HERMENEUTICS AND SEMANTIC ANALYSIS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS IN MODERN ISLAMIC DISCOURSE

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Abstract

Modern Islamic discourse is a field which studies Islam and its interaction with modernity from 18th century up to the mid of 20th CE. In doing so, textual analysis of religious texts is essential and includes employment of suitable methodologies of interpretation. Hermeneutics and semantic analysis are one of those important methodologies and are selected because of their role in determining vast writings in the subject. This paper attempts to do a comparative textual analysis in modern Islamic discourse by comparing and contrasting between the two major methodologies. Existing literature in the subject includes those of Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988), Mohamed Arkoun (1928-2010), Nasr Abu Zayd (1943-2010), Hassan Hanafi (1935-2021), Toshihiko Izutsu (1914-1993) and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1931-). From the review of the works as well as recent articles related to the subject, we can conclude that hermeneutics is more widely employed by key figures in modern Islamic discourse especially related to sociological ideas and historical approaches. However, semantic analysis is more compatible and better to be employed in Islamic discourse because of Quranic Arabic and conceptual factors in the worldview of Islam.

Kata kunci: Modern Islamic discourse; textual analysis; hermeneutics; semantic analysis

HERMENEUTIK DAN ANALISA SEMANTIK: SATU ANALISA PERBANDINGAN DALAM KAJIAN MODEN ISLAM

Abstrak

Kajian moden Islam merupakan bidang yang berkaitan dengan pengajian Islam dan moderniti bermula kurun ke-18M sehingga pertengahan 20M. Dalam kajian ini, Analisa teks kitab-kitab agama merupakan elemen penting meliputi metodologi pentafsiran yang sangat penting. Hermeneutik dan analisa semantik merupakan antara metodologi terpenting ini dan dipilih dalam kertas kajian kali ini kerana fungsi dan peranannya yang luas dalam bidang tersebut. Kertas ini berhasrat untuk menganalisis secara perbandingan dua jenis mentodologi ini. Antara bahan sorotan literatur penting yang

digunakan adalah hasil nukilan Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988), Mohamed Arkoun (1928-2010), Nasr Abu Zayd (1943-2010), Hassan Hanafi (1935-2021), Toshihiko Izutsu (1914-1993) and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1931-). Daripada hasil analisis terhadap teks, dapat disimpulkan bahawa hermeneutic sememangnya sangat luas digunakan oleh para pengkaji dalam bidang ini terutama yang berkaitan dengan idea sosiologi dan pendekatan sejarah. Walau bagaimanapun, analisa semantik dalam perbincangan pengajian Islam adalah metodologi yang lebih sesuai untuk digunakan kerana faktor Bahasa Arab al-Quran dan konsepsual pandangan alam Islam.

Keywords*: kajian moden Islam; analisa teks; hermeneutik; analisa semantik*

INTRODUCTION

Recent developments in the modern Muslim thoughts reveal misusages and corruptions in various key-terms and important concepts in Islamic worldview. (Ahmad, 2017). Basic vocabulary in the Quranic Arabic as well as the Islamic languages has been tempered with, causing confusion of Islamic worldview and its religious and ethical contents. Language (*bayān*) as the tool of the worldview of Islam consisting of a set of basic vocabulary is supposed to be correctly understood in order for its correct meanings (*ma'ānī*) to be preserved.

This study seeks to analyze the root of the problem, hence, the interpretation of the Quran for it serves as a vessel to attain to reality and truth (*ḥaqīqah*). The study seeks to observe linguistic trends in Islamic tradition and the contemporary Muslim world. The phenomenon of "secularization of language and thought" (al-Attas, 1978) from which stems the core problem of Muslims which is the "confusion and error in Islamic knowledge and its worldview"; shows that language projects worldview and ontology, and that Arabic has a special position of being the language of final revelation as well as having scientific character (al-Attas, 1980). The employment of right methodology to interpretation of the Quran would secure right definition and dissemination of Quranic *welstanchauunglehre* (Izutsu, 2004).

This study hopes to prove that semantic analysis is a right methodology in the modern Islamic discourse to solve the problem of confusion and errors in Islamic knowledge and its worldview and in its legal-ethical framework. This is founded on the premises of firstly, semantic analysis historically was one of the major methods which safeguarded the correct meanings of the key-terms of the Islamic worldview from corruptions; and secondly, its procedures and processes are compatible with the interpretation of a sacred text, from which the understanding of Islam is derived. In the light of al-Attas' conception of language and his utilization of semantic analysis, the study hopes to suggest this methodology as a better solution to contemporary scholars as well as preserving one of the prominent methodologies in the Islamic intellectual tradition.

