Al-Attas' Semantic Analysis in *Tafsīr*: With Special Reference to *On Justice and the Nature of Man*[1]

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Abstract

Semantic analysis is a major method of interpretation in the Islamic intellectual tradition which is concerned with correct application of linguistic symbols to arrive at correct meaning. This method has been neglected by modern commentators due to modernization. As a result, Islamic vocabulary has been tampered with: the definitions either changed, reduced or incorrectly translated; causing confusion in the Islamic worldview. Syed Muhammad Naqib al-Attas has addressed the significance of correct application of linguistic symbols by re-introducing the method of semantic analysis. This paper attempts at elucidating al-Attas' method of semantic analysis in *tafsīr* by examining his conception of *insān*. The paper is divided into two sections: the first scrutinizes al-Attas' semantic analysis while the second elucidates on how this method is applied in the semantic field of *insān*. Al-Attas' published works on *insān* especially "*On Justice and the Nature of Man*" are examined.

Keywords

Islamic worldview*, tafsīr*, semantic analysis, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *insān*.

Abstrak

Analisis semantik merupakan kaedah pentafsiran utama dalam tradisi keilmuan Islam yang menitikberatkan tentang pemilihan perkataan yang betul untuk sampai kepada makna sebenar. Kaedah ini telah diabaikan oleh para pentafsir moden kesan daripada modernisasi. Kesannya, perbendaharaan kata asas Islam telah dirosakkan sewenang-wenangnya: definisinya telah diubah, disempitkan atau diterjemahkan secara tidak tepat; sehingga menyebabkan kekeliruan terhadap pandangan alam Islam. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas telah mengenengahkan kepentingan pemilihan perkataan yang betul dengan memperkenalkan semula kaedah analisis semantik. Kertas kajian ini merupakan satu percubaan untuk menjelaskan kaedah analisis semantik al-Attas dalam *tafsīr* melalui perbincangan beliau

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tentang konsep *insān*. Kertas ini dibahagikan kepada dua seksyen: yang pertama memerhatikan kaedah semantik analisis al-Attas, manakala yang kedua menerangkan bagaimana kaedah ini diaplikasikan dalam lapangan makna *insān*. Hasil penulisan al-Attas berkenaan *insān* khususnya "*On Justice and the Nature of Man*" menjadi sumber penting pemerhatian.

Katakunci

Pandangan alam Islam, *tafsīr*, analisis semantik, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *insān*.

They are like torches that light the way along difficult paths; when we have such torches to light our way, of what use are mere candles?

Introduction

The Quran and the *ḥadīth*, two most important sources of knowledge in Islam, emphasize on the significance of language and application of correct linguistic symbols (words) to arrive at correct meaning**.** The foundation that the Quran and the *ḥadīth* have laid pertaining to the preservation of meaning substantively influenced Muslims in their approach to knowledge. [3] However, by the coming of modernity and modernization in the Muslim world during the 19th century onwards, Muslim interpretation of their religion and Islamic texts has changed into instilling a character of rationality and scientific spirit. Some Muslim

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[3]   For a detailed elaboration on the foundation of language in Islamic intellectual tradition and the significance of correct application of words to arrive at correct meanings, please refer Salina Ahmad, "Al-Attas Conception of Language and His Utilization of Semantic Analysis" Thesis (Ph.D), UTM 2017, hereafter cited as *ACL*; "The Role of Language in the Process of Islamization: A Brief Analysis of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas' Thought," Seminar Kebangsaan Isu Ketamadunan dan Cabaran Semasa (SIKCAS) 2013, Bahagian Falsafah dan Tamadun Pusat Pengajian Ilmu Kemanusiaan Universiti Sains Malaysia, 27th November 2013, 5-9, 15-18; "Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab di Kelantan dan Terengganu: Satu Tinjauan" (M.A. thesis), Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, 2011); "Bahasa dan Peranannya dalam Pendidikan: Suatu Perbahasan Ringkas tentang Konsep Makna dan Hakikat," Seminar Penyelidikan Siswazah UNISZA 2013 (UNISZA Postgraduate Research Conference 2013), Persatuan Pengajian Siswazah and Pusat Pengajian Siswazah UNISZA, 7th-8th September 2013; "Language in the Islamic Intellectual Tradition," The 2nd International Conference on Arabic Studies and Islamic Civilization (iCASIC 2015), WorldConferences.net and International Islamic University College Selangor, 9th-10th March 2015 included in e-Journal of Arabic Studies and Islamic Civilization, Volume 2, Issue 1, 2015, 15-27; and "The Doctrine of *al-Mīthāq*, Man (*Insān*), Knowledge (*'Ilm*) And Witnessing (*Shuhūd*): An Analysis From Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas' Metaphysical and Linguistic Ideas", Jurnal QALBU 1.4 (Jun 2017): 53-79.

commentators uphold total rejection of the traditional way of interpretation while others while embracing some part of Islamic values turn to evolutionist and positivist theories under the anthropological and sosiological framework for explanation.[4]

As a result, there are confusion and errors in understanding knowledge of Islam and its worldview in Muslim world today. Recent developments in modern Muslim thoughts reveal misusages and corruptions of various key-terms and important concepts in the Islamic worldview. Important Islamic terminologies in ethical and civilizational discourses tend to be limited, reduced or incorrectly translated. These misusages are apparent not only in Islamic discourses and writings, but also in the dictionaries extant to the Muslims as well as the media. Examples are like the reduction and change of meanings of the words *'ulamā'*, *'ibādah*, *adab*, *sa'ādah*, *jihād* and the worst *lafẓ al-jalālah* Allah.[5]

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[4] For modern Muslim exegetes and their reactionary approach to modernity and modernization, see Jacques Waardenburg, "Some Thought on Modernity and Modern Muslim Thinking About Islam," *Islam and the Challenge of Modernity: Proceedings of the Inaugural Symposium on Islām and the Challenge of Modernity: Historical and Contemporary Contexts* ed. Sh. Shifa al-Attas, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1996), 317-350, hereafter cited as *ICM*; Aziz al-Azmeh, "Muslim Modernism and the Text of the Past," *ICM*, 391-428.; Shahzadi Pakeeza and Ali Asghar Chishti, "Critical Study of Approaches to the Exegesis of the Qur'an," Pakistan Journal of Islamic Research Vol 10, 2012, 20-24; and J.M.S. Baljon, *Modern Muslim Koran Interpretation. (1880-1960)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968). On the concept of heritage (*turāth*) and the contemporary Muslim intellectuals response to it see Marcia K. Hermansen, "Modernity and Religious Worldviews – The Challenge of Classical Islamic Religious Thought for Contemporary Muslim Intellectuals", *ICM*, 509-534. On colonization and de-colonization, see Ngugi Wa Thiongo, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, (London: James Currey, 1986) and Ali A. Mazrui, "Globalization, Islam and the West: Between Homogenization and Hegemonization," *Islamic Paradigms on International Relations*, School of Islamic and Social Sciences and the Centre of Political Research and Studies in Cairo, Egypt, 2nd December 1997; *Africa's International Relations: The Diplomacy of Dependency and Change*. Colorado, Westview Press, 1979; *The African Condition: A Political Diagnosis*, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1980). On Islamization and contemporary responses see Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud, *Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization*. Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1998, 371- 414, hereafter cited as *EPP*; "Dewesternisation and Islamisation: Their Epistemic Framework and Final Purpose," *Critical Perspectives on Literature and Culture in the New World Order*, eds. Noritah Omar et. al.. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010; and *Islamization of Contemporary Knowledge and the Role of the University in the Context of De-Westernization and Decolonization*. Kuala Lumpur: UTM, 2013.

