

PARADIGMATIC AND SYNTAGMATIC RELATIONS IN THE QUR'AN: A STRUCTURAL-SEMIOTIC READING OF QUR'ANIC HUMAN CREATION VERSES

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the phases of human creation in the Qur'an through Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistic framework, with particular attention to paradigmatic (lexical selection) and syntagmatic (sequential arrangement) relations operating in key verses: QS al-Mu'minūn [23]:12–14, al-Hajj [22]:5, as-Sajdah [32]:7–9, and al-Insān [76]:2. Employing a qualitative descriptive method with content analysis, the study draws on primary data comprising Qur'anic texts and secondary data from classical and contemporary exegetical works. The analysis demonstrates that lexical variations, including *ṭīn* (clay), *turāb* (soil), *ṣulālah* (essence of earth), and *nutfah* (seminal fluid), constitute a system of paradigmatic oppositions. These lexical choices encode a graduated ontological progression, moving from material origin to spiritual endowment. Syntagmatic relations, realized through conjunctions such as *ṣumma* and *fa*, organize these stages into a coherent narrative sequence. The sequence progresses from physical formation to the bestowal of cognitive and spiritual faculties. Accordingly, the language of the Qur'an functions not merely to describe biological processes, but also to construct a conceptual framework through which human identity, origin, and existential purpose are discursively represented. This study concludes that the Qur'anic linguistic structure constitutes a theologically organized semiotic system. Within this system, lexical selection and syntagmatic patterning jointly produce a layered discourse of human existence, integrating the material, biological, spiritual, and cognitive dimensions of personhood into a unified sign system.

Keywords: Saussure, Paradigmatic Relations, Syntagmatic Relations, Human Creation Verses, Qur'anic Linguistics

ABSTRAK

*Artikel ini mengkaji tahapan penciptaan manusia dalam Al-Qur'an melalui kerangka linguistik struktural Ferdinand de Saussure, dengan perhatian khusus pada hubungan paradigmatis (pilihan leksikal) dan sintagmatik (susunan narasi) yang beroperasi dalam ayat-ayat kunci, yaitu QS al-Mu'minūn [23]:12–14, al-Hajj [22]:5, as-Sajdah [32]:7–9, dan al-Insān [76]:2. Menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan analisis konten, penelitian ini mengambil data primer berupa teks-teks Al-Qur'an serta data sekunder dari karya-karya tafsir klasik dan kontemporer. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa variasi leksikal, termasuk *ṭīn* (tanah liat), *turāb* (tanah), *sulālah* (esensi bumi), dan *nutfah* (cairan mani), merupakan sistem oposisi paradigmatis. Variasi tersebut mengodekan perkembangan ontologis yang bertahap, dari asal-usul material hingga peniupan ruh. Hubungan sintagmatik, yang diwujudkan melalui konjungsi seperti *summa* dan *fa*, mengatur tahapan-tahapan tersebut menjadi urutan naratif yang koheren. Urutan ini bergerak dari pembentukan fisik menuju penganugerahan kemampuan kognitif dan spiritual. Dengan demikian, bahasa Al-Qur'an berfungsi tidak hanya untuk menggambarkan proses biologis, tetapi juga untuk membangun kerangka konseptual tempat identitas manusia, asal-usul, dan tujuan eksistensial direpresentasikan secara diskursif. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa struktur linguistik Al-Qur'an merupakan sistem semiotik yang terorganisasi secara teologis. Dalam sistem tersebut, pemilihan leksikal dan pola sintagmatik secara bersama-sama menghasilkan wacana berlapis mengenai eksistensi manusia, yang mengintegrasikan dimensi material, biologis, spiritual, dan kognitif ke dalam satu sistem tanda yang terpadu.*

Kata kunci: Saussure, Relasi Paradigmatik, Relasi Sintagmatik, Ayat Penciptaan Manusia, Linguistik Al-Qur'an

INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an presents accounts of human creation through diverse terminological and narrative frameworks, simultaneously emphasizing the spiritual and physical dimensions of human existence. Qur'anic references to human origins employ a range of lexical items, including *ṭīn* (clay), *turāb* (soil), and *nutfah* (seminal fluid), each of which carries distinct cosmological and theological implications.¹ The study of human creation in the Qur'an has long constituted a central concern within the tradition of Qur'anic

¹Farzaneh Rohanimashhadi, "'Adam's Istifā' in Qur'an and Human Evolution,'" *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 76, no. 1 (June 18, 2020): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i1.5795>.

exegesis (*tafsīr*). Classical commentators such as al-Ṭabarī (d. 923 CE), al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273 CE), and Ibn Kaṣīr (d. 1373 CE) devoted sustained attention to the lexical meanings of terms such as *nutfah*, *'alaqah*, and *mudḡhah*,² interpreting them through the resources of classical Arabic philology and the principle of *tafsīr al-āyāt bi al-āyāt*,³ which treats the Qur'an as a coherent, self-interpreting text that forecloses internal contradictions of meaning. Their primary concern was to elucidate the semantic content of individual terms within the framework of received religious knowledge, tracing the transformation of the human being from clay to a living entity endowed with spiritual and physical dimensions.

The emergence of scientifically oriented exegesis in the modern period introduced a new interpretive paradigm that sought to align Qur'anic accounts of human creation with contemporary embryological knowledge. Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī, in *Al-Jawāhir fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, interprets the sequence of *nutfah*, *'alaqah*, and *mudḡhah* as successive stages of embryonic development corresponding to the biological processes described in modern science.⁴ This approach reflects a broader tendency in modern Qur'anic exegesis to demonstrate the harmony between Qur'anic revelation and scientific discovery. However, such readings have attracted significant scholarly criticism: they are frequently characterized as apologetic and are seen as displacing the Qur'an's own linguistic and rhetorical logic in favour of external, scientifically derived frameworks. Moreover, scholars have examined the extent to which Qur'anic frameworks of meaning converge with or diverge from modern scientific insight,

²Fitri Dwi Agustina and M. Nurul Huda, "Perspective Al-Qur'an and Biology in Human Creation," *Journal Intellectual Sufism Research (JISR)* 3, no. 1 (November 24, 2020): 68–76, <https://doi.org/10.52032/jisr.v3i1.91>.

³Sukron Kamil and Rizqi Handayani, "Semiotika Struktural Sebagai Standar Tafsir Teks Islam," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 21, no. 2 (December 11, 2023): 493–526, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlka.v21i2.1129>.

⁴Alya Muhibah et al., "The Creation of Man in Tafsir Al-Jawahir by Thantawī Jawhar," *Al-Afkar, Journal For Islamic Studies* 8, no. 3 (2025): 2069–84, <https://doi.org/10.31943/afkarjournal.v8i3.1656>. The; Feni Khairifa, Endrise Septina Rawanoko, and Indira Fatra Deni Peranginangin, "The Dilemma of Human Cloning in Islamic Theology: A Critique of the Uniqueness of Human Creation and Implications for Maqashid Al-Shariah," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 106, no. 3 (2025): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.106.303>.

a question that remains actively debated rather than settled. Differences in how the narratives of Adam's creation⁵ and human biological reproduction are positioned within traditional and modern interpretations⁶ further complicate any unified reading.

