

The Linguistic (*Lughawī*) Orientation in Indonesian Qur'anic Exegesis: A Comparative Study of Mahmud Yunus's *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* and M. Quraish Shihab's *Tafsir al-Mishbah*

Nur Azizah¹, Zaki Khabib Nasirin²

¹UIN Salatiga, ²UIN Salatiga

E-mail: nurazizah290125@icloud.com, zakikhabibnsrn@gmail.com.

Received: 09-06-2026; Revised: 27-06-2026; Accepted: 27-07-2026

Abstract

This study compares the linguistic (*lughawī*) orientation of Mahmud Yunus's *Tafsir Qur'an Karim*, one of the earliest Qur'anic commentaries written in Indonesian, with that of M. Quraish Shihab's *Tafsir al-Mishbah*. It focuses on how both exegetes employ Arabic lexical and semantic analysis to elucidate Qur'anic vocabulary and meanings. This qualitative study adopts a library-research method and applies comparative textual analysis to the two commentaries, supplemented by relevant secondary literature. The findings demonstrate that linguistic analysis is a prominent feature of Yunus's commentary, although his explanations are generally concise and practical. He also strategically employs footnotes to clarify important terms and concepts, thereby making the Qur'anic message more accessible to readers with limited proficiency in Arabic. Shihab similarly adopts a linguistic approach, but develops his analysis in greater depth and detail. Despite their differences in analytical depth and mode of presentation, both exegetes regard proficiency in Arabic as indispensable to a nuanced understanding of the Qur'an. The study concludes that Yunus made a significant contribution to the development of Indonesian Qur'anic exegesis by introducing an accessible form of linguistic interpretation, while Shihab's work represents a more elaborate application of the same exegetical orientation.

Keywords: Indonesian Qur'anic exegesis; linguistic interpretation; *lughawī* exegesis; Mahmud Yunus; M. Quraish Shihab

Introduction

In Arabic exegetical discourse, the Indonesian term *corak* is associated with *alwān*, the plural form of *lawn*, meaning "colour," as recorded in *Lisān al-'Arab*. Munawwir's Arabic-Indonesian dictionary similarly defines *lawn* as the singular form of *alwān* and records its broader meanings as *al-naw' wa al-ṣinf*, denoting a kind, type, or category (Munawwir, 1997). The Indonesian word *corak* has an equally broad semantic range. The *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* defines it as a pattern or design, a combination of colours against a particular background, or, in a more figurative sense, a distinctive characteristic, type, or form. In expressions such as "architectural style" or "casual style," for example, *corak* denotes a particular design or mode of presentation (Kemendikbud, n.d.). It is this figurative meaning that underlies the use of *corak* in Qur'anic studies to describe the distinctive intellectual orientation or "colouring" of a commentary.

An exegetical orientation generally refers to the distinctive characteristics of a Qur'anic commentary that emerge from an exegete's particular tendencies in explaining the meanings of the Qur'an. Classifying a commentary according to a particular orientation does not imply that it contains no other tendencies. A single work may incorporate several exegetical orientations, while its classification is normally determined by the orientation that appears most dominant.



Islah Gusmian (2013) argues that Qur'anic exegesis in the Indonesian archipelago exhibits distinctive nuances, including Sufi, theological, and psychological tendencies. He therefore prefers the expression “exegetical nuance” (*nuansa tafsir*) to “exegetical orientation” (*corak tafsir*). An exegetical orientation may be understood as a tendency derived from an exegete's disciplinary specialization and shaped by educational background, social environment, and religious convictions. These factors subsequently exert a strong influence on the interpretation of the Qur'an. Within studies of Qur'anic exegesis in Indonesia, the concept functions as an analytical category through which the distinctive intellectual tendencies of individual exegetes and their works can be identified.

Exegetical orientations emerge through the interaction of various intellectual disciplines and sociohistorical forces. An exegetical work may be shaped by the author's school of thought, sociocultural environment, and political circumstances, all of which contribute significantly to its interpretive character. Consequently, exegetical orientations remain diverse and continue to evolve rather than being confined to a fixed number of categories. Their development depends on advances in knowledge, methodology, and the interpretive approaches adopted by exegetes, which may generate new forms of exegesis with distinctive characteristics. The identity and method of an interpretation, therefore, reflect not only the features of the commentary itself but also the intellectual personality of its author, as shaped by culture, social conditions, and the development of knowledge (Malaka, 2021).

Qur'anic commentaries may be classified into several major orientations. The *fiqhī* orientation concentrates on deriving legal rulings from Qur'anic verses. The *falsafī* orientation interprets the Qur'an in relation to philosophical questions and employs philosophical theories to understand its verses. The *'ilmī* orientation uses scientific approaches and theories to explore the meanings of the Qur'an. The *tarbawī* orientation prioritizes themes related to Islamic education, particularly the principles and systems of instruction contained in the Qur'an. The *i'tiqādī* orientation, derived from *i'tiqād*, or belief, focuses on theological and doctrinal questions. Meanwhile, the *adabī-ijtimā'ī* orientation closely examines Qur'anic expressions, explains their intended meanings in an engaging literary style, and relates the Qur'anic text to existing social and cultural realities (Syukur, 2015).

Among these different orientations, *lughawī* exegesis interprets the Qur'an on the basis of linguistic principles (Firdaus & Surur, 2025). It is characterized by a tendency to analyze the linguistic dimensions of the Qur'anic text. Commentaries employing this approach commonly provide word-by-word analysis (*tahkīl al-lafẓ*), covering the roots, forms, and meanings of words; Qur'anic vocabulary (*mufradāt*); and the instrumental sciences of Arabic grammar, particularly *naḥw* and *ṣarf*. They may also examine variant Qur'anic readings (*qirā'āt*).

Exegetes working within this orientation frequently cite Arabic poetry as linguistic evidence and as a reference for determining the meanings and usages of Qur'anic expressions. Accordingly, an exegete who applies a linguistic approach must possess a comprehensive command of Arabic, including its grammar, rhetoric (*balāghah*), and literary tradition (Kusroni, 2019). Linguistic exegesis not only explains the intended meanings of Qur'anic verses but also elucidates the linguistic features through which those meanings are expressed. Historically, this orientation gained particular importance as Islam expanded among non-Arab communities and as proficiency in the Arabic literary tradition declined, even among some Arab speakers. These developments created a growing need for systematic explanations of the linguistic meanings and features of the Qur'an (Sa'dullah, 2016).

