

A Semantic Analysis of the Concepts of “Concealment” in the Holy Qur’an Based on Conceptual Links

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to explain the structure of the conceptual network of “concealment” in the Holy Qur’an and to identify the semantic distinctions among the vocabulary of this domain, while rejecting the notion of total synonymy. Using a descriptive-analytical method grounded in a semantic framework and componential analysis, this study examines the etymology, morphological structures, and contextual usage of eleven selected words. The findings show that the use of concealment-related vocabulary in the Qur’an rests on a precise and systematic order, such that factors including the type of object concealed, the differentiation among acoustic, material, and cognitive domains, the instrument and manner of covering, axiological orientation, and the semantic weight of morphological patterns distinguish the semantic boundaries of these words from one another. Moreover, in the epistemic domain, some of these roots, moving beyond their original lexical meaning, have been redefined as key concepts of the monotheistic worldview. The results of the research indicate that the conceptual network of concealment in the Qur’an possesses a multilayered system that is not absolutely interchangeable; attention to these subtleties frees the researcher from interpretive reductionism and opens new horizons in recognizing the rhetorical inimitability of the Qur’an.

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Introduction

In order to express various concepts, including the concept of concealment, the Holy Qur'an draws upon a set of vocabulary and linguistic constructions. The use of words such as "*ikhfā'*," "*iknān*," "*khab'*," "*khafat*," "*khamr*," "*dass*," "*satr*," "*ghufrān*," "*kitmān*," "*kufr*," and "*muwārāt*" shows that the concept of concealment in the Qur'an is not confined to a single, uniform meaning; rather, in connection with the subject matter, context, morphological structure, and its relation to concepts such as disclosure, covering, protection, denial, and effacement of traces, it takes on various forms. Hence, identifying the relationships among these words and examining the position of each within the semantic network of the Qur'an is essential for arriving at a more precise understanding of Qur'anic significations and for avoiding the equating of these words with one another.

Although the meanings of a number of these words have been examined separately in lexicographical sources and in some semantic studies, the conceptual links among the set of words related to concealment, and the manner of their distinction in Qur'anic usage, have rarely been studied in a coherent and comparative fashion. The central problem of this research is the relationship these words bear to one another and the linguistic and contextual components and indicators by which the Holy Qur'an employs each of them in its own particular place. The importance of this problem lies in the fact that disregarding the differences in usage and the conceptual links among words of the same domain can lead to general, synonym-based, and at times imprecise readings of the verses of the Qur'an.

The present study has been carried out with a comparative approach and a descriptive-analytical method. In this method, the lexical and etymological meanings of the words are first examined by consulting authoritative sources; their Qur'anic usages are then analyzed with regard to context, the object to which they pertain, morphological structure, and syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations. On this basis, the article attempts, while mapping the conceptual network of the selected words, to explain the logic of their usage and their semantic relationship within the text of the Qur'an. The structure

of the article is likewise organized accordingly: after reviewing the background and clarifying the concepts and theoretical foundations of the research, the selected words are analyzed comparatively, and finally, the outcome of the conceptual relationships and the significations derived from this examination will be presented.

Literature Review

The semantic analysis of Qur'anic vocabulary centered on the concepts of concealment and covering is among the challenging areas of research in Qur'anic linguistics and textual exegesis. Semantic analysis of the vocabulary in this domain shows that these concepts have long received attention in lexicographical and exegetical sources, each with its own particular semantic weight and with regard to different contexts. Previous studies have chiefly addressed this topic by focusing on lexical root-finding, contextual analysis, and the mapping of semantic networks.

In the field of studies on the semantics of the Holy Qur'an, valuable works have been authored by leading scholars, each addressing one aspect of the semantic analysis of Qur'anic vocabulary. Foremost among these scholars, Mohammad Va'ez-zadeh Khorasani, in his valuable work *al-Mu'jam fī Fiqh Lughat al-Qur'ān wa Sirr Balāghatih* (2009), with an emphasis on Arabic philology and the rhetoric of the Qur'an, undertook a deep investigation of the semantics of vocabulary and the extraction of their subtle semantic components. Among classical sources, the book *al-Furuq al-Lughawīyyah* by Abu Hilāl 'Askarī (1991), centered on the semantic distinctions among near-synonymous words, and likewise the *Farhang-nāmeḥ-yi Tahlīl-i Vāzhegān-i Mushābih dar Qur'ān* (Dictionary of the Analysis of Similar Words in the Qur'an), published by the Center for Qur'anic Culture and Learning (2019), through a comparative examination of vocabulary, has taken effective steps toward the structural semantics of the Qur'an.

Among the Western scholars who have devoted themselves to the study of Qur'anic semantics, Toshihiko Izutsu occupies a special place. In his two landmark works, *God and Man in the Qur'an*:

Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung (1964) and *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (1966), he undertook a systematic analysis of the key concepts of the Qur'an through an innovative method. Izutsu's approach, which is a blend of structural and historical semantics, rests on identifying "focus-words" and mapping their "semantic field" within the conceptual network of the Qur'an. In his view, understanding the Qur'anic worldview becomes possible only through an examination of the intra-communal and oppositional relations of vocabulary within this integrated semantic network.

Nevertheless, despite the rich background of research in this field, there remain significant research gaps in the systematic analysis of the conceptual links among the vocabulary of this semantic domain. The present study, by employing the method of domain semantics and a comparative examination of the vocabulary related to "concealment" in the Holy Qur'an, seeks to offer a comprehensive mapping of the conceptual relations among these terms and, by presenting a systematic approach, to take a fresh step in completing previous studies and to open new horizons in understanding the semantic subtleties of the Qur'an's lexical network. An examination of the etymology of these words shows that, while many of them share the general concept of "covering," they nonetheless carry subtle differences. Differences in the usage of these words are likewise observable in religious and literary texts. These distinctions show that the semantic analysis of these words not only aids a more precise understanding of their meanings but can also prove effective in the exegesis of religious texts and in the analysis of their metaphorical usages.

