THE INTERPRETASION OF "*WA-'ALLAMA ĀDAMA AL-ASMĀ'A KULLA-HĀ*" (QS. 2: 31) AND ITS RELATION WITH THE ISSUE OF THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGE: Study Text of al-Ùabarī's, al-Zamakhsharī's and al-Rāzī's Commentary on the Qur'ān

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Abstract: This paper will describe the interpretation of the verse 31, and its relation with the issue of the origin of langguage, from three selected commentaries, namely; *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, *al-Kashshāf 'an ×aqā'iq al-Tanzīl*, and *MafātīÍ al-Ghaib*. A close reading of these tree commentaries reveals that there are two interpretation of the word *al-asma'*; first, it means every single word that signifies a meaning: nouns, verbs or particle i.e. the names of everything: angels, humans, animals, and inanimate existent includes its qualities, properties and everything relates to objects. This was the same to saying that God had taught Ādam language in its totality. Al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī believe the verse demonstrates that God taught Ādam every language. But unlike al-Zamakhsharī, who seems to suggest that God was pointing to the objects and naming them, al-Rāzī does not explain how this process occurred, whether God educated him or thrown a knowledge (the understanding of language) into his mind. Second, al-Ùabarī who interprets it in a narrow meaning: *al-asma'* means the names of the angels and Ādam's sons, seems to suggest that God just taught Ādam some languages.

Abstrak: Tulisan ini akan mendiskusikan penafsiran dari ayat 31 dan kaitannya dengan isu asal mula bahasa, dari tiga kitab tafsir yaitu: *Jāmi'al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, *al-Kashshāf 'an ×aqā'iq al-Tanzīl*, and *MafātīÍ al-Ghaib*. Berdasarkan penafsiran dari ketiga kitab tafsir ini ditemukan bahwa terdapat dua pemahaman dari lafaz *al-asma'*. Pertama; meliputi semua kata yang menunjukkan kepada makna baik kata benda, kata kerja atau partikel dan lain sebagainya. Yakni meliputi nama segala sesuatu termasuk malaikat, manusia, binatang maupun benda mati termasuk kualitas, sifat dan semuanya yang berhubungan dengan objek. Ini bermakna bahwa Allah telah mengajarkan Ódam bahasa secara keseluruhan. Al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī berpendapat, ayat menjelaskan bahwa Allah mengajarkan Ódam semua Bahasa. Namun berbeda dengan al-Zamakhsharī yang nampaknya menerangkan bahwa Allah mengajarkan Ódam dengan menunjuk kepada benda kemudian menamainya, al-Rāzī tidak menjelaskan bagaimana proses itu berlangsung, apakah Allah mengajarkan Ódam atau mengilhamkan pengetahuan kepadanya. Kedua, al-Tabari yang menafsirkan ayat dengan makna yang lebih sempit, di mana *al-asma'* pada ayat bermakna nama-nama malaikat dan anak-anak Ódam terkesan memahaminya bahwa Allah mengajarkan Ódam hanya sebagian bahasa saja.

Keywords: Interpretation, Names, Process of naming, Language Origin.

Intoduction

The verse "*wa-'allama ādama al-asmā'a kulla-hā*" generally demonstrates how names are *given* to entities or how the process of *naming* firstly occurs in language. Discussing this question the issue of the origin of language is difficult to be avoided.[1] Because names are part of language and language could not exist without the process of *naming*. Therefore, this verse tends to be linked with the issue of language origins and indeed is used by the proponents of the divine origin of language to support their argument.[2] Similarly with the commentators of *al-Qur'ān*, there was who associates the interpretation of this verse with the problem of language origins straightly, such as al-Rāzī, which will be shown in the following passages, whereas most of them more concern on the content of the verse, i.e. the process of *naming*.

This paper, however will only describe the interpretation of the verse 31 from three selected commentaries, namely; first, *Jāmi'al-Bayān Ñan Ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, which represents a traditional exegesis (*tafsir bil-ma'thūr*).[3] The commentary made by the early generation of Islam in the third century *hijrī*: Abu JaÑfar MuÍammad b. Jarīr b. Yazīd b. Kathīr b. Ghālib al-Ùabarī, who was born at the end of 224/839 at Āmul, northern Iran and died at Baghdād in 310/929.[4] Generally, in his *tafsīr* al-Ùabarī quoted three kinds of materials:[5] the tradition of earlier *tafsīr*,[6] the opinion of grammarians, which based on the linguistic schools of *BaÎrā* and *kūfah*, and the variant reading of the *Qur'ān*.[7]

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[1] A broad discussion of this matter can be found in 'Abd book *Al-Mughnī fī Abwāb* al-Jabbar's *al-Tawhīd wa al-'Adl,* vol. V. ed. MaÍmud MuÍammad al-HuÌayrī (Cairo: Al-Firaq al-Islamiyya, 1965). 160-86 or in Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī's book *Al-MaÍÎūl fī 'Ilmi 'UÎūl al-Fiqh*, vol. I. ed. Ùaha Jābir FiyāÌ al-'Ulwāny (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Imam MuÍammad bin Sa'ūd Islamic University, 1979). 243-60 and in Abu ×āmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-MustaÎfā fī 'Ilm al-'Usūl*, vol. I (Bayrūt: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 1983). 318-22.

[2] See al-Ghazālī, 320 and al-Rāzī, *Al-MaÍÎūl*. 249-50.