Mastery of the language of the Qur'an thus enables an exegete to uncover the meanings embedded in its expressions. Knowledge of Arabic and its related disciplines—including *nahw*, *ṣarf*, etymology, *balāghah*, and *qirā'āt*—has consequently been regarded as an essential qualification for Qur'anic interpretation. This requirement demonstrates the centrality of language to the exegetical enterprise. Classical commentaries that place considerable emphasis on linguistic analysis include *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, jointly composed by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, and *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb* by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (Kusroni, 2019). Within the Indonesian exegetical tradition, linguistic analysis is also evident in Mahmud Yunus's *Tafsīr Qur'an Karim* and M. Quraish Shihab's *Tafsīr al-Mishbah*.

Several previous studies are relevant to the present discussion. Kusroni (2019) examines the diverse approaches to Qur'anic interpretation from the classical to the modern-contemporary periods. He also maps concepts such as approach, method, and exegetical orientation, whose meanings frequently overlap in Qur'anic studies. Dewi Murni (2020) identifies three major orientations in Qur'anic exegesis. These consist of *lughawī* exegesis, which focuses on semiotic, semantic, etymological, grammatical, and rhetorical aspects of language; *fiqhī* or *aḥkāmī* exegesis, which concentrates on legal questions; and *ilmī* exegesis, which seeks to explain scientific concepts and theories of knowledge in relation to the Qur'an. These orientations demonstrate that the Qur'an may be studied through various approaches, provided that such interpretations remain consistent with the substance of its divine guidance.

Edi and Fangesty (2023) trace the historical evolution of *lughawī* exegesis from the time of the Prophet to the modern period. Their study outlines the various linguistic dimensions addressed by this exegetical orientation, as well as the debates and criticisms surrounding it. It also examines several prominent works of linguistic exegesis and the methodological developments that have taken place in the contemporary period. Firdaus and Surur (2025), meanwhile, investigate the history, boundaries, and controversies of *lughawī* exegesis. They trace its origins to the Prophetic period and divide its subsequent development into three phases, culminating in its renewal through the method advanced by Amīn al-Khūlī. Their study also draws attention to ideological bias in classical interpretation and recommends integrating linguistic exegesis with other interpretive methods and modern linguistic theories to produce a more holistic and contextually relevant understanding of the Qur'an.

Although these studies provide valuable conceptual and historical accounts of linguistic exegesis, they largely focus on its general characteristics and development. The linguistic dimensions of Mahmud Yunus's *Tafsīr Qur'an Karim* have not received comparable systematic attention, partly because the work has frequently been treated primarily as an Indonesian translation of the Qur'an. The present study addresses this gap by examining the linguistic orientation embedded in Yunus's commentary, particularly his use of lexical and semantic analysis, and by comparing it with the linguistic approach employed in M. Quraish Shihab's *Tafsīr al-Mishbah*. It asks how the *lughawī* orientation is manifested in the two commentaries, how their linguistic methods differ, and what these differences reveal about the development of Indonesian Qur'anic exegesis. The novelty of this study lies in its systematic identification of Yunus's linguistic-exegetical characteristics and its positioning of those characteristics within the historical development of Qur'anic interpretation in Indonesia.

Method

This study employs a qualitative library-research design. Its primary sources are Mahmud Yunus's *Tafsīr Qur'an Karim* and M. Quraish Shihab's *Tafsīr al-Mishbah*, supplemented, where relevant, by their other writings and biographical materials concerning their intellectual backgrounds. Secondary sources include books, journal articles, and other scholarly studies addressing

linguistic exegesis, Indonesian Qur'anic interpretation, and the intellectual thought of the two exegetes. Data were collected through documentary research and analyzed through the stages of data reduction, unitization, categorization, and interpretation (Abdullah, 2020). A comparative reading is subsequently undertaken to identify similarities and differences in the two commentaries' lexical and semantic analyses, use of linguistic explanation, depth of discussion, and modes of presenting Qur'anic meanings.

Discussion and Results

A Brief History of Indonesian Qur'anic Exegesis

Any account of the scholarly networks that shaped Qur'anic exegesis in the Indonesian archipelago must acknowledge 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkilī, also known as al-Fanṣūrī, and his *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd*. As one of the earliest surviving complete Qur'anic commentaries in Malay, this work provides important evidence of the formative development of exegesis in the region. Numerous studies have emphasized its contextual character and continuing relevance. It may also have contributed to the emergence of various exegetical orientations and methods throughout the archipelago. Historically, exegetical knowledge was transmitted through at least two principal channels: oral teaching in religious study circles (*pengajian*) and the production of written commentaries. Both forms of transmission have continued to shape Indonesian Qur'anic scholarship (Anwar et al., 2022).

Hakiki, as cited in Anwar et al. (2022), characterizes the period following *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* as one of relative inactivity in Indonesian Qur'anic exegesis. This should not be understood as the complete absence of exegetical activity. Rather, *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* remained the only widely known complete Malay-language commentary for an extended period, while the production of new translations and commentaries remained limited. More visible activity began to emerge during the nineteenth century. This period included a relatively free Makassarese paraphrase of the Qur'an that did not reproduce the Arabic text. It was followed by several elementary Javanese commentaries, including the 462-page *Kitab al-Qur'an: Tetedhakanipun ing Tembung Arab Kajawekaken*, printed by Lange & Co. in Batavia in 1858. The work was printed in Pegon, a modified Arabic script adapted for writing Javanese and several other regional languages (Anwar et al., 2022).

The term *Nusantara* generally refers to the Indonesian archipelago and has become an important analytical category across several academic disciplines. In Azyumardi Azra's formulation, as cited in Anwar et al. (2022), *Islam Nusantara* represents a distinctive historical expression of Islam produced through the interaction, contextualization, indigenization, and vernacularization of universal Islamic teachings within Indonesia's social, cultural, and religious realities. Its dominant intellectual configuration—Ash'arī theology, Shāfi'ī jurisprudence, and al-Ghazālī's Sufism—has frequently been associated with the development of a moderate and tolerant religious orientation known as *wasatīyyah*. This intellectual heritage is significant to the history of Qur'anic exegesis because it helps explain how the Qur'an was translated, interpreted, and communicated through local languages, scripts, and cultural frameworks.

