Thibāq and Muqābalah in *Surah Al-Mulk*:
A Stylistic Study of Semantic Contrast and Theological Persuasion

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Abstract: *Surah Al-Mulk* articulates divine sovereignty, accountability, and *inzār* through a discourse that relies on patterned semantic contrast. This study examines how *thibāq* and *muqābalah* function stylistically in the surah to organize rhetorical meaning and reinforce theological emphasis. The analysis is grounded in classical *balāghah*, with particular attention to al-Sakkākī's principle of *muṭābaqat al-kalām li-muqtaḍā al-ḥāl* in order to explain the fit between linguistic form and communicative context. Using qualitative textual research, the study identifies contrastive indicators through close reading and applies classical criteria to select relevant verses. The analysis focuses on *thibāq* in Q. 2, 13, 19, 22, and 30, and on *muqābalah* in Q. 6–9. Findings show that *thibāq* operates through direct oppositional pairings and contextual contrasts that sharpen moral differentiation and intensify theological focus at the level of individual verses. In Q. 6–9, *muqābalah* is realized mainly as *muqābalah maʿnawiyyah*, where punishment and denial are foregrounded while counter-meanings are prompted through semantic absence, fitting the *inzār* setting. The study argues that *thibāq* and *muqābalah* form a connected stylistic system that supports the surah's persuasive direction through contrast, concision, and guided inference.

Keywords: *Thibāq; Muqābalah; Al-Mulk; Qur'anic Stylistics; Balāghah; al-Sakkākī*

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Introduction

Surah Al-Mulk is widely recognized for its strong theological orientation, especially its discourse of *inzār*, its affirmation of divine sovereignty, and its reinforcement of *tawḥīd*. Alongside these themes, the *surah* displays rhetorical precision through recurring patterns of semantic contrast and parallel opposition that shape how the message is received and internalized.[1] Two devices stand out in this regard, namely *thibāq* as semantic opposition and *muqābalah* as parallel contrast.[2] Their presence suggests that the persuasive force of the *surah* is closely tied to how meaning is organized

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[1] Adung Abdur Rohman, "Isi Kandungan Surat Al-Mulk Dan Al-Waqi'ah Dan Korelasinya Dengan Konsep Keberkahan Hidup," *Jurnal Iman Dan Spiritualitas* 1, no. 3 (July 15, 2021): 272–79, https://doi.org/10.15575/jis.v1i3.13099.

[2] Angga Mustaka J.P., "Study of Speech Acts of Directive Verses of Command in Qur'an Surah Al-Mulk," *Jurnal Studi Al-Qur'an* 18, no. 2 (2022): 299–312, https://doi.org/10.21009/jsq.018.2.07.

linguistically, including how contrasts guide the reader toward moral discernment and reflective awareness.

Classical scholarship on Qur'anic rhetoric provides a firm basis for approaching contrast as a meaning-making structure. In *al-Kashshāf*, al-Zamakhsharī consistently highlights that Qur'anic meaning emerges through relations among expressions within a discourse, including oppositional pairings that sharpen semantic direction and strengthen coherence.[3] Likewise, al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī, through his attention to Qur'anic diction in *Mufradāt al-Qur'ān*, shows how lexical choices and their semantic fields can direct theological understanding, especially where warning and accountability are foregrounded.[4] These perspectives support a view in which contrast functions as a rhetorical mechanism that participates in constructing theological emphasis rather than serving as ornament.

Contemporary studies have extended the discussion by describing *thibāq* and *muqābalah* across Qur'anic passages and by classifying their forms within ʿilm al-badīʿ. Suhaimi[5] argues that contrast contributes to semantic clarity and rhetorical beauty, while Aidil and Abdullah[6] emphasize the role of *balāghah* in carrying ideological and theological meaning. Studies such as Siti Aqila et al.[7] map patterns of *thibāq* and *muqābalah* in selected *suwar*, and Elpi Dayanti Siregar and Yarsha Ardhana Harahap[8] examine *muqābalah* in Surah Al-Mulk with attention to textual harmony and rhetorical emphasis. Recent stylistic work also begins to connect linguistic patterning with reader perception and response, as shown by Hishomudin Ahmad and Norfarhana Ahmad

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[3] Sidiq Samsi Tsauri, Ahsin Sakho Muhammad, and Adha Saputra, "Corak Tafsir Balaghi (Studi Analisis Tafsir Al-Kassyaf 'An Ghawamidh At-Tanzil Wa 'Uyun Al-Aqawil Fii Wujuh At-Ta'Wil Karya Abu Al-Qasim Az-Zamakhsyari)," *Zad Al-Mufassirin* 3, no. 1 (June 30, 2021): 1–20, https://doi.org/10.55759/zam.v3i1.24.