[3] Although *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān* has been categorized as *tafsīr bil ma'thur*, in fact, because of his own judgments among competing interpretation, or his preference prominence of place, it Éalso had been labeled and used as a ground of *tafsīr bi al-'aqly*. See MuÍammad ×usayn al-Dhahaby, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufassirūn*, vol. I (al-Qāhirah: Maktabah Wahbah, 1995) 217 and 220.

[4] Bosworth, C.E. "al-Ùabarī, Abū Ja'far MuÍammad b. Jarīr b. Yazīd." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Brill Online, Mcgill University Library, http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/ entry?entry=islam_COM-1133. For his complete biography, see Yāqūt ibn 'Abd al-×amawī al-Rūmī, *Irshād al-Arīb ilā Ma'rifat al-Adīb*, vol. IV. Ed. D. S. Marjuliyūth (Cairo: MaÏba'ah Hindīyah, 1923-21) 423-62.

[5] In some places he also expands his interpretation with additional legends (*isrā'īlīyyāt*), poetic allusion (*syi'ir*), and reference to point of law (*al-ahkam al-fiqhīyyah*). A wide explanation of al-Ùabarī's methodology in commentary can be found in al-Dhahaby, 217-34 and in Jane I. Smith, *An Historical and Semantic Study of term Islam, As Seen in a Sequence of Qur'ān Commentaries*. (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1975) 59-62. Furthermore, an exhaustive study of *tafsīr* al-Ùabarī's methodology is discussed by al-'ustādh MuÍammad al-Mālīky in his book, which it entirely dealing with this subject in depth. *Dirāsah al-Ùabarī li l-Ma'nā min Khilāli Tafsīrih*i: *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān* (al- Maghrib: Wizārah al-'Awqāf wa al-Syu'ūn al-'Islāmiyyah, 1996)

[6] Al-Ùabarī's commentary according to Heribert Horst as quoted by Smith contains 13,026 different *isnād*. The oldest traditionists to which the *isnād* lead are Ibn 'Abbās, Mujāhid and al-DaÍÍāk. He assumed that probably only a few complete books of older authors such as, the *tafsīr* of 'Ali b. A. Ùalha, the commentary of Mujāhid, the *tafsīr* of 'Abd al-RaÍmān b. Żayd b. Aslam, the kitāb *al-Maghāzī* of Ibn Ishāq and maybe a work from Ibn Sa'd have been available to al-Ùabarī, whereas others coming to him in abbreviated form. See Smith, 59.

[7] However, as he said himself, because he has worked on this subject in another his book, the *Kitab al-Qirā'āt wa-Tanzīl al-Qur'ān* he just reexplained this point occasionally. Al-Ùabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. I (Bayrūt, Lubnān: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1986-87) 66.

Second, al-Zamakhsharī's commentary *al-Kashshāf 'an ×aqā'iq al-Tanzīl*, represents a more rationalistic approach which is called *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* as opposed to *tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr*. Abū al-Qāsim MaÍmūd b. 'Umar b. MuÍammad b. 'Umar Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī was born a century and half after al-Ùabarī's death at Zamakhshar on 27 Ra'jab 467/1075 and died at the age of seventy-one in 538/1144 at al-Jurjānīyah in Khawārizm.[8] Comparing to al-Ùabarī who presents various understanding of the verses based on traditional interpretation, al-Zamakhsharī generally gives the sense of the passages concisely as it appears most obvious with a suggestion of possible interpretation built on philological and philosophical analysis. He also concerned mostly with inimitability (*i'jāz*) of the *Qur'ān*.[9] Furthermore, studying intensively al-Zamakhsharī's commentary on *Sūrat al-Dukhān* and *Surāt al-Qamar*, Andrew J. Lane classifies several methods that are followed by al-Zamakhsharī in his commentary namely; *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi-al-Qur'ān* i.e. to use one part of text to clarify or complete another, variant reading of the *Qur'ān* (*Qirā'āt*), grammar approach, occasion of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), poetry, and question and answers (*masā'īl wa-ajwība*).[10]

Beside these methods, al-Zamakhsharī's commentary also has been judged as the commentary, which was influenced by his theological views as a *Mu'tazilite* scholar. Goldziher as quoted by Andrew J. Lane said that al-Zamakhsharī has produced a concise fundamental work for *Mu'tazilite Qur'ān* interpretation;[11] Smith noted that al-Zamakhsharī's interpretation of and commentary on the Qur'ān strongly influenced by his theological viewpoints.[12] On the contrary, Jansen argues that in spite of marks of *mutazilite* dogmatical attitudes, al-Zamakhsharī's work is not a dogmatical commentary, but philological and syntactical;[13] Lane also asserts, it is true that Zamakhsharī seems willing to offer some *Mu'tazilism* when he has an opportunity to do it but he does not going into a long development of the topic.[14]

Third, *MafātīÍ al-Ghaib* which is also known as *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, the *tafsīr* was written by Fakhr al-Din Muhammad b. 'Umar b. al-×usayn al-Rāzī, who was born in 543/1149 at Rayy five years after Zamakhsharī's death. He was famous as theologian of *Ash'arite* school and generally opposed to *Mu'tazilī* views.[15] Although he was a follower of *Ash'arī*, al-Rāzī felt free to contradict any elements, which he could not agree.