In order for the study to be organized and able to properly express the ideas and the information gathered, we have based the literary review on three categories: writings of

modern proponents of hermeneutics, works related to theory and application of semantic analysis; and how semantic analysis is better off with interpretation in the Islamic discourse.

METHOD

This paper is a comparative analysis of two different methodologies of exegete, namely hermeneutics and semantic analysis, in the modern Islamic discourse. Firstly, timeframe of "modern" is identified which connotes the ideas of "Westernization", "colonization" and "Islamization". Secondly, key scholars prominent in both positions are identified; however, reduced to only several numbers. Thirdly, their major works are selectively scrutinized while secondary sources on their ideas; in the aspects of philosophy of language, linguistics, semantics and lexicography are revisited. Fourthly, the paper dives through the ideas to capture and characterize the peculiarities of each methodologies. The process, finally, leads to the comparing and contrasting of some key-ideas and concepts. At this level, it shows the interconnection of these key-ideas and concepts in the larger Islamic metaphysical and religious-ethical systems. In the whole process, the data gathered are sorted and placed in a proper systematic body of Islamic thought which fits the structure of a worldview.

All the informations gathered are then summarized and provided with explanations. Their premises, deductions and conclusions are scrutinized to retrace their path of logic and understand them in their correct perspectives. This technique is important to know the originality of an idea and how it is consistently maintained and expanded. Limitations of the subject is made in order to focus on more prioritized matters to suit the format and need of the paper. Figure 1 and 2 show the designation and process of the analysis.
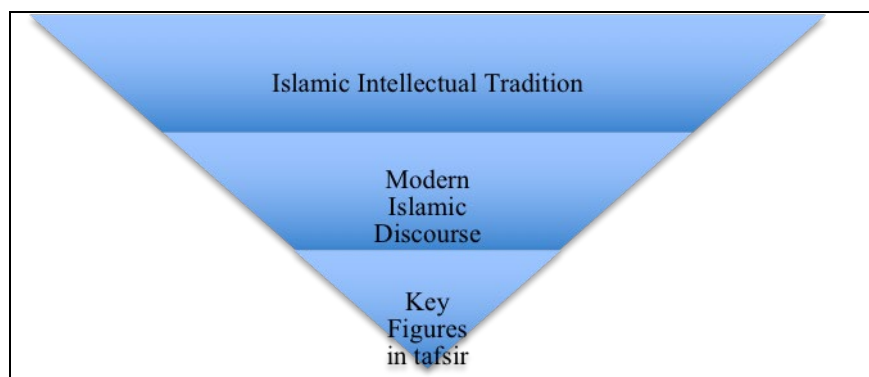

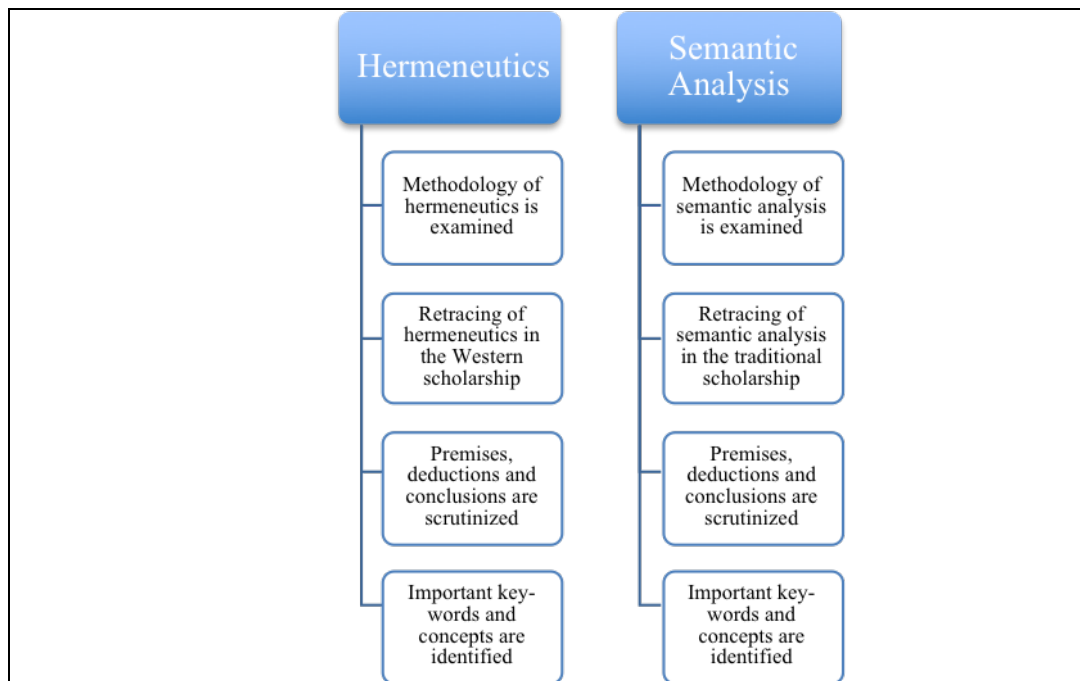Fig. 1   Determining Time Frame and Key Figures

