



THE CONCEPT OF TIME: A STUDY OF SEMANTIC ANALYSIS AZ-ZAMAN

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Abstract:

Understanding the meaning of the az-zaman and its derivatives has implications not only theoretically (in interpretation, semantics, and theology), but also practically in how humans respond to the times, utilize them, and maintain the relevance of moral values amidst changing times. However, in the literature on interpretation and semantics, in-depth focus on the az-zaman is still limited, especially in contemporary studies that incorporate a modern semantic approach. The method used in this research is library research. This research refers to data derived from various literature such as books, journals, theses, dissertations, and so on. The primary literature in this study is the original text of the Qur'an, classical and contemporary interpretations (Ibn Kathir, Buya Hamka, Quraish Shihab, Al-Azhar interpretation, Al-Misbah interpretation). In semantic studies, the initial step is to refer to the root word as the starting point for basic meaning. The term az-zaman comes from the Arabic root z-m-n (ز-م-ن). This root is lexically associated with the concepts of masa, time, duration, and temporal transition. This basic meaning is reflected in classical Arabic dictionaries such as Lisan al-Arab, Taj al-'Arus, and Qamus al-Lughah, where zaman (زمن) is defined as a span of time, masa, era, period, or elapsed time. Time in its etymological sense is something that indicates a specific moment. The Qur'an uses various terms to refer to time, such as al-waqt, al-'ashr, al-dahr, al-ajal, al-amad, and al-abad. Each term has a different meaning and emphasis. Al-'ashr indicates the result of feelings or events. Al-amad emphasizes limited time, while al-abad indicates a very long time without limits.

Keywords: *al Qur'an, ashtr, azzaman, semantics, time*

INTRODUCTION

Human life is filled with time past, present, and future that cannot be stopped or reversed. Every human action, decision, and choice is bound by time. Within the Islamic framework, time is not merely a chronological variable, but also a trust, a test, a source of reward, and a moral/spiritual field. In the Qur'an and religious literature, time appears in many terms: waqt, 'asr, dahr, umr, zaman, and various other variations. Each term carries a unique nuance of meaning, depending on the context of the text, the theme of revelation, and lexical relations.

Among the terms referring to time are az-zaman (الزمن) and its derivatives (e.g., zamān, az-zamān, muzman, zamni, etc.), which imply a broader concept of time—not merely daily time or duration, but also era, epoch, temporal

continuity, and the transformation of time. Therefore, a semantic study of the Az-Zaman and its derivatives, such as yaum, sa'ah, and asr, is crucial for understanding how the Qur'an presents "time" as a category containing values, warnings, hopes, and historical understanding.

Understanding the meaning of Az-Zaman and its derivatives has implications not only theoretically (in exegesis, semantics, and theology), but also practically—how humans respond to the times, utilize them, and maintain the relevance of moral values amidst changing times. However, in the exegesis and semantics literature, in-depth focus on Az-Zaman is still limited, especially in contemporary studies that incorporate modern semantic approaches. Therefore, understanding the semantics of the term Az-Zaman is crucial, because through understanding this term, humans can develop a sense of time, discipline, productivity, and spiritual responsibility.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this study is library research. This research refers to data derived from various sources, such as books, journals, theses, dissertations, and so on. The primary literature in this study includes the original text of the Qur'an, classical and contemporary interpretations (Ibn Kathir, Buya Hamka, Quraish Shihab, Tafsir Al-Azhar, Tafsir Al-Misbah), and recent journal articles from the past five years relevant to the theme of the time of the azzaman. A descriptive-analytical research approach was used to describe the findings from various relevant information obtained from various sources. (Hariwijaya & P.B., 2005).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In semantic studies, the initial step is to refer to the root word as the starting point for its basic meaning. The term az-zaman is derived from the Arabic root z-m-n (ز-م-ن). This root is lexically associated with the concepts of masa, time, duration, and temporal transition. This basic meaning is reflected in classical Arabic dictionaries such as Lisan al-Arab, Taj al-'Arus, and Qamus al-Lughah, where zaman (زَمَان) is defined as a span of time, era, period, or elapsed time. However, the meaning of zaman in the Qur'an is not always limited to its literal meaning (duration of time), but rather develops into relational and contextual meanings. To examine the relational meaning, we need to examine the paradigmatic and syntagmatic network of meanings that relate to other words in the Qur'an.