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[8] Madelung, W. "al-Zamakhsharī, Abu al-Qāsim MaÍmud b. 'Ūmar." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Brill Online, Mcgill University Library, http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/ entry?entry=islam_SIM-8108. For a deep study of Zamakhshari's life, see the book of Andre J. Lane who has presented it in detail by consulting it from a large number of biographical sources. The study includes the history of Zamakhshari's family and early life, his travels for the course of his studies, his teachers and students, and his works. *A Traditional Mu'tazilite Qur'ān Commentary: The Kashshaāf of Jār Allah al-Zamakhsharī,* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006) 9-47.

[9] Al-Dhahaby, 439-42 and Smith, 89-92.

[10] Andrew J. Lane, 117-41.

[11] Ibid., 141 quoted from I. Goldziher, *Aus der Theologies des Fachr al-din al-Rāzī, Der Islam*, 220

[12] Smith, 92-3.

[13] Jansen, J. J. G., *The Interpretation of Qur'ān in Modern Egypt*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974) 63.

[14] Andrew J. Lane, 142-3.

[15] Anawati, G.C. "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Brill Online, Mcgill University Library, http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/ entry? entry=islam_COM-0206. See also Walīd Musā'id al-ÙabÏabā'iy, *Al-Tafsīr wa Manāhij al-Mufassirīn* (Kuwayt: Dār al-Tajdīd, 1994) 140

According to Khawānsārī (Rawdat al-Jannāt, 730) as quoted by Anawati he criticized *Ash'arī*'s doctrine of the divine attributes. The same is true of his occupation with Philosophy. He had studied al-Fārābī and wrote a commentary on the *Ishārāt* and the *'Uyūn al-Akhbār* of Ibn Sīnā, but he maintain his freedom of mind by criticizing Ibn Sīnā strongly, where he did not agree with his opinion.[16] Regarding his method in tafsīr, it is likely al-Ùabarī who tries to harmonize the majority of exegetical tradition, al-Rāzī attempts to harmonize the orthodox interpretation of the *al-Qur'ān* with the philosophical and theological view. Al-Razi seems in favor to explain what he wishes to say systematically and in detail whenever the opportunity presents itself and he forms it in question and answer (*mas'alah*).[17]

Next, in discussing the interpretation of the verse 31, whenever possible, I shall to summarize the above selected commentaries rather than giving a direct translation of the text. In the following passages I shall deliberate the view of each commentator on the process of *naming* and on the *language origins* subject-matter. Therefore, the paper will only focus on the interpretation that relates to both subjects or precisely this will only engage with the meaning of the word *wa-'allama* and *al-asmā'a kulla-hā*. However, it is difficult to have a broad understanding of the word *'allama* since commentators more concern on the meaning of the word *al-asma* and didn't go into detail with the word *'allama*.

Al-Tabarī's Commentary (*Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*)[18]

The only part that relates to the point of this paper in his treatment of 2:31 is al-Ùabarī's interpretation of the segment *al-asmā'a kulla-hā*. In dealing with this term al-Ùabarī quoted 15 traditions, which then can be classified into three groups according to their opinion.

1. First opinion: Ibn 'Abbās, Mujāhid, and Qatāda, who believe that God taught Ādam the name of everything.

   "Ibn 'Abbas said: He taught Ādam the names, all of them, which are the names which human is familiar; man, animal, earth, plateau, sea, mountain, donkey and all the nation of creatures and so on, like this" (no.646. p.482)[19]

   "Mujahid said: He taught Ādam the name of crow and pigeon and the names of everything" (no.649. p. 483)[20]

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[16] Ibid.,

[17] For instance when he explicates the meaning of the selected verse, al-Rāzī classifies the interpretation into seven categories and expounds everything relates to the verse even if the subjects are not exactly content in the verse: he explains last two *mas'alah*, about the superiority of knowledge (*faÌl al-'ilm*) and the discussion on the limitation of knowing (*'aqwā-l-nās fī Íadd al-Ñilm*) six times longer than his interpretation of the meaning of the verse itself.

[18] Abu Ja'far MuÍammad b. Jarīr al-Ùabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. I. (Bayrūt, Lubnān: Dār al-MaÑrifah, 1986-87) 482-6.

[19] Other traditions quoted by al-Ùabarī from Ibn 'Abbas have the same opinion but give other example. See tradition number 651 (*He taught Adam the name of faswah and* fusayya*h*: both mean the breaking of wind) on page 483 and tradition number 653 (*He taught Ódam the name of everything even a small thing*: Íanah and Íunayyah) on page 484.

"Qatada said: "And He taught Ādam the names, all of them". He taught him the name of everything. This is a mountain; this is a sea and so forth for everything. Then he presented these things to the angels and said "Now tell me the names of these if you speak the truth" (no. 656. p. 484)[21]

2. Second opinion: al-Rabī', who said that God taught Ādam the names of the angels.
"Al-Rabī' said: He taught Ādam the names all of them, means the names of the angels" (no. 659. p. 485)

3. Third opinion: Ibn Zayd, who believes that God taught Ādam the names of all his children.
"Ibn Zayd said: He taught Ādam the names all of them, means the names of all his children" (no. 660. p. 485)

