumed central importance in the science of qirāʾāt. Prominent qirāʾāt imams—such as Nāfiʿ, Ibn Kathīr, Abu Amr, Ibn ʿĀmir, ʿĀṣim and Hamzah,—preserved both the method of recitation and its transmission chain from generation to generation, thereby forming the canonical repertoire of qirāʾāt sciences. The seventeen and twenty variant readings were further assessed by later scholars and muḥaddithīn (scholars of ḥadīth), who classified each transmission according to the principles of ḥadīth criticism and verification (naqd and taḥqīq), categorizing them as either "authentic" (ṣaḥīḥ) or "weak" (ḍaʿīf).

Among the primary components encompassed within the science of qirāʾāt are the phonetic variations in the pronunciation of letters—such as idghām (assimilation), ifrāq (separation), zihāb (omission), vowel shortening or lengthening, and emphasis—as well as the varieties of elongated vocalization (madd). Additionally, studies on qirāʾāt principles systematically record the phonological rules specific to each recitation tradition. The codification of variant verse readings, often indicated in the Mushaf by different colors or symbols, also falls within this scope. The morphological impact of each recitation variant on root-affix relationships within the text is examined through detailed analysis. Furthermore, the application of ḥadīth methodological approaches serves to test the reliability of transmission chains. In the modern era, phonetic-acoustic analyses, spectral voice examinations, and computer-assisted text mining techniques are employed to reveal the statistical characteristics, frequency distributions, and geographic dispersion models of qirāʾāt variants.

The reflections of variant readings on the semantic universe of the Qur'an extend beyond mere lexical differences, enriching the interpretive depth of the text at both semantic and pragmatic levels. For instance, a minor morphological change in the verb form along certain transmission lines can subtly reposition the emphasis directed at the addressee or the temporal aspect of the action. Such nuances open new perspectives in exegesis, translation, qirāʾāt pedagogy, and even ritual practices. Accordingly, the science of qirāʾāt is regarded as a multifaceted discipline that balances the Qur'an's historical integrity with contemporary modes of understanding. Positioned at the intersection of textual criticism, linguistics, and religious studies, qirāʾāt serves as a crucial bridge connecting classical Islamic sciences with modern academic research methodologies.

The Concept of Variant: Definition and Categories

In Qur'anic studies, the term "variant" (Arabic/English: *variant reading*) refers to alternative modes of recitation that, while adhering to the original *rasm ʿUthmānī* orthographic framework of the Mushaf, encompass multidimensional differences such as pronunciation, vocalization (vowelization), patterns of emphasis and alteration (*tashdīd*–

taḥyīf), degrees of elongation and shortening, and even variations in the internal letter sequence within words. The epistemological foundation of the variant phenomenon rests upon mutawātir reports affirming that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) recited the revelation according to the "seven letters" (*sabʿa al-ḥurūf*)—dialects of different Arab tribes—to facilitate ease of recitation. Here, the term "letter" encompasses linguistic variation at both phonological and morphosyntactic levels. From the earliest generations in which the Qur'anic revelation was transcribed, the Muslim community preferred to preserve the text primarily through memorization. Since the written *rasm*—a skeletal script devoid of diacritical marks and vowel signs—could not fully capture the subtle nuances of pronunciation, oral transmission chains (*isnād*) became the carriers of these variants. Thus, "variant" simultaneously reflects a pluralistic authenticity in terms of multiple valid pronunciations of the same divine text and, when selected and classified according to rigorous scholarly criteria, serves as evidence of the Qur'an's preservation from corruption (Karakuş,2020).

In the classification of variants, modern philological terminology intersects with classical qirāʾāt methodological terms. The classical tradition is based on the hierarchical framework of qirāʾa, ṭarīq, and riwāya: the canonical seven imams' modes of recitation, canonized by Ibn Mujāhid (d. 324/936), are referred to as qirāʾāt; the different versions transmitted by various narrators (rāwīs), who convey the imams' recitations with varying details, are termed riwāyāt; and the transmission lines that preserve subtle phonetic distinctions within these riwāyāt are called ṭurūq (plural of ṭarīq) (Gezgin,2021). Although classifications of ten and later fourteen *qirāʾāt* became widespread starting from the era of Ibn al-Jazari (d. 833/1429), the chain of variant readings accepted as *mutawātir* has remained within this canonical framework. Methodological works also acknowledge *shāz* readings—those that fail to meet authenticity criteria either in their chains of transmission or linguistic rules—and *mudraj* readings, which were appended to the text in later periods, thereby adding stratification to the universe of variants. Modern research employs criteria beyond isnād authenticity, such as conformity with the *rasm ʿUthmānī* orthography and adherence to Arabic linguistic norms, to classify variants into categories like *majmūʿ mutawātir*, *āḥād* (popular), *shāz*, and *mursal*. This classification allows for measurable degrees of philological reliability (Ersöz, 2021).

Variants can also be typologically classified according to their intra-linguistic functions. Phonological variants encompass phonetic differences such as madd-kasr (lengthening-shortening), imāla (fronting-backing vowel shifts), idghām (phonetic assimilation), tashhīl (facilitation), and ishmām (labialization); these variations generally do not alter meaning but enrich the melodic and tajwīd aesthetics of Qur'anic recitation. Morphological variants involve formal shifts such as root letter alternations (e.g., yaʿlamūn ↔ taʿlamūn), verb form and mood alternations (e.g., yuqātilūn ↔ yuqātilān), and nominal-verbal equivalences; these often reorganize agent-patient relationships or temporal-mood emphasis within the verse, thus directly impacting semantics. Lexical variants include substitutions of synonymous or near-synonymous terms (e.g., ṣirāṭ ↔ sabīl), sometimes softening semantic tone or introducing theological nuance. Syntactic variants, on the other hand, manifest as structural transformations such as word order changes (taqdim-taʾkhīr), sentence addition or omission, which reconfigure emphasis and relational dynamics within the contextual discourse.

In addition to structural-typological classification, variants can also be categorized as "semantically effective" and "semantically neutral." Semantically neutral variants differ solely in pronunciation or tajwīd features and do not alter the core message of the verse (Demirbaş, 2016). In contrast, semantically effective variants expand the interpretive potential of the text, ranging from legal rulings and doctrinal formulations to literary nuances and historical guidance. For example, the variants maliki yawmid-dīn ("Owner of the Day of Judgment") versus maliki yawmid-dīn ("King of the Day of Judgment") give rise

to exegetical nuances concerning whether God's authority on the Day of Reckoning is emphasized primarily as "ownership" or "sovereignty." Such effects have served as reference points in jurisprudential reasoning, theological doctrines and mystical interpretations.

The types of variants reflected in the textual structure can also be subdivided according to their level of intervention into *ikāma* (substitution), *ziyāda* (addition), *ḥadhf* (omission), and *ibdāl* (replacement of letters or words). In the case of *ikāma*, where permitted by the *rasm ʿUthmānī*, one letter or word replaces another while preserving semantic coherence. *Ziyāda* involves the insertion of a contextual word to achieve semantic expansion or clarification. *Ḥadhf* denotes the omission of a word for reasons of economy or rhetorical density. *Ibdāl* refers to the preference for an entirely different lexical form. The boundaries among these types are not always sharply defined; most variants resonate to varying degrees simultaneously across phonological, morphological, and semantic categories (Bulut, 2025).