Muslim scholars in the archipelago had engaged with Qur'anic exegesis since at least the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, the production of complete commentaries developed relatively slowly and did not expand significantly until the twentieth century. Only a limited

number of pre-twentieth-century works have been identified, suggesting that Qur'anic exegesis had not yet become an independent and widely cultivated field of scholarship. The discipline was often regarded as intellectually demanding and was therefore less extensively studied than other branches of Islamic knowledge. This situation changed considerably during the twentieth century, when the writing and publication of Qur'anic translations and commentaries increased rapidly (Anwar et al., 2022).

One of the foundational figures in this history was 'Abd al-Ra'ūf ibn 'Alī al-Jāwī al-Fanṣūrī al-Singkilī, commonly known as 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkilī. This Acehnese scholar produced *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* in the seventeenth century, the earliest surviving complete Malay-language commentary covering the entire Qur'an. Its influence extended beyond the Indonesian archipelago, and it became known among Malay-speaking Muslim communities in several regions. The work was first printed in Istanbul in 1884 and reprinted there in 1906. Subsequent editions and circulation extended to Singapore, Penang, Bombay, Cairo, Mecca, South Africa, and other centers of Muslim learning. A later edition was published in Jakarta in 1981. Its extensive geographical circulation demonstrates the importance of *Tarjumān al-Mustafīd* in the intellectual history of Islam in the Malay-Indonesian world.

A further stage in this development occurred during the second half of the nineteenth century with the emergence of Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani, a prominent scholar from Banten. At the request of his students and colleagues, Nawawi composed a two-volume Arabic commentary entitled *Marāḥ Labīd li-Kashf Ma'nā al-Qur'ān al-Majīd*, also known as *al-Tafsīr al-Munīr*. In its introduction, Nawawi presents the work as an attempt to transmit established Islamic knowledge in a renewed form rather than as a claim to doctrinal innovation. His commentary constituted an important continuation of the exegetical tradition associated with scholars from the Indonesian archipelago and helped connect that tradition to the broader scholarly networks of the Middle East (Anwar et al., 2022).

Indonesian Qur'anic exegesis expanded much more rapidly during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This period witnessed the publication of numerous influential works, including Mahmud Yunus's *Tafsīr Qur'an Karīm*, A. Hassan's *Tafsīr al-Furqan*, Hamka's *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqy's *Tafsīr al-Bayan* and *Tafsīr an-Nur*, the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs' *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, and M. Quraish Shihab's *Tafsīr al-Mishbah*. These works demonstrate the increasing diversity of Indonesian exegesis in terms of language, methodology, intellectual orientation, and intended readership. Within this broader historical trajectory, the works of Mahmud Yunus and M. Quraish Shihab represent two important stages in the development of linguistic approaches to Indonesian Qur'anic interpretation (Anwar et al., 2022).

Shifting Characteristics and Orientations in Indonesian Qur'anic Exegesis

Drawing on Nashruddin Baidan's periodization, Amin (2021) divides twentieth-century Indonesian Qur'anic exegesis into three phases: 1900–1950, 1951–1980, and 1981–2000. This framework identifies changes in the scope, presentation, methods, and dominant orientations of Indonesian commentaries. In this classification, the category of *tafsīr* is used broadly enough to include both formal commentaries and Qur'anic translations containing explanatory material.

1. The 1900–1950 Period

Qur'anic commentaries produced between 1900 and 1950 shared several principal characteristics. They commonly defined Qur'anic terms, explained foundational concepts in Islamic teachings, presented the general content of the Qur'an, and used footnotes to provide additional clarification. Some works also discussed the history of the Qur'an and included alphabetically arranged indexes. In terms of textual scope, these works may be divided into commentaries on particular surahs, commentaries on selected *juz*, and complete commentaries covering all thirty *juz*.

No single disciplinary orientation became overwhelmingly dominant during this period. Baidan therefore characterizes these works as possessing a general orientation. This classification does not indicate an absence of exegetical tendencies; rather, it suggests that the commentaries had not yet become strongly specialized or polarized around a particular field of knowledge.

Representative works from this period include A. Hassan's *Tafsir al-Furqan*, Mahmud Aziz's *Tafsir al-Qur'an Bahasa Indonesia*, Mahmud Yunus's *Tafsir Qur'an Karim*, *Qur'an Indonesia* prepared by the Syarikat Kweekschool Muhammadiyah, Iskandar Idris's *Tafsir Hibarna*, and K.H. Ahmad Sanusi's *Tafsir asy-Syamsiyah* (Amin, 2021). These works illustrate the formative character of modern Indonesian exegesis, particularly its concern with making the Qur'an accessible through concise explanations and the Indonesian language.

2. The 1951–1980 Period

Between 1951 and 1980, Indonesian Qur'anic exegesis began to develop in a more systematic direction and became increasingly responsive to contemporary intellectual and social conditions. Representative works from this period include Hamka's *Tafsir al-Azhar*, the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs' *Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, Yayasan Bahrul 'Ulum's *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya*, and Bachtiar Surin's *Terjemah dan Tafsir al-Qur'an: Huruf Arab dan Latin* (Amin 2021). The inclusion of both commentaries and annotated translations in this inventory reflects the historically fluid boundary between translation and exegesis in Indonesian Qur'anic scholarship.

This period also witnessed the wider circulation of commentaries written in regional languages. These included K.H. Muhammad Ramli's Sundanese-language *Al-Kitabul Mubin*, first published in 1974, and K.H. Bisri Mustofa's Javanese-language *Al-Ibriz li-*

Ma'rifat Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Azīz, completed in 1960. Such works demonstrate the continuing vernacularization of the Qur'an and the role of local languages in communicating its meanings to Indonesian Muslim communities.