After mentioning all of these arguments al-Ùabarī states his own view. According to him the most correct of these views and the closest to the clear demonstrative meaning of the text that is indicates to be true, is the one who said that God taught Ādam the names of his sons and the names of the angels. In discussing this topic al-Ùabarī sees it from grammatical approach. Arab people he says hardly ever refer to anything by masculine plural third person pronoun (*hum*) except the names of humans and angels. They refer to all other things by *hā* or *hunna* even when there is a combination of various entities including rational and irrational objects. He seems to suggest that if God had taught Ādam the names of all entities, in the latter part of the verse when he said "*then he showed them to the angels*" it would have been used the pronoun *hā* or *hunna* which both can refer to either rational or irrational being, rather than *hum*, which only refer to rational being. However, al-Ùabari is very open on the possibilities of the interpretation. Even though he believes that the phrase "*all the names*" means the names of the angels and Ādam's sons, he still allows the interpretation of Ibn "Abbās who believes that God taught Ādam the name of everything. He assumes probably, Ibn 'Abbas interprets the verse according to the recitation of Ubay (*qirā'ah Ubay*) who recite the verse "*thumma 'araÌahā*" (then he showed them: including rational and irrational being) or perhaps it could be understood as an exception from a common usage of the pronoun *hum*, as it appears in God's word, when He used *hum* as referring to a combination of various categories including rational and irrational objects such as, in the following verse:[22]

"*Wa l-Allah khalaqa kulla dābbatin min māin famin-hum man yamshī 'ala baÌni-hi wa min-hum man yamshī 'ala rijlay-hi wa minhum man yamshī 'ala 'arba'*" (Al-Nūr: 45)

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[20] See also tradition number 647 and 648 on page 483.

[21] Similarly with ibn 'Abbas, Qatadah's other traditions give the same idea. See tradition number 655 and 657 on page 484.

[22] For this summarize of Ùabarī's opinion see al-Ùabarī, 485-6

> *"And Allah has created every animal from water: of them there are some that creep on their bellies; some that walk on two legs; and some that walk on four"*[23]

There can be no question from these very clear statement that the phrase "*al-asmā'a kulla-hā*" for al-Ùabarī means the names of angels and Ādam's sons, which this indicates that al-Ùabarī believes that Ādam as the first human is not being taught every single word by God, at least at the moment of this dialogue occurs, if it is possible to assumes that maybe there was another moment took place between them regarding the process of naming, but the moment was not recorded and immortalized in the *al-Qur'ān*.

However it is hard to grasp how process of naming occurs or further what is al-Ùabarī's view about the origins language issue, since he did not explain what the word *'allama* mean: whether God told Ādam those names or God inspired and gave him the ability to create the words .i.e. language. Al-Ùabarī in this case seems did not link the verse with the language origins topic but interpret the verse as it appears itself. He concern with the difference argument of traditions among the verse, discussing these competing argument from linguistic approach and *qirā'a*h analysis, and clarified it with another verse.

Without willing to be too further, however I hypothesize that perhaps we could categorize him as a person who believes that language some of them are taught by God and some of them are created by human. I will cover this idea more in the following passages when we arrive at the discussion of the meaning of the word *al-'asma'* in *tafsī*r al-Rāzī.

Al-Zamakhsharī's Commentary (*al-Kashshāf 'an ×aqā'iq al-Tanzīl*)

As already noted before, al-Zamkhsharī specifically concern with philosophical analysis and write the text very concisely. This technique is completely obvious practiced by Zamakhsharī in explaining the verse "*wa-'allama ādama al-asmā'a kulla-hā*"**.** He begin his commentary by explaining the meaning of the phrase "*al-asmā'a kulla-hā*": he said *al-asmā'a kulla-hā* means *asmā'u-l musammiyāt*; *asmā'* presents as a construct state (*mudhā*f) and *al-musammiyāt* (objects/things) as a noun of genitive construction (*mudhāf ilayh*), but *mudhāf ilayh* (*musammiyāt*) is deleted because the meaning of the phrase is already clear from *mudhā*f (*al-asmā'a*); the word *ismun* (names) he said inevitably contains the meaning of the word *musammā* (thing). Aware of the possibility of the counter argument next he adds the explanation, why the text must be accepted as his suggestion; *asmā'u-l musammiyāt* and not to be assumed as an opposite; *musammiyāt al-'asma'*. This, he explain because the word *ta'līm* (teaching) depended on the word *ismun*, therefore must be connected with the word *ismun*, i.e. *wa-'allama ādama al-asmā'a,* not with *musammā*, and it is also based on God's words when He speak to angels and Ādam in the latter part of the verse. He neither said to angels tell me nor to Ādam tell them the things (*musammā*) but he was saying: "*Tell me the names (asmā') of these if you are truthful*" and "*Ādam! Tell them the names (asmā')*". It seems Zamakhsharī want to stress here that otherwise,

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[23] 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Aly, *Tarjamah Ma'āny al-Qurān al-Karīm bi-l Injilīziyyah*, (Amerika: Amana Corporation, 1994) 880-1

God demand did not match with what he had taught Ādam. How God asked Ādam to tell angels the names if He had not taught him the names but the things.