The functional value of the variant concept in Qur'anic textology has become increasingly evident through contemporary methodologies such as *al-īmāla* (source text emendation) in textual criticism, the development of *qirāʾāt* apparatuses in critical editions, and the re-modeling of the *rasm* layer in digital collation projects. In this way, variants are not merely elements of historical memory, but also constitute a dynamic data reservoir that sustains the interpretability and philological vitality of the Qur'an.

Semantic Core Terms
Literal Meaning

Literal meaning refers to the most basic and direct definition of a word or phrase as found in the lexicon—that is, the semantic layer perceived at the surface level of the text, independent of context (Bilgiz,2017). In the Qur'anic framework, literal meaning centers around the root–derivation relationship intrinsic to the Arabic language: the core semantic domain of a word is established based on the lexical definitions of its derived forms—verb patterns (*sīghas*), plurals, verbal nouns (*maṣādir*), adjectives, and verb moods. For instance, the term *Qurʾān* (قُرْآن) carries lexical meanings such as "that which is recited" or "that which is collected," indicating the concrete act of revelation being recited. Similarly, the attributes *Raḥmān* (الـرَّحْمن) and *Raḥīm* (الـرَّحِيم), derived from the root *raḥma* (رَحْمَـة, "mercy, compassion"), literally express God's absolute mercy at the lexical level(Alrawashdeh,2016). When *qirāʾāt* variants are introduced, the literal meaning may expand or narrow through changes in letters or vocalization. For example, the reading *maliki yawmi al-dīn* (مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّين), with the literal meaning "sovereign" or "one possessing authority," emphasizes divine rulership; whereas *māliki yawmi al-dīn* (مَالِـكِ يَـوْمِ الـدِّين), meaning "owner" or "possessor of property," foregrounds divine ownership. Both terms carry precise, lexically attested meanings in Arabic, and thus any semantic analysis begins at the literal level of the text.

Literal meaning analysis is often addressed in traditional Qur'anic exegesis under the rubric of lughawī (philological) commentary. The exegete typically begins by identifying the root of a word, then cites its definitions from classical lexicons. Subsequently, the exegete surveys other Qur'anic occurrences of the same word to delineate the semantic boundaries of its literal domain. This approach facilitates the discovery of intra-textual coherence and inter-verse lexical nuances. Modern semantic studies, however, build upon this lughawī legacy by incorporating the tools of contemporary linguistics—particularly the method of semantic features. In this approach, a word's SELECT properties (e.g., [+animate], [+abstract], [–temporal]) are identified and analyzed, and any phonemic or affixal shift in a variant is examined for how it revises the semantic feature set. Quantitative methods are also employed to assess these shifts. As a result, literal meaning

is no longer treated as a mere repetition of dictionary entries, but rather is contextualized within the word's distribution across the Qur'an, its frequency profile, and its discursive function.

In delineating the literal semantic field of the Qur'an, contextual factors such as the historical setting of revelation (asbāb al-nuzūl), dialectical variations among Arab tribes, and the socio-cultural codes of early Islamic society are also taken into account. This is because a word bears the semantic weight of its historical circumstances. For instance, the term al-zakāh (الزَّكوة), whose root meaning is "purification," forms the lexical foundation of the Qur'an's economic-ritual institution; yet in its early Meccan usage, the tone of "personal inner purification" is more pronounced, while in the Medinan period, the emphasis shifts toward economic obligation. The phonetic and vocalic variations offered by qirā'āt enable a detailed tracing of such historical-semantic shifts within the text.

Metaphorical and Deep Semantic Layers

Figurative (majāzī) and deep (bāṭinī or thematic) meaning refers to extended semantic layers that go beyond the lexical boundaries of a word, emerging through context, rhetoric, discourse, and theological connotation. Within the Qur'an's tradition of balāgha (rhetoric), devices such as simile (tashbīh), metaphor (istiʿāra), metonymy (kināya), and synecdoche (majāz-i mursal) transport the word beyond its dictionary confines. Deep meaning, on the other hand, arises from the word's multilayered associations within the broader conceptual network of divine revelation. For instance, the term nūr (نُور), lexically meaning "light," in the verse Allāhu nūru al-samāwāti wa-l-arḍ ("God is the Light of the heavens and the earth") symbolizes not only physical illumination, but also divine guidance, spiritual enlightenment, and epistemic truth (Yüksel,2018). Here, the figurative meaning shifts the term from the physical domain of "light" to the abstract domain of "guidance"; the deep meaning, meanwhile, constructs the metaphysical core of the nūr concept within the verse's broader thematic network—encompassing creation, existence, and knowledge.

Qirā'āt variants serve as powerful tools that further enrich the interpretive multiplicity enabled by figurative language. For instance, the variant وَيَخْلُدْ فِيهِ مُهَانًا (wa-yakhlud fīhi muhānan, recited by Ḥafṣ) versus وَيُخَلَّدْ فِيهِ مُهَانًا (wa-yukhallad fīhi muhānan, recited by Ḥamzah) alters the subject-object relationship by shifting the verb from active to passive voice. The former implies, "the servant humiliates himself and remains therein eternally," while the latter suggests, "the servant is eternally humiliated." (Furkan,69) On the literal level, this may be viewed as a transformation of the verb's grammatical voice. However, on the figurative level, it opens the door to deep theological reflections on human responsibility and divine agency—namely, whether the subject of the humiliation is the human being or whether it is inflicted by divine will.

The deep semantic layer also sustains the thematic unity (waḥdat al-mawḍūʿ) inherent in the Qur'an. The selection of a word variant establishes a deliberate semantic connection with the overarching theme of the surah in which the verse appears, as well as with the socio-historical needs of the period of revelation. For example, in Medinan surahs, where there is an increased emphasis on social and legal norms, variants emphasizing ownership or authority may predominate; at a figurative and deep level, this encodes the divine design of social order in layered subtexts. Contemporary semantic-pragmatic analyses examine the discursive load of such variant choices through *topic-focus modeling*, determining the word's position within the focus domain and calculating how each variant amplifies specific rhetorical effects(Tay, 2019).

To grasp figurative and deep meaning, it is also important to benefit from the ishārī (mystical) interpretations found in classical exegeses. Scholars situate the symbolic connotations that hover above the literal text within a map of the soul, self (nafs), and heart (qalb); the word or letter chosen in a variant thus becomes a subtle metaphor for spiritual states. Consequently, figurative meaning transcends mere rhetorical play and transforms into a carrier of the Qur'an's inner pedagogy. Qirā'āt variants multiply the steps of this pedagogical ladder, dividing the comprehension of truth into stages: a semantic progression extending from the literal rung to the figurative and deep levels.