Although many works from this period continued to draw extensively on Arabic exegetical models and intellectual sources, Hamka's *Tafsir al-Azhar* displayed a particularly strong Indonesian social and cultural sensibility. From the perspective of exegetical sources, the works of this period are generally classified as *tafsīr bi al-ra'y*, in the sense that they incorporate the exegete's reasoning and *ijtihād*. From the perspective of presentation, they employ the *ijmā'ī*, or synoptic, and *taḥlīlī*, or analytical, methods. Within the typology adopted by Natasya (2023), most are classified as predominantly *ijmā'ī*, whereas *Tafsir al-Azhar* is distinguished by its more extensive *taḥlīlī* treatment.

Two principal orientations may be identified within this framework. The first is a general orientation found in many of the commentaries of the period. The second is the literary-social orientation (*al-adabī al-ijtimā'ī*), combined with Sufi elements, that characterizes Hamka's *Tafsir al-Azhar*. Its engagement with Indonesian social realities distinguishes it from commentaries that remained more closely tied to inherited explanatory patterns (Natasya, 2023).

3. The 1981–2000 Period

Indonesian Qur'anic exegesis expanded significantly between 1981 and 2000. Although some surveys estimate that approximately one hundred exegetical works were produced during this period, many were never widely published and therefore remained inaccessible to the general public. The available literature consequently represents only part of the exegetical production of the period.

Among the published works were Oemar Bakry's *Tafsir Rahmat* (1983); Nashruddin Baidan's *Tafsir bi al-Ra'y: Upaya Penggalan Konsep Wanita dalam al-Qur'an* (1999); Zaitunah Subhan's *Tafsir Kebencian: Studi Bias Gender dalam Tafsir* (1999); and M. Quraish Shihab's *Tafsir al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian al-Qur'an* (2000). These titles reflect an increasing concern with specific themes and contemporary issues, including gender, social relations, spirituality, and the contextual interpretation of the Qur'an.

This period was also marked by considerable methodological diversification. Qur'anic interpretation was no longer dominated exclusively by the *taḥlīlī* and *ijmā'ī* methods; the *muqāran*, or comparative, and *mawḍū'ī*, or thematic, methods also became increasingly prominent (Natasya, 2023). These methodological developments enabled exegetes to organize their discussions around specific concepts, social problems, or comparisons among verses and commentaries.

Method, however, should be distinguished from exegetical orientation. The terms *ijmā'ī*, *taḥlīlī*, *muqāran*, and *mawḍū'ī* describe how an interpretation is organized and conducted, whereas terms such as linguistic, juridical, theological, Sufi, and literary-social identify its dominant intellectual orientation. A single commentary may therefore employ more than one method and simultaneously incorporate several orientations. *Tafsir al-*

Mishbah, for example, may be understood as having a composite orientation because it integrates linguistic, literary-social, legal, and other forms of analysis.

This periodization provides an important historical context for comparing Mahmud Yunus and M. Quraish Shihab. Yunus's *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* emerged during the formative period of modern Indonesian exegesis, when concise explanations, lexical clarification, and accessibility were primary concerns. By contrast, Shihab's *Tafsir al-Mishbah* appeared during a period of methodological diversification and greater thematic specialization. This historical difference helps explain why the linguistic orientation in Yunus's commentary tends to be concise and practical, whereas Shihab develops linguistic analysis in a more detailed and integrative manner.

The Linguistic Orientation of Mahmud Yunus's *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* in Comparison with Quraish Shihab's *Tafsir al-Mishbah*

Among Indonesian Qur'anic commentaries that display a discernible linguistic (*lughawī*) orientation, Mahmud Yunus's *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* occupies a significant position. Of his numerous publications, this commentary became one of his most consequential works because of its broad circulation and influence among Indonesian Muslims. His attempt to translate Qur'anic meanings and provide an Indonesian commentary represented a bold intellectual initiative. At the time, the permissibility of translating the Qur'an into languages other than Arabic had not yet been accepted by all Muslim scholars, and some even regarded the practice as religiously prohibited. Yunus began this pioneering project around 1922, an undertaking that presupposed considerable proficiency in Arabic (Rouf, 2020).

The project was temporarily suspended amid criticism and opposition from scholars who rejected his initiative. In 1924, Yunus continued his studies in Egypt to deepen his knowledge of the Islamic sciences. During his studies there, he encountered scholarly arguments supporting the permissibility of translating Qur'anic meanings. According to the position of one of his teachers at Dār al-'Ulūm, such translation could even constitute a *farḍ kifāyah*, or collective religious obligation.

After completing his studies in Egypt and returning to Indonesia, Yunus became involved in teaching and educational leadership at two institutions established in 1931: al-Jāmi'ah al-Islāmiyyah and Normal Islam, also known as *Kulliyat al-Mu'allimīn al-Islāmiyyah*. In 1935, he resumed his translation and commentary project and gave it the title *Tafsir Qur'an Karim*. The work was initially published serially in installments. H.M.K. Bakry assisted Yunus with the translation of *jūz* 7 through 18, and the complete translation and commentary of all thirty *jūz* was finished in April 1938 (Yunus, 2003).

Yunus arranged each page of the commentary into two parallel sections. The Arabic Qur'anic text appears in the right-hand column, while its Indonesian translation in Latin script appears in the left-hand column. For verses requiring further explanation, Yunus added concise interpretive notes at the bottom of the page in a format resembling footnotes. These explanations generally occupy no more than half a page. This layout allows readers to move easily between the Arabic text, its Indonesian translation, and the supplementary commentary.

Rouf (2020) estimates that approximately 60 percent of the work consists of the Indonesian translation of the Qur'anic text, while the remaining 40 percent consists of explanatory notes

addressing particular terms, concepts, and religious teachings. Yunus predominantly employs a literal translation strategy. Nevertheless, he also uses meaning-based translation when a strictly word-for-word rendering would not adequately convey the intended meaning. Interpretive additions or meaning-based renderings are generally enclosed in parentheses, while more extensive explanations are placed in the footnotes. His translation practice should therefore not be described as exclusively literal; rather, it combines lexical correspondence with interpretive clarification.