In contrast to the word *al-'inbā'* (telling) and *al-ta'līm* (teaching), which both necessarily connect to the word *ismun*, the word *'arÌ* (showing) however, need to be joined to the word *musammaā*, because showing does not appear right with the names but it need the thing. For this reason Zamakhsharī interprets the phrase *'araÌahum* (show them) as *'araÌa al-musammiyāt* (show the objects). Then, Likewise al-Ùabarī, he also explains about the pronoun *hum,* but unlike al-Ùabarī he argues that *hum* is used in respect to rational being as predominant because they included in it, i.e. in the word *musammiyāt.*

Going back to the interpretation of *asmā'u-l musammiyāt*, Zamakhsharī said that the phrase *wa-'allama ādama al-asmā'a* means God taught Ādam all of his creatures: God taught him: this is the horse, and this is camel and so forth like this. He also taught him the content of the object and everything relate to it including its religious and worldly function.[24]

If we look at this statement, it appears that Zamakhsharī believes that God had taught Ādam the names of everything and indeed everything related to the words including the understanding of its essences, properties and qualities i.e. he argues that language is taught by God. However, since there is also a possibility that God taught Ādam the language which is already created by jins or group of angels,[25] perhaps, this not essentially means that Zamakhsharī is the one who claims that language is a God creation. In addition, considering ZamakhsharÊ as a *Mu'tazilite* scholar, it is interesting that his view obviously against *Mu'tazilite* doctrine. Language, in *Mu'tazilite* view is not transcendental that bestowed from heaven, but language is a part of man, i.e. a creation of man. They believe that God does not intervenes into the world of human action, therefore God's participation is not essential in the process of creating language, because this would be inconsistent with His *taklīf* (human responsibility).[26] Further, Zamakhshari's explanation of God's way in teaching Ādam the language: "*wa'allama-hu anna hādhā isma-hu fars, wa hādhā isma-hu ba'īr, wa hādhā isma-hu kadhā,*" (this is the horse, and this is camel and so on like this) also opposed to the essential *Mu'tazilite* principle about anthropomorphism, because it seems to suggest that God was pointing out to things and naming them, while God has no body and cannot be seen. From this sort Zamakhsharī's commentary showed that he is more interested in the content of the *al-Qur'ān*, explaining it word by word or phrase by phrase from grammatical view than in demonstrating *Mu'tazilite* content as used to be claimed to his al-Kashāf. It might be possible for him, of course, to use this passage for a demonstration of *Mu'tazilite* views, but he does not. Next, it will be interesting to see how the interpretation of al-Rāzī, who is reckoned among the opponents of *Mu'tazilite*.

Al-Rāzī's Commentary (*MafātÍ al-Ghaib* also known as *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*)

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[24] For whole of Zamaksharī interpretation see Mahmūd b. 'Umar b. MuÍammad al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashāf 'an ×aqā'iq GhawāmiÌ al-Tanzīl wa-'Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fi Wujūh al-Ta'wīl,* vol. I. ed. 'Ādil AÍmad 'Abd al-Maujūd and 'Alī MuÍammad Mu'awwaÌ (al-Riyād: Maktabat al-'Ubaykān, 1998)

[25] A discussion of this possibility see Al-Ghazāly, 321

[26] Abd al-Jabbar, 167-168.

Comparing to al-Ùabarī and al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī is the only one who associates the commentary of 2:31 with the language origins issue. He begins his discussion in his familiar style by saying that there are several problems to be considered. But in this essay I shall only focus on three topics, viz. language origins discussion, a discussion on *Mu'tazilate* view: language is a miracle (*mu'jizah*) for Ādam and the meaning of the word *al-asma'*.

1. Language Origin Issue.

In order to get a whole idea of this topic, I will not merely present a discussion from al-Rāzī's *tafsīr* but it is a combination of ideas from his *tafsīr* and his Fundamental of Islamic Jurisprudence (*Uîūl al-Fiqh*) book: *al-MaÍÍūl*, because, as he states himself that a complete discussion of some arguments are located in his *usūl fiqh* book. Relating to this topic al-Razī mentions three considerable arguments:

First opinion: al-Ash'arī, al-Jabbā'ī al-Ka'bī and Ibn Furaq[27], who argues that language is divine (*tawqīfiyyah*): God set up the word together with its meaning. To support their idea the proponents of t*awqīf* argue some arguments from authority (*naql*) as well as from reason (*'aql*). Their arguments from authority are:

> *"Wa 'allama Ādama 'l-asmā'a kulla-hā"* (God taught Ādam the names all of them) and *"SubÍāna-ka lā 'ilma lanā illā mā 'allamtanā"* (Glory be to you, we know only what you have taught us). (2:31 and 2:32)

From these two verses those people argue that names are divine, because neither Ādam nor angels knew anything except being taught by God. And it is also true for the verb and particle since both are also parts of speech and have the same function with the names that is to characterize. Therefore, it must be God taught Ādam the names together with the verbs and particle. In short, God taught that language in its entirety to Ādam.[28]

Al-Rāzī then answer this argument by saying that there is also a possibility to say that God inspired Ādam the necessity of the words and then gave him a sort of knowledge that make him able to create a language. Because the word *ta'lim* say al-Rāzī does not necessarily mean a creation of language or a supply of knowledge, but it means the process of gaining knowledge. For instance, one said: "'*allamtu-hu falam yata'allam*" (I taught him but he did not understand it yet). Therefore, al-Rāzī adds the word *ta'līm* in the verse does not eliminate the possibility of *iÎÏilāÍ* (conventional). According to al-Rāzī, it is also possible to say that language is created by Ādam based on knowledge gave by God to him or created by others before Ādam, and then God taught him.[29]

> *"In hiya illā asmā' sammaytumū-hā antum wa ābā'u-kum mā anzala Allāh bi-hā min sulÏān"* (These are nothing but names which you have devised -you and your

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[27] Al-Ash'arī, al-Jabbā'ī al-Ka'bī are mentioned by al-Rāzī in his tafsīr, while Ibn Furaq is mentioned in *al-MaÍÍūl.*
[28] *Al-MaÍÍūl*, 249-50.
[29] Ibid., 255-7.