Conceptual Framework: Semantics

The foundational concept that constitutes the cornerstone and theoretical framework of the present study is carefully examined and explained in this section so that, by establishing a common language and a coherent understanding of technical terms, a firm ground may be provided for the analyses of the research. Semantics, as a foundational branch of linguistics, is concerned with the systematic study of meaning and the conceptual relations among words, such that each

word is defined and delimited within a network of semantic commonalities and distinctions with other words. The key tool for investigating this conceptual network is "componential analysis" (Safavī 2018, 280). In this method, semanticists, by breaking down concepts into smaller constituent parts (semantic components), attain a deeper understanding of the conceptual structure of a word (Safavī 2018, 78); these components, which are a set of fundamental meaning-constituting features, make possible a more precise interpretation of syntactic and semantic relations within the context of speech (Palmer 1981, pp. 108-110). This analysis is generally carried out on two distinct levels: first, the lexical (conventional) level, in which the primary, historical meaning of a word is extracted by reliance on authoritative dictionaries and with consideration of the multiplicity of meanings recorded therein; second, the applied (contextual) level, which is oriented toward discovering the speaker's intent in a particular context of speech and with regard to the syntagmatic relations among words. Owing to its inherent complexity and its dependence on intra-linguistic and extra-linguistic factors, this level requires deeper semantic analyses; for componential analysis reveals more hidden layers of meaning, which are sometimes inferred directly from the context of the text and sometimes clarified through interaction with other terms of the same family (Palmer 1981, pp. 53-54), and thus, in accordance with contextual conditions, a word recovers its own particular and distinct meaning.

Data Analysis

In this section, in order to deconstruct the conceptual network of "concealment" in the Holy Qur'an and to reject the notion of total synonymy, eleven selected words are examined on the basis of the method of "componential analysis" and domain semantics. Each word is first explained at the level of its basic, etymological meaning by reliance on the oldest lexicographical sources, and is then analyzed at the level of relative, contextual meaning with attention to morphological structures, the contextual setting of the verses, and semantic relations. At the end of each entry, the semantic distinctions

of that word from its other conceptual counterparts will also be extracted, so that the precise geometry of word usage in the speech of revelation may be disclosed. These words are as follows:

1. Semantic Analysis of “*ikhfā*”

The word “*ikhfā*” is derived from the root *kh-f-y*, which carries two contrary meanings: being hidden and being manifest (Ibn Fāris 1984, 2:202). Lexicographers have taken the primary meaning of “*ikhfā*” to be covering and concealment (Farāhīdī 1993, 1:510; Ibn Duraid 2005, 1:545; Azharī 2000, 7:597; Fayyūmī 1984, 176). Likewise, derivatives such as “*khafā*” as opposed to “*alāniyyah*” (Farāhīdī 1993, 1:509) and “*khāfi*” in the sense of a hidden being, such as the jinn (Ibn Duraid 2005, 1:546), indicate the concept of being hidden.

In the Qur’an, “*khafā*” is used negatively with respect to God, as in: “*Nothing is indeed hidden from Allah in the earth or in the sky*”¹ (Quran 3:5), and with respect to human beings it is used in two domains: 1) concealing inward matters such as thoughts and intentions, as in the verse: “*...and whether you disclose what is in your hearts or hide it, Allah will bring you to account for it...*”² (Quran 2:284); 2) concealing external matters, such as charity: “*If you disclose your charities, that is well; but if you hide them and give them to the poor; that is better for you...*”³ (Quran 2:271), or adornment (Quran 24:31).

1.1. Semantic Distinction

1. *Ikhfā*’ as against *i’lān* and *ibdā*’: some scholars have set “*ikhfā*” in opposition to “*i’lān*” and “*ibdā*’,” defining it as concealment in the general sense (Rāghib Iṣfahānī 1991, 289).

2. The distinction between *ikhfā*’ and *satr*: ‘Allāmah Muṣṭafavī holds that “*satr*” refers to covering one thing beneath another, whereas “*ikhfā*” denotes mere hiddenness without an emphasis on the existence of a cover (Muṣṭafavī 1995, 3:96).

¹. ﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَخْفَىٰ عَلَيْهِ شَيْءٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ﴾ (آل عمران/ ٥)

². ﴿...إِنْ تُبْدُوا مَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَوْ تُخْفُوهُ يُحَاسِبْكُم بِهِ اللَّهُ...﴾ (البقرة/ ٢٨٤)

³. ﴿إِنْ تُبْدُوا الصَّدَقَاتِ فَنِعِمَّا هِيَ وَإِنْ تُخْفُوهَا وَتُؤْتُوهَا الْفُقَرَاءَ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ...﴾ (البقرة/ ٢٧١)

3. The difference between *ikhfā'* and *kitmān*: Abu Hilāl 'Askarī states that "*kitmān*" is confined to silence regarding a meaning, whereas "*ikhfā'*" also includes the concealment of objects or concepts and is more general than "*kitmān*" ('Askarī 1991, 448).

4. *Ikhfā'* and *asrār*: Ṭabarsī locates the difference between these two in the scope of their usage; "*ikhfā'*" is used for concealing both objects and meanings, whereas "*asrār*" refers only to the concealment of inward concepts (Ṭabarsī 1993, 9:448).