Yunus's linguistic orientation is evident in his tendency to emphasize the lexical meanings and semantic ranges of Qur'anic words and expressions. In explaining a verse, he frequently discusses particular vocabulary and then presents the verse's general meaning. This practice is selective rather than exhaustive. Some words receive no separate lexical explanation, while others are discussed in greater detail because they function as significant Qur'anic or religious terms.

In several instances, Yunus explains a term by examining its use in other Qur'anic verses. This cross-referential technique enables him to clarify the semantic range of a word and determine its meaning within a particular context. His linguistic analysis is therefore not limited to providing dictionary equivalents; it also considers how a word functions across different Qur'anic contexts. The combination of lexical explanation, semantic clarification, and cross-referencing supports the classification of *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* as a commentary with a significant *lughawī* orientation.

Nevertheless, Yunus's linguistic approach is primarily functional and pedagogical rather than extensively philological. His explanations are designed to help Indonesian readers understand Qur'anic vocabulary without burdening them with prolonged grammatical or rhetorical discussions. This feature differentiates his commentary from M. Quraish Shihab's *Tafsir al-Mishbah*. Both exegetes regard linguistic analysis as indispensable to understanding the Qur'an, but they apply it at different levels of detail. Yunus generally compresses his linguistic explanations into the translation and concise footnotes, whereas Shihab incorporates them into a more extended exegetical discussion.

Yunus's sustained engagement with Arabic was shaped by both his family environment and formal education. He was born into a family with a strong religious background. His father had studied in the *surau* tradition and possessed sufficient religious knowledge to be appointed *Imam Nagari*, a community religious leader. His mother, Hafsah, had not received formal schooling because no village school was available in her community at the time. Nevertheless, she came from a respected scholarly family and was a granddaughter of Shaykh Muhammad Ali, a prominent local scholar, known as Tuanku Kolok (Rina, 2011).

Yunus began learning the Qur'an from his grandfather, Engku Gading, who had established a *surau* in their community (Herry & et al., 2006). His teachers recognized his intellectual ability from an early age, and he had already acquired considerable proficiency in Arabic before beginning his studies in Egypt. His subsequent education in Egypt further strengthened his command of Arabic and broadened his engagement with Islamic intellectual traditions. His expertise in Arabic is also reflected in his extensive body of linguistic and pedagogical publications. Rouf (2020) identifies at least fifteen Arabic-language instructional works, counting the individual volumes separately:

1. *Pelajaran Bahasa Arab I*
2. *Pelajaran Bahasa Arab II*
3. *Pelajaran Bahasa Arab III*
4. *Pelajaran Bahasa Arab IV*
5. *Durūs al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah ‘alā al-Taṭīqah al-Ḥadīthah I*
6. *Durūs al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah ‘alā al-Taṭīqah al-Ḥadīthah II*
7. *Metodik Khusus Bahasa Arab*
8. *Kamus Arab-Indonesia*
9. *Contoh Tulisan Arab*
10. *Muṭāla‘ah wa al-Maḥfūzāt*
11. *Durūs al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah I*
12. *Durūs al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah II*
13. *Durūs al-Lughah al-‘Arabiyyah III*
14. *Muḥādathah al-‘Arabiyyah*
15. *Al-Mukhtārāt li al-Muṭāla‘ah wa al-Maḥfūzāt*

These publications encompass graded language instruction, reading, conversation, lexicography, writing, memorization, and Arabic-language pedagogy. They provide important biographical and bibliographic context for Yunus’s linguistic expertise. Nevertheless, his classification as a linguistically oriented exegete must ultimately rest on textual evidence from *Tafsir Qur’an Karim* itself rather than on his educational background alone. The following verse-level examples demonstrate how this *lughawī* orientation operates in his commentary and how it compares with the more extensive linguistic analysis found in *Tafsir al-Mishbah*.

Textual Evidence from *Tafsir Qur’an Karim*

The Functions and Meanings of Mā

In a note appended to Q. al-Mā’idah 5:6, Mahmud Yunus discusses eight grammatical and semantic functions of the particle *mā*, drawing on examples from several Qur’anic verses and ordinary Arabic usage (Yunus, 2003).

1. Negative *mā* (*mā al-nāfiyah*)

In this function, *mā* means “not.” For example, *mā hādhā basharan* means “This is not a human being” (Q. 12:31), while *mā yurīdu Allāhu li-yaj‘ala ‘alaykum min ḥarajin* means “God does not intend to impose any hardship upon you” (Q. 5:6).

2. Relative *mā* (*mā al-mawṣūlah*)

In this construction, *mā* means “that which,” “whatever,” or “what.” Yunus cites the phrase *wa-yata‘allamūna mā yaḍurruhum wa-lā yanfa‘uhum*, meaning “They learn that which harms them and does not benefit them” (Q. 2:102). He criticizes the interpretation of *mā* in this passage as a negative particle, which would produce the meaning “They learn something that does not harm them and does not benefit them.” According to Yunus, this rendering is erroneous because it reverses the meaning of the verse.

3. Interrogative *mā* (*mā al-istifhāmiyyah*)

In this function, *mā* introduces a question and means “what?” An example is ‘*amma yatasa’alūna*, “About what are they asking one another?” (Q. 78:1). Here, ‘*amma* results from the combination of the preposition ‘*an* and the interrogative particle *mā*.

4. Exclamatory *mā* (*mā al-ta’ajjubiyyah*)

This construction expresses astonishment or wonder. Yunus cites *mā aṣbarahum ‘alā al-nār*, which may be rendered as “How patiently they endure the Fire!” (Q. 2:175).

5. Nominalizing *mā* (*mā al-maṣdariyyah*)

In this function, *mā* transforms the clause that follows it into the equivalent of a verbal noun. An example is *wa-ḍāqat ‘alayhim al-arḍu bi-mā raḥubat*, “The earth, despite all its vastness, became constrained for them” (Q. 9:118). The perfect verb *raḥubat* is nominalized through its combination with *mā*, producing the sense of “its vastness.”

6. Emphatic or augmentative *mā* (*mā al-zā’idah*)

Yunus explains that this form of *mā* reinforces the expression in which it occurs. He cites *fā-bi-mā raḥmatin min Allāhi linta lahum*, “It was by a mercy from God that you dealt gently with them” (Q. 3:159).