Scholarship on the phases of human creation in the Qur'an over the past decade has been dominated by scientific-biological interpretive approaches. Saifuddin et al. examine the five stages of human development (*nutfah*, *'alaqah*, *mudghah*, *'izām*, and *lahm*) through a literary and scientific interpretive lens,⁷ with the primary aim of confirming correspondences between Qur'anic descriptions and the findings of modern embryology. Similarly, Bagja et al. analyse the phases of human creation as presented in the scientific commentary published by the Indonesian Ministry of Religion, tracing the sequence from gametes to metaphysical dimensions.⁸ While both studies contribute to understanding the thematic content of human creation verses, neither engages with the structural organization of Qur'anic language as a semiotic system, nor does either attend to the paradigmatic oppositions or syntagmatic patterns through which meaning is constructed across passages.⁹

Akzam and Yaacob represent a closer approximation to the present study's concerns, examining grammatical issues in the Qur'anic verses of human creation¹⁰ with attention to syntactic and

⁵Casey Luskin, "Comparing Contemporary Evangelical Models Regarding Human Origins," *Religions* 14, no. 6 (June 5, 2023): 748, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14060748>.

⁶Maryam Farahmand, Mostafa Taqavi, and Ali Asghar Ahmadi, "Iranian Scholars' Contemporary Debate between Evolutionary Human Genesis and Readings of the Qur'an: Perspectives and Classification," *Religions* 14, no. 2 (2023): 143, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14020143>.

⁷Hadid Humaid Saifuddin et al., "Creation of Human in Qur'an," *Journal of Ulumul Qur'an and Tafsis Studies* 2, no. 1 (April 10, 2023): 19–24, <https://doi.org/10.54801/juquts.v2i1.171>.

⁸Kemal Bagja Salam et al., "Phases of Human Creation from the Scientific Interpretation Perspective of the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia," *Journal of Ulumul Qur'an and Tafsis Studies* 3, no. 2 (2024): 10–28, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.54801/juquts.v3i1.271>.

⁹S Joshua Swamidass, "Advancing Evolutionary Science in Dialogue with Islam," *Theology and Science* 21, no. 4 (October 2, 2023): 642–59, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2023.2255949>.

¹⁰Ismail Akzam and Solehah Yaacob, "Grammatical Issues In The Holy Qur'an About Human Creation," *Al-Hikmah: Jurnal Agama Dan Ilmu Pengetahuan* 246 |

morphological dimensions. However, their analysis does not proceed to the level of paradigmatic or syntagmatic relations in the Saussurean sense: it describes grammatical forms without theorizing the oppositional network of lexical choices or the semantic effects of sequential arrangement. Prior work employing Saussurean linguistics in Qur'anic interpretation has largely concentrated on individual lexical analysis, binary oppositions, or general semiotic readings. Kamil and Handayani,¹¹ for instance, have demonstrated the productive application of structural semiotics as an interpretive standard for Islamic texts, establishing an important precedent for the methodological approach adopted here. Nevertheless, a systematic investigation of how paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations *jointly* structure the semantic field of human creation across multiple Qur'anic passages remains absent from the literature.

The linguistic study of the Qur'an regarding human creation encompasses semantic, grammatical, and rhetorical dimensions, yet research that specifically examines these verses through a structural linguistic framework, particularly Ferdinand de Saussure's concepts of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations, remains substantially limited. This gap is consequential, because Saussurean structural linguistics offers analytical resources that neither classical exegesis nor scientifically oriented commentary provides: the capacity to examine systematically *why* the Qur'an selects certain terms over available alternatives, and *how* the sequential arrangement of those terms generates theological meaning beyond what any individual lexical item conveys in isolation.

This present study is guided by two research questions: (1) What paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations govern the Qur'anic terms that describe the phases of human creation? (2) What are the structural-semiotic implications of these relations for the theological understanding of the human being in the Qur'an?

21, no. 1 (May 18, 2024): 108–22, [https://doi.org/10.25299/al-hikmah:jaip.2024.vol21\(1\).15854](https://doi.org/10.25299/al-hikmah:jaip.2024.vol21(1).15854).

¹¹Sukron Kamil and Rizqi Handayani, "Semiotika Struktural Sebagai Standar Tafsir Teks Islam," *Jurnal Lektur Keagamaan* 21, no. 2 (December 11, 2023): 493–526, <https://doi.org/10.31291/jlka.v21i2.1129>.

This study makes two principal scholarly contributions. Theoretically, it extends the application of Saussurean structural linguistics to sacred text analysis, demonstrating that paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations constitute productive analytical categories for understanding how theological meaning is organized discursively in the Qur'an. Methodologically, it introduces a structural-semiotic approach to Qur'anic human creation studies that complements and critically engages with existing exegetical and scientific-interpretive traditions, thereby opening a productive avenue for interdisciplinary research at the intersection of linguistics and Qur'anic studies.

This study is grounded in the structural linguistic theory of Ferdinand de Saussure, specifically his conceptualization of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations as the two fundamental axes through which meaning is generated within a language system. For Saussure, meaning does not inhere in individual signs but emerges from the relational network in which signs are embedded: paradigmatically, through the system of oppositions among signs that could occupy the same position (*in absentia*), and syntagmatically,¹² through the linear combinations that signs form with one another in actual utterances (*in praesentia*). Paradigmatic relations thus concern the axis of selection, while syntagmatic relations concern the axis of combination, and it is the interaction of these two axes that produces meaning in any given text.¹³

Within Saussure's semiotic framework, each sign is constituted by the relation between a *signifier* (the acoustic or

¹²David Wible and Nai-Lung Tsao, "Constructions and the Problem of Discovery: A Case for the Paradigmatic," *Corpus Linguistics and Linguistic Theory* 16, no. 1 (May 27, 2020): 67–93, <https://doi.org/10.1515/cllt-2017-0008>; John E. Joseph, "Saussure's Dichotomies and the Shapes of Structuralist Semiotics," *Sign Systems Studies* 50, no. 1 (June 1, 2022): 11–37, <https://doi.org/10.12697/SSS.2022.50.1.02>; Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. Wade Baskin (trans.) Charles Bally and A Sechehaye (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959).

¹³Ubaidillah, *Teori-Teori Linguistik* (Yogyakarta: Prodi Sastra Inggris Fakultas Adab dan Ilmu Budaya UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2021); Wible and Tsao, "Constructions and the Problem of Discovery: A Case for the Paradigmatic"; Ubaidillah, *Aliran-Aliran Linguistik Era Tradisional Hingga Kontemporer: Sejarah, Tokoh, Dan Teori* (Bone: Alinea Indonesia, 2026).

graphic form) and a *signified*¹⁴ (the conceptual content), a relation that is arbitrary and differential rather than natural or fixed. Applied to textual analysis, this framework directs attention to the choices made among available lexical items and to the sequential patterns through which those items are organized, both of which are treated as meaning-generating operations rather than neutral descriptive acts.

The application of this framework to Qur'anic texts requires careful theoretical grounding. Consistent with the approach developed by Kamil and Handayani, this study treats the Qur'anic textual system as a structured semiotic whole in which the full repertoire of creation-related lexicons (*turāb*, *ṭīn*, *sulālah*, *nutfah*, *'alaqah*, *mudghah*, and related terms) constitutes a paradigmatic field, while the sequential arrangement of these terms within and across verses constitutes the syntagmatic dimension of the discourse. From an analytical standpoint, individual verses may be understood as concrete textual realizations (*parole*) that instantiate patterns belonging to the larger organizational system of the Qur'anic text (*langue*). This distinction is adopted here as a methodological tool, not as a theological claim: the *langue/parole* distinction serves to separate the systemic level of analysis (the relational network of signs across the corpus) from the level of particular textual instances (individual verses and their sequential structures).