Ultimately, figurative and deep meaning constructs the timeless and universal dimension of the Qur'an that transcends its historical context. The alternative word forms offered by variants function as a dynamic component of this universality, enabling the text's re-reading and reinterpretation across different eras. Modern hermeneutic approaches describe variants as a "semantic plurality strategy," since each alternative expands the potential interpretive space of the text and nourishes the polyphonic corridors of exegetical traditions. Thus, the figurative-deep semantic layer becomes, through variants, not a fixed but a living and breathing interpretive ecosystem; the divine speech of the Qur'an, addressing every age, resonates within this dynamic semantic plurality.

Basic Morphological Terms

In the context of Qur'anic qirā'āt (variant readings), *morphology* refers to the comprehensive examination of the Arabic language's root-derivation system, word-formation rules (*taṣrīf*), and the syntactic inflectional markers (*'i'rāb*) within a sentence. Although qirā'āt variants are often perceived as minor differences limited to the phonetic level—such as changes in individual letters—they in fact exert direct influence on deeper linguistic structures. These include root selection, pattern (*wazn*) preference, the placement of inflectional vowels and nunation (*tanwīn*), and even the assignment of final case endings governed by syntactic relationships like *iḍāfa* (genitive constructions). Therefore, morphological analysis does not merely answer the question of "how a word is pronounced"; it also reveals how reading variations affect subject–predicate agreement in verbal clauses, root transformations in weak verbs, or the syntactic positioning of the *mubtada'* and *khabar* in nominal sentences. In other words, morphology constitutes the foundational layer that shapes the semantic implications of variant readings: subtle changes between the triliteral (or occasionally quadriliteral or quinquiliteral) root structures and the accompanying inflectional elements often guide the interpretive trajectory of a verse more profoundly than the lexical meaning of the word itself(Soylu,2024).

Root and Inflectional Affixes

The root–pattern system (*al-jidhr wa al-wazn* – الجـذر والـوزن) constitutes the backbone of Qur'anic morphology. Triliteral (*thulāthī* – ثلاثـي) and quadriliteral (*rubā'ī* – رباعي) roots generate a multiplicative effect through dozens of morphological patterns (*abwāb* – أبواب, sing. *bāb* – بـاب) that vary according to tense (zamān – الزمـان), person (shakhs – الشـخص), voice (ṣīgha / mabnī al-fi'l – الصيغة / مبني الفعل), and semantic nuance (lawnu al-ma'nā – لـون المعنـى)(Öztürk,2021). Qur'anic variant readings (qirā'āt) often emerge through micro-level modifications in morphological structure, whereby the root (al-jidhr – الجـذر) remains constant while the pattern (al-wazn – الـوزن) or inflectional elements (al-taṣrīf – التصـريف) are altered. For instance, in the root '–l–m (ع—لـم), the forms *ya'lamūna* (يَعْلَمـونَ) in the Ḥafṣ reading and *ta'lamūna* (تَعْلَمـونَ) in the reading of Ibn 'Āmir differ only in the initial person marker (yā' / tā' – ت / ي). Yet, this slight morphological shift reorients the verse's address from "they" to "you," fundamentally altering its communicative focus. Similarly,

the readings *malik* (مَلِك) and *mālik* (مَالِك)—both derived from the same root m–l–k (م–ل–ك)—differ in morphological pattern rather than lexical root. While *malik* emphasizes absolute sovereignty and authority, *mālik* underscores possession and dominion. Thus, from a single root, two distinct theological nuances are generated through pattern variation.

Subtle variations in inflectional affixes can dramatically shift the semantic pendulum in Qur'anic recitation. When *ʾiʿrāb* markers—such as vowel diacritics or morphological elements like *nūn*, *fatḥa*, or *yāʾ* used for *rafʿ*, *naṣb*, and *jarr* (رَفْع، نَصْب، جَرّ)—differ across transmitted readings, the syntactic role of a word within a sentence can change significantly; subjects may become objects, and vice versa. For example, in the variants *yarḥamhu Allāhu* (يَرْحَمْهُ ٱللَّهُ) and *yarḥamuhu Allāha* (يَرْحَمُهُ ٱللَّهَ), a minor shift in case endings and the presence or absence of a preposition (*ḥarf al-jarr* – حرف الجر) inverts the entire *ʾiʿrāb* relationship(Güney,2023). Moreover, morphological alternations such as indefinite ↔ definite (*nakira* ↔ *maʿrifa* – نَكِرَة ↔ مَعْرِفَة), plural ↔ singular (*jamʿ* ↔ *mufrad* – جَمْع ↔ مُفْرَد), or masculine ↔ feminine (*mudhakkar* ↔ *muʾannath* – مُذَكَّر ↔ مُؤَنَّث)—often manifested through a simple addition of an *alif-lām* (definite article), the dropping of a *yāʾ*, or the transformation of a final *ḍamma*—determine the pragmatic emphasis of the text. Such nuances signal whether a verse addresses a generalized category or a specific referent, or whether the intended audience is a collective group or an individual. The early *qirāʾa* scholars canonized these morphosyntactic variants by tracing them to specific dialectal lineages (*luġāt*), such as Qurashī, Tamīmī, or Hudhailī (قُرَشِيّ، تَمِيمِيّ، هُذَيْلِيّ), thereby affirming both the linguistic richness and narrative authenticity of the transmitted readings. In contemporary scholarship, morpho-statistical projects utilize *n-gram* mining techniques to track pattern- and affix-based divergences. These studies can probabilistically map which *qirāʾa* tradition favors the *faʿala* (فَعَلَ) form versus *iftaʿala* (افْتَعَلَ) or *tafāʿala* (تَفَاعَلَ), generating geolinguistic distribution charts of morphological exposure across the recitational corpus(Gördük, 2016).

Beyond pattern-based (*wazn*) variation, morphological transformations—such as *al-ishtiqāq al-akbar* (الاشتقاق الأكبر), *al-idghām al-kabīr* (الإدغام الكبير), and *al-idghām al-ṣaghīr* (الإدغام الصغير)—further intensify the morphological complexity of Qur'anic readings. In certain qirāʾāt, the grammatical transformation of a verb into a *mabnī* (مَبْنِيّ, indeclinable) form during pause (*waqf* – وقف) or resumption (*ibtidāʾ* – ابْتِدَاء), or the elision of weak radicals in verbs (*ḥadhf ḥarf al-ʿilla* – حذف حرف العلة), may be obligatory; in others, merely optional. Such alternations affect not only the phonetic contour and rhythmic cadence of the verse, but also the semantic fluidity of its recitation. Ultimately, the root and its derivational axis act as the initial domino in the semantic oscillation between qirāʾāt. A seemingly minor change in a subject prefix or suffix may, in a different context, invert the entire narrative perspective of a passage—shifting from third-person narration to direct second-person address—without introducing any lexical surplus (*ziyāda lafẓiyya* – زيادة لفظية). This illustrates how morphological nuance in the Qur'an can reshape meaning with maximal efficiency and minimal form.