2. Semantic Analysis of "*iknān*"

The word "*iknān*" is derived from the root *kanna* and is used in lexicographical sources in the sense of covering, hiding (*satr*), or preserving a thing (Ibn Fāris 1984, 5:123; Farāhīdī 1993, 3:1601).

Some lexicographers, such as Farāhīdī (1993, ٣:١٦٠١) have interpreted it as anything that preserves another thing, while Ibn Duraid and others emphasize the meaning of hiding a thing within itself or covering it (*Jamharat al-Lughah*, 3:250; *Tahdhīb al-Lughah*, 9:452). These differences show that "*iknān*" is used both for material preservation (such as keeping an object in a vessel) and for spiritual preservation (such as keeping a secret).

In the Qur'an, "*iknān*" is sometimes set opposite "*i'lān*" (Quran 27:74), which indicates a semantic opposition between concealment and disclosure. Likewise, the words "*akinnah*" and "*maknūn*" in other verses denote both preservation and covering together (Rāghib Iṣfahānī 1991, 727). In light of this evidence, it may be concluded that "*iknān*" is more specific a term than "*satr*" and "*ikhfā'*," since it simultaneously encompasses both covering and protection.

This analysis, drawing on authoritative lexicographical and exegetical sources, has clarified the semantic distinctions of "*iknān*" from its cognate vocabulary and shows that this word carries a more complex semantic weight in Islamic and Qur'anic texts.

2.1. Semantic Distinction

- Difference from *satr*: unlike “*satr*,” which denotes only outward covering (such as covering a body with cloth), “*iknān*” includes, in addition to covering, the preservation and protection of the thing as well (‘Askarī 1991, 459). For example, Fayyūmī in *al-Miṣbāh al-Munīr* likens “*iknān*” to “*ghitā*” (covering), but with the added qualification of protection (Fayyūmī 1984, 542).

- Difference from *ikhfā*’ and *asrār*: “*ikhfā*” means absolute hiding, without emphasis on covering or preservation (Muṣṭafavī 1995, 10:122), whereas “*iknān*” is hiding accompanied by safekeeping. Likewise, “*asrār*” refers to concepts hidden within the mind, whereas “*iknān*” can apply to both material and spiritual matters.

3. Semantic Analysis of “*Khab*”

The word “*khab*”, from the root *kh-b-*’, denotes intense hiddenness and being stored away. Ibn Fāris (1984, 2:244) in *Mu‘jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah* defines this root as “concealing a thing.” The same meaning is confirmed in Fayyūmī’s *al-Miṣbāh al-Munīr* (163) with the expression “*mā istatar*” (that which has been covered). Some lexicographers, such as Ibn Duraid (2005, 1:483) in *Jamharat al-Lughah*, interpret it as “*shay’ makhbū*” (a covered thing) or “*mā hubi’a*.” Likewise, Jawharī (1984, 1:46) in *al-Ṣiḥāh* points to other usages such as “*ikhtaba’a*” (to hide oneself).

3.1. Semantic Distinction

Some scholars, such as Rāghib Iṣfahānī (1991, 274) in *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur’ān*, interpret “*khab*” as “being stored away,” whereas ‘Allāmah Muṣṭafavī (1995, 3:3) in *al-Taḥqīq* emphasizes that the point of distinction between “*khab*” and words such as “*satr*” and “*khafā*” lies in the intensity of concealment. In other words, “*khab*” denotes complete concealment, imperceptible to the senses, whereas “*satr*” denotes covering in the general sense and “*khafā*” stands opposite “*zuhūr*” (manifestation). For example, “*satr*” may refer to covering part of a thing, whereas “*khab*” refers to concealing it entirely.

In light of the sources cited, the primary meaning of “*khab*” is intense hiding or being stored away, and its difference from cognate

words such as "*satr*" and "*khafā*" lies in the degree of concealment and the inaccessibility of the object concealed. This distinction has specific applications in Qur'anic and traditional texts that require more precise examination in different contexts.

4. Semantic Analysis of "*Khafat*"

The root "*khafat*" (*khā'*, *fā'*, *tā'*) originally denotes whispering, concealment, hiding, and speaking softly (Ibn Fāris 1984, 2:202). Accordingly, "*ṣawṭun khaḥīṭ*" means a low voice as opposed to a loud one (Farāhīdī 1993, 1:505; Azharī 2000, 7:305, quoting Ibn Muṣaffar). Likewise, the expression "*khafata al-ṣawṭ*" means to quiet and lower the voice (Jawharī 1984, 1:248; Fayyūmī 1984, 175).

The words "*mukhāḥfatah*" and "*khafat*" are used by lexicographers in the sense of concealing speech and utterance (Rāghib Isfahānī 1991, 289 — "*takhāḥfut*" occurs once in the Qur'an and "*yatakhāḥfatūn*" occurs twice). Lexicographers have taken "*takhāḥfut*" to mean secret and covert consultation (Azharī 2000, 7:305), the concealing of words (Jawharī 1984, 1:248), and speaking in a low voice. From the sum of lexicographical opinions, it emerges that both "*mukhāḥfatah*" (on the pattern of *mufa'alah* from the root *khafat*) and "*takhāḥfut*" (on the pattern of *tafa'ul* from *khafat*) denote concealing and lowering the voice as opposed to *jahr* (loudness of voice).