[4] Tri Ulva Chandra, "Karakteristik dan Corak Penafsiran Al-Ragib Al-Asfahani dalam Kitab Tafsir Al-Raghib Al-Asfahani," *Amsal Al-Qur'an: Jurnal Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis* 1, no. 2 (2024): 174–88, https://doi.org/10.63424/amsal.v1i2.40.

[5] Suhaimi Suhaimi, "Rahasia Al-Hazfu dalam Gaya Bahasa Al-Quran," *Jurnal Ilmiah Al-Mu'ashirah* 15, no. 2 (December 31, 2018): 132, https://doi.org/10.22373/jim.v15i2.5290.

[6] NMAAN Adli And Md. Nor Abdullah, "Peranan Ilmu Balaghah dalam Penafsiran Al-Quran: Kajian Terhadap Al-Tibaq dan Al-Muqabalah," *Jurnal'Ulwan* 9 (2024): 71–85, Https://Www.Unimel.Edu.My/Journal/Index.Php/JULWAN/Article/View/1779.

[7] Siti Aqila Maysarah Aqila and Kamus, "Thibaq DAN Muqabalah DALAM Surah An-Najm dan Al-Waqiah," *Al-MUALLAQAT* 4, no. 1 (December 31, 2024): 25–35, https://doi.org/10.46870/jurnalbsa.v4i1.1063.

[8] Elpi Dayanti Siregar & Yarsha Ardhana Harahap, *Analisis Seni Muqabalah dan Implikasinya Terhadap Makna Al-Qur'an Surah Al-Mulk*, As-Salam: Journal Islamic Social Sciences and Humanities 3, no. 2 (2025).

Ghafar.[9] Even so, the existing discussion leaves a gap that matters for this study, namely that the operation of *thibāq* and *muqābalah* within *Surah Al-Mulk* is rarely examined as a sustained and interconnected rhetorical strategy, especially when implicit contrast is treated as part of the surah's warning discourse.

In response, this study asks how *thibāq* and *muqābalah* function stylistically in *Surah Al-Mulk* to construct rhetorical meaning and reinforce theological messages. The analysis is guided by classical *balāghah,* with particular attention to al-Sakkākī's principle of *muṭābaqat al-kalām li-muqtaḍā al-ḥāl*, in order to explain how linguistic form corresponds to communicative context in the surah's theological persuasion. This study uses qualitative textual research with a stylistic analysis framework.[10] The primary data consist of verses from *Surah Al-Mulk* identified through close reading to locate indicators of semantic contrast, including opposing lexical pairs, parallel structures, and implicit oppositions. Verses were included when they met classical criteria for *thibāq*, including *ijābī* and *salbī*, and for *muqābalah*, including implicit forms such as *muqābalah maʿnawiyyah*. Based on these criteria, the analysis focuses on *thibāq* in verses 2, 13, 19, 22, and 30, and on *muqābalah* in verses 6–9, with terminological grounding in al-Sakkākī and other authoritative rhetoricians.[11]

Data analysis proceeded in four steps. First, key lexical and syntactic structures were mapped in each selected verse. Second, the stylistic forms were classified according to their type. Third, each structure was interpreted in its immediate textual setting and within the surah's broader thematic direction in order to identify rhetorical and theological implications. Fourth, the functional role of each contrastive pattern was evaluated in relation to the surah's discourse aims, including emphasis, moral orientation, and reader engagement. To reduce interpretive subjectivity, theoretical triangulation was applied by comparing stylistic readings with explanations in authoritative classical and

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[9] Hishomudin Ahmad & Norfarhana Ahmad Ghafar, *Stylistic Variation and Linguistic Strategies in Quranic Discourse: A Rhetorical, Phonetic, and Translational Analysis*, International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science 9, no. 4 (2025): 5957–5964.