Letter Variations

The concept of letter variation (*ikhtilāf al-ḥurūf* – اختلاف الحروف) encompasses alternatives in the position, articulation point (*maḥraj* – مخرج), phonetic attributes (*ṣifāt* – صفات), or diacritical marks of individual letters without altering the root–pattern (*al-jidhr wa al-wazn* – الجذر والوزن) framework of a word. This constitutes one of the most subtle layers of *ʿilm al-qirāʾāt* (the science of Qur'anic readings). At the phonetic level, *tajwīd* phenomena such as *idghām* (with or without nasalization, *bighunnah / bighayr ghunnah* – بغنة / بغير غنة), *iẓhār* (clear articulation), *qalqala* (echoing sound), *imālah* (inclination towards /e/ sound), *taklīl* (lightening of sound), and *tarqīq–tafhīm* (light vs. heavy articulation) assign radically different acoustic identities to the same letter. For example,

the letter ṣād (ص) in the *Warsh* transmission is subject to slight *imālah* effects that soften it towards a sound resembling sīn (س). This subtle phonetic shift may evoke in the listener a perception not of a "heavy" emphatic consonant associated with intensity or stress (*shiddah*), but rather an image of calmness or serenity (*sukūn / sarārah*). Even such minimal acoustic variations can alter the emotional profile of a verse(Göktaş,2019).

At the graphic (orthographic) level, the dotless skeleton of the ʿUthmānī rasm (*rasm-i ʿUtmānī* – رسم عثماني) provides a broad pool of possibilities for letter variation. In early Qur'anic manuscripts, letters such as bā' (ب), tā' (ت), thā' (ث), nūn (ن), and yā' (ي) were written as single strokes without dots, while jīm (ج), ḥā' (ح), and khā' (خ) appeared in undotted forms. Until the oral transmission system was complemented by the diacritical system of dots (*iʿjām* – إِعْجَام) and vowel markings (*taškīl* – تَشْكِيل), such orthographic ambiguity permitted multiple readings from a single root. For example, the distinction between *qāla* (قَالَ) and *qīla* (قِيلَ) was marked only by vowel changes; the difference between *nashara* (نشرَ) and *bashara* (بشرَ) depended on the placement of a single dot; while the contrast between *tatabbaʿ* (تتبّعْ) and *fatabbaʿ* (فتبّعْ) was signaled by the presence or absence of the letter *fā'* (ف). In the canonical readings, the variation between *yaḍurru* (يضرُّ) —meaning "to cause harm" in *Imām ʿĀṣim's* recitation—and *yaḍiru* (يضرُ) —meaning "to touch" in *Ibn ʿĀmir's*—triggers a semantic shift relevant to the context of *asbāb al-nuzūl* (circumstances of revelation). The former verb implies harm or damage, while the latter denotes ordinary contact. Thus, a single *sukūn* versus *ḍamma* or the placement of a single dot can give rise to interpretive differences extending as far as *aḥkām fiqhiyya* (jurisprudential rulings).

Examples of 'ibdāl (letter substitution) hold significant morphological and strategic importance. For instance, some qirā'āt employ ṭaġayān (طَغَيَان) instead of ṭuġyān (طُغْيَان) ("rebellion" or "transgression"), where the addition of the *yā'* (*ziyādat al-yā'*) nominalizes the root and imparts a continuous or intensified aspect, thus creating subtle semantic nuances. (Ekin,2000). Similarly, ḥadhf (letter omission) in consonantal clusters lightens the phonetic load in certain readings, while ziyāda (letter addition) can imbue the verb with nuances of mubālagha (intensification) or shumul (inclusivity), thereby affecting the rhythm and emphasis through syncopation. Letter variations also manifest in *waqf–ibtidā'* (pause–resumption) markers: a word elongated with *madd al-lāzim* (mandatory prolongation) in the Ḥafṣ transmission may be pronounced with *madd al-ṭabīʿī* (natural lengthening) in the 'Abū 'Amr qirā'a, resulting in a shorter recitation. This temporal difference in stopping and starting alters the psychological reception and spiritual impact of the verse on the listener.

Contemporary acoustic-phonetic laboratories and machine learning–based diphone modeling projects are mapping the letter variations of Qur'anic readers (*qurrā'*) through wavelength analysis. These studies quantify the formant structures in examples of *idghām* (assimilation) versus *ghayr idghām* (non-assimilation) of *nūn* and *tanwīn*, as well as spectral sequences in *imālah* and *taklīl* variants. Thus, auditory cues that were traditionally transmitted via the classical "ear-to-heart" (*min al-samʿ ilā al-qalb*) oral tradition are now transformed into measurable data sets accessible to the scientific community. These investigations demonstrate that letter variations are not merely a topic of theoretical philology but also serve as an empirical window into the neuro-aesthetic dimensions of Qur'anic recitation.

Letter variations that do not violate the root–pattern stability serve the Qur'an's miraculous principle of "many meanings from few words". Each *qirā'a* reshapes the phonetic geometry of words, adjusting the spiritual resonance of the text; thus, believers across different eras and regions can apprehend the same divine speech in a phonetic *maqām* (musical mode) consonant with their own auditory memory. This flexible yet authentic nature of variations constitutes the morphological–phonological guarantee of the Qur'an's universal vitality.

Semantic Field: Definition and Dimensions

The term semantic field refers to the interwoven universe of meaning created by clusters of words and expressions within a language or text, connected through shared conceptual elements and associative links. In the context of the Qur'an, the concept of semantic field is not merely a lexical clustering based on dictionary proximities; rather, it encompasses a multilayered semantic pattern structured around thematic axes (such as justice, mercy, power, guidance, resurrection, etc.) that shape the integral message framework of the revelation. This pattern deepens not only through paradigmatic (associative) relations at the level of lexical items but also through syntagmatic (sequential) relationships within verses and across chapters. Consequently, words and concepts intertwine both horizontally (through intratextual adjacency, context, and coherence) and vertically (across texts, within the divine discourse, exegetical interpretation, and historical-social resonance). Defining the "semantic field" with this broad and interwoven coordinate system is a prerequisite for explaining why Qur'anic variant readings produce echoes not only at the micro-level of verbal articulation but also at the macro-level of thematic discourse(Buladı,2022).

When determining the dimensions of a semantic field, the core–periphery distinction is made first: the core encompasses lexical items that carry the most fundamental and invariant elements of the concept, whereas the periphery consists of flexible layers such as metaphorical extensions, figurative implications, and contextually triggered secondary associations. In the Qur'anic context, for instance, the core of the semantic field of "rahmah" (mercy) includes cognate lexical items such as رحمة (rahmah), رحمن (rahman), and رحيم (rahim), while its periphery comprises words derived from different roots—such as "grace," "benevolence," "forgiveness," and "well-being"—which expand the field by adding additional semantic rings to the core concept. Qur'anic variant readings can make subtle adjustments within the core–periphery balance: for example, the variant مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الـدِّينِ)"Malik") leans toward the justice-power axis with a nuance of sovereignty, whereas the variant مَلِكِ يَـوْمِ الـدِّينِ)"Malik" with a different vowelization) reinforces the dimension of rulership and authority, opening different semantic gateways that touch upon the periphery of the mercy semantic field. Thus, even a single letter or diacritical change reconfigures the center–periphery tension within the semantic field.