Fig. 2   The Process of Comparing and Contrasting

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Existing literature shows a tendency towards proposing hermeneutics in the science of interpretation (*tafsīr*) like upheld by Fazlur Rahman, Mohamed Arkoun, Nasr Abu Zayd and Hassan Hanafi. Rahman follows Emilio Betti, as opposed to Hans-Georg Gadamer, who insists on "one must first of all ascertain the meaning intended by the mind that authored the object of study". (Shafie, 2005, 65). In the case of the Quran, Rahman maintains that 'the objective situation is a *sine quo non* for understanding, particularly since the view of its absolute normativity for Muslims, it is literally God's response through Muhammad's mind to a historic situation", (Shafie, 2005, 65-66) and that the understanding of the Quran can be attained through the reading of the Quran as a whole. (Rahman, 1982, 20 and 25)

Mohamed Arkoun holds that the Quran is an "Official Closed Corpus" (*le fait coranique*), that is something "resulted from a set of decisions taken by 'authorities' recognized by the community", and that it is no longer permissible "to add or subtract a word, to modify a reading in the Corpus now declared authentic". (Arkoun, 1994, 33). On the one hand, the Muslims are placed in a "hermeneutics position", that is the need to interpret the holy texts to derive law, prescriptions, and system of belief and non-belief; and on the other, "banalized" the Quran "by putting it within the reach of everyone, particularly after the invention of paper and then the printing press". (Shafie, 2005, 117)

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd goes to the extreme when he argues that once revealed to the Prophet (pbuh), the Quran entered human history and became a text like any other texts. He does not deny the Divine origin of the Quran but maintains that the state of the

original sacred text is "a metaphysical one about which we can know nothing except that which the physical text itself mentions and which always come to us via a historically changing humanity". (Shafie, 2005, 117; Abu Zayd, 1992, 93-94).

Similarly, the question pertaining to the nature of the revelation, according to Hassan Hanafi, should be put "in brackets", in the sense that "it does not matter for the interpreter". He considers the Quran as any other texts, which is subjected to "interpretation as legal code, a literary work, a philosophical text, a historical document, etc". All texts are subject to the same rules of interpretation. The distinction between the holy and the profane is not related to general hermeneutics, but to religious practice". (Shafie, 2005, 118)

However, on the other hand, scholars like Toshihiko Izutsu and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas have come out with a semantic approach to understand religion. Izutsu claims the fact that "God spoke, and revealed Himself". This "initial act on the part of God" has created Abrahamic religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam; although with each peculiar understanding of revelation. Izutsu admits a primary and pre-eminent linguistic nature of revelation, where God spoke in human language, a speech-act which works within semantic field of language and speech. It is something exceptional within sphere of language concepts and activity. (Izutsu, n.d., 122)

As to for Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, he holds the orthodox Muslim creed as to the position of the Revelation (*wahy*) and Quran as The Speech of Allah (*kalām Allāh*), "concerning Himself, His creation, the relation between them, and the way to salvation communicated to His chosen Prophet and Messenger". This speech, "not by sound or letter, yet comprising all that He has represented in words", is conveyed to the mankind in a new linguistic form safe from human subjectivity and imagination. What more of al-Attas' view is that the wahy is final, contains absolute truths, taken as it is and not to be confused with "*cultural creations*" and "*ethnic inventions*". (al-Attas, 1995, 6).

Relatively speaking, these two opposing groups in the science of *tafsir* perceive the knowability of Quranic meanings differently. The hermeneutics proponents look up the Quran as Divine; but as it is revealed amongst mankind, it is affected with science, culture and history of human being. For them, understanding the meaning of the Quran, is subject to prior understanding of historical evidence which is relative and always changing. As for the semantic analysts, they cling firmly to the premise that the Quran is Divine Speech and every single alphabet must be taken literally as it is. Knowing the realities in the Quran is attainable but preconditions are there for the *mufassirun*, it is not open to public scrutiny. It is normative, absolute and unchangeable. But it is understandable, for God send it to mankind purposely for them to study the Quran.