In this framework, lexical variations such as *turāb* (soil), *ṭīn* (clay), *sulālah* (essence of earth), and *nutfah* (seminal fluid) are not treated as synonymous or interchangeable references to human material origin. Rather, each term functions as a *signifier* whose *signified* is determined relationally, through its contrast with other terms in the paradigmatic field. Similarly, conjunctions such as *summa* and *fa* are not analyzed merely as temporal connectors but as syntagmatic elements that organize the progression of stages and mark ontological transitions within the Qur'anic narrative of human creation. This dual analytical orientation, attending simultaneously to paradigmatic selection and syntagmatic

¹⁴Joseph, "Saussure's Dichotomies and the Shapes of Structuralist Semiotics"; Nathan Houser, "Semiotics and Philosophy," *The American Journal of Semiotics* 36, no. 1 (2020): 135–64, <https://doi.org/10.5840/ajs202082764>.

arrangement, allows the study to examine how the Qur'anic discourse constructs a multi-dimensional representation of human existence that integrates material, biological, spiritual, and cognitive dimensions within a coherent sign system.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach grounded in a structural paradigm, with the aim of examining paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations in the Qur'anic discourse of human creation.¹⁵ The analytical method is structural-semiotic, operating through two complementary procedures: paradigmatic analysis, which attends to the system of lexical oppositions governing term selection across verses, and syntagmatic analysis, which examines the sequential arrangement of terms and conjunctions within and across passages. Together, these procedures allow the study to investigate how meaning is constructed through both the selection and the combination of linguistic signs in the Qur'anic text.

The data in this study comprise two categories. The primary data consist of Qur'anic verses that explicitly present the process of human creation, specifically QS al-Mu'minūn [23]:12–16, QS al-Hajj [22]:5, QS as-Sajdah [32]:7–11, and QS al-Insān [76]:2. These verses were selected through purposive textual sampling based on linguistic rather than purely thematic criteria. Although the Qur'an contains numerous references to human creation, including the narrative of Adam and Hawwā', the selection was restricted to passages that present a complete sequence of creation-related lexicons such as *turāb*, *ṭīn*, *sulālah*, *nutfah*, *'alaqah*, and *mudghah*, and that exhibit explicit textual progression amenable to paradigmatic and syntagmatic analysis. These passages collectively represent the major stages of human

¹⁵Pam Gretschel, Elelwani Ramugondo, and Roshan Galvaan, "Linking Paradigms and Methodologies in a Qualitative Case Study Focused On Exploring the Operation of Power in Human Actions During the Design of a New Occupational Therapy Intervention," *The International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 22, no. 1 (2023): 1–18, <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231187590>; Georgios Chatzichristos, "Qualitative Research in the Era of AI: A Return to Positivism or a New Paradigm?," *The International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 24, no. 1 (2025): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069251337583>.

creation described in the Qur'an and constitute a focused corpus for examining the structural-semiotic organization of the discourse.

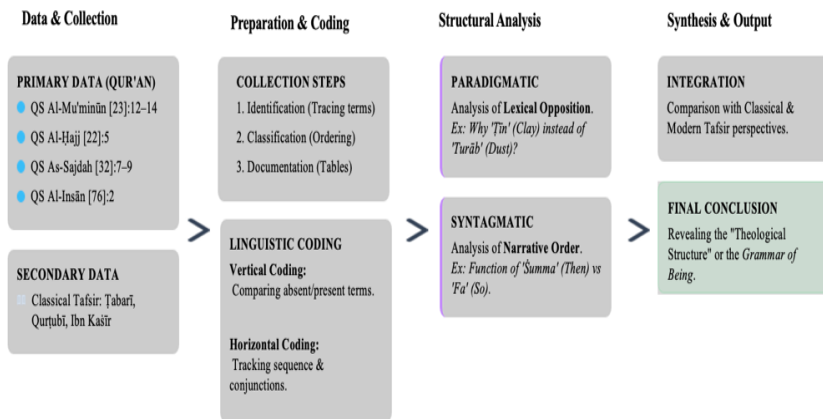
The secondary data consist of classical and contemporary Qur'anic commentaries and relevant scholarly works in Qur'anic linguistics and semiotics. Three classical exegetical sources were selected purposively: *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, and *Tafsīr Ibn Kaṣīr*. These works were chosen for their authoritative standing within the Sunni exegetical tradition and for the depth of their engagement with Qur'anic vocabulary and meaning. Specifically, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* was included for its extensive documentation of early exegetical opinions and lexical explanations; *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī* for its detailed linguistic and philological analyses; and *Tafsīr Ibn Kaṣīr* for its synthesis of transmitted interpretations and its enduring influence in contemporary Qur'anic scholarship. These commentaries function as comparative exegetical references that contextualize the structural-semiotic findings within the broader tradition of Qur'anic interpretation rather than serving as primary objects of analysis.

Data collection was conducted through four stages: identification, classification, documentation, and linguistic coding.¹⁶ In the identification stage, Qur'anic verses related to human creation were located using the thematic search functions of the Quranic Arabic Corpus and subsequently verified against classical Qur'anic indexes and commentaries. In the classification stage, the identified verses were grouped according to the creation-related terminology they employ (*turāb*, *ṭīn*, *ṣalsāl*, *nuṭfah*, *'alaqah*, *mudghah*, *'izām*, *lahm*, and related terms) and according to their narrative sequence, tracing the progression from the initial stages of creation through to subsequent human existence. In the documentation stage, all data were recorded in a structured categorization table containing the Arabic source text, translation, and a description of the relevant lexical and syntactic

¹⁶Andrea Révész, “Coding Second Language Data Validly and Reliably,” in *Current Approaches in Second Language Acquisition Research* (Wiley, 2023), 257–75, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781394259670.ch12>.

features of each verse. The fourth stage, linguistic coding, is described in detail below.

Data analysis was conducted through three sequential procedures. First, an inventory of the primary corpus was compiled, cataloguing all key lexical items (*turāb*, *ṭīn*, *ṣalṣāl*, *sulālah*, *nutfah*, *'alaqah*, *mudghah*) across the selected verses. Second, paradigmatic analysis was applied to each passage. Third, syntagmatic analysis was conducted across the same set of passages. The results of both analyses were then interpreted in relation to classical and contemporary exegetical sources to examine the theological, semantic, and rhetorical implications of the Qur'anic patterns of lexical selection and textual sequencing. The analytical procedures are summarized in Figure 1 below.



Source: Author's personal documentation.

Figure 1.

Flowchart of the Research Procedure (developed by the authors)

Paradigmatic analysis (vertical coding, in absentia) involved identifying the specific lexical item selected in each verse and systematically comparing it with alternative terms within the same semantic field that could have occupied the same position but were not selected. For example, the occurrence of *ṭīn* in QS as-Sajdah [32]:7 was examined in relation to *turāb* and *sulālah*, both of which appear in other creation verses and represent alternative lexical choices within the paradigmatic field of material origin. This procedure enabled the identification of paradigmatic oppositions and the specification of the distinct meaning

implications that each lexical choice carries within its immediate textual and broader Qur'anic context.

Syntagmatic analysis (horizontal coding, in praesentia) focused on the sequential arrangement of words, phrases, and conjunctions within individual verses and across the selected corpus. Particular attention was given to the conjunctions *summa* ("then," marking temporal distance or significant transition) and *fa* ("then/so," marking immediate sequence or causal relation), which organize the progression of creation stages within the text. By mapping these linear relations, the analysis examined how the Qur'anic text constructs a coherent narrative sequence connecting material origin, biological development, and subsequent stages of human existence.

With this procedure, the research is expected to yield a deeper understanding of how the Qur'anic texts select, organize, and construct meaning through linguistic devices, thereby closing the gap in previous research that has focused solely on theological aspects or traditional interpretations without a systematic linguistic approach.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents an inventory of primary linguistic data from the verses of the Qur'an that are the object of research. These findings are classified based on the lexical terms (paradigmatic) and conjunction patterns (syntagmatic) used in each key letter. This data forms the basis for a more in-depth structural-semiotic analysis in the Discussion section.