The second dimension can be defined as dialectical multilayeredness (layered semantics). Concepts in the Qur'an do not remain confined to the lexical level; rather, they generate resonant focal points that echo across phrases, verses, chapters, and even the entire Mushaf (Baysal,2016). The concept of Nūr (light) generates a multilayered semantic field woven around the ontological dimension of creation, the epistemology of knowledge, and the axis of moral guidance, transcending the notion of a singular beam of light. Variant readings subtly adjust one of these layers, thereby reweaving the tension among all layers: for instance, the placement of pronouns or the subject-verb adaptation in the phrase نُورُهُمْ يَسْعَى)"their light proceeds") determines whether the theological-cosmic narrative emphasizes a "servant-centered" or "divine-centered" conception of light. Thus, the semantic field is a dynamic network characterized by continuous vectorial energy transfer between its layers; variant readings act like microchips finely tuning the nodal points of this network.

The third dimension is the diachronic-social resonance: the historical usage of the semantic field, its context of revelation (nuzul), and the semantic shifts it undergoes through successive exegetical stages expand or contract the boundaries of the field. For

example, the semantic field of jihad primarily connoted "existential patience and perseverance" during the Meccan period, while in Medina it acquired military and political dimensions. Verb voice variations in variant readings (e.g., قاتَل ←قـاتلوا) serve as linguistic fingerprints that record this historical semantic evolution. In the modern era, socio-political contexts redraw the semantic periphery of the term; the semantic field acquires new layers expanded by contemporary exegetes' interpretations, encompassing domains such as international law, human rights, and peace diplomacy. Thus, the socio-procedural axis becomes an additional dimension of the semantic field.

The fourth and perhaps most complex dimension is the cognitive-schematic network. Cognitive semantics posits that concepts are organized in mental maps according to prototypes, image schemas, and frame structures. Qur'anic terms interact dynamically with these cognitive models in Muslim minds: for example, the concept of فطرة (fitrah) is linked to the prototype of "innate nature" or "essence of creation," while تقوى (taqwa) is associated with the schema of "attentive awareness" or "self-protection."Variant readings shift the nodes of this cognitive network toward different imagery intensities; for instance, the variant readings اتقـوا اللـه)("fear God") versus وقـوا اللـه)("be protected by God") distinguish between the states of "active conscious avoidance" and "being protected," redistributing the prototype positions within the semantic field of piety (taqwa). Thus, the cognitive dimension of the semantic field is continuously updated through micro-level lexical and morphological variations(Aydüz,2022).

When conceptualizing the semantic field, it is impossible to overlook the intertextual and exegetical resonance dimension. A word or concept evokes different reverberations across hadith literature, sīrah (Prophetic biography), classical Arabic poetry, Sufi treatises, and modern academic discourse; these reverberations circle back to the semantic field of the Qur'anic text, generating new contextual layers (Ateş,2017). Variant readings foreground certain contextual layers while relegating others, thereby opening exegetical interpretive corridors to varying degrees. For instance, Ibn Kathir's use of a variant in producing juridical evidence, al-Tabari's preference for another variant in linguistic interpretation, and a modern linguist's focus on phonostylistic analysis—all represent practical approaches that expand the intertextual dimension of the semantic field.

When all these dimensions are brought together, the semantic field is no longer seen as a fixed lexical category but rather as a dynamic, layered, resonant, and continually reformulated semantic universe situated within a socio-historical context. Variant readings are the vibrations within this microcosmic universe; each letter, diacritical mark, or inflection reshapes the core–periphery tension of the semantic field, the energy flow among its layers, its socio-historical resonance, and its cognitive-schematic structure. Thus, Qur'anic semantics transcends the notion of a singular "fixed text" and becomes a living, flexible, and pluralistic window of divine address.

Interconceptual Relations

In Qur'anic semantics, concepts do not exist as isolated fragments; rather, they are in continuous interaction as nodes within a broad network of meaning that spans the entire text. Core semantic fields such as mercy (rahmah), justice ('adl), power (qudrah), or guidance (hidayah) do not merely carry their own lexical cores in the verses where they appear, but also generate extensive semantic reverberations through their relations with contrasting, complementary, or resonant concepts. This relational context is often constructed through explicit patterns of attribution or opposition; dual axes such as "light (nūr)" – "darkness (ẓulumāt)", "faith (īmān)" – "disbelief (kufr)", and "piety (taqwā)" – "immorality (fujūr)" create a tensioned symmetry within the thematic fabric of the text. However, upon deeper analysis, intersections between concepts frequently develop through indirect contextual associations, semantic echoes established across successive

verses, and even through familial ties provided by the root-derivative system of the language. For example, the concept of mercy (rahmah), while containing the lexical core of compassion and kindness, extends towards the axis of forgiveness when combined with the attribute tawwāb (the Oft-Returning [in repentance]); the same concept highlights aspects of grace and benevolence when paired with niʿmah (blessing). Thus, mercy is enriched in every verse by absorbing the semantic shadow of its neighboring concept; the interconceptual bond forms a multilayered architecture of semantic resonance.

Another dimension of interconceptual relations is shaped through nuances triggered by morphological and phonological variants. Variant readings—such as the antithesis between "مَالِك" (mālik) and "مَلِك" (malik), both derived from the same root—redraw subtle distinctions between authority and ownership. The reading مَالِك foregrounds God's will over dominion and control, whereas مَلِك emphasizes the aspect of sovereignty; consequently, the concepts of justice (عَدْل) and judgment (حِسَاب) occupy different elliptical orbits within the associative fields of these variants. Similarly, the variant forms يُقَاتِلُونَ (yuqātilūn) versus يُقَاتَلَانِ (yuqātilān) create a subtle pragmatic shift between a plural and a dual subject in the verb of combat, re-signifying the concept of jihad (جِهَاد) either as a focus on communal consciousness or on bilateral fighting. Thus, morphological micro-transformations steer the contextual vectors between concepts and alter the topology of the semantic network; a seemingly minor phonetic variation at the lexical level generates wide-ranging reverberations across the conceptual geography of the text(Altundağ, 2004).

From the perspective of cognitive semantics, Qur'anic concepts are organized in the mind at the levels of prototypes and frames, with interconceptual relations crystallizing in shared schemas arising from the overlap of these prototype domains. For example, the prototype of تقوى (taqwā) encompasses schemas such as "caution," "protection," and "foresight," whereas the prototype of صبر (ṣabr) is dominated by schemas of "endurance," "waiting," and "perseverance." When these two concepts unite within the frame of "protective perseverance," they form a dynamic axis in the psychology of faith. Variant readings redraw the boundaries of these schemas, either reinforcing or repositioning the bridges between concepts. For instance, the variant pronunciation يَسْتَعْجِلُونَ (yastaʿjilūn) replacing يَسْتَعْجِلُونَ (yastaʿcilūn) (both meaning "they hasten"), alters the phonetic value at the root, intensifying the tone of "urgent seeking," which heightens the tension of opposition with the concept of حِلْم (ḥilm)—"forbearance" or "serenity." Thus, the conceptual axis of "haste–calm" gains a sharper contrast in the reader's cognitive space.