The Hermeneutics Root: Modernity and Modernist Exegetes

In the 15th century C.E., Western colonialism made its way outside the Western provinces right to the American and Eastern regions, especially the Muslim world. It started as a political campaign underlying within it economical and evangelical missions, gradually becoming into the imposition of European colonialism and its influence on the colonized

Africa and Asia (Mazrui, 1997, 1-19; el-Nagar, 1996, 443-467) particularly in language and national identity; and its interrelationship with culture, values and worldviews. (Mazrui, 1979, 1980; Thiongo, 1986; Omar, 1987). Such clash of civilization further developed into dissemination of Western ideologies of secular worldviews and modernity in education and religious practice.(Wan Daud, 2010, 2013; al-Attas, "Islam and Dialogue Among Civilizations: Prerequisites and Preparations" in http://www.nursistudies.com/index.ph/). This development in the East especially the Muslim world has sparked reactions from the Muslims one of which is manifested in the exegetical works of modernist and neo-modernist Muslims.

Modernity is the impact of modernization on man's mind, individually and socially. It is the impact of a new kind of rational thinking on people's way of life and thought, and of articulating their norms and values. (Waardenburg, 1996, 317-350). Some repercussions cast by modernity on thinking about religion include a particular kind of reinterpretation of traditional religion in the course of the 20th century. There is the rise of secular ideologies in the process of reinterpretation, and the other way round, in certain cases fundamentalization of religion. (al-Azmeh, 1996, 391-428). In Muslim countries, rational modernity, a corollary of the modernization of society, started in the nineteenth century, among young intellectuals in urban centres in the Ottoman empire, Egypt and Tunisia, Iran and also Bengal and spreading to other parts of the Muslim world. Muslim thought has increasingly concerned itself with the idea that Islam is a religion consonant with reason and certainly not contradictory to it. (Waardenburg, 1996, 324-328). Modernist Reformism is founded on: salvaging the intellectual credibility of the Quran and other foundational texts, and adopting the inevitable tropes and values of modernity. (al-Azmeh, 1996, 391).

Modernity has pressured some Muslims to a new approach to the interpretation of Quran. Modernist exegetes argue that textual study of the Quran should consider factors like social, political and cultural conditions of the Prophet's time in order to get a better understanding of the verses. They based their arguments on linguistic analysis, hermeneutics and literary theory. (Pakeeza and Chishti, 2012, 20;). The literature on Quranic exegesis depicts that Muslims want to respond to their contemporary issues without losing their religious perspective. Thus, three trends are prevalent in modern period, namely, textualist, semi-textualist and contextualists. Textualists argue to strictly abide by text and interpretations within traditions. Semi-textualists point towards to presenting the ethico-legal content of the Quran in socio-historic context linking it with modern perspective; while contextualists believe in understanding ethico-legal content in the light of political, social, historical, religious and economic contexts in which the verses were revealed, understood, interpreted and applied. (Pakeeza and Chishti, 2012, 23-24; Wan Daud,1989, 38-56.)

Ahmad Khan (1817-1898 C.E.), a very early modernist thinker, dedicated a commentary of the first 17 chapters of the Quran, in the firm conviction that the truth contained in it is demonstrable in any age. Muhammad 'Abduh (1849 -1905 C.E.) attempts to arrive at a new evaluation of Islamic principles. He started by writing *Risālah al-Tawḥīd*, a discussion on theology. He then started a commentary which was continued by his disciple, Rashīd Riḍha; and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī, who considered that man's

imagination developed alongside his faculty for rational thought. To the latter, primitive man worshipped the baser things like stones and progressed to the worship of fire, clouds and stars. (Pakeeza and Chishti, 2012, 23-24; Waardenburg, 1996, 329-333; and al-Azmeh, 1996, 391-395). Abu'l A'lā Mawdūdī (d. 1979) puts the *sharī'ah* in the centre, as a prescriptive system which is fundamentally based on revelation but which has its own rationality. He defines Islam as a system, an Islamic order (*niẓām*) which ought to be realized, in the hoped-for Islamic state. In his numerous writings he has treated a great number of problems based on Scripture, analogical reasoning and common sense in the socio-political context. (Waardenburg, 1996, 333-334). Syed Qutub (d. 1966 C.E.) is one of the main proponents of this aspect of exegesis; his work draws mainly on modern world and its challenges. (Pakeeza and Chishti, 2012, 23-24).

