



Dilnoza SHODMONOVA^a 

^a International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan
11 Abdulla Qodiriy Street, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

THE ROLE OF MASDAR PATTERNS IN EXPRESSING MEANING IN ARABIC

Abstract. *This article analyzes the phenomenon of triliteral Arabic verbs possessing multiple masdar (verbal noun) forms. The study examines the principal factors that produce masdar variation namely, dialectal differences among Arab tribes and semantic specialization and demonstrates through Qur'anic evidence how different masdars of the same verb can diverge in meaning and serve specialized contextual functions. The masdars كُفِّرَ, كُفْرَانٌ, and كَفُورٌ derived from the verb كَفَرَ, as well as صِيَامٌ and صَوْمٌ, are analyzed for their semantic properties and Qur'anic distribution. The article further demonstrates that certain Arabic morphological patterns possess inherent semantic values a property illustrated through the fi'alah pattern and that changing a masdar's pattern can alter its meaning.*

Keywords: *Arabic language; masdar; morphological pattern; triliteral verb; semantic specialization; Qur'an; dialect; morphology; fi'alah pattern; semantic differentiation.*

INTRODUCTION

Arabic is one of the languages with the richest morphological systems in the world. Its word-formation is built upon a root-and-pattern system in which triliteral and quadriliteral verbal roots are combined with fixed morphological templates to produce different grammatical categories. Among these categories, the masdar (verbal noun or infinitive) occupies a central position, serving as the primary nominal derivation from a verb and carrying the verb's core lexical content in nominal form.

A distinctive and linguistically significant feature of the Arabic masdar system is that a single triliteral verb may possess not one but several masdar forms, each potentially conveying a distinct shade of meaning or serving a specialized semantic function. This

multiplicity has long been recognized in classical Arabic grammatical tradition but has received less systematic attention in contemporary linguistic research, particularly in the context of Qur'anic usage. The aim of this article is to analyze the causes of masdar multiplicity in Arabic, to identify the principal semantic functions that different masdar forms serve, and to demonstrate these functions through Qur'anic examples.

METHODS

The article employs descriptive-analytical and corpus-based methods. Selected Arabic verbs with multiple masdar forms are analyzed for their morphological patterns and semantic distinctions. Qur'anic occurrences of each masdar form are counted and their contextual meanings are identified. The primary corpus is the text of the Holy Qur'an; classical Arabic lexicographical and grammatical sources provide the analytical framework for the morphological and semantic analysis.

RESULTS

1. Causes of masdar multiplicity. It is a well-established feature of Arabic that words are built upon patterns (*awzan*). Some trilateral verbs possess multiple masdar forms, a phenomenon that can be attributed to two principal causes. The first is inter-tribal dialectal variation: different Arab tribes historically employed different masdar patterns for the same verb. For example, the primary masdar of the verb كَتَبَ (to write) is كِتَاب (kitat), yet certain Arab tribes used كَتَّبَ (katb) for the same meaning. The second, and more linguistically significant, cause is semantic specialization: one masdar form may become associated with a specific shade of meaning while another form is used for a different nuance, with both remaining in active use.

The semantic specialization pattern is illustrated clearly by the pair صِغَر (sighar) and صِغَارَة (saghara): صِغَر refers to the smallness of a physical body or object, while صِغَارَة denotes smallness of rank or social standing. The two forms share the same root and the same basic lexical content but have differentiated through use into two semantically distinct lexical items.

2. The verb كَفَرَ and its three masdars in the Qur'an. The verb كَفَرَ (kafara) provides one of the clearest examples of semantic specialization in Qur'anic usage. Three masdar forms are attested: كُفْر (kufr), كُفْرَان (kufuran), and كُفُور (kafur).

كُفْر (kufr) designates disbelief in the religious sense rejection of the true faith. In the Qur'an it appears in this specific meaning in twenty-seven instances, exclusively in the domain of religious belief. كُفْرَان (kufran) by contrast is used in the sense of ingratitude for divine blessings (kufr al-ni'ma) and appears in the Qur'an only once, in this specialized meaning. كَافِر (kafir) is semantically the most general of the three: it can be used for both religious disbelief and ingratitude for blessings, and appears three times in the Qur'an covering both meanings. The Qur'anic distribution thus confirms the specialization: كَافِر is semantically broader, while كُفْر and كُفْرَان are semantically narrower and more precisely allocated to distinct semantic domains.