[5] See footnote 3. For elaboration on *'ulamā'* please see Alparslan Açıkgenç in his paper, "Toward an Islamic Concept of Philosophy," *ICM*, 7, 535-589; on *'ibādah* Hassan Abdel Razig el-Nagar, "Speaking with One Voice: the Politics of Language in the Modern Muslim World," *ICM*, 463-464; on *adab* works of al-Attas especially *Risalah untuk Kaum Muslimin*, *Islam and Secularism* and *The Concept of Education in Islam*, works of Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud especially *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed*

The scenario explicated above, reflects what Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas has observed as the "confusion and error in Islamic knowledge and its worldview"[6] through the process of "deislamization of language"[7] which emerged out of deviation from our intellectual tradition in the way of methodology. Al-Attas once remarked:

> In elaborating on the nature of the educational crisis in which we are presently involved, certain preliminary remarks would suffice to demonstrate the extent to which we have deviated from the Islamic intellectual tradition …. to remind us of what we have apparently forgotten in the way of methodology and the correct application of linguistic symbols.[8]

This "correct application of linguistic symbols" is the method of semantic analysis, a major method of interpretation in the Islamic intellectual tradition. It has been a regular practice for the past 1,400 years especially in the science of *tafsīr* [9] but tend to be ignored at the expense of modern call for rationalization.[10]

Muhammad Naquib al-Attas; and the whole *festschrift* of *Adab dan Peradaban* edited by Mohd. Zaidi Ismail and Wan Suhaimi Wan Abdullah; on *sa'ādah*, al-Attas *The Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islam* and Muhammad Zainiy Uthman *Ma'na Kebahagiaan dan Pengalamannya dalam Islam*; on jihād Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud, "A Jihad against Corruption and for the Enhancement of Integrity among Muslim Countries", The Journal of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations, Kuala Lumpur: 2006, 111-123; and on the controversy of the term Allah Malaysian context Md. Asham Ahmad, *Antara Nama dan Hakikat: Kemelut Kalimah Allah*, (Kuala Lumpur: IKIM, 2010) and *Controversy over the Term "Allah" in Malaysia*, ed. Wan Azhar Wan Ahmad, (Kuala Lumpur: IKIM, 2013).

[6] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, (Kuala Lumpur: Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, 1978 second impression 1993), 105-109. This reflection also corresponds with some other Muslim scholars. Fazlur Rahman, for example, observes that there is "a general failure to understand the underlying unity of the Qur'an, coupled with a practical insistence upon fixing on the words of various verses in isolation. Refer his *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

[7] Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1999), 10-11, hereafter cited as *CEII*.

[8] *CEII*, 1-2. Cf *Tinjauan Ringkas Peri Ilmu dan Pandangan Alam*, (Pulau Pinang: Penerbitan USM, 2007), chap. *Perihal Bahasa dan Istilah Kunci*.

[9] *CEII*, 3. For an overview of *tafsīr* development from the Prophet time up to our modern time please refer *Tafsir Quranic Exegesis: An Entry from Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam* ed. Ghomali Haddad Adel et. al. Petaling Jaya, Islamic Book Trust, 2018; first published in 2012 by EWI. For an early exposition of Quranic exegesis Rashid Ahmad Jullundhry, *Quranic Exegesis in Classical Literature With Particular Reference to Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayri*, (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2010), first published in 2006 by Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore. For an exposition on language and its role in the development of Islamic sciences please see fn 3.

[10] See fn 4.

Al-Attas' Semantic Analysis

Semantic analysis at this point carries two meanings:

1.   Generally, it is the method of interpreting Islamic texts by defining important Islamic key terms and concepts in the vocabulary of Islam. It concerns about analyzing a term or a concept from the aspects of grammar, lexicology, etymology and then its synonyms as well as antonyms before contextually defined. In the Islamic discourse, semantic analysis is actually the method of *tafsīr*, the understanding of Quran from the Quran and prophetic Ḥadīth. In other words, it is Quran interpreting itself. [11]

2.   Technically, it is al-Attas' method of interpretation, a continuation of this traditional blueprint with new definitions in the modern contexts. For the most part of the paper, semantic analysis refers to this second meaning.

Al-Attas' conception of language relies heavily on metaphysical and cultural expositions as follow:

1. the divine origin of language (the day of covenant 7:172)

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[11]   The science of interpretation (*tafsīr*) in the Islamic tradition works on the basis of understanding the Quran and the ḥadīth as a "*naṣṣ*" (text), a term which refers to not just a text, but the verses of the Quran and the saying of the Prophet pbuh, together with its authenticity as the words of God, transmitted both in verbal and written forms. It is the idea of clarity and obviousness, as oppose to ambiguity and vagueness. For an elucidation on the concept of *waḥy* and *tanzīl* please see al-Attas *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2001), first appeared in manuscript in 1973, 26-9, hereafter cited as *RUKM*; *IS*, 25-32, and *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam*. Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995.4-14, hereafter cited as *Prolegomena*. For a full discussion on text and textuality, please refer Ahmad Bazli Shafie, "A Modernist Approach to the Quran: A Critical Study of the Hermeneutics of Fazlur Rahman" (Ph.D thesis), ISTAC, 2005; hereafter cited as "Modernist Approach"; "Modernisme dan Neo-Modernisme: Rekonstruksi atau Dekonstruksi Agama," *Adab dan Peradaban: Karya Pengi'tirafan Untuk Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas*. Petaling Jaya: MPH Group Publishing Sdn. Bhd., 2012 and "Tafsīr dan Ta'wīl Modenis: Metodologi Tafsir Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh," *al-Hikmah*, No 18, Bil. 1 Tahun 7 2001. Cf the term "*naṣṣ*" in Ibnu Manẓūr, *LA*, vol. 8 of 9, 575 and 575, col. 1; Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1980), vol. 8, 2797 and 'Alī bin Muḥammad Al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-Ta'rīfāt*, (Singapore: al-Haramyn, n.d.), 241. Hereafter cited as *Ta'rīfāt*.

2. man as rational animal/living being that speaks (*al-ḥayawān al-nāṭiq*)

3. language reflects ontology

4. language interconnectedness with thought

5. formulation of Islamic worldview

6. language and change

7. Islamization of language

8. scientific nature of Quranic Arabic

9. the semantic field in the context of Islam.[12]

This conception of language, in turn, influences al-Attas' semantic analysis.

In his *Preliminary Statement On A General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago*, al-Attas remarks:

> ….Almost all the evidence for the formulation of this general theory [the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago] has been derived from these primary literary sources … Apart from a critical, commentative, interpretation of the texts, I have also employed the methodological concepts and approach of modern semantic analysis…." [13]

This statement is not to be taken as total reliance on modern approach at the expense of the tradition; rather, as profitting considerably from modern

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[12] See fn 3. For other angles of al-Attas' framework of language, one can also refer to Adi Setia Mohd. Dom, "Hakikat Bahasa Menurut Chomsky dan al-Attas: Satu Tinjauan Perbandingan" in Kesturi 2004/1425H, 14 (1 & 2), 1-12; and Khayrurrijal, "Kritikan Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas terhadap Falsafah Bahasa Barat Moden dan Pascamoden" Thesis (M.A.), UTM 2015.

[13] See al-Attas, *Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago*, (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1969), 2, hereafter cited as *Preliminary Statement*. He also uses the term 'semantic analysis' in his description of certain subjects of his treatment. See for example in his *Prolegomena*, 293 on *majāz* and existence. In his *The Mysticism of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī*, al-Attas allocates chapters IV and V on the meanings of important concepts in Ḥamzah's mystical system by introducing methodological concepts in a modern semantic analysis, while preparing an index of semantic vocabulary in his system in the Appendices. Al-Attas' argument of applying semantic approach is that it has not been applied before in any study of Malay mysticism (and history) and that by this method it becomes possible to discover the conceptual system in a mysticism (particularly of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī) as a whole. Al-Attas, *The Mysticism of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī*, (Kuala Lumpur: UM Press, 1970), in the preface, x and introduction, xiv-xv, 111-75, 142; chapters IV and V, and also in the index of semantic vocabulary in *Ḥamzah's* system in the Appendices, hereafter cited as *MHF*.

sources as well as systematization of tools and methodology of research.[14] "Methodological concepts and approach of modern semantic analysis[15]" here relates to the study of *weltanschauunglehre*[16] as exposed by Toshihiko Izutsu[17].[18]

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[14] In *MHF*, 142, fn 2, al-Attas mentioned that he is indebted to Prof. Izutsu's lectures and writings especially God and Man in the Quran chapters 1 and 2 on the methodological concepts of semantic analysis. Cf Izutsu, *God and Man*. See also *EPP*, 319 fn 74.