7. Indefinite *mā*

In this usage, *mā* conveys the meaning of “any” or “whatever.” Yunus illustrates this function with the non-Qur’anic expression *a’ṭinī kitāban mā*, meaning “Give me any book whatsoever.”

8. Relative or nominalizing *mā*

A construction may sometimes admit more than one grammatical analysis. The phrase *Allāhu yaf’alu mā yuīdu* can be understood by treating *mā* as a relative pronoun: “God does what He wills.” Alternatively, if *mā* is interpreted as a nominalizing particle, the phrase may be rendered as “God acts according to His will.”

This discussion demonstrates that Yunus does more than provide an Indonesian equivalent for the Qur’anic text. He classifies the grammatical functions of individual particles and explains how alternative classifications can affect the meaning of a verse. His criticism of the erroneous interpretation of *mā* in Q. 2:102 is particularly significant because it shows his awareness that grammatical analysis is essential to preserving the intended meaning of the Qur’anic text.

The Meanings of Zālim, Fāsiq, Kāfir, Rabbāniyyūn, and Aḥbār

In his commentary on Q. al-Mā’idah 5:44-47, Yunus offers concise definitions of several important religious terms (Yunus, 2003):

1. *Zālim* denotes an unjust or wrongful person. In Yunus’s formulation, injustice consists of placing something somewhere other than its proper place; justice is therefore the opposite of *ẓulm*.
2. *Fāsiq* refers to one who transgresses the limits or rules established by Islamic law.

3. *Kāfir* denotes one who does not believe in God, His scriptures, and the other fundamental articles of faith.
4. *Rabbāniyyūn* refers to those who are devoted to God and have attained excellence in both knowledge and religious practice. Yunus also associates the term with senior Jewish religious scholars, whom he analogizes to the *awliyāʾ Allāh* in the Islamic tradition.
5. *Aḥbār*, the plural of *ḥibr*, refers to learned religious scholars. Yunus compares them to Muslim jurists.

These explanations are brief, but they show Yunus's concern with both the lexical meanings and the religious connotations of Qur'anic terminology. His use of analogies drawn from Islamic scholarly categories also reflects his pedagogical effort to make unfamiliar Qur'anic terms intelligible to Indonesian Muslim readers.

The Meanings of Baḥīrah, Sā'ibah, Waṣīlah, and Ḥām

In explaining Q. al-Mā'idah 5:103, Yunus defines four terms associated with pre-Islamic Arabian practices (Yunus, 2003):

1. *Baḥīrah* refers to a she-camel whose milk could not be drawn because the animal had been consecrated to idols.
2. *Sā'ibah* denotes a camel that could no longer be burdened or used for labor because it had been dedicated to idols.
3. *Waṣīlah* refers, in Yunus's explanation, to a she-camel whose first and second offspring were both female.
4. *Ḥām* denotes a male breeding camel that, after siring a prescribed number of offspring, could no longer be burdened and was consecrated to idols.

Yunus concludes that such practices have no foundation in the divinely revealed law. Once again, his explanation is concise and directed primarily toward clarifying culturally unfamiliar vocabulary.

The foregoing examples demonstrate that Yunus selectively supplements his translation with explanations of grammatical particles, lexical meanings, technical religious concepts, and historically specific terminology. His analysis emphasizes the lexical and contextual meanings of Qur'anic expressions, although it is not applied systematically to every verse. The *lughawī* orientation of *Tafsīr Qur'an Karīm* is therefore selective and pedagogical: linguistic explanation is employed whenever Yunus considers it necessary to prevent misunderstanding or make the Qur'anic message more accessible.

The Linguistic Orientation of M. Quraish Shihab's *Tafsīr al-Mishbah*

M. Quraish Shihab's academic formation provides relevant context for the extensive linguistic analysis found in *Tafsīr al-Mishbah*. In 1958, he was sent to Cairo and admitted to the second year of al-Azhar's secondary program. He subsequently studied in the Department of Qur'anic Exegesis and Hadith at al-Azhar University's Faculty of *Uṣūl al-Dīn*. He obtained his Licentiate degree in 1967 and his master's degree in 1969. In 1973, he returned to Ujung Pandang and served as deputy rector for academic and student affairs at IAIN Alauddin until 1980. He then

returned to al-Azhar to pursue doctoral studies in Qur'anic exegesis, completing his doctorate in 1982.

Shihab began writing *Tafsir al-Mishbah* in Cairo on June 18, 1999, while serving as Indonesia's ambassador to Egypt. He completed the work in Jakarta on September 5, 2003. The completed commentary covers all 30 *juz'* of the Qur'an in 15 volumes (Ibrahim & Usman, 2013). Its organization and exegetical procedures reveal sustained attention to linguistic analysis. According to Rouf (2020), Shihab generally employs the following structure:

1. He begins with a general introduction to each surah.
2. He divides the verses into thematic units and provides a translation of each unit.
3. He analyzes vocabulary that he considers necessary for understanding the verses.
4. He inserts explanatory words or phrases to clarify meanings that are implicit in the Qur'anic wording.
5. He cites other Qur'anic verses and Prophetic traditions as interpretive evidence, sometimes presenting only their translations.
6. He explains the *munāsabah*, or thematic and structural relationships, among verses and passages.

After introducing the general features of a surah, Shihab proceeds to interpret its verses sequentially. The Arabic text is divided into smaller units, each of which is followed by a translation and an extensive explanation. His *lughawī* orientation becomes particularly evident in his discussions of verb forms, sentence structures, etymologies, and the semantic range of Qur'anic vocabulary.

Textual Evidence from *Tafsir al-Mishbah*

Verb Forms and Sentence Structure in Q. al-Şāffāt 37:102

In interpreting Q. al-Şāffāt 37:102, Shihab draws attention to the use of the imperfect verb (*fi'l muḍā'irī*), which can indicate present or future action (Shihab, 2002).