The use of this root and its derivatives in the verses of the Holy Qur'an has been analyzed by exegetes: in the noble verse, "...and be neither loud in your prayer, nor murmur it..."⁴ (Quran 17:110): on this verse, the meaning of "*lā tukhāḥfit bihā*" is that one should not conceal the recitation excessively nor fail to make it manifest (Azharī 2000, 7:305, quoting Layth). Some exegetes, in explaining the threshold of "*mukhāḥfatah*" in prayer, have stated that its threshold is that the reciter himself hears the sound of his own recitation, as against "*jahr*," in which others too hear his voice (Ṭūsī, n.d., 6:534). Others, by contrast, have said that the intent is that one should not lower the voice to such a degree that even those standing behind him cannot hear it (Zamakhsharī

⁴ ﴿...وَلَا تُخَفِّزْ بِصَلَاتِكَ وَلَا تُخَافِتْ بِهَا...﴾ (الإسراء/ ١١٠)

1986, 2:700). “*Mukhāfatah*” has likewise been interpreted as lowering and softening the voice (Qurṭubī 1992, 11:343). Ibn ‘Āshūr, too, regards it as a *mufā‘alah* form from “*khafata bikalāmihi*” (he concealed his speech), and, emphasizing that the *mufā‘alah* pattern conveys intensity of meaning, states that the intended prohibition is against speaking so softly as to approach total inaudibility and the absolute concealment of speech (Ibn ‘Āshūr 1973, 14:187).

In the noble verse, “*So off they went, murmuring to one another: ‘Today no needy man shall come to you in it’*”⁵ (Quran 68:23-24), the word “*takhāfut*” refers to the secret, whispered conversation of the garden’s owners, who sought to deprive the needy (Ṭabarsī 1993, 9:506). Zamakhsharī, too, interprets “*takhāfut*” as speaking softly and “*khafat*” as concealment (Zamakhsharī 1986, 4:590). Furthermore, Ibn ‘Āshūr states explicitly that the *tafa‘ul/mufā‘alah* structure in “*yatakhāfatūn*” denotes the intensity of their mutual concealment and whispering (Ibn ‘Āshūr 1973, 29:78).

4.1. Semantic Distinction

Ibn ‘Āshūr (1973, 14:187), emphasizing the *mufā‘alah* structure in “*mukhāfatah*,” holds that it denotes intensity of action in the concealment of speech. In other words, “*mukhāfatah*” does not merely mean speaking softly but conveys a kind of interaction and precision in muffling the voice, whereas “*khafat*” more generally refers to any concealment of speech whatsoever. This distinction is likewise evident in Zamakhsharī commentary (1986, 2:700), where he interprets “*mukhāfatah*” as a degree of softness such that even those nearby cannot hear the reciter’s voice, whereas “*khafat*” may include any level of vocal concealment.

On the basis of the analysis of the sources above, although “*khafat*” and “*mukhāfatah*” share a common core meaning, they differ in intensity and scope of usage. “*Mukhāfatah*,” owing to its *mufā‘alah* form, denotes interaction and greater emphasis on concealment, whereas “*khafat*” encompasses a more general meaning. These

⁵. «فَانْطَلَقُوا وَهُمْ يَتَخَفَتُونَ أَنْ لَا يَدْخُلَهَا الْيَوْمَ عَلَيْكُمْ مَسْكِينٌ» (القلم/٢٣-٢٤)

distinctions play an important role in Qur'anic exegeses, particularly in verses concerning the etiquette of prayer, in the precise understanding of the degrees of loudness and softness of voice.

The word "*khafat*" has semantic differences when compared with other Qur'anic words such as "*ikhfā*," "*sirr*," "*iknān*," "*baṭn*," "*satr*," and "*hijāb*." Unlike "*ikhfā*" and "*sirr*," which are also used for non-verbal matters, "*khafat*" is confined to the concealment of voice and speech (Muṣṭafavī 1995, 3:90). Likewise, "*iknān*" means preservation and covering, "*baṭn*" means absolute hiddenness, "*satr*" means covering by means of a barrier, and "*hijāb*" means preventing connection, whereas "*khafat*" denotes the softness and concealment of voice (Askarī 1991, 456).

5. Semantic Analysis of "*Khamr*"

The word "*khamr*" and its derivatives occur seven times in the Holy Qur'an (Rāghib Iṣfahānī 1991, 298). This word is from the root *kh-m-r* and carries the primary meaning of "covering." Rāghib Iṣfahānī, in *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur'ān*, states explicitly that "*khamr*" applies to anything that covers, although in common usage "*khimār*" refers to a woman's headscarf (ibid). This primary meaning is likewise evident in Qur'anic usage; for example, in verse 31 of *Sūrat al-Nūr*, "...and let them draw their scarfs over their bosoms..."⁶ (*Quran* 24:31), "*khumur*" is used to mean women's scarfs (Ṭabarsī 1993, 7:217; Ālūsī 1996, 18:208).

5.1. Semantic Distinction

Despite this shared semantic core of "covering," the differences in the usage of this word in the Qur'an are notable. In some verses, such as "*They ask you concerning wine...*"⁷ (*Quran* 2:219), "*khamr*" is applied to wine. Ṭūsī, in *al-Tibyān*, explains that this naming arises from the fact that wine covers the intellect (Ṭūsī, n.d., 2:212). Zamakhsharī, in *al-Kashshāf*, likewise emphasizes this meaning,

⁶. ﴿...وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ...﴾ (النور/ ٣١)

⁷. ﴿يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْخَمْرِ﴾ (البقرة/ ٢١٩)

writing: “The *khamr* of the intellect is its covering” (Zamakhsharī 1986, 1:261). Thus, in this usage, “*khamr*” refers not only to a material covering but also to an imperceptible covering brought about by intoxication.