father- For which Allāh has sent down no authority, (whatever) they follow nothing but conjecture and what their own souls desire, even though there has already come to them guidance from their Lord) (*al-Najm*: 23)[30]

This verse according to partisans of *tawqīf* demonstrates that God had blamed and critiqued people who named some entities using their own words. So, the verse indicates that all the rest of names are divine or the critique in the verse was incorrect.[31] Al-Rāzī counters with the argument that God blamed those people not because they named some entities by their own word, but God blamed them because they generalized the word *al-ilah* (Lord) for the *Îanam* (image) with the belief that the image is God[32]

> "*Wa min Āyātihi khalqu al-samāwāt wa al-'arÌwa ikhtilāf alsinati-kum wa alwāni-kum*" (And among of His sign is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the variations in your languages and your colours) (*al-Rūm*: 22)[33]

The verse above is used to support the argument that God himself who create the variations of languages, because according to them the meaning of the phrase "*wa ikhtilāf alsinati-kum*" is not the differences of the tongues but the variations of language[34]. Al-Rāzī answers, it is true that it does not mean the tongue, but it just a figure of speech. However, says al-Rāzī interpreting it as the language not totally better than interpreting it as the different ability of language or the differences of phonetics.[35]

As rational reason, advocates of *tawqīf* made the following point; language could not have established by convention, because it requires a regression (*tasalsul*). In order for people to establish language they need a communication to familiarize others with what they have in mind, but this could not be achieved without a prior language. And this prior language also requires another further previous language, i.e. every convention presupposes language.[36] Al-Rāzī says it is true that we need the first language in order to create the second language. However, why it is not true to say that the language we use now is by conventional and there was another language before the language we use now which was setting up by God.[37]

Second opinion: Abū Hāshim[38] and his followers, who argue language is by conventional (*iÎÏilah*). As an argument from authority they cite the verse: "*wa mā arsalnā min rasūl illā bilisān qawmi-hī*" (Me sent not a messenger except (to teach) in the language of his own people, in order to make clear to them). (*Ibrāhīm*: 4)[39] This verse implies that

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[30] 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Aly, 1379

[31] *Al-MaÎÎūl*, 250

[32]Ibid., 257-8

[33] 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Aly, 1013.

[34] *Al-MaÎÎūl*, 251

[35] *Al-MaÎÎūl*, 258.

[36] Ibid., 251

[37] Ibid., 258-9

[38] Abu Hāshim is 'Abd al-Salaām ibn MuÎammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahāb ibn Salām ibn Khālid ibn ×imrān ibn abāna. He is one of the senior leader of *Mu'tazilite*.

[39] 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Aly, 604

language precedes the mission (*bi'thah*) of a messenger. So, on the condition that language is divine it requires a repetition (*falaw kānat al-lughah tawqīfīyah wa al-tawqīf lā yaÍÍalu illā bi al-bi'thah- lazima al-dawr*).[40] In view of the fact that there is no further explanation of this argument by al-Rāzī, it is quiet hard to ensure whether the meaning of the word a repetition (*al-dawr*) is a repetition of *bi'thah* (mission) or a repetition of language establishment. On the assumption a repetition means a repetition of language establishment, conventionalist perhaps argue that *tawqīf* will require a periodic change of language, because according to them divine only happens with the mission or if it means a repetition of *bi'thah*, it implies that *tawqīf* requires a prior messenger of language preceding a real messenger, but this is impossible since there is no justification in authority. Regarding this argument al-Rāzī says the argument is unacceptable.[41]

Arguing from rational reason, conventionalists state that on the assumption language is divine, whether God created both, expression and the meaning together or God created expression without the meaning both are impossible. First, if God is the author of language and created expression together with the meaning, then to know language is to know that expressions are given for certain meanings inevitably include something (the knowledge) about God himself. This suggests a necessary knowledge of God within man, whereas, as we knew the essence of God is realized by reasoning. Further, if we link with the idea of *taklīf*, this also implies that the responsibility of man to seek the knowledge of God become meaningless. Second, If God created the expression without the meaning, it leads to a regression (*tasalsu*l), because the hearers could not understand the meaning of the expression except by explaining it with others language. Al-Rāzī argues, if this is the case then why we can not say that the author creates those names for entities without identifying whether the creator is God or human.[42]

Furthermore, conventionalists argue that language precedes its teaching (language exists before God taught Ādam) for some reasons: 1) God spoke to angels: this means language came before the dialogue happened. Al-Razī answers, probably God talked to angel by other kinds of language. 2) God word *wa 'allama Ādam al-asmā'* implies a genitive construction (*iÌāfah ta'lim ilā al-asma'*) which it means there were names before its teaching. Al-Rāzī responds there is no problem if God wants to create the names before he taught Adam.[43] 3) Angel must already know the names before Ādam taught by God, if not how angels knew whether Ādam was true or not. Al-Razī argues probably, God had taught angels those names before they hear it from Ādam or maybe, every group of angels

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[40] Al-MaÍÍūl, 253

[41] Ibid., 259

[42] Ibid., 253 and 260 and see also MafātiīÍ al-Ghayb, 175-6

[43] This idea perhaps could be related to Hishām ibn al-Hikam's claim that God does not know something except when that thing happens: His knowledge is not potential (*anna-hu lā ya'lam al-ashyā' illā 'inda wuqū'i-hā*) that is to say God only knew the names accidentally when he taught Ādam, but the verse states that there were names before its teaching, therefore it must mean that God not the author of language, but it already existed and created by others. However al-Rāzī claims that God knows something before it happens (*anna-hu subÍāna-hu wa ta'ā lā ya'lam al-ashyā' qabl Íudūthi-hā*), concequently, there is no problem if God wanted to create language before he taught Ādam.