1. The verb *arā* ("I see") suggests that Abraham's dream remained vividly present to him when he related it to his son.
2. The verb *adhbaḥuka* ("I am slaughtering you") indicates that the divine command conveyed through the dream had not yet been carried out and therefore required implementation.
3. The passive verb *tu'mar* ("you are commanded") appears in the son's response. Its imperfect form conveys his readiness and indicates that his father should carry out whatever divine command he was receiving or might receive.
4. The son says *if'al mā tu'mar* ("Do what you are commanded") rather than "Slaughter me." For Shihab, this formulation reveals the basis of the son's obedience: he submits because the act constitutes a command from God. Whatever its form or manner, he accepts the divine command completely.
5. The statement *satajjidunī in shā'a Allāhu minā al-şābirīn* ("You will find me, God willing, among the patient") associates the son's promised patience with God's will. By invoking

the divine will before affirming his own patience, the son demonstrates humility and exemplary propriety toward God.

Shihab's analysis shows that grammatical tense and sentence construction are not treated merely as formal features. Rather, they become the basis for interpreting the psychological disposition, obedience, and theological awareness of the figures represented in the verse.

The Meanings of Al-Khabīth, Al-Ṭayyib, and Al-Albāb in Q. al-Mā'idah 5:100

Shihab also provides extensive lexical and semantic explanations of the principal terms in Q. al-Mā'idah 5:100 (Shihab, 2002).

1. *Al-khabīth* denotes anything regarded as objectionable because of its badness or vileness, whether material or immaterial and whether judged by sound reason or religious law. The term encompasses corruption in belief, speech, and conduct.
2. *Al-ṭayyib* is the opposite of *al-khabīth*. It encompasses what religion or sound reason commands or permits. According to Shihab, that which religion permits cannot be intrinsically evil; anything corrupt in its substance, cause, or form cannot be pleasing to God and His Messenger or acceptable to sound reason.
3. *Al-albāb* is the plural of *lubb*, meaning the innermost essence or kernel of something. A nut, for example, consists of an outer shell surrounding its edible kernel, and this inner part is called its *lubb*. Accordingly, *ulū al-albāb* are people endowed with pure intellects that are not obscured by the "shell" or fog of ideas that produces confusion. Those who reflect on God's ordinances and act upon them may attain success, whereas rejection of those ordinances indicates confusion in one's reasoning.

This explanation illustrates Shihab's tendency to move from etymology and concrete imagery to ethical and theological interpretation. His lexical analysis therefore serves as an entry point into the wider message of the verse.

The Meanings of Baḥīrah, Sā'ibah, Waṣīlah, and Ḥām in Q. al-Mā'idah 5:103

Shihab's interpretation of the four pre-Islamic designations in Q. al-Mā'idah 5:103 is considerably more detailed than that of Yunus (Shihab, 2002).

1. *Baḥīrah* is derived from the verb *baḥara*, meaning "to slit." According to one account of pre-Islamic practice, when a camel had given birth five times and its fifth offspring was male, its ear was slit, and it could no longer be ridden or slaughtered. Instead, it was left alive as an offering to the gods. Another account holds that if the fifth offspring was male, it was slaughtered and eaten; if it was female, its ear was slit, and it could neither be ridden nor milked, except when its milk was served to guests.
2. *Sā'ibah* is derived from *sāba*, meaning "to roam" or "to move freely." Some scholars understand the term as referring to a camel treated similarly to a *baḥīrah*. Such an animal would be dedicated to a deity when its owner returned safely from a journey or recovered from an illness.
3. *Waṣīlah* is derived from *waṣala*, meaning "to join" or "to reach." According to one account, the term referred to a goat that had given birth repeatedly and whose seventh delivery produced male and female twins. The female was then said to have "joined" or

protected her male sibling. The mother's milk was reserved for men, and the animal itself was allowed to roam freely like a *sā'ibah*. Another interpretation states that a male offspring was dedicated to the gods, whereas a female belonged to its owners. If male and female twins were born together, the female was said to have "joined" her brother; consequently, the male was not slaughtered but was instead dedicated to their gods.

4. *Ḥām* is derived from *ḥamā*, meaning "to protect" or "to prohibit." According to one explanation, the term designated an animal whose offspring had itself produced offspring. Such an animal became protected: it could no longer be ridden or made to carry a burden and could not be prevented from eating or drinking wherever it wished. Another account identifies the *ḥām* as an animal that had produced ten pregnancies, after which its back was protected from carrying burdens and it was permitted to graze and drink freely.

Unlike Yunus's concise definitions, Shihab presents the etymological roots of the four terms and records multiple historical explanations of the customs to which they refer. The comparison shows that both exegetes seek to clarify culturally unfamiliar Qur'anic vocabulary, but their depth of treatment differs substantially.

Comparative Analysis

The examples above demonstrate that both Mahmud Yunus and M. Quraish Shihab employ a discernible *lughawī* orientation. This conclusion, however, should be based primarily on their exegetical practices rather than merely on their recognized proficiency in Arabic. In both works, linguistic competence shapes the interpretation of Qur'anic vocabulary, grammatical forms, and sentence structures. Nevertheless, the scope and function of linguistic analysis differ between the two commentaries.

Yunus generally presents linguistic material concisely. His explanations focus on the basic grammatical functions of particles, the lexical meanings of key terms, and brief descriptions of concepts that may be unfamiliar to Indonesian readers. This concision corresponds to the principal purpose of *Tafsir Qur'an Karim*: to render the meanings of the Qur'an into accessible Indonesian and to provide supplementary clarification only where necessary. At the time Yunus began this project, modern Indonesian translations of the Qur'an remained scarce, and the permissibility of translating the sacred text was still contested among some Muslim scholars. His work therefore constituted an important pedagogical intervention intended to enable readers with limited Arabic proficiency to move beyond recitation toward an understanding of the Qur'an's message.

Shihab, by contrast, presents linguistic analysis in a more extensive and systematic manner. He examines etymology, morphology, verb tense, syntax, semantic range, rhetorical formulation, and the relationships among verses. Furthermore, he frequently moves from linguistic form to theological, ethical, and psychological significance. His analysis of Q. 37:102, for example, demonstrates how verbal forms and sentence construction contribute to the representation of Abraham's and his son's obedience to God. Similarly, his discussion of Q. 5:103 combines etymology with several historical accounts in order to reconstruct the cultural meanings of its terminology.