Some scholars, such as Ibn Fāris (1984, 2:215) and Muṣṭafavī (1995, 3:129), have also regarded the qualification of “admixture” as inherent in the meaning of “*khamr*.” In other words, “*khamr*” does not denote mere covering alone but also conveys a kind of mixing and intermingling. This feature is the point of distinction between “*khamr*” and words such as “*satr*” (covering in general) or “*ghitā*” (sensory covering). Qurṭubī (1992, 3:51), drawing on this very point, states that wine is called “*khamr*” because it intermingles with the intellect and incapacitates it.

From an examination of lexicographical and exegetical sources it may be concluded that the central meaning of “*khamr*” is covering, but in certain usages (such as wine) this covering is accompanied by intermixture and disruption. These subtle semantic differences show the precision of the Qur’an in its choice of vocabulary and the high capacity of the Arabic language for conveying multidimensional concepts.

6. Semantic Analysis of “*Dass*”

The word “*dass*” in the Arabic language means to conceal a thing beneath or within another thing, though some lexicographers, such as Rāghib Iṣfahānī (1991, 314), have added to this meaning the qualification of “reluctance” — that is, placing something within another with aversion. This qualification of reluctance is especially evident in cases such as the pre-Islamic practice of burying infant daughters alive. Unlike words such as “*ikhfā*,” “*kitmān*,” “*satr*,” and “*tawārī*,” the concept of “*dass*” carries a negative semantic weight and denotes concealment accompanied by denial or refusal (Muṣṭafavī 1995, 3:212-213).

In the verse, "... one who betrays it ..." ⁸ (Quran 91:10), Rāghib Iṣḥāhānī (1991, 314), has taken "*dassa*" to mean hiding the soul away in sins. Muṣṭafavī (1995, 3:214), emphasizing the distinction of this word from "*ikhfā*," holds that "*dassahā*" in this verse means covering over the truth of the soul and failing to purify it. Thus, "*tadsis*" denotes not merely concealment but also a kind of refusal to disclose truths and a corruption of the inner self.

6.1. Semantic Distinction

– "*Satr*": in this word there exists the qualification of "*sātir*" (that which covers) — that is, concealment accompanied by an outward covering, as in covering a fault. "*Dass*," by contrast, does not necessarily entail covering, but rather more often means burying deeply within something (ibid).

– "*Tawārī*": this word denotes complete and thorough concealment from every direction, such as the hiding of the moon behind a cloud, whereas "*dass*" may be a relative concealment (Muṣṭafavī 1995, 3:213).

– "*Kitmān*": means concealing within the heart and the inner self, such as the concealment of truths in the heart, whereas "*dass*" more often refers to physical or spiritual concealment accompanied by reluctance (Rāghib Iṣḥāhānī 1991, 314).

– "*Ikhfā*": this word is absolute and general and includes every kind of concealment, whereas "*dass*" carries a more specific semantic weight (Muṣṭafavī 1995, 3:213).

On the basis of the analysis of lexicographical and exegetical sources, "*dass*," in comparison with similar words, has two distinctive features: 1) the qualification of reluctance — concealment accompanied by aversion or denial; and 2) negative semantic weight — used in cases where concealment is intended for deception or defilement.

⁸ ﴿... مَنْ دَسَّاهَا﴾ (الشَّمْسُ/ ١٠)

These differences cause “*dass*,” in its Qur’anic usage, to carry a deeper meaning than “*ikhfā*” or “*satr*,” and it receives particular attention especially in the expression of ethical and psychological concepts.

7. Semantic Analysis of “*Satr*”

The word “*satr*” and its derivatives occur in three verses of the Holy Qur’an, each conveying a different meaning within its particular context. In the verse, “...*We draw between you and those who do not believe in the Hereafter a hidden curtain*”⁹ (Quran 17:45), this word refers to a spiritual veil that prevents the polytheists from grasping Qur’anic truths. Some exegetes, such as ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī (1996, 13:113), have interpreted this veil as a non-material barrier that limits the understanding of the disbelievers, while Ibn ‘Āshūr (1973, 14:94) has regarded it as a kind of hyperbolic covering — that is, a veil that is itself also concealed.

In the verse, “...*for whom We had not provided any shield against it*”¹⁰ (Quran 18:90), this word has been interpreted as a material covering such as a building, a mountain, or a tree (Zamakhsharī 1986, 2:745; Ṭabarsī 1993, 6:758). Some exegetes have also interpreted it as clothing, or anything at all that covers the body (Ibn ‘Āshūr 1973, 15:129). This shows that “*satr*” can refer to both material and spiritual covering.

The word “*istitār*” in the verse “And you did not use to conceal yourselves lest your ears, your eyes, and your skins should bear witness against you...”¹¹ (Quran 41:22) means concealing one’s deeds (*istikhfā*) or avoiding them (*ittiqā*) (Qurtubī 1992, 16:351-352). This expression shows that “*istitār*” refers more to deliberate concealment, whereas “*satr*” may be either intentional or unintentional.

⁹. ﴿...جَعَلْنَا بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حِجَابًا مَّسْتُورًا﴾ (الإسراء/٤٥)

¹⁰. ﴿لَمْ نَجْعَلْ لَهُمْ مِّنْ دُونِهَا سِتْرًا﴾ (الكهف/٩٠)

¹¹. ﴿وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تَسْتَوِرُونَ أَن يَشْهَدَ عَلَيْكُمْ سَمْعُكُمْ وَلَا أَبْصَارُكُمْ وَلَا جُلُودُكُمْ...﴾ (فصلت/٢٢)

7.1. Semantic Distinction

– *Satr* as against *ghufrān*: “*satr*” denotes the outward or spiritual covering of a thing (such as sin), whereas “*ghufrān*” means covering accompanied by effacement and forgiveness from God. In other words, every act of “*ghufrān*” is an act of “*satr*,” but not every act of “*satr*” is “*ghufrān*” (Ḥusaynī Kafawī 1991, 666; ‘Askarī 1991, 387).