3. The pair صَوْم and صِيَام in the Qur'an. Another Qur'anic example is provided by the two masdar forms of the verb صَوَّمَ (sawama): صَوْم (sawm) and صِيَام (siyam). Analysis of Qur'anic usage reveals a clear semantic differentiation. صَوْم (sawm) is used in the sense of "keeping silence" and appears only once in the Qur'an in Surah Maryam, where Mary is commanded to observe silence. صِيَام (siyam) by contrast designates the ritual act of fasting as an act of worship and appears nine times in the Qur'an exclusively in this specialized religious meaning.

4. Pattern-inherent semantic values: the fi'alāh (فِعَالَة) pattern. Arabic morphology provides a further dimension to the masdar problem: certain morphological patterns carry inherent semantic values that operate independently of the specific root. The fi'alāh (فِعَالَة) pattern, for example, is conventionally associated with the designation of crafts, professions, and trades. Examples include: خِيَاطَة (khiyata) tailoring; تِجَارَة (tijara) trade and commerce; قِصَابَة (qasaba) butchery. In each case, the fi'alāh pattern imposes a semantic specification the designation of an occupational activity upon whatever root it combines with. This demonstrates that changing the masdar pattern of a given root can alter its meaning, since the pattern itself is a bearer of meaning.

DISCUSSION

The findings confirm that masdar multiplicity in Arabic is not a random linguistic accident but a systematic feature of the language's morphological and semantic architecture. The two mechanisms identified dialectal variation and semantic specialization operate

differently: dialectal variation produces synonymous forms that are used interchangeably by different communities, while semantic specialization produces forms that appear synonymous but have diverged into distinct semantic functions, as confirmed by Qur'anic distribution patterns.

The Qur'anic evidence is particularly valuable for two reasons. First, the Qur'an provides a corpus of authoritative, fixed usage from which semantic distributions can be reliably read. Second, the precision with which the Qur'an employs different masdar forms using كفران exclusively for ingratitude, كفر exclusively for religious disbelief, and صوم exclusively for silence while صيام designates ritual fasting demonstrates that the semantic specialization of these forms was already stable in the classical Arabic of the Qur'anic text, reflecting the richness of the Arabic morphological and semantic system.

The existence of pattern-inherent semantic values illustrated by the fi'alah pattern adds a further dimension to the picture. It demonstrates that meaning in Arabic is encoded not only at the level of the root but also at the level of the pattern, and that the interaction between root and pattern can produce fine-grained semantic distinctions that are invisible to a purely root-based analysis.

CONCLUSION

The research demonstrates that the possession of multiple masdar forms by some Arabic trilateral verbs is connected with the richness of the language's morphological and semantic system. The multiplicity of masdars is explained primarily by dialectal differences among Arab tribes and by semantic specialization, through which a particular masdar becomes associated with a specific meaning while another masdar form serves a different function. Through Qur'anic examples it was shown how different masdars of the same verb diverge semantically and express specialized meanings in specific contexts. It was further demonstrated on a scientific basis that certain Arabic patterns possess inherent semantic properties, and that changing a masdar's pattern can change its meaning. This research holds significant value for the deeper study of Arabic morphology and semantics and for the precise interpretation of Qur'anic vocabulary.

REFERENCES

1. Brill Publishers. (1993). The Encyclopaedia of Islam (New ed.). Leiden: Brill.
2. Carter, Michael G. (2004). *Sībawayhi*. London: I.B. Tauris.
3. Ibn Fāris, Aḥmad ibn Fāris. (1979). *Mu‘jam Maqāyīs al-Lugha*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.
4. Ibn Hishām al-Anṣārī, ‘Abdullāh ibn Yūsuf. (2001). *Sharḥ Qaṭr al-Nadā wa-Ball al-Ṣadā*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya.
5. Lane, Edward William. (1863–1893). *Arabic English Lexicon*. London: Williams and Norgate.
6. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, Abū al-Qāsim. (2009). *Al Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur’ān*. Damascus: Dār al-Qalam.
7. Al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn. (1998). *Al-Muzhir fī ‘Ulūm al Lugha wa-Anwā‘ihā*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya.
8. Versteegh, Kees. (2014). *The Arabic Language* (2nd ed.). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
9. Wright, William. (1996). *A Grammar of the Arabic Language*. Beirut: Librairie du Liban
10. Al-Zajjājī, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ishāq. (1986). *Al-Īdāḥ fī ‘Ilal al-Naḥw*. Beirut: Dār al-Nafā‘is.
11. *The Qur’an*. Arabic text with English translation. Medina: King Fahd Glorious Qur'an Printing Complex.
12. Wehr, Hans. (1979). *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (4th ed.). Edited by J. Milton Cowan. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.