[15] Modern semantic analysis can be traced back to the end of the 19th century in the work of Ignaz Goldziher (d. 13th November 1921), a Hungarian scholar of Islam. In his article *Muhammedanissche Studien* in 1888 C.E., he concluded that the concept of *jāhiliyyah* as traditionally upheld is erroneous. *Jahl* is not opposite to *'ilm* but to *ḥilm*, hence denotes 'the moral reasonableness of a civilized man'. He derives his conclusions from his collecting of important examples of the actual use of the root JHL in pre-Islamic poetry. Semantic analysis has systematically put into principles by Toshihiko Izutsu (d.7th January, 1993). For a detailed elaboration on semantic analysis and its principles, see Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Quran* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2004), first published in 1959 by Keio University Institute of Philological Studies under the title *The Structure of the Ethical Terms in the Koran*, p. 3-45; on Quranic *weltanschauung* and the Islamic key-terms *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2002), first published in 1964 by Keio University. One can also follow Izutsu's epistemology and methodology of argumentation in his *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology: A Semantic Analysis of Īmān and Islām* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2006), first published in 1965 by the Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, Keio University; *The Concept and Reality of Existence*. (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2007), first published in 1971 by the Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, Keio University; and *Language and Magic: Studies in the Magical Function of Speech*. (Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press, 2012), first published in 1956 by Keio Institute of Philological Studies. These works to be cited hereafter as *God and Man*, *The Concept of Belief*, *Ethico-Religious*, *The Structure* and *Language and Magic* respectively.

[16] See for example Izutsu's famous definition of semantics in *God and Man*, 3:

> …an analytic study of the key-words of a language with a view to arriving eventually at a conceptual grasp of the *weltanschauung* or worldview of the people who use that language as a tool not only of speaking and thinking, but, more important still, of conceptualizing and interpreting the world that surrounds them. Semantics, thus understood, is a kind of *weltanschauunglehre*, a study of the nature and structure of the worldview of a nation at this or that significant period of its history, conducted by means of a methodological analysis of the major cultural concepts the nation has produced for itself and crystallized into the key-words of its language.

In the beginning of chapter 5 in *MHF*, al-Attas remarks: "…I understand key words to be product of the crystallization of the major mystical concepts in Ḥamzah's system, and his system is none other than his *weltanschauung*….".

[17] Toshihiko Izutsu (1914-1993) is a professor in the Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, University of Keio, Tokyo. He is a semanticist and Arabist; and is the first Japanese scholar who writes about Islam in a Western language. He possesses an impressive knowledge of Arabic language, particularly the pre-Islamic Arabic poetry and the Arabic of the Quran, and generally Islamic thought. In the three major works (as above), Izutsu employs a semantic approach and method in the study of the Quranic *weltanschauung* and the concept of belief (*īmān*) in Islamic theology. He was Professor Emeritus at Keio University in Japan and author of many books on Islam and other religions. He taught at the Institute of Cultural and Linguistic studies at Keio University in Tokyo, the Iranian institute of Philosophy in Tehran, and McGill University in Montreal, Canada. He was fluent in over 30 languages, including Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese, Japanese, Russian and Greek.

In The *Mysticism of Ḥamzah Fanṣūrī,* al-Attas clarifies the three concepts in the methodology which are proved to be "of great utility" in a study of language or thought (such as of Ḥamzah's system):[19]

1. Semantic vocabulary: not a mere gathering together of words, but a systematic *gestalt* – an arrangement in meaningful pattern. The words isolated must be words that are closely interrelated and interdependent and derive their meanings from the entire system of relations.[20]

2. Semantic fields:[21] conceptual spheres which necessarily overlap with each other. A semantic field is comprised of key words clustering around a particular key word and this key word may also be a focus word in that particular semantic field. A key word is called a focus word if its semantic field is clearly defined and stands out as important.[22]

3. 'Basic' and 'relational' meaning: words do not reveal the objective reality of the things described, but rather concept of them. An example is of the word *titah* which basic meaning is command from charismatic authority. When Ḥamzah gave new meaning to it, titah as *amr* (God's command), this relational meaning has entirely different semantic field

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[18] This methodological concepts of Izutsu has its root in a particular type of semantics which has been developed and elaborated in West Germany by Leo Weisgerber, '*sprachliche Weltanschauungslehre*'. This type of semantics coincides very largely in its major arguments with 'ethnolinguistics', a theory of interrelations between linguistic patterns and cultural patterns which was originated by Edward Sapir in his later years in the United States. Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious*, 6-7. His pioneering studies have indicated a wide and dominant influence on contemporary Islamic studies, especially in the field of Quranic and Arabic studies apart from other influential figures, like Noldeke, Jeffery and Wansbrough. Subsequent works such as Fazlur Rahman's *Major Themes of the Quran*, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's *Mafhum al-Nass* and Daniel A. Madigan's *The Quran's Self-Image* all owe one way or another to Izutsu's writings. See Syamsuddin Arif, "Preserving the Semantic Structure of Islamic Key Terms and Concepts: Izutsu, al-Attas and Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī," *Islam and Science* 5 (2): 107 (10) (2007), 107-116, 107; hereafter cited as "Preserving,".

[19] *MHF*, page 142 in the beginning of chapter 5. Also in the footnote 2 of the same page, al-Attas mentioned that he is indebted to Prof. Izutsu's lectures and writings especially God and Man in the Quran chapters 1 and 2 on the methodological concepts of semantic analysis. Cf Izutsu, God and Man in the Quran,

[20] *MHF*, 142-3.

[21] The field of meaning, which governs a word's usage and its influence on other fields. Semantic fields usually overlap and impinge upon each other. An example is the word *bakhīl* is applicable to a sane mature wealthy male. To apply it to a woman or a boy is violation of the conceptual order of the concept *bukhl*. Refer *CEII*, 7. For a lengthy elaboration on semantic field, see Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, especially chapters 1 – 3.

[22] *MHF*, 143-5.

than its basic meaning. The Quranic context of *titah* has effected a drastic change in the Malay cultural context.[23]

Al-Attas' method is more than merely selecting and enlisting of words. More importantly a selection of key words must presuppose full knowledge of the language (especially, Quranic Arabic)[24], full comprehension of of the meaning structure[25] and full participation in the linguistic consciousness[26].

We can see for example, to embark on Ḥamzah's concept of *irādah*, al-Attas collected a sample of the word *hendak* in its several linguistic forms in literary works of varied nature and topics covering a period of five hundred years beginning from Ḥamzah's time (16th century) up to our modern time.[27] This sample of words reflects a conceptual structure of a certain system of thought, in this case *hendak* reflects the concept of Divine Will in Ḥamzah's mysticism.