At the historical-exegetical level, the forms that interconceptual relations take within the socio-cultural space become evident. Concepts such as جهاد (jihad), صبر (ṣabr), and هجرة (hijrah) play distinctive roles within the same verse contexts in early Islamic society, while in the Medina period they intersect with زكاة (zakāt), أخوة (uhūwah), and شورى (shūrā), steering the paradigm of social justice. Variant readings serve as living traces documenting this historical semantic migration: as societal needs and dialects evolve, the transmitted pronunciation differences build transitional bridges among new conceptual clusters. Modern semantic-corpus studies map the verses containing variants within context-based vector spaces, statistically revealing which concepts co-occur and which variants intensify the density of interconceptual connections. This approach visualizes the Qur'anic semantic map through multidimensional network graphs, demonstrating the "measurable" nature of conceptual interaction.

Semantic–Morphological Interaction

Semantic–morphological interaction constitutes the most critical intersectional plane of the Qur'anic variant readings (qirā'āt), as micro-changes occurring in the morphological form of a word directly redraw the semantic attribute map of that word or

concept. Due to the root-and-pattern structure of Arabic, which can generate dozens of derivatives from a single root, the choice by a qirā'ā imam of a particular verb form, inflectional suffix, or measure (wazn) becomes a subtle dialectical lever manipulating the parameters of agent (fā'il), patient (maf'ūl), tense, and aspect embedded in the verb. For example, the shift in the personal suffix between the reading يَعْلَمُونَ(ya'lamūn, "they know") and تَعْلَمُونَ(ta'lamūn, "you [plural] know") is morphologically realized merely as the transformation of the initial yā' into tā'. However, semantically, it produces a powerful shift in the axis of address by moving the epistemic responsibility from the collective third person to the direct interlocutor, thus transferring the cognitive burden from the community to the individual reader. Similarly, the transformation of the pattern مُسْتَقِيم (mustaqīm, "steadfast, continuously straight") into forms resembling سِقَام(siqām) in some variants produces a nuanced semantic resonance by modulating the gradation scale of adjective derivatives from the same root. This shift expands the concept of "istikāmah" (steadfastness) from a linguistic notion of "verbal perseverance" to a broader moral dimension of "ethical stability." Therefore, morphological selection acts as a subtle key that either unlocks or restricts semantic potential: a single diacritical mark or an additional pronominal suffix can enlarge, reduce, or shift the prototypical domain of a word.

This interaction cannot always be explained by a straightforward "form → meaning" relationship; more often, the semantic demand calls for a morphological alternative in a reverse manner. This phenomenon, known in exegetical tradition as "ma'nā ihtiyāj" (semantic necessity), becomes evident when an exegete prefers a variant reading aligned with the desired semantic direction in order to resolve interpretative ambiguities arising from the context. For example, the morphological difference between the readings فَتَبَيَّنُوا(fatabayyanū, "investigate") and فَتَثَبَّتُوا(fatathabbitū, "obtain firm knowledge") reflects a shift from the second verb form (bāb II, tefa'ul) to the fifth verb form (bāb V, tefe'ul). Semantically, however, the former emphasizes the context of "verification of information," while the latter foregrounds the moral exhortation of "avoiding hasty judgment." Thus, the functional load of the word reorganizes its theological and ethical subtexts in parallel with the morphological pattern shift in its form. Ultimately, the semantic–morphological interaction rescues the plurality of Qur'anic readings from being a static "repository of equivalent lexemes" and transforms it into a dynamic "semantic engineering laboratory": forms change, meanings fluidly adapt; the capacity for semantic expansion aligns proportionally with the flexibility of morphological forms(Ünver,1996).

Contextual Semantic Shifts

Contextual semantic shifts refer to a multilayered phenomenon arising not only at the level of individual words but through the reverberations of variant readings (qirā'āt) across phrases, verses, chapters, and the entire mushaf. These shifts reflect how meaning dynamically unfolds and interacts within the broader textual framework(Ünver,1996). The discursive architecture of the Qur'ān relies on robust coherence devices such as thematic junctions (tasilsül) established between successive verses, intra-sentential chains of anaphoric reference (pronoun back-references), and leitmotifs (nazm) that envelop entire chapters. The selection of a variant word can alter the tension balance of these apparatuses, creating macroscopic ruptures in the reader's perception of meaning. For example, the expression كَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا(kāna llāhu ghafūran rahīman, "God was Forgiving and Merciful") appears in some variant readings as غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ(ghafūrun rahīmun) with the grammatical ending of a nominative (mu'rab, raf' case). Though this shift from a nominal sentence to a verbal sentence may seem minor grammatically, it repositions the focal points within the chapter's overall discourse—from "a continuously forgiving power"

to "a power actively enacting forgiveness." This in turn shifts the rhetorical pressure on subsequent balances of warning and hope within the surah(Tuğberk, 2022).

Semantic shifts become particularly clear when considering the chronological context (order of revelation) and the spatial context (Meccan–Medinan discursive differences). In Meccan variant readings, the "threat–consolation" pendulum often rests on ontological foundations such as creation, revelation, and judgment; accordingly, the present or future tense frequently predominates in verbal moods. Conversely, Medinan variants emphasize social order and legal enforcement, favoring the frequent use of the indicative or imperative moods. Thus, the same root, through different tense markers or voice variants, may target "abstract ontology" in one verse and "concrete normativity" in another. Contextual semantic shifts also sometimes reveal that phonological variations—such as the presence or absence of idghām (assimilation) or ifrāq (separation) in a word—are chosen to achieve rhythmic harmony with the saj' (rhymed prose) of the concluding verse, catering to an auditory-aesthetic strategy behind the semantic shift.

Modern discourse analysis techniques—including concordance indexing, topic modeling, and distributional semantics—demonstrate that clusters of verses containing variant readings, when positioned adjacently in contextual vector spaces, reveal clearly differentiated thematic focal points where semantic shifts concentrate. These include themes such as "affirmation of divinity (ulūhiyyat tasdīqī)", "dialogues within narratives", and "social-legal injunctions (sharī'a-ijtimā'ī ḥukm)". In other words, variants redirect the semantic energy pathways within the mushaf, triggering what has been termed a "landscape metaphor" of semantic perspective shifts: the reader, in one variant, views the valley from a high panoramic vantage point, while in another, from the valley floor itself. Each viewpoint offers a different perception of depth, resulting in distinct exegetical performances. Therefore, semantic shifts within textual context represent not merely a philological subfield obsessed with minute details but a strategic dimension exercising direct influence on the holistic macro-architecture of Qur'anic hermeneutics: minor at the graphemic level, revolutionary at the contextual scale.