Table 1.

Structural data of the verse of human creation

Main Verses	Paradigmatic Relation (Lexical)	Syntagmatic Relation (Conjunction)	Syntagmatic Flow
Surah al-Mu'minūn [23]:12–14	<i>sulālah min ḥīn, nutfah, 'alaqah, mudghah</i>	<i>ṣumma & fa</i>	A gradual sequence (<i>ṣumma</i>) from the origin of the soil to the seed (<i>nutfah</i>), then the rapid change (<i>fa</i>) between the phases of the embryo until it becomes <i>khalqan ākhara</i> (<i>ṣumma</i>).
Surah al-Ḥajj [22]:5	<i>turāb, nutfah, 'alaqah, mudghah</i>	<i>ṣumma</i> (Consistent)	Underlining the process of creation that is stratified and consistently spaced (<i>tadarruj fī al-khalq</i>) from the basic elements (<i>turāb</i>) to <i>the mudghah</i> .

<p>Surah as-Sajdah [32]:7–9</p>	<p><i>ṭīn, sulālah</i> ṣumma <i>min mā'in</i> (Twice) <i>mahīn, rūḥihī</i></p>	<p>Emphasizing the ontological leap: From the physical formation (<i>ṭīn</i>) to the seed of descent (<i>sulālah</i>), then the great leap (<i>ṣumma</i>) to the refinement of form (<i>sawwāhu</i>) and the blowing of the Divine Spirit (<i>naḥakha fīhi min rūḥihī</i>).</p>
<p>Surah al-Insān [76]:2</p>	<p><i>nuḥḥa amsyāj, fa</i> (Direct Causal) <i>nabtalīhi,</i> <i>samī'an</i> <i>baṣīrā</i></p>	<p>Connecting direct causes: The creation (<i>khalaqnā</i>) of <i>the nuḥḥa amsyāj</i> is immediately devoted to testing (<i>nabtalīhi</i>), which is then directly supplemented (<i>fā</i>) with consciousness (<i>samī'an baṣīrā</i>).</p>

While Table 1 maps the occurrence of creation-related lexicons within their textual sequences, a paradigmatic analysis requires moving beyond linear arrangements to examine the system of oppositions underlying lexical selection. From a Saussurean perspective, meaning is generated not only through syntagmatic combination but also through paradigmatic contrast among signs that occupy the same semantic field. Accordingly, the lexicons identified in Table 1 were further analyzed to determine the ontological meanings they represent and the oppositional relations they establish within the Qur'anic discourse of human creation. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Recapitulation of paradigmatic opposition in the Qur'anic discourse of human creation

Lexicon	Ontological Meaning Represented	Main Opposition (<i>In Absentia</i>)
<i>Turāb</i> (Dust)	The most basic material elements; The Origin of Inanimate Matter.	<i>Ṭīn</i> (Ready-to-form soil)
<i>Ṭīn</i> (Clay)	Elements of the material that are moist and ready to take shape (<i>al-ṭabī'ah al-mā'iyyah</i>).	<i>Turāb</i> (The most basic/dry elements)
<i>Sulālah min ṭīn</i> (essence of land)	Selected essences from the soil; indicates the process of divine selection.	<i>Turāb</i> (Raw material)
<i>Nutfah amsyāj</i> (mixed semen)	Incorporation of biological elements of men and women; marking the complexity of the creature to be tested.	<i>Ṭīn / Turāb</i> (Focus shifts from soil origin to reproductive continuity)

<i>'Alaqah</i> (a clot of blood)	An attached and dependent embryonic stage.	<i>Nutfah</i> (potential life not yet attached or developed)
<i>Mudghah</i> (a lump of flesh)	A differentiated embryonic form undergoing physical development.	<i>'Alaqah</i> (earlier undifferentiated embryonic stage)
<i>'Izām</i> (Bones)	Structural framework of the developing human body.	<i>Mudghah</i> (soft embryonic tissue)
<i>Laḥm</i> (Flesh)	Bodily completion through the covering of bones with flesh.	<i>'Izām</i> (skeletal structure without bodily completion)
<i>Rūḥ</i> (Spirit)	Transcendent dimension of human existence bestowed by God.	Purely physical stages of development (<i>'izām</i> and <i>laḥm</i>)
<i>Sam'</i> (Hearing)	Capacity for sensory reception and perception	Earlier pre-sensory developmental stages
<i>Başar</i> (Sight)	Capacity for visual perception and awareness.	Earlier pre-perceptual stages
<i>Fu'ād</i> (Heart/Minid)	Cognitive and reflective faculty associated with consciousness and understanding.	Mere sensory faculties (<i>sam'</i> and <i>başar</i>) without higher cognition

The paradigmatic structure of the human creation verses reveals a hierarchical semantic system rather than a collection of synonymous expressions. The lexical items are organized into three interconnected ontological domains. The first concerns material origin (*turāb, ṭīn, and sulālah min ṭīn*), which represent different conceptualizations of earthly substance. The second comprises biological formation (*nutfah, 'alaqah, mudghah, 'izām, and laḥm*), describing successive stages of embryonic and physical development. The third consists of spiritual and cognitive endowment (*rūh, sam', baṣar, and fu'ād*), which signify the transition from biological existence to conscious human life. Viewed paradigmatically, each lexicon derives its meaning not in isolation but through its contrast with other lexical possibilities within the same semantic field. This network of oppositions demonstrates that the Qur'anic discourse on human creation is structured through a layered system of signs that integrates material, biological, spiritual, and cognitive dimensions of human existence.

DISCUSSION

The verses of the Qur'an that describe the process of human creation contain a language structure that is informative and symbolic. In this sub-discussion, the verses of the Qur'an regarding the process of human creation will be examined through a structural linguistic perspective, focusing on paradigmatic and syntagmatic connections to elucidate the integrity of the Qur'an's meaning.

Analysis of the Stages of Human Creation in Surah Al-Mu'minūn [23]:12–14

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِّنْ طِينٍ ﴿١٢﴾ ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاهُ نُطْفَةً فِي قَرَارٍ مَّكِينٍ ﴿١٣﴾ ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا النُّطْفَةَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْعَلَقَةَ مُضْغَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْمُضْغَةَ عِظَامًا فَكَسَوْنَا الْعِظَامَ لَحْمًا ثُمَّ أَنْشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا آخَرَ فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

Verily We created man from a product of wet earth; (12) Then placed him as a drop (of seed) in a safe lodging; (13) Then fashioned We the drop a clot, then fashioned We the clot a little lump, then fashioned We the little lump bones, then clothed the bones with flesh, and then

*produced it as another creation. So blessed be Allah, the
Best of creators! (14).¹⁷*

Paradigmatic, key words such as سَلَالَةٌ مِّنْ طِينٍ /*sulālah min ṭīn*/ (essence of land), نُطْفَةٌ /*nutfah*/ (semen drops), عَلَقَةٌ /*alāqah*/ (a clot of blood), and مِضْغَةٌ /*mudghah*/ (a lump of flesh) form a lexical field about the origin and phases of human creation. Each term has a paradigmatic opposition to the same term in the other verse. For example, /*sulālah min ṭīn*/ (essence of land) is opposed to /*turāb*/ (dust) (QS Al-Ḥajj [22]:5), *ṭīn* (land) (QS Al-Sajdah [32]: 7, and *ṭīn lāzib* (clay) (QS al-Ṣāffāt [37]:11).