– *Satr* as against *ghitā*: “*satr*” applies to any external covering such as a wall or mountain, whereas “*ghitā*” refers to a covering attached to the body such as clothing (‘Askarī 1991, 272).

– Levels of covering: “*satr*” is generally used for covering from the outside, “*taghtīyah*” for partial covering, and “*ghishāwah*” for complete covering (Muṣṭafavī 1995, 5:49).

The word “*satr*” in the Holy Qur’an possesses a broad semantic scope that extends from material covering such as clothing or a mountain to spiritual covering such as a veil upon understanding. Its difference from similar words such as “*ghufrān*,” “*ghitā*,” and “*istitār*” lies in the fact that “*satr*” emphasizes the covering itself, without necessarily denoting effacement (“*ghufrān*”) or attachment to the body (“*ghitā*”). This semantic analysis shows that the Holy Qur’an employs its vocabulary with great precision in order to convey diverse concepts within different contexts.

8. Semantic Analysis of “*Ghufrān*”

The word “*ghufrān*” is derived from the root *ghafara* (*ghāyn, fā’, rā’*), which lexically means “covering and concealing” (Ibn Fāris 1984, 4:385; Farāhīdī 1993, 2:1348). This meaning is confirmed in several sources, such as Farāhīdī’s *al-‘Ayn*, Ibn Duraid’s *Jamharat al-Lughah*, and Azharī’s *Tahdhīb al-Lughah* (Ibn Duraid 2005, 2:662; Azharī 2000, 8:106). Some lexicographers likewise regard “*maghfirah*” and “*ghafir*” as derived from the same root and carrying the same meaning (Jawharī 1984, 2:770; Fayyūmī 1984, 449). In certain usages, “*ghufrān*” has also been employed in the sense of “pardoning a sin,” though its root meaning nonetheless remains “covering.”

8.1. Semantic Distinction

In exegetical texts, “*ghufrān*” (forgiveness) most often refers to God’s covering over of sin, in such a way that the effect of the sin is effaced or its punishment lifted (Ṭanṭāwī 1997, 2:375). “*Takfīr*” (expiation/effacement), by contrast, more often denotes the compensation of a sin through a righteous deed or some other recompense (Ibn ‘Āshūr 1973, 3:310). Some exegetes, such as Ṭabarsī (1993, 2:512), hold that “*ghufrān*” may occur either with or without a cause, whereas “*takfīr*” is realized only after a compensatory act has been performed. Others, such as Ālūsī (1996, 2:375), hold that both words share the meaning of covering, but that “*ghufrān*” pertains more to the absence of punishment, whereas “*takfīr*” emphasizes the removal of the effect of sin.

In the Holy Qur’an, “*ghufrān*” is generally associated with sin and divine forgiveness and carries a positive ethical weight (Rāghib Iṣfahānī 1991, 241). For instance, certain exegetical works, such as *al-Mīzān*, emphasize that terms such as *‘afw* (pardon) and *ṣafḥ* (forbearance) primarily denote overlooking or disregarding a sin, rather than concealing it (Ṭabāṭabā’ī 1996, 12:280). These distinctions indicate that, although *ghufrān* and *takfīr* may be closely related in certain contexts, they exhibit subtle differences in Qur’anic and exegetical usage, pointing to distinct semantic domains.

9. Semantic Analysis of “*Kitmān*”

The word “*kitmān*” in the Holy Qur’an, in light of the context of the verses and the views of the exegetes, carries several meanings, derived from the root *k-t-m* in the sense of hiding and concealing. Rāghib Iṣfahānī (1991, 702) in *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur’ān*, defines this word as “concealing speech or a blessing,” and in the verse “...and conceal whatever Allah has given them out of His grace...”¹² (Quran 4:37), he regards it as equivalent to “ingratitude for a blessing” (*kufrān al-ni‘mah*). This interpretation shows that concealment, in some instances, in addition to its general sense of hiding, carries a negative

¹² ﴿...وَيَكْتُمُونَ مَا آتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ...﴾ (النساء/ ٣٧)

ethical weight such as ingratitude. Ālūsī (1996, 1:390), by contrast, in *Rūḥ al-Ma‘ānī*, citing the verse "...conceal the truth..."¹³ (Quran 2:42), interprets "*kitmān*" simply as "concealing the truth," without necessarily implying ingratitude. This difference shows that the meaning of "*kitmān*" varies according to its object such as a blessing, the truth, or faith. Some exegetes, such as Tūsī in *al-Tibyān* (1:191) and Qurṭubī (1992, 1:342) in *al-Jāmi‘ li-Aḥkām al-Qur‘ān*, while not spelling this out in detail, likewise point to this contextual variability.

9.1. Semantic Distinction

"*Kitmān*" is compared semantically with words such as "*ikhfā*" and "*satr*." Abu Hilāl ‘Askarī (1991, 24), in *Mu‘jam al-Furūq al-Lughawīyyah*, holds that the essential difference lies in the fact that "*kitmān*" is specific to the concealment of matters that exist within a person such as belief or knowledge, whereas "*ikhfā*" can also include material objects. For example, in the verse, "*When Allah made a covenant with those who were given the Book: ‘You shall explain it for the people, and you shall not conceal it’...*"¹⁴ (Quran 3:187), "*kitmān*" means refraining from stating scholarly truths, not the sensory concealment of a book. Likewise, "*kitmān*" stands in contrast to "*ibdā*" (disclosure), as in the verse "*And when We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate before Adam,’ they prostrated, but not Iblis: he refused and acted arrogantly, and he was one of the faithless*"¹⁵ (Quran 2:34) — for although this verse does not use the word "*kitmān*" explicitly, the source text cites it to show that Iblis, in concealing the truth of his refusal, sets himself against the divine command. This twofold opposition shows the central role of "*kitmān*" in the epistemological domain of the Qur’an.