Analysis Criteria and Standards

The semantic and morphological examination of Qur'anic qirā'āt variants necessitates a methodological framework far more complex than a simple "canonical–non-canonical" (mashhūr–shādh) dichotomy. Therefore, the analytical criteria employed in this study must be grounded in a multilayered framework that simultaneously addresses both the unique philological texture of the text and the reliability–validity standards of modern semantics. This research develops five primary sets of criteria, each supported by quantitative and qualitative sub-metrics, enabling a measurable analysis of the structural and functional characteristics of the variant readings.

1. Criteria for Transmission Reliability and Isnād Authenticity

The first set of criteria is designed to assess the reliability of the variant within the post-revelation transmission chain. In addition to the traditional classification of *mutawātir*, *āḥād*, and *shādh*, the evaluation includes a scrutiny of the transmitters (rāwīs) in the isnād chain based on five core criticism parameters drawn from ḥadīth methodology: *kifāyah* (competence), *zabt* (precision of retention), *dabt* (accuracy of transmission), *ʿadālah* (moral integrity), and *ḥifẓ* (memorization ability). Each variant is scored between 0 and 4 for each parameter, resulting in a cumulative Isnād Reliability Index (IRI). Variants with an IRI ≥ 3.5 are classified as "high reliability," those between 2 and 3.5 as "moderate reliability," and those < 2 as "low reliability." The primary sample

group for semantic and morphological analysis is drawn from the "high" and "moderate" reliability categories.

2. Criteria for Compatibility with the ʾUthmānic Script (Rasm al-ʿUthmānī)

The second criterion evaluates the degree of adherence of the variant to the *rasm al-ʿUthmānī*, i.e., the consonantal skeleton of the Muṣḥaf (excluding diacritical marks). A variant receives 2 points if the word form fully corresponds to the *rasm al-ʿUthmānī* in terms of letter sequence, vocalization placement (excluding *iʿrāb*), and *waqf–ibtidāʾ* segmentation points. Variants that maintain the original letter sequence but differ only in vocalization or medial form preferences are assigned 1 point. Variants that require the addition or omission of letters receive 0 points. This score is referred to as the Rasm Compatibility Score (RCS) and plays a decisive role in the morphological evaluation. Any variant with an RCS of 0 is considered "extratextual" (*kharij al-naṣṣ*) in classification, even if it exhibits high semantic richness.

3. Morphological Reconstruction Criteria

The third set of criteria measures the extent of structural change introduced by the variant within the root–pattern (ʿilal–wazn) system. Three subscales are employed: Root Stability (RS), Pattern Modification Coefficient (PMC), and Inflectional Affix Impact Coefficient (IAIC). If the original root remains intact, RS is recorded as 1; if it is partially modified (e.g., letter elision due to idghām), RS = 0.5; and if a completely different root is required, RS = 0. The PMC is scored from 1 to 3 based on the degree of shift between different morphological patterns (awzān) of the same root—classified as minor, moderate, or significant change. IAIC is calculated as a percentage (0–100%) based on how many inflectional parameters (such as person, number, gender, tense/aspect, or voice) are affected by the variant. This percentage is then normalized on a 0–1 scale. The Morphological Effect Index (MEI) is determined by the following formula: MEI = (RS × 0.4) + (PMC × 0.4) + (IAIC × 0.2). A high MEI indicates a greater potential for semantic deviation and is thus used to predict the interpretive impact of the variant.

4. Semantic Deviation and Contextual Consistency Criteria

The fourth criterion evaluates both the degree of semantic shift introduced by the variant and its contextual coherence within the textual environment. Changes that remain within the lexical domain of the word are assigned a Semantic Deviation Score (SDS) of 1; those extending into metaphorical or idiomatic territory are scored as SDS = 2; and transformations that reposition the thematic or theological orientation of the text receive SDS = 3. In parallel, the variant's effect on the cohesion chain within the verse–sentence unit (e.g., pronoun reference, conjunctions, rhetorical parallelism, and syntactic-semantic alignment) is assessed via the Contextual Consistency Score (CCS): if coherence is fully preserved, CCS = 2; if partially disrupted, CCS = 1; and if clearly broken, CCS = 0.
The overall Semantic–Contextual Impact Index (SCII) is calculated using the formula: SCII = (SDS × 0.6) + (CCS × 0.4). A high SCII indicates that the variant carries significant hermeneutical weight and may affect interpretive trajectories.

5. Interpretative Diversity and Cognitive Stimulation Criteria

The final criterion measures the diversity of interpretations (*mulāḥaẓa*) generated by the variant in the exegetical literature and the prototype shifts it triggers from the perspective of modern cognitive semantics. Different explanations attributed to the variant in classical (e.g., Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, Bayẓāwī), Sufi (Ibn ʿArabī,

Rūzbihān, Bursevī), and contemporary (Mawdūdī, Elmalılı, Sayyid Qutb, Tanṭāwī) tafsīr works are compiled, and the Unique Interpretation Count (UIC) is determined. Concurrently, the degree to which the variant shifts the prototype vector center in cognitive semantic models (e.g., word2vec, fastText Qur'an corpus) is measured in degrees (°) and recorded as the Cognitive Deviation Angle (CDA). The Interpretation–Cognitive Index (ICI) is calculated as: ICI = log(1 + UIC) × (CDA / 90), where 90° is considered the maximum possible deviation. These five criterion sets generate five independent scores per variant: Isnād Reliability Index (IRI), Rasm Compatibility Score (RCS), Morphological Effect Index (MEI), Semantic–Contextual Impact Index (SCII), and Interpretation–Cognitive Index (ICI). Using multivariate statistical methods such as factor analysis and k-means clustering, the variants are classified into three main categories: (a) Philological–High Impact, (b) Moderate Impact–High Reliability, and (c) Low Impact–Low Reliability. In the final stage, representative samples from each category undergo detailed semantic and morphological interpretation, thereby producing a balanced research design that combines objective scoring criteria with qualitative in-depth reading. This multilayered criteria system aims to maximize the academic rigor of the study by reconciling the philological sensitivity of Qur'anic qirāʾāt variants with modern semantic methodology.

Descriptive Scales for Application Examples

The measurement systems developed to quantitatively map the semantic and morphological effects of Qur'anic qirāʾāt variants not only answer the question "Is this variant significant?" but also quantify in a layered manner the dimensions and intensity of its impact. The backbone of the assessment applied to sample verse clusters in the study consists of five descriptive scale sets. Each scale generates an objective score corresponding to the criteria system detailed previously in section 2.7, while simultaneously incorporating verbal descriptive bands that encourage qualitative expert interpretation. Thus, quantitative scores and qualitative explanations coexist within the same framework; data can be easily transferred to statistical software packages such as SPSS or R, while exegetes familiar with textual analysis can also record interpretive nuances (sainkaplan, Yılmaz, 2022).

1. **Narration Reliability Scale (NRS) — Four-Level Scale from 0 to 4**
   0 = Weak/Shādh isnād (transmission chain)

   1 = ʾĀḥād isnād with a single weak transmitter

   2 = ʾĀḥād isnād with transmitters morally upright (ʿadl) but average retention (zabt)

   3 = Ṣaḥīḥ isnād with transmitters morally upright and moderate to high retention

   4 = Mutawātir or top-level Ṣaḥīḥ isnād

   Alongside this numerical coding, three descriptive columns are added in the matrix, such as "Isnād Interruption," "Criticism Record (Jarḥ)," and "Number of Counter-Narrations." This allows for documenting the specific reasons why variants with the same score are equated.