In the commentary on *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, al-Ṭabarī interprets *sulālah min ṭīn* as خلاصة الطين (the essence of the earth), which is the fundamental element of Adam's creation.¹⁸ This term signifies a Divine selective process. Al-Qurṭubī adds that *ṭīn* here refers to *malleable properties*, as opposed to *turāb*, which only marks the origin of matter.¹⁹ Meanwhile, Ibn Kaṣīr emphasized that the choice of this pronunciation highlights *tadarruj al-khalq* (the gradual process of creation) and the *ḥikmah* of Allah in the stage of transformation into living beings.²⁰ The choice of *sulālah min ṭīn* (essence of the earth) over *turāb* (dust) shows an aspect of essential selection, indicating that man is created from pure essence, not from humble origin. This lexical selection serves as a signifier representing the theological meaning of the holiness of human origin.

¹⁷Marmaduke William Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an: An Explanatory Translation*, Revised ed (London: IDCI, 2011).

¹⁸Muhammad bin Jarīr Aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr Aṭ-Ṭabarī: Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āyī Qur'ān*, Critical e (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr, 2022); Farahmand, Taqavi, and Ahmadi, "Iranian Scholars' Contemporary Debate between Evolutionary Human Genesis and Readings of the Qur'an: Perspectives and Classification."

¹⁹Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Aḥkām Al-Qur'ān*, ed. Aḥmad Al-Bardūnī and Ibrāhīm Aṭfīsh (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2006); Amina Inloes, "Other 'Adams': Twelver Shi'ism and Human Evolution," *Theology and Science* 21, no. 4 (2023): 708–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2023.2255953>.

²⁰Ismail Ibn Katsir, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Azīm*, 10th-volume ed. (Riyadh: Dār As-Salām, 2023); Majid Daneshgar, "The Qur'ān and Science, Part III: Makers of the Scientific Miraculousness," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 58, no. 4 (December 2, 2023): 1005–1028, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygon.12930>.

Syntagmatically, this sequence of verses shows the narrative structure of the stratified phases of human creation, in sequence written: *sulālah min ṭīn* (essence of earth) → *nutfah* (drops of semen) → *'alaqah* (a clot of blood) → *mudghah* (a lump of flesh) → *'izām* (bones) → *lahm* (flesh) → *khalqan ākhara* (other beings) show the narrative continuity from static material to dynamic living beings.

The syntagmatic relations of this verse show regular linear changes, characterized by the conjunctions *ثُمَّ* /*summa*/ (then) and *فَ* /*fa*/ (then) that connect each phase of creation in sequence. *Summa* signifies *pauses and major transitions between stages*.²¹ At the same time, *fa* signifies *rapid progress and continuity*.²² It is seen in the transition from the phase *sulālah min ṭīn* (essence of earth), where the conjunction *summa ja'alnāhu nutfah* (then we make semen). This conjunction indicates the transition from *ṭīn* (the soil element) to *nutfah* (the biological/semen element), i.e., from inorganic to organic. Also, after becoming *lahm* (flesh), it is used conjunctively with *summa ansha'nāhu khalqan ākhar* (then we make him another being). The conjunction in this phase signifies the transition from the physical to the spiritual, indicating that a spiritual transformation is occurring. The conjunctive *fa* is used for "فَخَلَقْنَا الْعَاقَةَ مُضْغَةً" (then we make a lump of flesh). There is a direct progression from *'alaqah* (a clot of blood) to *mudghah* (a lump of flesh). Moreover, in the next phase, "فَكَسَوْنَا الْعِظَامَ لَحْمًا" (and We wrap the bone with the flesh), the lining of the bones by the flesh, which shows a continuous and rapid biological process.

Al-Qurṭubī interprets this sequence as evidence of *systematic tadbīr Ilāhī*, not biological coincidence.²³ In *Al-Lubāb*,

²¹Abd-Gawaad Abd Al-Hassan Ali Al-Baydhani, "The Letter (Thuma) between Neglect and Realization (An Analytical Study of Its Occurrence in the Glorious Qur'an)," *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education* 14, no. 1 (2022): 732–37, <https://doi.org/10.9756/int-jecse/v14i1.221086>.

²²Abeer Alshbeil, "Conjunctions Letters on Soura (AL Kahf) of the Holy Quran 'the Conjunction Letters Was: (Wa 'Fa 'Aw)," *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences* 50, no. 1 (January 30, 2023): 405–14, <https://doi.org/10.35516/hum.v50i1.4423>.

²³Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Ahkām Al-Qur'ān*; Robi Sofian Hadi et al., "The Concept of Human Nature from the Perspective of Imam Al-Qurṭhubi in Tafsir Al-Jami' Li Ahkam Al-Qur'an (Study of Analysis of Q.S Ar-Rum Verse 30)," in *Proceeding International Conference on Islam, Law, and Society (INCOILS)*, vol. 4, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.70062/incoils.v4i1.227>.

Shihab asserts that the function of *summa conjunctions* in this structure is not merely a temporal sequence, but also marks the *semantic* and *ontological* distance between stages one and the next, e.g., the transition from *lahm* (flesh) to *khalqan ākharā* (other beings) indicates a transformation of form categories from the body to the spiritual.²⁴

In Saussure's semiological framework, each lexical element and sequence in this verse serves as a sign that unites two sides: the *signifier* and *signified*. The signifiers in this verse are a series of linguistic forms (*sulālah min ṭīn, nuṭfah, 'alaqah, mudghah, 'izām, lahm, khalqan ākharā*). Meanwhile, the signified that emerges is the metaphysical stage of human existence, from the natural element to spiritual existence.

Thus, the structure of this verse does not merely describe biological processes. Rather, the sequence constructs a semantic movement from material origin to spiritual distinction, in which human existence is represented through successive stages of physical formation, sensory endowment, and moral responsibility.

Analysis of the Stage of Human Creation in Surah al-Ḥajj [22]:5

بَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِن كُنْتُمْ فِي رَيْبٍ مِّنَ الْبَعْثِ فَإِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِّن تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ مِّن نُّطْفَةٍ ثُمَّ مِّن عَلَقَةٍ
ثُمَّ مِّن مُّضْغَةٍ مُّخَلَّقَةٍ وَغَيْرِ مُخَلَّقَةٍ لِّنُبَيِّنَ لَكُمْ ...

"O mankind! If ye are in doubt concerning the Resurrection, then lo! We have created you from dust, then from a drop of seed, then from a clot, then from a little lump of flesh shapely and shapeless, that We may make (it) clear for you..."²⁵

Paradigmatically, this verse forms a series of lexical oppositions to similar verses, e.g., QS al-Mu'minūn [23]:12–14. If in QS al-Mu'minūn the word *سَلَالَةٍ مِّن طِينٍ* /*sulālah min ṭīn*/ (essence of the land), then in QS al-Ḥajj it is replaced by *تُرَابٍ* /*turāb*/ (dust/dry soil). Al-Ṭabarī stated that *turāb* is interpreted as *أصل*

²⁴ M. Quraish Shihab, *Al-Lubab: Makna, Tujuan, Dan Pelajaran Dari Surah-Surah Al-Qur'an* (Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2012).

²⁵ Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an: An Explanatory Translation*.

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الخلق الأول (the origin of the first creation), indicating the most basic material phase before it is processed into biological form.²⁶ Al-Qurṭubī affirmed that *turāb* here means the origin of the dead earth, while *sulālah min ṭīn* in another verse indicates the choice element of the living land.²⁷ Ibn Kaṣīr called this difference in lexical selection an indication of *tafaḍḍul al-khalq*, that the creation of man involved a gradual selection from the lowest element to the most perfect form.²⁸

The paradigmatic relationship between *turāb* and *ṭīn/sulālah min ṭīn* marks different ontological levels: *turāb* (dust/dry soil) marks the beginning of material. In contrast, *sulālah min ṭīn* (essence of the earth) marks the potential of form and marks essential choices. In the Saussurean sign structure, this lexical difference is a variation *in absentia* (vertical) that transforms the conceptual meaning of "man" from a mere earthly element to a process and a divine being.