In *A Commentary On the Ḥujjat al-Ṣiddīq of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī Commentary*, he gives an account of the term *al-dārāt* in the beginning of al-Rānīrī's *Ḥujjat al-Ṣiddīq li Dafʿ al-Zindīq*, which reads: "*Fī baḥri nawālihi kānat al-dārātu gharīq*" (In the ocean of His generosity the souls are drowned). The author use *al-dārāt* to mean *al-arwāḥ* (the spirits), its singular form is *dārat*, derived from the root DWR, where the medial and original W can also be converted to Y to read DYR and to A to read DAR. The verb *dāra* in its various forms and constructions conveys many meanings, but its basic meaning refers to someone who or something which went round, circled, revolved, beginning at

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[23]   *MHF*, 145-7.
[24]   *CEII*, 2-6. Cf *Risalah*, 98-110.
[25]   the Arabic system of root, lexicology and clarity (ʿ*ilm al-bayān*). Please see *CEII*, 2.
[26]   Al-Attas refers to Ḥamzah as poet, that in dealing with mystical literature like his one has to plunge into the depths of its emotional currents, be be at one with its sentiments and feel one's way into its symbols. MHF xv.
[27]   the writings of Ḥamzah, Shams al-Dīn of Pasai, Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī, ʿAbdu al-Raʾūf Singkel, some 17th century tracts on Ṣūfism, the Sejarah Melayu, Hikayat Acheh, Hikayat Hang Tuah, some 18th century manuscripts on Ṣūfism from Acheh, Riau and Terengganu, Hikayat Pelayaran series of Abdullah and the writings of Angkatan '45. *MHF*, 111.

one point and returning to it again. The meaning of *dāra baynahum* is when a cup being passed round a ring or circle of people. [28]

In relation to this basic meaning of *dāra*, al-Attas elaborates on how al-Rānīrī speaks of himself as one "who passes round the Cup of the Messenger of God, upon whom be peace" (*yang mengidarkan piala Rasūl Allāh, ṣalla Allāhu ʻalayhi wa sallam*) meaning the content of the Cup, which is the Water of spiritual knowledge and illuminative experience and not the act of passing.[29]

With reference to the basic meaning of *dāra* al-Attas connects to the many references in Islamic thought connecting the heavenly spheres with souls like of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā, who said that the Universal Soul (*al-nafs al-kulliyyah*) is the Soul of the Universe. The human soul is but a particular manifestation of the Universal Soul, where the most perfect of all are the Prophets who are sent in every circle (*dawr*) or period of history to remind the particular souls of the knowledge they have forgotten.[30] He also relates the ontological cycle of spirit (*al-dārāt*) to that of the atoms (*al-dharrāt*) and the human progeny (*dhurriyyah*).[31] This explication of human spirit by al-Attas shows an elaborate and deep understanding of Islamic concept of spirit made known by way of application of semantic analysis.

Why Semantic Analysis?

The fact that Western scholarship tend to employ this traditional method (in the age where Muslim scholarship themselves tend to forget) verifies the relevance and validity of *tafsīr* and the authenticity and scientificity of Islamic sources throughout any ages. Izutsu, though pioneered the systematic employment of modern semantic analysis, relies distinctively on Islamic method

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[28] For a extensive elaboration on this and other related meanings of *dārāt* see al-Attas, *A Commentary On the Ḥujjat al-Ṣiddīq of Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī* (Kuala Lumpur: Ministry of Culture, 1986), 113, 116-24.

[29] *Ibid.*, 111-113.

[30] *Ibid.*, 113. For a extensive elaboration on this and other related meanings of *dārāt* see 116-124.

[31] *Ibid.*, 124-128.

of interpretation and its texts.[32] His elucidation of the semantic structure and fixity of a number of key terms and concepts of the Quran, for example, has been compared to with that of al-Rāghib al-Isfahāni, a scholar of the eleventh century of Islamic intellectual tradition.[33] It is also argued that the process of testing the authenticity of meaning has initiated much earlier by Ibnu ʿAbbās (d. 687 C.E.) while the establishment of the Quran as the highest authority of Arabic language has completed in the second century after Hijrah.[34]

Let us see Izutsu's familiar method, where he underlined seven cases in which any passage assumes a strategic importance:[35]

1. the precise meaning of a word is elucidated concretely in its context by means of verbal description (contextual definition). An example is when the word *birr* is explained in the verse 2:177 as "the belief in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Scriptures and the prophets" and not "turning your faces towards the east or the west".

2. the particular value of synonyms for the purpose of analysis. An example is in verse 7:94-95, the whole phrase of *ba'sā'* and *ḍarrā'* in the first part of the verses is replaced in the other part by the term *sayyi'ah*.

3. the semantic structure of a given term is elucidated by contrast. The word *khayr* for example, is the opposite of *sharr*, whereas *ḥasanah* to *sayyi'ah*. If the precise meaning of any of the four is ascertained, one will become surer about the meanings of the other three.

4. the semantic structure of an obscure word *x* is cleared up in terms of its negative form, not-*x*. An example is, the word *istakbara* means "to be big with pride", a characteristic feature of *kāfir*. Verse 32:15 tells the conduct of those "who never getting puffed up with pride" is prostration.

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32   Al-Attas in a special lecture at Institute of Integrity, Special Lecture delivered at Institute of Integrity Malaysia, 8th September 2012, Kuala Lumpur.
33   "Preserving,", 107-116, 107.
34   *CEII*, 3.
35   *Ethico-Religious*, 39.

5. semantic field is any set of patterned semantic relations between certain words of a language. The verb *iftarā* (to invent, to forge) in the Quran for example, most frequently takes the noun *kadhib* (a lie) as its grammatical object, forming an inseparable group, together with *ẓālim* (a wrongdoer, an injust).

6. very often the rhetorical device of parallelism reveals the existence of a semantic relationship between two or more words. For example, "And none denies Our signs save the *kāfir*" in verse 29:47 and " And none denies Our signs save the *ẓālim*" in verse 29:49 has proved that *kāfir* and *ẓālim* are semantic equals.

7. the key ethical terms in the Quran are sometimes used in non-religious contexts. For example *kāfir* in verse 26:18-19 is said by Pharaoh to Moses to mean "ingratitude".[36]

These seven cases are basically what Izutsu infers as "to make the Quran interpret its own concepts and speak for itself".[37] Compare this to, for example, al-Iṣfahānī's procedures: first, he clarifies the lexical meaning of words, analyzing their morphology and tracing their etymology; then he exemplifies their usage in various contexts, citing from the Quran, Traditions, and poetry; and then he explains the meaning of the term occurring in the verse in relation to other verses.[38]

Al-Attas, in relation to this, asserts that:

"This method will show that, since words do not reveal the objective reality of the things described, but rather concepts of them, what is important is to comprehend the meanings of words not standing alone, but within their particular fields…."[39]

A word as it really is, as al-Attas indicates, is "a symbol, and to know it as it is is to know what it stands for, what it symbolizes, what it means".[40] A sign

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[36]   *Ibid.*, 39-45.

[37]   *Ibid.*, 3.

[38]   "Preserving,", 113-4.

[39]   *MHF*, xv.

[40]   Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 134.

or symbol is "something that is apparent and is separable from something else not equally apparent, in such wise that when the former is perceived, the other, which cannot be perceived and which is of one predicament as the former, is known." [41] Both *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* in one hand, and semantic analysis in another is actually an approach which seeks to uncover the authorial message, by examining through the structure of certain texts. The examining of the structure involves the examining of the meaning of words and how the words explain each other. These explaining of each other's meaning explains the interconnected relationship of the words, which as al-Attas explains, are symbols which make the unapparent apparent.