has a language, each group unable to understand other group language, but Ādam knew all of their language. So, every group of angels knew that Ādam told the true.[44]

This matter will be comprehensible with 'Abd al-Jabbār[45] explanation in *al-Mughnī*. He states that man has to know language in order to understand God. Therefore, Ādam as the first man must have known some languages before his communication with God. Thus the knowledge of language preceded the process of learning the names. If not he would not understand God. God whenever he spoke to humans He used the language that had been known to them. If He spoke to Arab people in a *Zinjī* (African) language, says al-Jabbār no one would understand him and the same would happened if He spoke to Ādam before he learned language, he would not understand Him.[46] Next, al-Jabbār explains how the first man learn this language or precisely how the process of agreement of language (*muwāÌa'a*) occurred for the first time. He argues perhaps, the agreement took place between Ādam and angels or maybe, Ādam learned it from angels. In other place he adds that it is also possible that this agreement took place between Ādam and Eve.[47]

Third Opinion: Abū IsÍaq, who argue some of languages are divine and some of them are convention, because if not it requires a regression (*tasalsul*). He suggests a compromise idea between *tawqīf* and *muwāÌa'a* views. According to him God created some minimal language, which make human able to gain his basic need. Then through convention language could develop. So, at first language was divine (introduced by God) then many languages occurred conventionally (improved by man).[48]

2. *Mu'tazilate* View: Language is a Miracle (*Mu'jizah*) for Ādam

Mu'tazilite assert that Ādam's ability to know language is one of his miracle (mu'jizah), because his achievement of that knowledge against the habitual capability of human being. Al-Rāzī then explains as follows: this is true that Ādam's ability of understanding language is against the habitual capability of ordinary mans, but perhaps says al-Rāzī this is a kind of his excellence ability (*kirāmāh or irhaāÎ*). Because there are several reasons why at that time Ādam was not a messenger; 1) If he was a messenger it indicates that he did a disobedience (*maÑÎiah*) after being a messenger, which is not allowed: the *maÑÎiah* must happen before *bi'thah* and Ādam must not a messenger at that time. 2) If he was a messenger he must sent for someone, otherwise there was no usefulness of his being a messenger. Yet, there was no one possible to be his follower. It is a fallacy reasoning to argue that he was sent to angels, since in *Mu'tazilite* view angels are better than human being, i.e. it is not true to place the one who is lower in status as the messenger for the one who is higher. Similarly, saying that he was sent to demons (*jin*) or human. There was no one of demons in the heaven and no humans except Ave, whereas Ave received a message directly from God not through Ādam: She knew that she was

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[44] *Mafātīh al-Ghayb*, 176.
[45] 'Abd al-Jabbār is one of Abū Hāshim's pupil, and seems he has developed Abū Hāshim theory about language. He quoted Abū Hāshim view about language in many places; *wa qāla shaykhunā* Abū Hāshim. See *Al-Mughnī*, 168, 175, 177, 178. etc.
[46] Ibid., 166.
[47] Ibid., 166 and 169.
[48] *Al-MaÍÎūl*, 245.

obligated to observe the precepts of religion not through Ādam: God says: "walā *taqrabā hādhi-hī al-shajarah*", God use a dual form for the word *taqrabā* which refers to Ādam and Ave. 3) God's word: "*thumma ijtabā-hu rabbu-hu*" according to al-Rāzī this implies that then God chooses Ādam to be a messenger after his *maÑÎiah*, i.e. he was not a messenger before this *ijtiba'*.[49]

3. The meaning of the word *al-asma'*

In discussing the meaning of the word *al-asma'*, al-Rāzī mentions three arguments: first, *al-asma'* means attribute (*al-Îifah*). This first opinion argues that whether the word *ism* derived from *simmah* or from *sumuww*, both mean attribute. Here al-Rāzī shows the possibility to harmonize two different views about the origin of the word *ism*: 1) In case the word *ism* derived from *simmah*, which it means to characterize, then *ism* is just the characteristic or signal of the entity, while the attributes, qualities and properties are the essence of the entity. Therefore, the real meaning of *ism* is *sifah*. 2) In case the word *ism* derived from *sumuww*, *ism* means exalted. So the name is higher than the language, because name is a guide to understand language and its understanding must comes before the understanding of language. Al-Rāzī called a guide (name) as the essence, therefore it is not impossible to define name as attribute in language. Second, *al-asma'* means the names of all God's creatures. The difference and revision of language arose through the time. Third, *al-asma'* from grammarian view: this could be interpreted *as asma' al-musammiyāt* or *musammiyāt al-asma'*, but the former is better.[50]

According to al-Rāzī, if it is true to interpret the verse as the language issue, the true meaning of *al-asma'* is the first view: the attributes, because an advantage in understanding the essence of things is more than the advantage in understanding its names. It implies that God had taught Ādam the essence of things instead of just taught him their names. If not so, the challenge in the verse is not true, because we can only test people for something that possible for them to do it. Al-Rāzī gives the example that Arabs can not challenge Africans to speak in their language, because there is no possibility for mind to gain a language except by teaching. But, al-Rāzī adds, mind is able to know the essence of things, therefore the meaning of *al-asma'* must be the essence of things.[51]