The main feature which characterized reformist discourse at the end of the nineteenth century was its independence on the evolutionist optimistic evolutionism current, associated with positivism and Darwinism. (al-Azmeh, 1996, 392-393). Abduh adopted the Comtean model of the evolution of societies within three stages: natural existence, social and political:

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. (Abduh quoted as in al-Azmeh, 1996; 337)

Abduh appropriated evolutionism within the field of the history of religions, in accordance with the concept of religion and education current in his age especially with thoughts inspired by Herbert Spencer: that the evolution of religion runs parallel to that of culture and society, total authority based on power is consonant with man's primitive stage, and the image of authority and fear of death channels the imagination to the veneration and worships of idols. Man then evolved to the stage of prophethood and finally the stage of people regaining the truth of prophethood. (al-Azmeh, 1996, 394-399). As for natural selection and the survival of the fittest, this appeared in Abduh's works of *Tafsīr al-Manār*. (al-Azmeh, 1996, 399).

The relentless criticism of ḥadīth by Riḍā involves the call for legal judgement on the basis of "true" ḥadīth as only obligatory as long as it was not inconsistent with public interest. When a ḥadīth was inconsistent with public interest, then it was considered to be in contradiction with the general foundations of Quran and Sunnah. Among the ḥadīth Riḍā challenged on legal grounds was the ḥadīth of the *gharānīq*. At the hands of Riḍā, some of the Prophet's utterances became matters of guidance and not of command, expressing an opinion and not issuing from God. Examples of such utterances were those concerning agriculture, medicine and other mundane affairs. (al-Azmeh, 1996, 414-418.)

Another distinctively modern approach involves examining Quran in the light of modern science (scientific exegesis). An Egyptian scholar Ṭanṭāwī Jauharī (d.1940 C.E.) wrote an encyclopedia on scientific exegesis that meant to link the Quranic text with

modern scientific worldview, a departure from the usual course of commenting. Scientific exegesis is to demonstrate that modern scientific achievements were foreseen by Quran centuries ago, i.e. 'scientific miraculous nature of Quran'. (Pakeeza and Chishti, 2012, 23-24; Baljon, 1968, 5). Other recent authors on the exegesis of the Quran include Mud. Aḥmad Khalaf Allah, Muḥd. Kāmil Ḥussain, Abul Kalām Āzād (1888-1958 C.E.) – *Tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, Muḥd. 'Ināyat Allah Khān (al-Mashrīqī) (1888- C.E) wrote *Tazkirah* and *Ḥadīth al-Qur'ān* - and G. A. Parwez (1903- C.E.) *Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, a work written not in a traditional form but best compared with 'Biblical Theology'. (Baljon, 1968, 7-14. Pakeeza and Chishti, 2012, 20).

As far as interpreting Quran from literary perspective is concerned, an Egyptian Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (d. 1973 C.E.) argued for analyzing Quran as a literary text and regarded that incidents mentioned in Quran may not necessarily be historical; while Amīn al-Khūlī (d. 1967 C.E.) of Egypt came up with thematic exegesis, another popular approach for interpreting Quranic texts that emphasized the unity of Quranic text over the interpretation of verses in isolation. (Pakeeza and Chishti, 2012, 23-24).

The Reformists had to confront the new scientific, natural and historical knowledge which was based completely on secular authority and which was unequivocally incompatible with the text of the Quran. They therefore had to rely on the same strategy which was employed in the interpretation of the sharī'ah that is, firstly by restricting the domain of binding certainty and narrowing the sphere of religion vis-à-vis an expanding world endowed with an independent secular authority; secondly, using skepticism as a method to establish the soundness of their arguments. When reason (*'aql*) and transmission (*naql*) contradict each other, then transmission must either be relegated to fideism (*tafwīḍ*), meaning, that only God has knowledge of this, or be subjected to interpretation. As for interpretation, it must comply with the rules of the Arabic language, and that the result of this disciplined interpretation must be in conformity with those rules established by reason. Thus, with interpretation being restricted to philological exegesis and discounting allegory in the name of fideism, a literalism is affirmed which then goes against the very grain of this reformist effort. (Shafie, 2001, 2004).

An example of *tafwīd* concerns the *jinn*. The Quran affirms a world of *jinn* parallel to our own but does not provide any evidence for the reality of these invisible beings, although the text does mention that they were created "from fire not smoke". Riḍā considered that one should not conjecture about divine secrets but believe them without interpretation. Likewise, in the story of Noah and the Flood, the possibility of resorting to interpretation is shown to the asserting that the literal meaning is "not the one intended". In this way the spirit of modernity is correlated with that of the text, and the definitive authority of the text entails endowing that authority with a meaning derived from modernity, which is compatible with it. The examination of this, however, represents a transitional stage between *tafwīḍ* and interpretation. (Shafie, 2004).