In the Qur'an, the az-zaman often appears in the themes of oaths (qasam), warnings, the history of previous nations, and eschatological narratives. For example, when Allah swears "wal 'asr" (by the time) in Surah Al-Ashr, the term 'asr is closely related to the meaning of time and indicates that time is a witness to the human condition. Studies of the concept of time in the Qur'an suggest that terms such as al-'asr are understood as part of a broader spectrum of time meanings, which include zaman and waqt. (Gaffar, 2014)

Within the paradigmatic network of meanings, the word "az-zaman" (time) coexists with other terms such as "waqt," "dahr," "umr," and "sā'ah." For example, "waqt" more often refers to "time as an opportunity or a specific time," while "dahr" refers to "the passing of time/age of the universe." Az-zaman serves as a general term encompassing the broad notion of "age/era." Therefore, when it appears in verses, the context determines whether the intended meaning is "the time of human life," "the time of the previous people," or "the

end of the age."

Relational analysis also considers antonyms and contrastive meanings. In several verses, "az-zaman" is contrasted with the concept of "eternity" (age, immutability), or framed by events of change within the age of the people (e.g., "the past" versus "the present"). Here, the word "az-zaman" marks a point of change or a winding, rather than static, era.

Through a syntagmatic approach (the relationship of words in verses), the meaning of az-zaman is often colored by words such as qad, qaala, yathkur, khalafa, takhlū, li and others which provide a temporal or historical context. For example, in verses warning against previous people, era is often combined with the words khalafa (moving / changing) or thāla (has passed). In this case, era refers to previous eras of people that have passed as lessons for today's people. The semantic interpretation of az-zaman in this context goes beyond duration, but contains historical and narrative elements.

Furthermore, the meaning of the times is also existential: humans are asked to reflect on how they got through the times - whether with faith, good deeds, or in vain. So time is not just a temporal field, but also an ethical and moral field. In the perspective of contemporary interpretation, the term era is often used as a symbol of social transformation - humans not only live in the era, but also shape the era with their actions.

To make it easier to understand, here are the terms in the Qur'an that indicate the general meaning of time,

1. The word al-'ashr is used in the Qur'an five times spread across four surahs (three makkiyah surahs and one madaniyyah surah). (Baqi, 2018) In terms of etymology, Ibn Faris explained that al-'ashr has three meanings, namely al-dahr or hin/masa or squeezing something to produce milk or the relationship between something/shelter. (Zakariyya, n.d.)

Al-'Ashr, a'shir and ya'shir mean something that is condensed or the essence of something that is squeezed as found in QS Yusuf/12: 36 and 49. Clouds containing water droplets then gather and then become heavy clouds and finally rain. Such clouds are called al-mu'shirat (al-Naba'/78:14). Air whose pressure is so strong that it destroys everything that its hidden parts become visible/exposed is called 'ishar (Quran 2:103). Thus, al-'asr has three meanings: feeling, time, and evening. (M. Quraish Shihab, 2007)

This verse emphasizes that someone who does not prepare themselves in the morning, does not learn and use their minds during childhood, does not plan their life during their youth, and so on, will regret it in old age and become a loser. This loss is only felt when they reach old age. Like a trader, profits and losses are only calculated when all transactions are completed. However, by then it is too late to rectify the situation; all that remains is regret and sadness when faced with losses caused by one's own negligence.