Conceptually, al-Attas concurs with Izutsu, in that the Quranic usage of a number of Arabic words in a new conceptual scheme was indeed a revolution in the history of the religious and moral thought of the Arabs, a phenomenon that al-Attas calls "Islamization":[42]

> The islamization of Arabic, then, consisted in the Quranic reorganization and reformation of the conceptual structures, semantic fields, vocabulary and basic vocabulary that once served the *Jāhilī* vision of the world and of life and human existence….[43]

However, al-Attas goes more technical by explicating "the scientific nature of the Arabic language" ,[44] offering the solution of islamization of language and thought [45] through linguistic means, either by reintroducing certain Arabic-Islamic key terms in their original meanings, or by redefining existing key terms and concepts in Malay or English.[46] This mechanism is applied in the

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[41]   *Ibid.*.
[42]   "Preserving,", 110-113. Cf. *EPP*, 291-370, 371-422.
[43]   *CEII*, 7-12.
[44]   *CEII*, 1-3. Also Wan Daud, *EPP*, 265-267, 332-343. In *CEII* al-Attas argues that Arabic language presents scientific precision with respect to meaning; particularly to meanings that convey *absolute* and *objective* truth. This is due to the fact that (1) its linguistic structure is established upon a firm system of 'roots'; and that (2) its semantic structure is governed by a clearly defined system of semantic 'fields' that determine the conceptual structures inherent in its vocabulary; and that (3) its words, meanings, grammar and prosody have been scientifically recorded and established so as to maintain semantic permanence.
[45]   Al-Attas, *IS*, 105-109. Op. cit., *EPP*, 371-372. See the many articles written on islamization of language and thought in Knowledge *Knowledge, Language, Thought and the Civilization of Islam: Essays in Honor of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas* ed. Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud and Muhd. Zainiy Uthman, (Kuala Lumpur: UTM, 2010).
[46]   *EPP*, 420-422.

case of "the islamization of the Malay-Archipelago",[47] and the effort of semantically defining important key-terms like religion (*dīn*), justice (*'adālah*), education (*ta'dīb*), happiness (*sa'ādah*) and man (*insān*) in Islamic worldview. Much of this owes to the methodology.[48]

Izutsu differs from al-Attas in terms of epistemological sources, hence, differs in the selection of words. Izutsu studied on ethico-religious concepts of Islam. He includes pre-Islamic poetry,[49] accepts the reliability of the "Prophet's contemporaries and his immediate followers" but excludes "thoughts that have been developed and elaborated by the Muslim thinkers of the post-Quranic ages".[50] Al-Attas', on the other hand, applies semantic analysis in metaphysics, *ṣūfi*sm, ethics, education, history, socio-politics[51] and *tafsīr*. He selects significant key-terms of Islam through a thorough analysis of the Quran and meticulous observation of the authorities of Islam under the dimensions of *ḥadīth*, *sunnah* and traditions.[52] All this, al-Attas applies, together with his reliance on intuition, makes his method all more rigourous and insightful. The difference in epistemological sources affects selection of key terms as can be seen in table 1:

Izutsu's major key terms	Al-Attas' major key terms
1. the concept of *kufr* 2. the semantic field of *kufr* 3. religious hypocrasy 4. the believer 5. good and bad	1. religion (*islām/dīn*) 2. happiness (*sa'ādah*) 3. science (*ḥaqīqah*) 4. man (*insān*) 5. existence (*wujūd*)

Table 1   Izutsu and al-Attas' major key terms

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[47]   See *Islam dalam Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Melayu and Preliminary Statement On A General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago* (Kuala Lumpur: DBP, 1969) and *Preliminary*.
[48]   See fn 3.
[49]   Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, in private discussions with him in 2014/15 at CASIS.
[50]   *God and Man*, 75. One can observe this tendency in Izutsu's various works on ethico-religious concepts. See fn 15.
[51]   Wan Daud, *EPP*, 268-271, 285-290,
[52]   In the Islamic theory of man, for example, al-Attas puts forward the dual nature of man as having both *jasad* and *rūḥ* embedded in the Quran, and the traditional Islamic definition of *al-ḥayawān al-nāṭiq* as the premise as opposed to the Western's "rational animal".

Now, let us consider al-Attas' utilization of semantic analysis in the *tafsīr* of Sūrah al-Mu'minūn (23):12-14 which shows how he rebukes modern understanding of man.[53]

Al-Attas' Semantic Analysis in *Tafsīr*

In the science of *tafsīr*, al-Attas argues for a kind of exegesis void of learned guess and conjecture (*ẓann*), subjective readings (*hawā*) or historical relativism; which tend to befall scientific and hermeneutic approach in our modern interpretations of the Quran. The process of interpretation is (supposed to be) based upon "the Holy Quran and the *ḥadīth* supported by the knowledge of semantic 'fields', that govern the conceptual structures of the Quranic vocabulary which projects the Islamic vision of reality (*ḥaqīqah*) and truth (*ḥaqq*)". [54]

Tafsīr is a scientific method having two sides: *tafsīr*, the ultimate meaning of an expression; and *ta'wīl*, an extensive form of *tafsīr* which seeks to interpret ambiguous meaning of the expression. An example is of verse 6:95 on terms *al-ḥayy* (living) and *al-mayyit* (dead). The ultimate meanings of the terms are clear, but their concealed meanings are revealed from the conceptual structures of those words and the contexts in which they revolve (their semantic fields) in the Quran and Ḥadīth. The *ta'wīl* of those words become "the believer" and "the unbeliever" based on verses (2):164 and (86):11 and the *ḥadīth* "The similitude of one who remembers his Lord and one who does not remember his Lord is like the living and the dead" (*mathalu al-ladhi yadhkuru rabbahū wa al-ladhi lā yadhkuru rabbahū mathalu al-ḥayyi wa al-mayyiti*).[55]

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[53] Adi Setia Mohd. Dom has presented a critic from within towards Darwin evolution theory by some prominent scientists namely Michael Denton, Michael Behe, W.R. Thompson and L. Harrison Matthews in his "Kritik Sains Terhadap Teori Evolusi Darwin," *Islamia 2004 Tahun 1 No 1*, 70-83. For a recent study on the Islamic source of the identity of man and woman as opposed to the gender argumentation, one can see Sh. Hajar al-Mahdaly and Sania Sufi, "Contextualizing the Human Soul in Identifying the Roles and Responsibility of Women in Leadership" in SERIKANDI, 2019.

[54] *CEII*, 4-5.

[55] *CEII*, 3-6. (2): 164 reads *fa aḥyā bihi al-arḍa ba'da mawtihā* and (86): 11 reads *wa 's-samā'i ẓāti al-raj'i*.

Let us compare this with the method of Muhammad 'Abduh (1849 - 1905), who adopted the Comtean model of the evolution of societies. Abduh wrote in his *al-A'māl al-Kāmilah*:

> Man is seen to have been simple and instinctive, searching for sustenance, shelter and the other natural requirements which it was in his power to satisfy. Then concern for himself induced him look to the preservation of his species, and his many needs compelled him to look for assistance from others. So he joined with others, united with them and became a town dweller. He progressed in this stage and began to consider his affairs and to attend to the concerns of his species. He thus became political. This is civil man with all his rights and duties.[56]

Abduh appropriated evolutionism within the field of the history of religions. As for natural selection and the survival of the fittest, this appeared in Abduh's works of *Tafsīr al-Manār* a collection of writings continued by his disciple Rashīd Riḍā (1865 – 1935).[57]

Abduh's methodology can be understood as having these characteristics: dismissal of earlier authorities of *tafsīr*, classification of the *tafsīr* into two levels (for scholars and common people) and advocacy of independent interpretation.[58] This, unfortunately, can open the door for subjective reading based upon *ẓann* and *hawā*. For example, see his *tafsīr* of Ṣūrah al-Nās (114):6:

> The *'ulamā'* say that the *Jinn* are living bodies which cannot be seen. The *Manār* has said more than once that it is permissible to say that minute living bodies which today have been made known by the microscope and are called microbes, may possibly be a species of the *Jinn*. It has been proven that the microbes are the cause of most diseases....However, we Muslims are fortunately under no necessity of disputing with science or

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56 "Muslim Modernism," 394-9, 414-8. The quotation is in Muhammad Abduh's *al-A'māl al-Kāmilah*, ed. Muhammad 'Amārah (Beirut: 1972-73), vol. 1, 337. Ahmad Bazli Shafie has elaborated Abduh's method of that traditional method of *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* are "permanently relevant and valid methods" of interpreting the Quran. In his introduction, Modernist Approach cf *The Educational Philosophy of al-Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh* (Kuala Lumpur: IIUM, 2004), 107-17, hereafter cited as *EPA*. See also *EPA*, 62, 67-9; "Modernisme dan Neo-Modernisme: Rekonstruksi atau Dekonstruksi Agama," and "Tafsīr dan Ta'wīl Modenis: Metodologi Tafsir Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh".

57 *Ibid.*. On Western understanding of justice (whether it is natural or political) and its consequence to the concept of man, see *OJNM*, 24-5.