Syntagmatically, this sequence of verses shows the narrative structure of the multi-tiered phases of human creation, in chronological order: *turāb* (earth) → *nutfah* (semen drops) → *'alaqah* (a clot of blood) → *muḍghah* (a lump of flesh) → *mukhallaqah wa ghayri mukhallaqah* (the perfect in occurrence and the imperfect). Each phase is connected by the conjunction *ثُمَّ* /*summa*/ (then), which indicates the stages are spaced and sequentially gradual. Unlike QS al-Mu'minūn, which also uses the conjunction *fa* (for a rapid process), this verse consistently employs *summa*, which, according to Qurṭubī, signifies *tadarruj fi al-khalq* (a gradual process of creation), highlighting God's power at each stage. In *Tafsīr Al-Mishbah*, Shihab highlights that the repetition of *summa* four times in a row confirms a pattern of biological and ontological order, namely that each phase has its own *maqām* or existential status.²⁹ It exhibits a consistent semiotic linearity: the structure of language (*summa* + biological noun)

²⁶ Aṭ-Ṭabari, *Tafsīr Aṭ-Ṭabarī: Jāmi Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āyi Qur'ān*.

²⁷ Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Aḥkām Al-Qur'ān*.

²⁸ Ibn Katsir, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Azim*.

²⁹ M. Quraish Shihab, "Tafsīr Al-Mishbah: Pesan, Kesan, Dan Keserasian Al-Qur'an," in 9 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002); Khalil Andani, "Evolving Creation: An Ismaili Muslim Interpretation of Evolution," *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 57, no. 2 (June 2, 2022): 443–66, <https://doi.org/10.1111/zygo.12774>.

represents the regularity of the creation process as a cosmological text.

From the perspective of structural semiology, these lexical forms work as a system of signs that unite two sides: *the signifier* and the *signified*. The signifiers in this verse are a series of linguistic forms: *turāb* 'earth' → *nutfah* 'drops of semen' → '*alaqah* 'a clot of blood' → *mudghah* (a lump of flesh) → *mukhallaqah wa ghayri mukhallaqah* (the perfect of occurrence and the imperfect). Meanwhile, the signified of the linguistic form is the level of human existence from the earth → biological elements → embryos → bodies → perfect beings.

The structure of this verse, with its repetitive syntagmatic patterns and paradigmatic shifts between surahs, creates a "theological grammar" about human existence: that human existence is a gradual process, not a single event, and that each stage contains a symbol of the relationship between matter and spirit. Thus, the structural-semiotic analysis of this verse shows that the order of language is a sequence of meaning: the lexical signs in the structure of syntagmatic relations construct the semantic logic of human creation.

Analysis of the Stages of Human Creation in Surah As-Sajdah [32]: 7–9

الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ وَبَدَأَ خَلْقَ الْإِنْسَانِ مِنْ طِينٍ (7) ثُمَّ جَعَلَ نَسْلَهُ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِّنْ مَّاءٍ مَّهِينٍ (8) ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُّوحِهِ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ (9)

"Who made all things good which He created, and He began the creation of man from clay; (7) Then He made his seed from a draught of despised fluid; (8) Then He fashioned him and breathed into him of His Spirit; and appointed for you hearing and sight and hearts. Small thanks give ye! (9)"³⁰

In this verse, the main lexicons that form a paradigmatic opposition to the other verses are طِينٍ /*tīn*/ (clay), سُلَالَةٍ مِّنْ مَّاءٍ مَّهِينٍ /*sulālah min mā'in mahīn*/ (the essence of the despicable water),

³⁰Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an: An Explanatory Translation*.

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and رُوحِهِ /*rūḥihī*/ (His spirit). The word /*ṭīn*/ (clay) differs paradigmatically from *turāb* (soil) in QS al-Ḥajj and *sulālah min ṭīn* (essence of the earth) in QS al-Mu'minūn. According to al-Ṭabarī, the word *ṭīn* here denotes *al-ṭabī'ah al-mā'iyyah*, a moist and ready-to-form soil element, not dry soil (*turāb*) or selected starch (*sulālah*).³¹ Al-Qurṭubī interprets the word *ṭīn* as *al-'unshur al-muqaddas al-awwal*, which is the sacred basic material from which the first human being (Adam) was formed.³² Meanwhile, Ibn Kaṣīr interprets *ṭīn* as a symbol of *al-layyinah fī khalq al-insān* (tenderness and readiness to receive form), indicating human readiness to accept both form and spirit.³³

The paradigmatic comparison between *ṭīn*, *turāb*, and *sulālah* forms a gradation of material, essential meanings: *turāb* is the most basic material element (dust); *ṭīn*, which is the element of form and biological readiness; *sulālah* is the element of choice in biological processes themselves. In Saussure's structural framework, each element is a *signifier in absentia* to the others. That is, the choice of *ṭīn* in this surah replaces *turāb* and *sulālah min ṭīn* with the implication of a new meaning: man is not just material or essence, but a creation that is ready to receive perfection and spiritual dimension.

The syntagmatic relationship of the sequence of the stages of human creation in this verse shows a very systematic narrative: *ṭīn* 'clay' → *sulālah min mā'in mahīn* 'essence of semen' → *sawwāhu* (He perfected it) → *nafakha fīhi min rūḥihī* 'blowing His spirit' → *ja'ala lakum al-sam'a wa al-abṣār wa al-af'idah* 'making hearing, sight, and heart'.

The conjunction *ثُمَّ* /*ṣumma*/ (then) in this verse is repeated twice to indicate the cascading and distant process of creation (*tadarruj fī al-khalq*): "...creation of man from the earth, then He made his offspring from the despicable essence of water. Then he perfected it." The absence of the conjunction *fa* 'then' in syntagmatic relations in this verse indicates a gradual transition

³¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr Al-Ṭabarī: Jāmi Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āyi Qur'ān*.

³² Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Aḥkām Al-Qur'ān*.

³³ Ibn Katsīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Azīm*; Shoaib Ahmed Malik, "The Use of Philosophy of Science in the Creationism-Evolution Debate: An Ash'arī Perspective," *Theology and Science* 21, no. 3 (July 3, 2023): 421–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746700.2023.2230430>.

that is not instantaneous. There is a change from material to spiritual consciousness.

According to al-Qurṭubī, the repetition of *ṣumma* in this surah is an indication of *tartīb bi al-tamkīn*, which is a multi-level arrangement to show each stage of creation perfected by Allah. In *Tafsīr al-Lubāb*, Shihab asserts that the use of *ṣumma* between material and spiritual processes marks an ontological leap: from *bodily* to *human existence*.³⁴

From a semiotic perspective, the structure of this verse contains two layers of signs:

- (1) The material-biological layer: *ḥīn* → *sulālah* → *mā' mahīn* → *sawwāhu*: represents the physiological sequence of human beings as biological beings.
- (2) The spiritual-transcendental layer: *naḥakha fīhi min rūḥihī* → *al-sam'a*, *al-abṣār*, *al-af'idah*: represents the structure of human consciousness as a spiritual being.

The syntagmatic relationship between "*sawwāhu*" (the perfection of form) and the "*naḥakha fīhi min rūḥihī*" (the gift of His spirit) illustrates a powerful iconic relationship in semiology. The sequence of these two verbs is not merely a grammatical arrangement but reflects the existential stages of human beings as understood in the reality of life: human beings are first formed physically, then endowed with a spiritual dimension that makes them alive.