Here we see al-Rāzī states his own position, al-asma' for him does not merely means the names but the attributes. Consequently, God not only taught Ādam the names of objects but the attributes involving its characteristic (names), qualities and properties, indeed everything relates to the object. He also believes *ism* doest not only mean a noun but also verb and particle. This view is made clear by his explanation of the word *ism* in his book *Lawāmi' al-Bayyīnāt*:

"Kullu lafÐ yufīd ma'nā fainna-hu yajibu an yakūna isman 'alā hādhā al-tafsīr, wa lihādhā al-sabab qulnā inna qawla-hu ta'ālā: "wa 'allama Ādam al-asmā'a kulla-

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[49] *MafātiÍal-Ghayb*, 177-8

[50] The discussion is similar as already mentioned in Zamakhshari's commentary; therefore I do not describe a whole discussion of this view.

[51] *MafātiÍ al-Ghayb*, 176

hā", yaqtaÌī anna-hu taʻālā ʻalima-hu kulla al-lughāt sawaʼun kāna min qabīli mā yusammī-hi al-naÍwīyūn isman aw yasmūna-hu fiʻlan aw Íarfan, liana bayyannā anna kulla hādhihi al-aqsām aqsām al-lafÐal-mufīd yajib an takūna asmāʻ biÍasb al-mafhūm al-aÎlī".[52]

Al-Rāzī says that every word that signifies the meaning must be the name. Therefore, the verse 31 means God had taught Ādam every language (word) including what it is called by philologists as a noun, verb or particle.

Conclusion

To gather the views, generally there are two interpretations of the word *al-asmaʻ*; first, it means every single word that signifies a meaning: nouns, verbs or particle i.e. the words (names) of everything: angels, humans, animals, and inanimate existent indeed includes its qualities, properties and everything relates to objects. This was the same to saying that God had taught Ādam language in its totality. For this reason I think al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī believe the verse demonstrates that God taught Ādam every language. But unlike al-Zamakhsharī, who seems to suggest that God was pointing to the objects and naming them, al-Rāzī does not explain how this process occurred, whether God educated him or thrown a knowledge (the understanding of language) into his mind. Second, al-Ùabarī who interprets it in a narrow meaning: *al-asmaʻ* means the names of the angels and Ādam's sons, seems to suggest that God just taught Ādam some languages.

However, none of these commentators state clearly their view about the language origins issue. Al-Ùabarī seems does not concern with this matter. On the one hand we could categorize him as the one who believes that God taught some languages and humans created some of them. On the other hand, it is still unclear how God taught Ādam the language. Was He educated him or gave him knowledge that enables him to create language? Or perhaps God taught him the language that was created by others before Ādam. The same is true with al-Zamakhsharī, though his explanation about the process of naming is more obvious, but because the meaning of the word *ʻallama* not discussed clearly, this also still possible for many interpretations: perhaps God taught Ādam the language which is already created by angels or maybe he believes *Muʼtazilite* view that Ādam has known some languages beforehand, in order for him to understand God's word. Moreover, Al-Rāzī who links the verse directly with the issue of the origin of language and discusses it broadly, mentioning all of the arguments about the topic, does not state his position clearly as well. But unlike al-Ùabarī and al-Żamakhsharī, which give interpretation by only focusing on the content of the verse without willing to develop widely, al-Razī takes the opportunity to introduce a wide variety of possible interpretation. Despite that, I do not think that he goes to further in explaining the *Qurʼan.* It is just like al-Ùabarī, al-Zamakhsharī or other commentators, who have their own way in explaining the Qurʼan, so also al-Rāzī, who interest in explaining it in his own way. As far as I can see

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[52] Al-Rāzī, *Lawāmiʻ al-Bayyināt SharÍ Asmāʻ Allāh Taʻālā wa al-Øifāt* (Bayrūt: Dar al-Kitāb al-ʻArabī, 1990) 30.

al-Rāzī wants to states that all of the arguments about the language origins are possible and no one of those views is certainty true; he does not willing to nominate one of them. As he states in *al-MaÍÎūl*: "*wa lammā kunnā lā najzimu biaÍad hādhihi al-thalāthah, fadhālika yakfī fīhi al-Ïa'n fī Ïuruq al-qāÏi'īn.*"[53] It could be al-Rāzī agrees with al-Ghazālī's view that the verse: "*wa 'allama Ādam al-asmā' kulla-hā*" is not a certain reason that language all of them are divine. Because there are many possibilities of interpretation; 1) God inspire Ādam the necessity to create language. 2) Language perhaps created conventional by others before Ādam (maybe jin or one group of angels) then God taught Ādam those language. 3) What God means by the names are perhaps just the names of heaven, earth and others things in the heaven and hell but not the names of all entities. 4) God taught Ādam the knowledge (language), and then his children created language after him by conventional.[54]

Looking at the whole of these three commentaries as it has been summarized here, it is obvious that the verse 31 or even the whole *al-Qur'an* does not assert a certain notion of the language origins issue. Apart from this, the commentators like al-Ùabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī and the others are very careful to interpret the meaning of Qur'an and seem felt fear to fall into error. There are some verses demonstrate the language subject matter as quoted by proponents of each arguments, but none of them clearly maintain who is the author of language, is language is a human creation or a God creation? The answer remains in a theoretical possibility.

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[53] *Al-MaÍÎūl*, 248.
[54] Al-Ghazālī, 320-2

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