58 *EPA*, 114.

findings of medicine regarding the correction of a few traditional interpretations.[59]

Abduh's interpretation ignores the ultimate meaning of the expression of *jinn* (*tafsīr*) and jumps into *ta'wīl* unnecessarily. To assume *jinn* as microbes reflects Abduh's vague understanding of *ta'wīl*. It is wrong from the first place to regard *jinn* as ambiguous while many Quranic refers to them as *rijālun min al-jinn* (individuals of *jinn*) or *nafarun min al-jinn* (a group of *jinn*) which clearly tells about their nature,[60] let alone applying allegorical interpretation under the name of acceptable coherence (*al-qarā'in al-maqbūlāt*)[61] while the necessity is not there.

In *On Justice and the Nature of Man* al-Attas selects Sūrah al-Nisā' (4): 58 and Sūrah al-Mu'minūn (23):12-14 as representatives of other verses on the subject of justice and the nature of man, with an interpretation not been elicited before.[62] This interpretation is the answer to the modern theory of man which posits man as *homo sapiens*.[63] He challenges this theory as false by forwarding the Quranic linguistic interventions of man as a new creation (*khalqan ākhara*).[64]

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[59]   *Al-Manār* as quoted in *EPA*, 116.
[60]   al-Jinn (72):6 reads *wa annahū kāna rijālun min al-insi ya'ūẓūn birijālin min al-jinn* (individuals of humankind used to invoke the protections of the individuals of the jinn).
[61]   *EPA*, 114-5.
[62]   The nature of man that man is not a genus or species, but a new and a special creation; man as a merging of the physical (*bashar*) and spiritual (*insān*: *al-nafs al-nāṭiqah*) natures. *OJNM*, preface, v-vi. There are more than 80 verses in the Quran alone which specify the terms *ins/insān*. Al-Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī interprets these verses by underlineating nine human changes in the circles of creation (*taqallub al-insān fī adwār al-khilqah wa akwān al-fiṭrah*): Fakhr al-Dīn Ibnu Ḍiyā' al-Dīn 'Umar al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr Fakhr al-Rāzī* vols. 32 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, first impression 1981), vol. 23, 84-7, hereafter cited as *Tafsīr Fakhr al-Rāzī*.
[63]   "*Homo sapien*" is a term derives from the Latin word *homo* (man) and *sapien* (wise). Technically it refers to a theory of human as the only extant members of the subtribe *Homininae* a species in the kingdom of Animalia. It is first introduced by Carl Linnaeus in 1758. This positivist and naturalist view has been widespread in schools and universities as accepted as fact.
[64]   *OJNM* in the introduction.

Sūrah al-Mu'minūn (23):12-14 and the translations are as follows:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا ٱلْإِنسَٰنَ مِن سُلَٰلَةٍ مِّن طِينٍ ۝ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَٰهُ نُطْفَةً فِى قَرَارٍ مَّكِينٍ ۝ ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا ٱلنُّطْفَةَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقْنَا ٱلْعَلَقَةَ مُضْغَةً فَخَلَقْنَا ٱلْمُضْغَةَ عِظَٰمًا فَكَسَوْنَا ٱلْعِظَٰمَ لَحْمًا ثُمَّ أَنشَأْنَٰهُ خَلْقًا ءَاخَرَ فَتَبَارَكَ ٱللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ ٱلْخَٰلِقِينَ ۝

We created man from a choicest selection of clay; then We made from it sperm and lodged it in a stable dwelling; then We created the sperm to become a clot, and of the clot We created a lump, and of the lump We created bones and clad the bones with flesh; then of it We originated another creature. So blessed be God, the Best of creators.

Al-Attas signifies 'man' by the term *insān*[65] which means '*al-ḥayawān al-nāṭiq*' (the living being that speaks).[66] *Nuṭq* signifies a certain power and capacity in man to articulate meaningful pattern,[67] it is the outward, visible and audible expression of the inner, unseen reality (*'aql*).[68] This defining the inner reality by its outward manifestation is what defines man.[69]

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[65] Al-Attas devotes two important work on man (*insān*), i.e. *The Nature of Man and the Psychology of Human Soul* (Kuala Lumpur:ISTAC, 1990) and *On Justice and the Nature of Man: A Commentary on Sūrah al-Nisā' (4):58 and Sūrah al-Mu'minūn (23):12-14* (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2015).

[66] Al-Attas, CSNL, 23rd June 2012. *Positive Aspects*, 3. Cf. al-Attas, *OJNM*, 37-9, 41-43. Literally *al-ḥayy* (pl. *al-aḥyā'*), its antonym is *al-mayyit*, while *al-ḥayawān* is every living being (*kullu shay'in ḥayyin*). The word *nāṭiq* literally is *ism al-fā'il* which originates from the word *naṭaqa* (*naṭaqa al-nāṭiqu yanṭiqu nuṭqan*) which means *takallama* while *manṭiqa* is *al-kalām* In Ibnu Manẓūr, Lisan arab 693, col 2. The word *ḥayawān* technically means a body that grows, conscious and moves with will (*al-jism al-nāmī al-ḥassās al-mutaḥarrik bi 'l-irādah*). Al-Ta'rīfāt, 94. *Al-nuṭq* to al-Iṣfahānī is *al-aṣwāt al-muqaṭṭa'ah allatī yuẓhiruhā al-lisān wa ta'īhā al-ādhān* i.e. the disjoined sounds which are made apparent by human tongue and noticed by the ears. "*al-aṣwāt al-muqaṭṭa'ah allatī yuẓhiruhā al-lisān wa ta'īhā al-āzān*" in al-Iṣfahānī, *Mufradāt Alfāẓ*, 811, col. 2. Al-Iṣfahānī elaborates on several Quranic verses with the *lafẓ* (word) *nuṭq* or its derivatives as having the meaning of speech: Allah said: "*mā lakum lā tanṭiqūn*" (37:92) meaning "What is the matter with you that ye speak not (intelligently)" and "*'ullimnā manṭiqa al-ṭayri*" (27:16) meaning "…we have been taught the speech of birds…"

[67] *Positive Aspects*, 3; *OJNM*, 31, 46-47

[68] Muslim thinkers, particularly the Sufis, did not conceive of what is understood as *ratio* as something separate from what is understood as *intellectus*; they conceived the *'aql* as an organic unity of both *ratio* and *intellectus*. Bearing this in mind, they defined man as *al-ḥayawān al-nāṭiq*, where the term *nāṭiq* signifies 'rational' in the sense that man is possessed of an inner faculty that formulates meaning (*zū nuṭq*),[68] while the term 'animal' is

It is established in Islam that man has a dual nature, both body and soul, physical being and spirit;[70] a theory which is different from the modern psychology.[71] However, man is neither soul, nor body, nor is he a composite of the two, but a third entity constituted out of the two.[72] God taught him the names of all things,[73] limited knowledge of the spirit [74] and of his true self or soul [75]. By means of this knowledge he is able to arrive at knowledge about God (*al-ma'rifah*) and His absolute oneness, that God is his true Lord (*al-rabb*) and

meant to be a living, moving and self-generating being; a new and separate category, different from the 'animal kingdom'. See *Positive Aspects*, 3; *OJNM*, 31, 46-7 and *NM*, 174-5.

[69]   Al-Attas relies his elucidation of the nature of man on Ibnu Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Najāt fil Ḥikmat al-Manṭiqiyyah wa't-Ṭabī'iyyah wa'l-Ilāhiyyah* and al-Ghazālī's *Ma'ārij al-Quds fī Madārij Ma'rifat al-Nafs*.

[70]   al-Ḥijr (15):26-29. For a detailed elaboration on the nature of man, please refer al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995), chapter IV The Nature of Man and the Psychology of the Human Soul, hereafter cited as *NM*.