Thus, the linguistic structure of this verse actually reflects the theological structure of human creation itself. Each word choice in paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations in this verse explains the biological process of human creation and presents a more profound meaning about human existence. In the structural-semiotic framework, the Qur'an teaches that man is formed not only from the physical element (*al-jism*), but also from the breath of the Divine spirit (*al-rūḥ*), which makes him a creature of thinking, feeling, and realizing himself. Thus, revelation is not just

³⁴Shihab, *Al-Lubab: Makna, Tujuan, Dan Pelajaran Dari Surah-Surah Al-Qur'an*; Salam Khaleel Alwan, "The Qur'anic 'Thumma': A Genealogical Study," *Mağallai Buhūt Al-Luğat* 4, no. 2 (2023): 102–19, <https://doi.org/10.25130/jls.4.2.9>.

a tool to narrate the process, but a medium that organizes human consciousness about its origin, essence, and purpose of existence.

Analysis of the Stages of Human Creation in Surah Al-Insān [76]:2

إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ نَبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا

"Lo! We create man from a drop of thickened fluid to test him; so We make him hearing, knowing. (2)"³⁵

This verse contains three main lexicons that establish important paradigmatic relationships in the discourse of human creation when compared to the previous verses, namely *nutfah amsyāj* (mixed semen), *nabtālīhi* (We test it), and *samī'an baṣīrā* (hearing and seeing).

The word *nutfah amsyāj* (mixed semen) differs paradigmatically from *ṭīn* (clay) in QS al-Sajdah and *sulālah min mā'in mahīn* (essence of despicable water) in QS al-Mu'minūn. Al-Qurṭubī stated that *nutfah amsyāj* is *ikhtilāṭ al-'anāsir* (the mixing of male and female elements), which symbolizes the unity of genetic and spiritual aspects.³⁶ Meanwhile, Ibn Kaṣīr views *amsyāj* as a sign of the complexity of human nature, which is a combination of reason and *nafs*, encompassing both the potential for good and evil.³⁷

The paradigmatic relationship between *ṭīn*, *sulālah*, and *nutfah* forms the semantic gradation of creation, from the elements of the earth (*ṭīn*) to biological filtering (*sulālah*) to the unification of the elements of life (*nutfah amsyāj*). Thus, this verse represents a more personal and reproductive phase than the previous verses. The choice of the word *nutfah amsyāj* shows that the Qur'an's focus is no longer on the origin of Adam's occurrence, but on the continuation of the creation of man as a tested entity. In

³⁵Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an: An Explanatory Translation*.

³⁶Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li Ahkām Al-Qur'an*.

³⁷Ibn Katsir, *Tafsir Al-Qur'an Al-'Azim*; G H Rassool and Zuleyha Keskin, "Positioning the Self (Nafs) in Islāmic Psycho-Spirituality," *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* 27, no. 1 (2023): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19349637.2023.2264848>.

Saussurean terminology, *nutfah amsyāj* serves as a *signifier* that replaces *īn* and *turāb* paradigmatically (*in absentia*), resulting in new meanings. Humans are complex creatures, resulting from both biological and spiritual interactions, not just those formed on land.

As for the syntagmatic relations of this verse, it forms a strong and progressive sequence of meanings: *khalaqnā* (We created) → *min nutfah amsyāj* (from a drop of mixed semen) → *nabtalīhi* (We test it) → *fa ja'alnāhu samī'an baṣīrā* (so We made him a hearer and a seer).

The conjunction *fa* 'then' in this verse serves as a direct causal link between creation and human consciousness: since man was created to be tested, he has been endowed with the ability to hear and see from the beginning. The absence of the conjunction *summa* (then), which usually signifies the time interval between processes, confirms that the physical creation and the bestowal of human moral-spiritual potential co-occur, not separately. This verse illustrates that man was from the beginning a conscious being: he was born not only with a living body, but also with inner hearing and vision that became a provision for understanding life and undergoing Divine tests.

From a structural-semiotic perspective, this verse forms two layers of sign structure:

1. Biological–material layer: *nutfah amsyāj* → *nabtalīhi* → describe human beings as biological beings created from a mixture of material elements.
2. Spiritual–epistemic layer: *fa ja'alnāhu samī'an baṣīrā* → signifies the bestowal of cognitive potential and moral awareness as spiritual representations.

The syntagmatic relationship between *nabtalīhi* 'We test him' and *fa ja'alnāhu samī'an baṣīrā* 'so We make him a hearer and a seer' does not merely describe the sequence of events, but weaves together the logic of human life itself: trials are part of creation, and consciousness is a gift for man to be able to live them. The structure of the language reflects the structure of human existence, where every test is always accompanied by the power to understand and face it. Thus, the language of the Qur'an here not only conveys the story of creation but also organizes the way

humans understand themselves: as creatures who are conscious, tested, and at the same time given the ability to understand the meaning of each test in their lives.

From a structural-semiotic perspective, the sequence *nabtalīhi* and *fa ja'alnāhu samī'an baṣīrā* forms a coherent progression from trial to perception and moral accountability. The conjunction *fa* links these elements into a unified semantic chain, indicating that the capacities of hearing and seeing function as prerequisites for responding to life's tests. The verse therefore presents human creation not only as a biological process but also as the foundation of ethical consciousness.

Comparative Analysis: Paradigmatic–Syntagmatic Patterns in the Qur'anic Narrative of Human Creation

A comparative analysis of QS al-Mu'minūn [23]:12–14, QS al-Ḥajj [22]:5, QS as-Sajdah [32]:7–9, and QS al-Insān [76]:2 shows that the narrative of human creation in the Qur'an is constructed through a coherent system of signs, both paradigmatically and syntagmatically. The lexical variations and grammatical structure between the surahs are not redundant but rather complement each other in establishing a theological meaning about human.

Paradigmatically speaking, the choice of the lexicons *turāb*, *ṭīn*, and *sulālah* constitutes the stages of creation. *Turāb* (QS al-Ḥajj) represents the most basic material level, emphasizing the possibility of resurrection from the dead elements. *Ṭīn* (QS as-Sajdah) denotes material that has had ready form, while *sulālah* (QS al-Mu'minūn) indicates elements of selection and purification. In Saussure's framework, this distinction works as a relation *in absentia*: each lexical choice acquires meaning through the absence of its alternative, so that human beings are constructed not merely as material, but as the result of a selective and gradual process.

At the syntagmatic level, variations in the use of the conjunctions *summa* and *fa* display different creation logics. QS al-Mu'minūn combines *summa* (distant and significant transitions) with *fa* (rapid biological processes), building a layered narrative from matter to *khalqan ākhara*. QS al-Ḥajj consistently uses *summa*, emphasizing creation as a gradual and orderly process. QS

as-Sajdah uses *summa* to mark the ontological leap from the physical to the spiritual, while QS al-Insān uses *fa* to show the direct cause-and-effect relationship between creation, testing, and consciousness. Thus, conjunctions serve as markers of the structure of meaning, not just temporal connectors.

Semantically, the four surahs show a clear shift in focus from physical formation to the granting of awareness and responsibility. If QS al-Ḥajj and al-Mu'minūn emphasize the physical stages as the basis of theological argument, QS as-Sajdah and al-Insān direct attention to the soul, consciousness, and moral responsibility. This shift forms a continuum of meaning: the language of the Qur'an leads the reader from the material origins of man to an understanding of himself as a conscious and tested spiritual subject.