On the basis of an analysis of the sources, "*kitmān*" in the Qur’an has two dimensions, semantic and ethical: 1) the semantic dimension — concealing truths (whether of a blessing, faith, or knowledge),

¹³. ﴿...وَتَكْتُمُوا الْحَقَّ...﴾ (البقرة/٤٢)

¹⁴. ﴿وَإِذْ أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ لَتُبَيِّنُنَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَكْتُمُونَهُ...﴾ (آل عمران/١٨٧)

¹⁵. ﴿وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ أَبَىٰ وَاسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ﴾ (البقرة/٣٤)

which is sometimes accompanied by ingratitude; 2) the applied dimension — its distinction from similar words such as “*ikhfā*” owing to its connection with inward and mental matters. This word, depending on its object (truth, testimony, blessing) in different verses, possesses semantic flexibility, though its central core remains “refraining from disclosure.”

10. Semantic Analysis of “*Kufr*”

The word “*kufṛ*” in the Arabic language, from the root *k-f-r*, means covering and concealing. Rāghib Iṣfahānī (1991, 714), in *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qurʾān*, and Ḥusaynī Kafawī (1991, 742), in *al-Kullīyāt*, emphasize this meaning. This concept appears in the Qurʾān with subtle differences across various usages. For example, “*kuffār*”, as the plural of “*kāfir*”, generally refers to those without faith, whereas “*kafarah*” is used more often for those who deny divine blessings (Rāghib Iṣfahānī 1991, pp. 714-717). This difference shows that the Qurʾān, depending on context, conveys different meanings through the word “*kufṛ*.”

In some verses, “*kuffār*” is applied to farmers, as in verse 20 of *Sūrat al-Hadīd*: “...like the rain whose vegetation impresses the farmer...”¹⁶ (*Quran* 57:20). Exegetes such as Zajjāj (1987, 5:127) and Ṭabarsī (1993, 9:359) explain that this term is used because farmers cover the seed. This usage shows that the primary meaning of “covering” is in certain instances used metaphorically and in positive contexts as well.

On the other hand, “*kaffārah*” refers to an act that covers over a sin, as in verse 89 of *Sūrat al-Māʾidah*: “... The atonement for it is to feed ten needy persons...”¹⁷ (*Quran* 5:89). Zamakhsharī (1986, 1:673), in *al-Kashshāf*, and Ṭabāṭabāʾī (1996, 6:111), in *al-Mīzān*, emphasize this meaning. Likewise, “*takfīr*” in verses such as *Āl ʿImrān* 193 means the compensation of a sin by a good deed (Ibn ʿĀshūr 1973,

¹⁶ ﴿...كَمَثَلِ غَيْثٍ أَعْجَبَ الْكُفَّارَ نَبَاتُهُ...﴾ (الحديد/ ٢٠)

¹⁷ ﴿...فَكَفَّارَتُهُ إِطْعَامُ عَشْرَةِ مَساكِينٍ...﴾ (المائدة/ ٨٩)

3:310). These differences show that the root “*kufṛ*” in the Qur’an is used both in a blameworthy sense (denial of the truth) and in a positive sense (the covering-over of sin).

Upon examining various sources, it can be seen that the root “*kufṛ*” fundamentally means covering, but in the Qur’an, depending on context, it has acquired different meanings. In some cases, such as “*kuffār*” for farmers, it carries a neutral or positive weight, whereas in most cases, such as “*kāfir*” meaning a denier of the truth, it takes on a negative weight. These differences point to the semantic subtleties of the Qur’an in the deployment of vocabulary.

11. Semantic Analysis of “*Muwārāf*”

Some scholars of Qur’anic lexicography have interpreted the word “*wārā*” in the sense of “covering.” Rāghib Iṣfahānī (1991, 866), for example, in *al-Mufradāt* interprets “*tawārā*” as “to cover oneself,” citing the verse, “...until [the sun] disappeared behind the [night’s] veil”¹⁸ (*Quran* 38:32), in which the horses disappeared from Solomon’s sight. This usage points to the primary meaning of “covering” and “concealment” in the root *w-r-y*. The derivatives of this root occur in six verses of the Qur’an and chiefly denote the concept of concealment (Rāghib Iṣfahānī 1991, 866).

In the verse, “...how to bury the corpse of his brother...”¹⁹ (*Quran* 5:31), the verb “*yuwārī*” refers to Cain’s effort to cover Abel’s corpse. Ṭabarsī (1993, 4:286), in *Majma‘ al-Bayān*, and Qurṭubī, in *al-Jāmi‘ li-Aḥkām al-Qur‘ān* (1992, 6:141-142), explain that Cain learned from the raven how to bury the corpse beneath the earth. This interpretation emphasizes the deliberate, active aspect of concealment. By contrast, in the verse, “he hides from the people...”²⁰ (*Quran* 16:59), “*tawārā*” has been interpreted as hiding oneself out of shame (Tūsī, *al-Tibyān*, 6:394; Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 2:612). This difference of usage

¹⁸. ﴿حَتَّىٰ تَوَارِثَ بِأَلْحَبَابٍ﴾ (ص/٣٢)