[71]   Psychology used to be the science which investigated human nature, but the developments after the nineteenth century in the West led to a different conception of psychology which no longer studies human nature, rather, devoted to the study of human behavior. As a result, the study of human nature is left to a new branch of philosophy which is called 'philosophy of man'. Alparslan Açikgenç, "Kant and Ghazali on Human Nature" in *KLT*, 163-197, 163. Classical psychologists (Alparslan is referring to past Muslim psychologists like al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī, al-Ṭūsī and al-Rāzī) assumed that the study of human nature is at the same time the study of human soul, which in turn yields the conclusion that human nature and the human soul are identical. This primary assumption means: man is not only a physical or material being; he does not merely consist of a physical body, but also of a deeper reality which characterizes him as human being. If we consider man as merely made up of a body, then we are denying him the possibility of transcending what is merely perceived by the senses; whereas man's perception is not limited to the five external senses but also some (internal) senses which can perceive and provide him with the experience of what is not physical. Based on this fact, traditional Islamic thought posits psychology as the science of human nature, such nature which distinguishes him from the rest of the animals. (164). Alparslan has made an observation of two distinctive groups of Quranic verses which mention about the external senses (eg. Al-Naḥl (16):78, al-Mu'minūn (23):78, Qāf (46):26, and al-Mulk (67):23) and the internal senses (Āli 'Imrān (3):190-191, al-Ḥajj (22):46, al-Jāthiyah (45):23, al-A'rāf (7):100, 179, and Qāf (50):37). But these latter verses give a clear indication of the two (external and internal senses) do not belong to the different entities; rather they belong to the same one being whose real nature is to possess these faculties. These verses also indicate the spiritual plane on which the human soul is situated. (178-183).

[72]   *OJNM*, 21.

[73]   al-Baqarah (2):31. By the 'names' al-Attas infer that it means knowledge (*al-'ilm*) of everything (*al-ashyā'*), not of the specific nature of the essence (*al-dhāt*) or the inmost ground (*al-sirr*) of a thing (*shay'*), like the spirit (*al-rūḥ*); rather, of accidents (sing. *'araḍ*) and attributes (sing. *ṣifah*) pertaining to the essences of things sensible and intelligible (*maḥsūsāt* and *ma'qūlāt*). It is to make known the relations and distinctions existing between them, and to clarify their natures within these domains in order to discern and to understand their meanings (causes, uses and specific individual purpose). Al-Attas, *NM*, 143.

[74]   al-Isrā' (17):85.

[75]   Fuṣṣilat (41):53.

object of worship (*al-ilāh*).[76] *Ma'rifah*, is from the root *'arafa*; and from it is derived *ta'rīf* (an arrival at the limit (*'urf*) of a thing (i.e. its *ḥaqq*)).[77] God taught man *ilm 'al-bayān*[78] to enable him to discriminate. By means of *qiyās* (analogical reasoning) he comes to know things and their relations within a system and distinguish logical divisions of genera, species, differentia, kinds and individuals, an ability which effects justice.[79]

The seat of knowledge in man is a spiritual substance which is referred to as heart (*al-qalb*), soul or self (*al-nafs*), spirit (*al-rūḥ*) or intellect (*al-'aql*).[80] In relation to *al-mīthāq* (7:172), knowledge and religion are intrinsic in the nature of man,[81] but man is also "composed of forgetfulness (*nisyān*)".[82] He is called *insān* basically because having testified the covenant he sealed with God, he forgot (*nasiya*) to fulfill his duty and purpose.[83] Forgetfulness is the cause of man's disobedience, and this blameworthy nature inclines him towards injustice (*zulm*) and ignorance (*jahl*).[84]

However, God has equipped him with the powers and faculties of right vision and apprehension, of real savouring of truth, of right speech and communication; and He has indicated of him the right and the wrong.[85] The

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[76] Āli 'Imrān (3):81, al-A'rāf (7):171.

[77] *OJNM*, 16; *IS*, 161; *CR*, 68; Cf al-Jurjānī, *Ta'rīfāt*, 155. He also employs a technical term of *intussusception* in the field of physiology. He interprets the mechanisms of *'ilm* as the "soul's intussusception" of what has arrived in it. The soul, being an active recipient always in act, setting itself for readiness to receive; and so to consciously strive for the arrival of meaning. It is a sense of "union" between soul and meaning. Intussusception technically means the taking of foreign matter by a living organism and its conversion into organic tissue. Thus, by way of analogy, the term intussusception used here to describe the souls's 'taking in' of what has come from outside of itself and 'assimilating' it into a system of relation with other meanings that are already present in the soul. *OJNM*, 17. Also in a private discussion with Prof. Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud.

[78] al-Raḥmān (55): 1- 4.

[79] *OJNM*, 28.

[80] al-Ghazālī begins his *Īḥyā'* with *Kitāb al-'Ilm* (The Book of Knowledge) which formulates the definition of these terms.

[81] *NM*, 144.

[82] *Kashf al-Khafa'*, 2 vols 4th print (Beyrut: 1985) vol. 2, 419, no. 2806: Al-Ṭabrānī, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Abi Shaybah from Ibn 'Abbās; quoted from al-Attas, *NM*, 145.

[83] Al-Attas cited the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, that the term *insān* is derived from *nasiya* whenhe said that man is called *insān* because, having covenanted with God, he forgot (*nasiya*). Ibnu Manẓūr, *LA* vol. 6, 11.

[84] al-Aḥzāb (33):72.

[85] al-Balad (90):8-10, al-Aḥqāf (46):26, al-Naḥl (16):78, al-Sajdah (32):9, al-Mulk (67):23, al-Mu'minūn (23):78.

choice for the better (*ikhtiyār*) is left to him.[86] The terms heart (*al-qalb*), soul or self (*al-nafs*), spirit (*al-rūḥ*) or intellect (*al-'aql*) conveys two meanings: one referring to material physical aspect of man (body) and the other non-material imaginal intelligential or spiritual aspect (soul).[87] From the first aspect originates the blameworthy qualities in man, the animal powers, beneficial and yet in conflict with the intellectual powers. The human being is created "in the best moulds",[88] but it is the animal powers which is urged to be in *jihād* with.[89]

Insān as Khalqan Ākhar

What makes *insān insān* is explicated before: his dual nature and possession of *'aql*. But what adds more to this quality, is man being a distinct species not in the animal kingdom, but as the *khalīfah* governing the three kingdom of animal, vegetable and mineral.[90] This additional meaning is linguistically proven by the three terms in (23):12-14: *khalaqa* (created), *ja'ala* (made) and *ansha'a* (originated):

1. *khalaqa* means the bringing into existence of something for the first time, the thing not having been before, it is the act of God only, (*awjada al-ashyā' ba'da an lam takun mawjūdah*). [91] Verse 12 tells us about the beginning stage of creation of man, saying that God created (*khalaqa*) him from a choicest selection (*sulālah*) of clay. *Sulālah* basically refers to a drawing forth of the best or choicest parts (extract) from a congested mixture of many different parts.[92]

2. *Ja'ala* means made a thing, its synonym is *waḍa'a* (put or laid a thing), but having more general signification than *fa'ala* and *ṣana'a*.

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[86]   *Prolegomena* in the introduction, 33-34.

[87]   al-Ghazālī, *Al-Iḥyā'*, vol 3, 3. See also *Prolegomena*, 146.

[88]   al-Ṭīn (95):4-5.

[89]   the *ḥadīth* "*a'dā 'aduwwika nafsika 'llatī bayna janbaika*" which means "the worst enemy of yours is what lies in between your ribs". *NM*, 146. Cf. al-Ghazālī, *Kitab Ma'ārij al-Quds fī Madārij Ma'rifat al-Nafs (The Ladder of Holiness Concerning the Degrees of Knowledge of Self)*, (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tijariyyah al-Kubra, 1344 A.H/1925 C.E.), 10; hereafter cited as *al-Ma'ārij. Ḥadīth* Baihaqi, *Zuhd*, from Jabir. Ibn Ḥajar says this hadith is well known. *Kashf al-Khafā'*, vol. 1, 511, no 1362, quoted from al-Attas, *NM*, 146.

[90]   *OJNM*, v.