Religious reason therefore resorted to interpretation, that is, imposing upon the text meanings which they could not sustain; instead, they were derived from the knowledge and circumstances of an age vastly different to that in which it emerged. The Quranic text, and especially the verses alluding to astronomy, came to be understood as if

some of its statements were based on a code, whose key was modern scientific knowledge. This idea was stretched up to the point of scientifically validating the Quranic texts in the name of *iʻjāz*. The two strands of skepticism towards the science and the scientific validation of the Quran have continued up to this present day which, according to Azmeh, have led to the formulation of the Islamization of Knowledge, not only in natural sciences but also in social and human sciences. (al-Azmeh, 1996, 418-428). In the same tone, Marcia K. Hermansen (1996) has laid a comprehensive analysis of contemporary intellectual positions regarding the classical Islamic religious tradition in her paper, "Modernity and Religious Worldviews – The Challenge of Classical Islamic Religious Thought for Contemporary Muslim Intellectuals" where the concept of heritage (*turāth*) and the contemporary Muslim intellectuals response to it is highlighted. (509-534). Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud, in *Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas* (1998), presents a philosophical and applied grounds for adapting to such challenges of modernity through Islamization of present knowledge, a grand scheme of "dynamic-stabilism" (371- 414).

In contrast to those who have sought to present Islam as a rational religion, there have also been thinkers who have either rejected or at least limited the scope. The Wahhābīs, while recognizing the value of rational argumentation, insist that its point of departure should be revelation. Over and against attempts at legitimating powerful interests with the help of Islam, Sayyid Quṭb declared Gamāl ʻAbd al-Nāṣir's Egypt as being jāhiliyyah and Maḥmūd Ṭāha in Numayrī's Sudan called for an Islam that would renounce the use of power. Likewise, in Turkey, movements like Süleymancılık and the Nurculuk have protested against the official modernist interpretation of Islam by continuously having recourse to the Quran and producing an impressive corpus of exegesis of Quranic texts. (Waardenburg, 1996, 338-339.)

Arab secularists pointed out that religion originated directly from fear: the fear of death and the overwhelming power of nature. Religion and its necessity were matters only dealt with consistently in terms of divine benevolence, mercy and God's choice; typical Muʼtazilite concept of determinism. (al-Azmeh, 1996, 396-397.)

It can be concluded that, the modernists efforts of re-interpreting the Quran can be reduced to application of the secular rationalization and scientific spirit into the way Muslims understand their religion. (Shafie, 2014). This effort is, in fact, a reactionary process from the part of Muslims to grapple with the challenge of modernity. The Western scholarship, eventhough it welcomes historical interpretation of the Quran by the modernists (Baljon, 1968), describes modern Muslim argumentation in general as 'mere apologetics' and that little value can be attached to it. (Baljon, 1968, 121; Waardenburg, 1996, 319-336)

It is important to highlight what Aziz al-Azmeh has summed up with regard to the validity of the translations and interpretations of the Quran by the Modernist Reformism in the nineteenth and twentieth century:

There is no guarantor for the validity of translation and interpretation – government restricted by law/consultative government or democratic/consultative

government as is said today – except the desire of the one advocating the interpretation, who can guarantee his interpretation with a cultural and political authority which by its nature overwhelms, criticism and examination. There is therefore no justification in reason or in history for this translation, nor any credibility for it except by its being based on an exclusive normative status given to a name – Islam – which is represented by an absolutely normative source, that is, the Quran and the early period of Islam – and on the desire to impose meanings on it that indicate modernism, such as participatory democracy or consultation of the aristocracy (learned and social) which Islamic Reformism pursued in its first phase. (al-Azmeh, 1996, 405-406)

The over-zealous effort of interpreting the Quran and the Prophetic ḥadīth has been continued by the succeeding generation of the intellectuals in the modern and post-modern Islamic scholarship. Their methods, however, are ambivalent to the science of interpretation; for apart from providing suggestions to the approach, they grapple with some Western thoughts of interpreting which in a way, are not compatible to our science of *tafsīr*. What is more worrying the neo-modernist exegetes tend to apply epistemological relativism in their approach as provided in the beginning of this paper.