¹⁹. ﴿...كَيْفَ يُوَارِي سَوَاءَ أَخِيهِ فَأُوَارِي...﴾ (المائدة/٣١)

²⁰. ﴿يَتَوَارَىٰ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ...﴾ (النحل/٥٩)

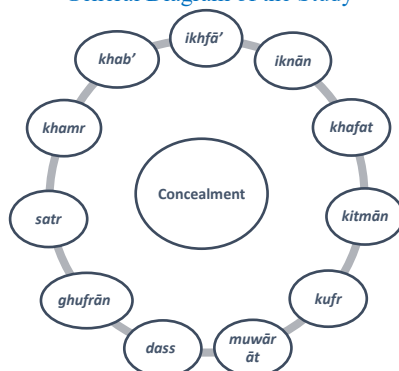
shows that “*tawārī*” more often refers to an involuntary state of concealment such as embarrassment, whereas “*muwārāh*” (of the *mufā‘alah* pattern) denotes sustained, deliberate covering.

11.1. Semantic Distinction

Ibn ‘Āshūr (1973, 13:149) notes that the root *waraya* is connected to *warā* (“behind”), and its primary meaning is covering a thing to the point of its complete disappearance. According to him, “*muwārāh*” (*mufā‘alah*) denotes continuity and active engagement in concealment, whereas “*tawārī*” (*muṭāwa‘ah*) refers to the result of an action — that is, involuntary covering. For example, in the verse of *Sūrat Ṣād*, the concealment of the horses (*tawārī*) is the direct consequence of a veil’s covering, whereas in the verse of *al-Mā‘idah*, the “concealment” (*iwārā*) of the corpse is a deliberate act. These differences show that the Qur’an, with great subtlety, employs the derivatives of this root to convey different meanings.

The semantic analysis of the words “*wārā*” and “*tawārā*” in the Qur’an shows that, despite sharing the basic meaning of “covering,” these words carry subtle differences across different contexts. “*Muwārāh*” emphasizes deliberateness and continuity in concealment, whereas “*tawārī*” refers to involuntary covering or a natural state such as hiding behind a veil. These distinctions can be explained with reference to the different verbal patterns (*mufā‘alah*, *muṭāwa‘ah*) and the context of the verses.

General Diagram of the Study



Conclusion

The present study, by applying a descriptive–analytical method within a framework of comparative semantics and componential analysis, has examined the structure of the conceptual network of “concealment” in the Holy Qur’an. The outcome of the lexicographical, morphological, and contextual investigations of eleven selected words (“*ikhfā*,” “*iknān*,” “*khaf*,” “*khafat*,” “*khamr*,” “*dass*,” “*satr*,” “*ghufrān*,” “*kitmān*,” “*kufr*,” and “*muwārāt*”) showed that the deployment of these words in the text of revelation is not based on linguistic chance or absolute synonymy; rather, each word is situated in its own particular expressive position on the basis of a set of distinguishing semantic components. Although all the words examined share a common core of “covering and the removal of clarity,” componential analysis proved that variables such as the type of object concealed, motive and purpose, the instrument and manner of covering, and ethico-axiological weight precisely differentiate their semantic boundaries — such that none of these terms can wholly replace another.

In terms of the differentiation of the domains to which concealment pertains, the vocabulary of this field is divided into three spheres: acoustic, perceptual, and physical. The word “*khafat*” and its derivatives, in the *mufā‘alah* and *tafa‘ul* patterns, pertain exclusively to the concealment of speech, whispering, and the lowering of the voice as opposed to “*jahr*,” and carry no implication of the concealment of bodies. At the opposite pole, the word “*kitmān*” is confined to the voluntary withholding of truths, knowledge, and testimonies of the heart, and its application to material objects is excluded; whereas “*iknān*” emphasizes the preservation and safeguarding of a secret within the depths of the soul. Likewise, words such as “*muwārāt*” and “*khamr*,” at the sensory level, refer above all to the veiling and covering of the body and external objects from the eye of the beholder. Furthermore, an examination of the degrees and manner of the efficacy of covering shows that “*satr*” refers only to the creation of a physical barrier without any transformation in the nature of the thing covered, whereas “*khamr*” is associated with intermixture and the incapacitation of perception and reason. The word “*dass*” goes

beyond outward concealment to mean the burying of a thing within the depths of another, accompanied by aversion, malice, and defilement, which in Qur'anic usage points to the corruption and concealment of the soul's innate dispositions beneath layers of sin; likewise, "*khab*" denotes deep, intense concealment beyond the reach of the senses. From a theological and axiological perspective, the roots *gh-f-r* and *k-f-r* have likewise evolved from the primary meaning of "covering" into fundamental religious concepts: "*ghufrān*" is the covering-over of sin by God, accompanied by the effacement of punishment and the bestowal of mercy, whereas "*kufṛ*," in its technical usage, is the deliberate concealment of truths and divine signs on the basis of obstinacy.

The role of morphological structures in the reproduction of meaning was likewise made evident: the *mufā'alah* and *tafa'ul* patterns in words such as "*takhāfut*" and "*mukhāfatah*" indicate a two-sided interaction, a collective whispered conversation, and a redoubled effort to prevent the voice from being understood, while the difference in usage between "*muwārāt*" and "*tawārī*" reveals psychological subtleties and the distinction between a voluntary act and a passive state. In sum, the achievement of this research demonstrates that the conceptual system of concealment in the Qur'an possesses a coherent and networked order, precise understanding of which frees the exegete from overlapping and uniform readings and opens new horizons before researchers in the recognition of revelatory eloquence and rhetorical inimitability.

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