[91]   *Ibid.*, 45. Cf. Ibnu Manẓūr, *LA*, col. 2 vol. 3 of 9 vols., 195.

[92]   *OJNM*, 34.

An example is making pottery from clay and making something bad good.[93] As for *ja'ala*, it is the drawing out of some latent thing from something else, the something else having been before. Verse 23:13 says that from this extract (*sulālah*), God made (*ja'ala*) a germ of male animal life or sperm and lodged it in the womb uniting it with the female germ.[94] *Ja'ala* is also a creative act in the sense of making, producing, manufacturing, inventing rather than creating. The Quranic verse: "*innā ja'alnāhu qur'ānan 'arabiyyan*", refers to the creative act of making the Quran speaks (*bayyana*) of itself in Arabic. As a new Islamized language, Arabic is a new language developed by Allah from a language already existed, a language which has been given new understanding and perspective.[95]

3.   *Ansha'a* is causing to come into being from an earlier thing or after the similitude of a former thing, a thing of a later period, the later thing not having been before (*ḥayiya, wa ansha'a Allahu 'l-khalqa* i.e. began to create or originate; it also means *al-ba'thah* (resurrection) and *rabā wa shabba* as in the stage of puberty. [96] Verse 23:14 goes on to say that from this fusion of the two gametes God created (*khalaqa*) a new individual organism; then an embryo; and then a foetus. Then from the final foetal stage, God originated (*ansha'a*) another creature by breathing of the spirit (*al-rūḥ*). [97] Al-Attas remarks that one of the basic meanings conveyed by the term *ansha'a* from its root *nasha'a* is 'to elevate' or 'become elevated'. This means that the introduction of the spirit into the animal being (i.e. *al-nafs al-nāṭiqah*), elevates the animal state of being to another level, man. It is no longer a mere species of the genus animal, it has now transformed into another and special creature (*khalqan ākhara*), man the Vicegerent.[98]

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[93]   *LA* 146-7.
[94]   *OJNM*, 34-5.
[95]   *LA*, on *ja'ala*, 2:146-147.
[96]   *OJNM*, 45-46. Cf Ibnu Manẓūr, LA, on *khalaqa*, 3:195-197; on *ja'ala*, 2:146-147; and on *nasha'a*, 8: 546-548.
[97]   *OJNM*, 35. In al-Ḥijr (15):29, the angels prostrated to Adam after this breathing of *rūḥ*.
[98]   *Ibid.*, *Tafsīr Fakhr al-Rāzī*, vol. 23, 85-6.

The three verbs have become a strong point to al-Attas' elucidation of *khalqan ākhar*: "Man is neither soul, nor body, nor is he a composite of the two, but a third entity constituted out of the two"[99] is understood by man is neither (in his state of) *al-nafs al-nāṭiqah* nor a foetus[100] but a new creation breathed with the Divine spirit.[101]

This is an understanding which is not equivalent to the Western understanding of man (in Greek, *homo* or in Latin, *humanus*) in their dualistic view of body and soul. The ancient Greek conceived man as eternal and allocated the science of soul to study man. But gradually when secularization undertook the Western thought, man is perceived not as soul but as physical and has been studied externally through acts and behavior in the modern sciences of psychology and anthropology. This new development has its root in the theory of evolution whereby the development of man is seen as a 'transition' into 'civil society'.[102]

The semantic field of *insān* are based on al-Attas' detailed analysis of five key terms related to the nature of man: *nuṭq, ʿaql, ʿilm, ikhtiyār* and *khalqan ākhar*. The relationship of *insān* with that of *iktisāb* is made compulsory due to the givenness of the faculty of *ʿaql* and *nuṭq* in man. Nevertheless, *insān* and *bashar* in both its *insāniyyah* and *bashariyyah* forms complement man for they are in fact the dual aspects of spirit and body in man. To conceive man as lacking from any aspect of the two, leads to undermining optimal potentiality in him, a condition of injustice (*ẓulm*) towards him and the world surrounding him. The concept of man must be understood properly as much as the concept of justice be thoroughly internalized.

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[99]   *OJNM*, 21.

[100]   al-Shams (91): 7-8. *Wa nafsin wa mā sawwāhā faalhamahā fujūrahā wa taqwāhā* (and a soul and Him who perfected it, and inspired it (with conscience of) what is wrong for it and (what is) right for it.)

[101]   al-Shams (91): 9-10. *Qad aflaḥa man zakkāhā wa qad khāba man dassāhā* (He is indeed successful who causeth it to grow, and he indeed a failure who stunteth it).

[102]   *OJNM*, 33-38.

ḥayawān
inshā'
'aql
ja'l
nuṭq
khalq
rūḥ
INSĀN
ikhtiyār
nafs
jihād
qalb
bashar
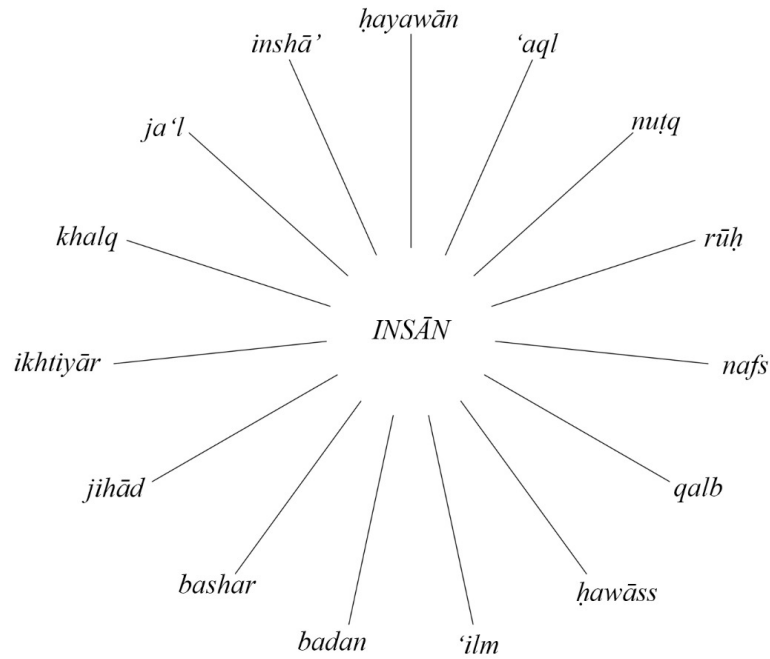*ḥawāss*
badan
'ilm

Figure 2   The Semantic Field of *Insān*

Concluding Remarks

We observe that very little attention been given to explicate al-Attas' method of semantic analysis especially its relation to *tafsīr-ta'wīl*. The ways in which al-Attas sought to clarify many metaphysical, epistemological, historical and historiographical, as well educational issues remain a neglected gray area. We feel that, one of the reasons could be the assumption that al-Attas is not enthusiastic in explaining his methodology, and that methodology is not something separately elaborated by the prominent Muslim scholars, that their methodology is inherent in their argumentations and does not need such explanations like what the modern scholars are doing.[103] We would not agree with this, since there are proofs in many books of our profound scholars of the past in the vast disciplines of Islamic sciences, as well as al-Attas himself,[104] who did elaborate on their methods especially when there are clashes with alien conceptualizations and worldviews. We would also consider that verification and adaptation of linguistic method once adapted by our discerned scholars in the

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[103]   *Prolegomena*, 3.
[104]   Refer fn 13.

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Islamic tradition and which has not been once broken from the chain up to al-Attas himself need to be re-introduced and re-regularised. The academics and the scholarly in our present Islamic discourse should start afresh and courageously return to such methodology and adapt it in their works. This methodology is much worthy than modestly emulating the modern sociological and hermeneutical interpretations of our religion. One of the crucial step towards that evolution is to re-observe and re-scrutinise the works of important Muslim scholars to open up the horizons of study of human nature and Islamic philosophy of language. Two of such areas in desperate need of serious excavation are the formulation of the essential concepts in Islamic neuroscience and Islamic linguistics.

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