A closer comparison of the four passages reveals that each surah foregrounds a distinct dimension of human creation while remaining connected to a common semantic framework. QS al-Ḥajj [22]:5 emphasizes the material origin of humanity through the progression from *turāb* to *mudghah*, employing a consistently sequential structure to support its broader argument concerning resurrection and divine power. QS al-Mu'minūn [23]:12–14 develops this framework further by providing the most detailed embryological sequence, thereby highlighting the gradual transformation from earthly substance to a new created being (*khalqan ākhara*). In contrast, QS as-Sajdah [32]:7–9 shifts the focus from biological development to ontological completion, linking material formation with the divine act of breathing the spirit. QS al-Insān [76]:2 then extends the discourse beyond creation itself by connecting human origin to testing, perception, and moral accountability.

Viewed together, these differences indicate that the Qur'anic narrative of human creation is not organized around repetition but around semantic distribution. Each passage contributes a particular aspect of meaning that is absent or less prominent in the others: material origin (*turāb* and *tīn*), gradual formation (*sulālah*, *nutfah*, *'alaqah*, and *mudghah*), spiritual endowment (*nafakha fīhi min rūhīhī*), and ethical purpose (*nabtalīhi*). The paradigmatic selection of lexical items and the

syntagmatic arrangement of creation stages therefore function together to construct a multidimensional representation of the human being. Human existence is portrayed not merely as a biological phenomenon, but as a structured progression from materiality to spirituality and ultimately to moral responsibility.

In a structural-semiotic perspective, these findings confirm that the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships in the verses of human creation not only maintain the cohesion of the text but also structure the way in which the Qur'an interprets human beings as beings departing from matter, refined through process, and directed towards theological consciousness.

Theoretical Implications of Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic Relations on the Verses of Human Creation

The Qur'anic language of human creation explains the biological sequence and compiles the story of human consciousness in an orderly system of signs.³⁸ In Saussure's structural framework, the meaning of these verses is born from two relationships: *paradigmatic* (word choice) and *syntagmatic* (word order). The two form a web of meanings that make the text of the Qur'an not just a theological description, but a linguistic structure that constructs the view of man.

On the paradigmatic axis, the selection of lexicons such as *ṭīn* (clay), *turāb* (dust), *sulālah min mā'in mahīn* (semen starch), and *nutfah amsyāj* (mixed semen) shows a gradation of meaning from material to spiritual elements. These differences in word choice form an opposition of meanings that, according to Saussure, became the basis for the birth of new meanings. Thus, human beings in the Qur'an are understood through the relationship between the low element (earth) and the high element (spirit), encompassing both physical and spiritual aspects, as well as material and spiritual meanings.

On the syntagmatic axis, verb sequences such as *khalaqnā*, *ṣumma sawwāhu*, and *fa nafakha fīhi min rūḥihī* describe a tiered existential motion: from physical form to spiritual perfection. The relationship *between ṣumma and fa* in the verse's structure reveals

³⁸ Fatemeh Khiveh et al., "The Modalization and Evolution of Human Intellect (Cognitive Systems): Following in the Prophets' Footsteps," *Maqolat* 3, no. 2 (2025): 180–94, <https://doi.org/10.58355/maqolat.v3i2.142>.

not only a chronology of time but also an ontological hierarchy, progressing from a gradual physical process to a spiritual consciousness directly inspired by God. In structural semiotics, this language sequence is iconic, meaning the structure of language represents the structure of creation. Thus, the Qur'an's grammar informs biological processes and affirms that form precedes spirit as matter precedes consciousness.

In a structural-semiotic framework, the language of the Qur'an embodies the beauty of the relationship between sign and meaning, as Saussure described, yet with a spiritual depth characteristic of revelation. Every word and sequence of sentences does not come by chance but is intertwined in the Divine will that arranges meaning through language structure. Thus, the text constructs a layered account of human existence through interconnected lexical choices and syntagmatic relations. The sequence indicates progression from material origin to spiritual distinction, while the lexical system organizes these stages into a coherent semantic structure.

These findings indicate that the Qur'anic discourse of human creation operates through a principle of semantic differentiation rather than lexical repetition. From a Saussurean perspective, the terms *turāb*, *ṭīn*, *sulālah*, and *nuṭfah* cannot be treated as synonymous references to human origin, since each acquires meaning through its contrast with the others. The paradigmatic relations identified in this study therefore challenge readings that reduce these lexicons to interchangeable expressions and instead reveal a structured semantic system in which each sign contributes a distinct ontological dimension of creation. Meaning emerges not from individual words in isolation but from their position within the broader network of signs.

The syntagmatic findings further demonstrate that the Qur'anic representation of human creation is organized through a progression of stages rather than a single descriptive statement. The recurrent use of *summa* and *fa* does more than establish temporal succession; it creates a hierarchy of relations that links material origin, biological development, spiritual endowment, and moral responsibility. In this regard, the study extends the application of Saussurean structuralism beyond lexical analysis by

showing how paradigmatic selection and syntagmatic arrangement work together to produce a coherent theological discourse on human existence.

Overall, the study shows that the Qur'anic representation of human creation is constructed through the interaction of paradigmatic selection and syntagmatic arrangement. Human beings are portrayed not merely as biological entities but as subjects whose material origin, spiritual endowment, and moral responsibility are integrated within a unified system of meaning. In this respect, structural linguistics provides a useful framework for understanding how the Qur'an organizes and communicates its conception of human existence.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the Qur'anic discourse of human creation is organized through a structured system of linguistic signs in which meaning emerges not from individual words in isolation but from their position within the broader network of paradigmatic oppositions and syntagmatic relations. At the paradigmatic level, the terms *ṭīn*, *turāb*, *sulālah*, and *nuṭfah* constitute a graduated semantic field in which each lexicon acquires its meaning through contrast with the others, encoding a progressive ontological movement from elementary matter through biological form to spiritual endowment. At the syntagmatic level, the conjunctions *ṣumma* and *fa* function as structural markers that organize the stages of human creation into a semantically graduated sequence: *ṣumma* signals significant ontological transitions between stages, while *fa* marks relations of immediacy and direct causal consequence. Together, these paradigmatic and syntagmatic dimensions reveal that the Qur'anic representation of human origins operates as a theologically organized semiotic system in which lexical selection and sequential arrangement work in concert to construct a multi-layered discourse of human identity integrating material, biological, spiritual, and cognitive dimensions within a coherent sign system.

Theoretically, this study demonstrates that Saussure's concepts of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations provide productive analytical categories for examining the semantic

organization of sacred texts. The findings extend the application of structural linguistics beyond its conventional domain by showing how theological concepts are encoded through structured patterns of lexical selection and textual sequencing operative across multiple passages rather than through individual signs. Consistent with the framework established by Kamil and Handayani, the study affirms that structural semiotics constitutes a rigorous and generative method for Islamic textual analysis, contributing a systematic perspective that complements existing exegetical approaches and opens productive avenues for further interdisciplinary inquiry.

The study has several limitations that qualify its findings and point toward future directions. The primary corpus is restricted to four sets of Qur'anic verses, and the exegetical references are confined to three classical commentaries within the Sunni tradition. This latter constraint is particularly significant: Mu'tazilite, Shia, and Sufi exegetical traditions may assign substantially different semantic and theological values to the same lexicons, potentially yielding different paradigmatic configurations, and the findings of this study should therefore be understood as reflecting one authoritative strand of Qur'anic interpretation rather than the full spectrum of possible readings. Additionally, the exclusive reliance on a Saussurean framework does not account for pragmatic, intertextual, or reader-response dimensions of Qur'anic meaning construction.

Future research may productively expand the corpus to encompass a broader range of creation-related passages, incorporate exegetical perspectives from Mu'tazilite, Shia, Sufi, and contemporary reformist traditions, and engage complementary frameworks including cognitive linguistics, discourse analysis, or relevance theory, to provide a more comprehensive account of how the Qur'an constructs and communicates its representation of human existence.

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