2. Al-Abad, derived from the root words أ-ب-د, is interpreted as a long period. In the Qur'an al-abad with its various derivations is repeated 28 times. (Baqi, 2018) In general, the word "al-abad" is used as an emphasis or reinforcement of the word "khulud", especially in the context of the inhabitants of heaven and hell, each of which has its own characteristics. The word "al-abad" used by humans can be found in various stories, such as the impatience of the people of the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) to enter the area of Sham after they managed to escape from Pharaoh, which is found in QS al-Maidah / 5: 24.

There is also advice from the cave dwellers to their friends to be careful

in walking so as not to be detected by their king. The story of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) who boycotted the hypocrites from taking part in the war also includes the use of the word. There are many other examples. If we look for the use of the word "al-abad" in the Qur'an, it is found that this word is used in two meanings, namely endless eternity and limited eternity. The word "al-abad" refers to heaven and hell, while the word "al-abad" refers to the word "al-abad" which is not directly related to heaven and hell.

3. Al-Dahr, whose root consists of the letters د-ه-ر, has the meanings al-galabah/victory and al-qahr/coercion. (Zakariyya, n.d.) Al-Dahr is interpreted this way because every time it comes, it will surely win. However, in the Qur'an, the word al-dahr, with all its derivatives, is used only twice: in QS al-Jatsiyah/45:24 and QS al-Insan/76:1.

Ibn 'Asyur, in his book, interprets the word الدهر in these verses as meaning that it is a continuous time during the alternating days and nights. ('Asyur, 1984). Meanwhile, al-Zuhailiy stated that what is meant by الدهر in these verses is the duration of the universe's existence. (Al-Zuhaily, n.d.)

From this, the words "day," "month," or "year" cannot be interpreted simply as is commonly believed. Allah created the universe in six days, but this does not necessarily mean six full 24-hour days. In fact, the word "year" in the Quran may not necessarily mean 365 days. Although the word "yum" (day) appears 365 times in the Quran, this does not mean that each day is necessarily 24 hours, as humans differ in their determination of the number of days in a year. This difference stems not only from the use of lunar or solar calculations, but also from humans' familiarity with other methods of calculation. Some scholars argue that Allah's statement that Noah (peace be upon him) lived among his people for 950 years should not be interpreted in the context of solar or lunar calculations. This is because humans once recognized the calculation of years based on seasons, such as summer, winter, autumn, and spring. Therefore, in a seasonal calculation, one year could be equivalent to four years calculated based on the sun's movement. If this view is accepted, then Noah's (peace be upon him) life among his people may have only lasted around 230 years. The Qur'an hints at the difference between syamsiah and qamariah calculations through a verse that discusses the length of time cave dwellers (ashhab al-Kahf) sleep, as in QS al-Kahf/18:25 (Translation: And they lived in their caves for three hundred years and nine years were added (more)). Three hundred years in that place is according to syamsiah calculations, while the addition of nine years is based on qamariah calculations. As is known, there is a difference of about eleven days each year between qamariah and Syamsiah. So the difference in nine years is around $300 \times 11 \text{ days} = 3,300 \text{ days}$ divided, or the same as nine years.

CONCLUSION

Etymologically, time is something that indicates a specific moment. The Quran uses various terms to refer to time, such as al-waqt, al-'asr, al-dahr, al-ajal, al-amad, and al-abad. Each term has a different meaning and emphasis. Al-'asr indicates the outcome of feelings or events. Al-amad emphasizes limited time, while al-abad indicates a very long, limitless time.

The nature of time is that it passes quickly, so the Quran mentions that many people feel like they only live a day or part of a day. The second characteristic of time is that it cannot be returned, so if someone does not use it wisely, they will regret it later. The third characteristic of time is that it is

extremely precious.

The complexity of time is divided into three: first, time as a sign of the beginning or end of worship, such as prayer, Hajj, and other acts of worship. Second, time as a medium for introspection so that past mistakes are not repeated and one can seek forgiveness from Allah. Third, time is used to plan the future according to Allah's commands.

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