However, not all of Muslim scholars would appeal to the interjection of scientific spirit into *tafsīr*. Some of the leading scholars in modern Islamic discourse, argues for the utilization of the classical scholars' approaches to the interpretation of the Quran with some modifications. Apart from the purely traditional method of interpretation, a more integrated method of utilizing philological and semantic analysis with socio-historical circumstances can be applied. (Wan Daud, 1989, 4-7; 1995, 2004, 2015)

The Semantic Analysis: Modern Method Yet Traditionally Rooted

In a specialized effort of interpreting sacret texts, Izutsu employed a semantic approach in the study of the Quranic *weltanschauung* and the concept of belief (*īmān*) in Islamic theology as apparent in his important books like *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung* (2008), *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology* (2006); and *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Quran* (2004). In *God and Man in the Quran*, Izutsu analyzes a number of Quranic key-words in order to grasp the Quranic worldview and its differences from pre-Quranic worldview.

Whereas in *Ethico-Religious Concepts*, he defined semantics as:

…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." (Izutsu, 2004, 4)

Semantic analysis, though recently a defined methodology, has its root long in the tradition of Islam as well as its philosophy of language. (Adamson, 2015; Versteegh, 1997). Muslims have been aware of the importance of language as interconnected to their souls and rationals through meanings. Early Islamic religious sciences like *tafsīr* and *usul-fiqh* had proven the scientific aspect the Quran shed on the Muslims. (Weiss, 1966, n.d.; al-Attas, 1980; Arif, 2007; Ahmad, 2013).

Weiss' dissertation (1966) entitled "Language in Orthodox Muslim Thought: A Study of "*Waḍʿu al-Lughah*" and Its Development" does not specify on semantic analysis. Rather, it focuses on the role of language in orthodox (Sunni) Muslim thought. His general contention has been that language occupies the place of a given, upon which Islam depends its philosophy of language. Because the Book (Quran) is the sole expression of the Divine Will (other than the natural ones), it is imperative that the Book be understood; which leaves man with no other choice than to master the language in which the Book is written. (Weiss, 1966, 2-7.) What the Orthodox were affirming, according to Weiss, in speaking of the establishment of language (*waḍʿu al-lughah*), was the validity of the "language of the Arabs" as a point of reference in the interpretation of sacred texts. Weiss further demonstrates the task of "science of *waḍʿ*" in working out the idea of the establishment of language in full; which according to him is a proof of the most thorough-going statement of the constancy of language imaginable, which is truly an Islamic phenomenon. (Weiss, 1966, 2-7). Weiss has provided a ground for the importance of *waḍʿu al-lughah* in the science of interpretation of Islamic texts. It will be another important task for future researchers to study this field as well as its proponent, ʿAḍd al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 1355 C.E.), the first to write about *waḍʿu al-lughah* as a special subject. (Weiss, 1966, 140-149)

Semantic Analysis in the Modern Islamic Discourse

Semantic analysis is a major method of interpretation in the traditional Islamic intellectual tradition which analyzes meaning and is itself comprised of the concept of *maʿnā*, which is laid in the Quran, the *ḥadīth* and the Islamic intellectual tradition. Its English equivalent "*semantic*" is a term taken from the French term "*semantique*" which has been coined lately in the 1800s. It is not something to be confused with the semantic analysis in the modern linguistics and semiotics which carry a narrow and technical dimension of a textual study and epistemologically different from the former. It is also different from hermeneutics, the biblical interpretation of text which seeks to bring in historical context into it. It is also not to be confused with "semantic analysis" which has been pioneered by scholars like R.A. Nicholson and Toshihiko Izutsu, which seeks to study Islamic texts by self-definition but differs a great deal in the sources of knowledge.

Semantic analysis 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, usage 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.

Some scholars write on semantic analysis with a close scrutiny. Syamsuddin Arif (2007, 107-116) for example, compares the the semantic structure and fixity of a number of key terms and concepts of the Quran by al-Attas and Izutsu with that of al-Rāghib al-Isfahāni. The major concern of the writer is that the contemporary semantic analysis of Quranic vocabulary has its precedent in the eleventh century. Arif argues that: Izutsu's pioneering studies have had a wide influence on contemporary Islamic studies, especially in the field of Quranic and Arabic studies. While others were also influential, notably Noldeke, Jeffery and Wansbrough; Izutsu made semantic analysis the dominant methodology in the field. 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 something to Izutsu's writings. (107-110). Al-Attas concurs with Izutsu 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. It is such revolution and replacement of the Jahiliyyah worldview with the Islamic *weltanschauung* that al-Attas calls and comes up with the idea of "Islamization". (110-113).