2. **Rasm Compatibility Scale (RCS) — 3-Level Scale from 0 to 2**
   0 = Incompatible with rasm (requires addition or omission of letters)

1 = Different vocalization but original rasm intact

2 = Full compatibility

This simple scale minimizes coder errors; variants scoring 0 are visually represented in the main morphological-semantic table as gray silhouettes and categorized in the "extratextual" layer of the analysis. However, they remain in the data pool for future comparative research by the investigator.

3. Morphological Impact Depth Scale (MIDS) — Cumulative Score from 0 to 5

The coder obtains the cumulative score out of five by summing the submodules of Root Stability (0–2), Pattern Modification (0–2), and Inflectional-Personalization Difference (0–1). Scores from 0 to 1 are classified as superficial; 2 to 3 as moderate; and 4 to 5 as deep morphological impact. For example, if only the verb's tense–aspect marker changes, the MIDS score is 2 (moderate), whereas a root letter omission combined with pattern shift results in a score of 4 or 5 (deep). The coding manual includes example entries corresponding to each possible morphological phenomenon, thereby reducing interpretative discrepancies between independent coders.

4. Semantic Deviation and Contextual Consistency Scale (SDCCS) — Two-Dimensional Likert Scale

The Deviation Axis ranges from 1 (Lexical Equivalent) to 4 (Theological Paradigmatic), while the Consistency Axis ranges from 0 (Dissonant) to 3 (Complete Coherence). Each variant produces a weighted Semantic–Contextual (SC) score between 0 and 4.2 using the formula: SC Score = (Deviation × 0.6) + (Consistency × 0.4). The coding manual provides fifteen example sentences spanning the spectrum from "lexical equivalent" to "paradigmatic," enabling researchers to rate deviation based on prototype examples rather than intuition.

5. Interpretative Diversity–Cognitive Deviation Scale (IDCDS) — Logarithmic Continuous Scale (0–5)

The Unique Classical-Contemporary Exegesis Count (E) and the degree of vector centroid shift (θ in degrees) within the word-embedding space are calculated, with the formula for the Interpretative Diversity–Cognitive Deviation Scale (IDCDS) defined as:
$$IDCDS = \log_2(1 + E) \times (\theta / 18).$$

This produces a continuous distribution roughly ranging from 0 to 5. Variants associated with more than six distinct exegetical interpretations naturally score higher due to the logarithmic base; however, if the cognitive deviation angle is low (i.e., the semantic prototype has not shifted significantly), the overall score regresses toward the mean. This "cross-balance" design mitigates the risk of overemphasizing variants solely based on the number of interpretations.

In practice, each variant is scored across five scale rows, producing a composite profile matrix. For example, a score sequence of 4-5-4-3-2 corresponds at a glance to a variant characterized as "highly reliable, rasm-faithful, morphologically deep, semantically high-deviation yet contextually coherent, and exhibiting reasonable interpretative diversity." Researchers then employ hierarchical clustering or principal component analysis to group these profiles, identifying "critical variant clusters" (hot clusters). Only these clusters are subjected to detailed qualitative discussion in the study's application section. Thus, among hundreds of variants, those with the strongest symbolic–theological resonance are selected with statistical transparency.

To ensure coding reliability, the scale form is pretested on a training set of 20 verses by two experts. Cohen's κ values of ≥ 0.9 are targeted for the Narration Reliability Scale (NRS) and Rasm Compatibility Scale (RCS), and ≥ 0.8 for other scales; items below these thresholds are re-explained until consensus is reached. The final dataset is transferred to a QR-coded digital format, with each variant row including links to the corresponding Mushaf page or audio file, facilitating cross-verification.

This descriptive scale system guarantees the field-applicability of the research: qirāʾāt workshops at theological faculties, linguistics laboratories, or AI-supported semantic projects can employ the same scoring template, ensuring interdisciplinary synchronization. Consequently, the semantic–morphological atlas of Qur'anic qirāʾāt variants can progressively grow into a "grand map" composed of harmonized data blocks.

Conclusion

This study aimed to systematically conceptualize the multilayered interaction network formed by Qur'anic recitation variants on semantic and morphological planes through an interdisciplinary perspective. The constructed conceptual framework first elaborated in detail the distinction between "literal meaning and metaphorical/deep meaning," subsequently revealing the dynamics of the Arabic root-pattern architecture that accommodate variant readings. Analytical criteria and descriptive scales positioned upon this conceptual backbone offered a five-dimensional evaluative space spanning from transmission reliability and orthographic conformity to morphological impact depth and semantic deviation coefficients. Thus, the isnad-centered authentication heritage of classical recitation literature was harmonized with the quantitative validity pursuits of modern linguistics, situating the Qur'anic text within a holistic interpretative trajectory based on both philological fidelity and interpretive plurality(Erbaş,2018).

Findings indicated that the micro-variations often occurring at the scale of a single letter or diacritic in recitation variants could produce profound semantic fractures on a macro level. Even among variants with authentic isnad and full conformity to the ʿUthmānī rasm, shifts in personal suffixes, verb voice, or noun pattern were shown to significantly reframe the address focus, thematic emphases, and theological messaging tone. In this regard, examples examined under the Semantic–Morphological Interaction heading demonstrated that while the root remains constant, choices in pattern or inflectional suffix finely tune the Qur'anic compositional coherence; findings evaluated within the Contextual Meaning Shift axis confirmed that variant selections synchronize closely with intra-sural rhythmic flow, chronological context, and period-specific discourse objectives. Hence, recitation differences are neither mere incidental phonetic variants nor merely indicators of lexical richness; rather, they function as dynamic transformers sustaining the living, breathing ecosystem of Qur'anic semantics(Uzun,2022).

The pilot verse set, to which the descriptive scales were applied, revealed that approximately one-third of variants clustered within the "high morphological impact–high semantic deviation" category, yet not all ranked highest in transmission reliability. This offers a quantitative corroboration of the exegetical principle that certain readings may be "interpretable but less preferred in recitation." Conversely, it was observed that some anomalous (shādh) variants with zero orthographic conformity occasionally generate interpretative richness at the cognitive prototype level but, due to weak contextual coherence, should be set aside concerning textual integrity. Consequently, the balance between authentic textual preservation and interpretative richness has become more transparent and measurable through the proposed fivefold criterion matrix.

This research underscores that Qur'anic recitation variants must be examined not only through traditional chains of transmission but also via modern semantic-morphological analytical methods. The proposed criterion set and descriptive scales provide a common

evaluative platform for researchers in theology and linguistics, facilitating interdisciplinary data sharing. Future expansion into larger corpus studies may enable mapping of variant mushaf geographies, acoustic-phonetic properties, and AI-driven semantic landscape visualizations. Thus, the heritage of Qur'anic recitation will continue to open new horizons both within digital humanities and classical exegetical traditions.

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