Heizer (2003, pp. 91-92) identifies two principal motivations underlying the composition of *Tafsir al-Mishbah*. First, Shihab was concerned that many Indonesian Muslims displayed a

strong attachment to the Qur'an but often confined that attachment to admiration of its recitation. For Shihab, recitation should be accompanied by an awareness of the Qur'an's majesty, an understanding of its meanings, and sustained practices of *tadhakkur* and *tadabbur*. Second, many Muslims who wished to understand the Qur'an encountered significant obstacles, including limited time, insufficient mastery of the relevant disciplines, and a lack of accessible yet comprehensive reference works. These circumstances help explain why Shihab sought to provide explanations that were detailed and intellectually rigorous while remaining accessible to a broad readership.

The principal distinction between the two commentaries, therefore, lies not in the presence or absence of a linguistic orientation but in its scale, function, and mode of presentation. In *Tafsir Qur'an Karim*, linguistic analysis is predominantly selective, concise, and translation-oriented. It functions as a pedagogical aid intended to prevent misunderstanding and facilitate direct access to the Qur'anic message. In *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, linguistic analysis is more expansive and integrative: it constitutes a central exegetical instrument through which lexical, grammatical, rhetorical, historical, theological, and ethical dimensions of the text are interconnected. Despite these differences, both works demonstrate the indispensable role of Arabic linguistic knowledge in Indonesian Qur'anic exegesis and represent important, albeit distinct, stages in its intellectual development.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that linguistic analysis constitutes an important feature of both Mahmud Yunus's *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* and M. Quraish Shihab's *Tafsir al-Mishbah*, although it serves different exegetical purposes in each work. Yunus employs concise and selective explanations of grammatical functions, lexical meanings, and Qur'anic terminology primarily to support translation and make the Qur'an accessible to Indonesian readers with limited knowledge of Arabic. Shihab, by contrast, integrates more extensive analyses of etymology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and rhetorical structure into his verse-by-verse interpretation.

These differences should not be understood merely as disparities in linguistic competence. Rather, they reflect distinct historical contexts, intended audiences, and exegetical objectives. Yunus adopts a pedagogical and translation-oriented approach, whereas Shihab develops a more analytical and elaborative form of linguistic exegesis. The findings also challenge the tendency to regard *Tafsir Qur'an Karim* solely as a translation, since its explanatory notes reveal a clear *lughawī* dimension. Accordingly, the two works represent different stages in the development of Indonesian Qur'anic exegesis: Yunus broadened public access to the meanings of the Qur'an, while Shihab expanded the depth and scope of its linguistic interpretation. Together, their works affirm that mastery of Arabic remains fundamental to a rigorous and contextually meaningful understanding of the Qur'anic text.

References

- Abdullah, M. (2020). Pembaharuan Pemikiran Mahmud Yunus Tentang Pendidikan Islam dan Relevansinya dengan Pendidikan Modern. *Al Murabbi: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 5(2), 22-33.
- Amin, M. (2021). Sejarah Tafsir Indonesia Abad ke XX. *Jurnal Ilmu Agama: Mengkaji*

- Doktrin, Pemikiran, Dan Fenomena Agama*, 22(2), 238-249.
<https://doi.org/10.19109/jia.v22i2.10967>
- Anwar, M. K., Dozan, W., & Malik. (2022). *Tafsir Nusantara Kajian Komprehensif Metodologi Tafsir*. UIN Mataram Press.
- Edi, & Fangesty, M. A. S. (2023). Tafsir Lughawi: Historisitas dan Perdebatannya. *Jurnal Iman Dan Spiritualitas*, 3(4), 675-684. <https://doi.org/10.15575/jis.v3i4.31248>
- Firdaus, M. I., & Surur, M. M. (2025). Tafsir Lughawi: Sejarah, Batasan, dan Polemik Penafsiran. *JSIM: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Pendidikan*, 5(6), 1293-1301.
- Gusmian, I. (2013). *Khazanah tafsir Indonesia : dari hermeneutika hingga ideologi* (1st ed.). Penerbit & distribusi, LKiS Yogyakarta.
- Herry, M., & dkk. (2006). *Tokoh-tokoh Islam yang berpengaruh Abad 20*. Gema Insani.
- Kemendikbud. (n.d.). *KBBI Daring*.
- Kusroni. (2019). Mengenal ragam Pendekatan, Metode, dan Corak dalam Penafsiran Al-Qur'an. *Jurnal Kaca Jurusan Ushuluddin STAI AL FITHRAH*, 9(1), 87-104.
- Malaka, A. (2021). Berbagai Metode dan Corak Penafsiran Al-Qur'an. *Bayani: Jurnal Studi Islam*, 1(2), 143-157. <https://doi.org/10.52496/bayaniv.1i.2pp143-157>
- Munawwir, A. W. (1997). *Kamus al-munawwir Arab-Indonesia terlengkap*. Pustaka Progressif.
- Murni, D. (2020). Tafsir Dari Segi Coraknya Lughawi , Fiqhi Dan Ilmiy. *Syahadah*, 8(1), 55-92.
- Natasya, H. (2023). *Identitas Tafsir Nusantara: Analisis Historis dan Perkembangan Tafsir di Indonesia*. 21(2), 15-46.
- Rina, M. (2011). *Pemikiran dan karya-karya Prof. Dr. H. Mahmud Yunus tentang Pendidikan Islam*.
- Rouf, A. (2020). *Mozaik Tafsir Indonesia Kajian Ensiklopedis Karya Tafsir Nusantara Dari Abdur Rauf As-Singkili Hingga Muhammad Quraish Shihab*. Sahifa Publishing.
- Sa'dullah, A. (2016). *Analisis Metode dan Corak tafsir Ijmali karya Prof. Dr. Muhibbin Noor, M.Ag*. Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang.
- Shihab, M. Q. (2002). Tafsir Al-Misbah: Pesan, Kesan, dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an. In *Lentera Hati* (Vol. 12). Lentera Hati.
- Syukur, A. (2015). Mengenal Corak Tafsir Al-Qur'an. *El-Furqania : Jurnal Ushuluddin Dan Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman*, 1(01), 83-104. <https://doi.org/10.54625/elfurqania.v1i01.877>
- Yunus, M. (2003). *Tafsir Qur'an Karim*. Klang Book Centre.