This paper agrees with Arif that "semantic analysis" has long got its root in the Islamic intellectual tradition, but does not concur as to al-Iṣfahānī's time; it is actually older than that. It must have its root instantly after the time of Prophet Muhammad pbuh, namely during 'Abdullah Ibnu 'Abbās (d. 687 C.E.) who was the first to effect the method of determining authentic and authoritative meanings, initiated in the process of interpretation of the Quran (al-Attas, 1980); or Al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad (d. 791 C.E.) the grammarian who wrote Book of the Letter 'Ayn' (*Kitāb al-'Ayn*). (Adamson, 2015). Al-Iṣfahānī has been renowned for his *Mufradāt* (2009) apart from other important dictionaries like *Ta'rīfat* by al-Jurjānī (d. 816 A.H.) and the encyclopaedic *Kashshāf* by al-Tahānāwī (fl. circa 12th C.E.). Al-Iṣfahānī and al-Attas are traditional in their semantic analysis approach, while Izutsu is basically modern; but al-Iṣfahānī is known more for his descriptive manner than for metaphysical and theological ideas, whereas the other two are renowned for their philosophical and metaphysical thought apart from their Arabic expertise.

Semantic analysis, especially of al-Attas' (1969,2; 1970, preface, x, introduction, xiv; 1995, 293; 2015) is the continuation of this traditional blueprint, albeit that it also defines new terms in the modern contexts. His methodology, though having some similarities with those methods of modern scholars in the Islamic discourse for it expands Izutsu's foundation, is very unique in terms of epistemological sources through which the key terms and concepts are derived. Al-Attas' semantic analysis is apparently applied in almost all of his works especially related to metaphysics, ṣūfism, ethics, education, history and socio-politics. In this methodology, al-Attas systematically 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. All this, al-Attas applies, together with his reliance on intuition, makes his method all more rigourous and insightful. (Wan Daud, 1998, 268-271, 285-290; Ahmad, 2017, 170-218, 219-271). Semantic analysis however, is not al-Attas' only method employed in his works. Apart from this primary method of explication, there are other supporting methods

such as: reasoning, experiential induction and contextual analysis which are applied to a certain extent in his writings. (Ahmad, 2017)

Another important point to address herewith is that Arabic as al-Attas promotes it in his methodology is in fact the "Quranic Arabic". (al-Attas, 1980, 2-3; Wan Daud, 1998, 333-343). It is the highest form of Arabic which manifests itself in the exact physical linguistic forms of the Quran and corresponds to precise meaning (*ma'nā*) of Islam. Quranic Arabic is different from the standard Arabic (*fuṣḥā*) in the sense that the former is the latter's one of the most important references apart from other non-Quranic materials like pre-Islamic poetry and modern prosody and literature. The Quranic Arabic is distinct from the rest of Revelation languages in the sense of its lexical root system, and systematic lexicographical documentation. (al-Attas, 1980). The fact that Arabic is chosen as the Quranic language, proves the fact of its credibility. The interpretation of its meaning must be based on these philosophy. (al-Attas, 1980, 2015).

CONCLUSION

Semantic analysis as we take it, is not as contemporarily accepted in the Western intellectual discourse as having very technical aspect and very much related to semiotics, the study of signs and symbols. Semantic as we take it is a form of a very essential scientific method in understanding Islamic texts, especially the Quran. It is very much interconnected with the meanings embedded in the Islamic worldview as well as Islamic tradition. Though being so traditional in nature, it is not something to be rendered obsolete. Should it happen to be so, it is simply because the majority of the Muslim intellectuals fail to properly appreciate it let alone apply it in the interpretation of such texts.

As we mentioned earlier, to understand how the science of interpretation (*tafsīr*) in the Islamic tradition works, it is appropriate to understand the meaning of the word "text" as connoted by the term "*naṣṣ*" in Arabic (Shafie, 2005, 117) and also revelation (*waḥy*) which differ from poets' vision, apostolic inspiration and intuition, and which must be accepted absolutely. (Al-Attas, 1995, 6). With respect to this understanding of the concepts of *waḥy* and *naṣṣ*, it is certain that modern Muslim scholarship can benefit from the right understanding of Quranic Arabic terms more than relying merely on socio-historical contexts. Applying socio-historical perspectives in understanding Islamic texts, that is the Quran and the Ḥadīth, must be preceded with referring to authentic meanings of the Islamic key terms in the Islamic sources. Then, the proper understanding of the subject can be realized. The basic and technical meanings of Islamic key-terms and concepts must be attained to before the issues with regard to their socio-historic angles be discussed. In this way, Muslim scholars can execute an Islamic discourse in a just and rightful manner.

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