[10] Sugiyono, *Metodelogi Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif Dan R&D* (Alfabeta, 2013).

[11] Sirāj al-Dīn Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf al-Sakkākī, *Miftāḥ al-ʿUlūm* (13th century); see also Talqis Nurdianto, *Al-Fikr al-Balāghī fī al-Maʿānī ʿinda al-Sakkākī fī Kitābihi Miftāḥ al-ʿUlūm: Dirāsah Balāghiyyah* (Yogyakarta: Universitas Muhammadiyah, 2018); Husam Ayyoub, "The Dominant Feature of the Stylistic Phenomenon in Arabic Rhetoric: Miftāḥ al-ʿUlūm of al-Sakkākī as an Example," *Journal of Arabic and Human Sciences* (2015); Chiara Fontana, "The Name of the Key: al-Sakkākī's Literary Craftsmanship and Pragmatic Poetics in Miftāḥ al-ʿUlūm," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* (2025).

contemporary exegetical works, ensuring that the argument remains transparent and academically accountable.

Discussion

Stylistics in the Study of the Qur'an

Stylistics (Arabic: *al-uslūbiyyah*) is a linguistic approach that examines how choices of diction, structure, and patterns of expression contribute to meaning in a text.[12] In Qur'anic studies, stylistics is relevant because it allows analysis to move beyond identifying what a verse states toward examining how rhetorical organization shapes emphasis, persuasion, and interpretive direction.[13] This approach does not replace classical exegesis, but it can clarify why particular linguistic configurations recur in specific discursive settings, such as warning, instruction, or reassurance, and how those configurations guide the reader's attention within the flow of meaning.

Within the classical tradition, the concern with style is closely tied to *balāghah*, especially the principle that effective speech corresponds to communicative context. Al-Sakkākī's formulation of *muṭābaqat al-kalām li-muqtaḍā al-ḥāl* highlights that rhetorical force is achieved when linguistic form is aligned with the demands of situation, audience, and purpose.[14] From this perspective, patterns such as contrast, parallelism, ellipsis, emphasis, and ordering are not treated as decorative features, but as strategies that serve the text's communicative function.[15] When applied to Qur'anic discourse, this framework provides a structured way to interpret how certain stylistic choices intensify warning, sharpen moral differentiation, or direct theological reflection.

In modern Qur'anic scholarship, stylistic analysis is also developed as a bridge between classical rhetoric and contemporary linguistic description. Figures such as Amīn al-Khūlī foreground the importance of examining the Qur'an's literary expression as part

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[12] Tri Tami Gunarti and Mubarok Ahmadi, "Stilistika Al-Qur'an," *Al Furqan: Jurnal Ilmu Al Quran Dan Tafsir* 4, no. 2 (December 30, 2021): 220–33, https://doi.org/10.58518/alfurqon.v4i2.748.

[13] Acep Ihsan Rohmatulloh, "Analisis Stilistika (Sajak) Pada Surah Al-'Asr Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Pembaca," *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu Ushuluddin* 4, no. 2 (April 30, 2024): 137–48, https://doi.org/10.15575/jpiu.34631.

[14] Angelika Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity* (Oxford University Press, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199928958.001.0001.

[15] Athian Sulthon, Dzaki Amrullah, and Raswan, "A Pragmatic Investigation of Khabar Types in Al-Sakkākī's Miftāḥ Al-'Ulūm: Applying Searle's Speech Act Theory," *Journal of Literature Review* 1, no. 2 (2025): 350–59, https://doi.org/10.63822/czv65t25.

of interpretation,[16] while Sayyid Quṭb draws attention to how Qur'anic language generates affective and imaginative engagement.[17] These contributions support the view that stylistic devices can be meaning-bearing, particularly in passages where persuasion is built through repeated rhetorical patterning rather than through explicit argument alone. In the context of this study, stylistics is therefore used to explain how contrastive structures, especially *thibāq* and *muqābalah*, operate in *Surah Al-Mulk* as a sustained rhetorical mechanism that reinforces theological messages within the surah's warning-oriented discourse.

The Theory of *Thibāq* and *Muqābalah*

In the discipline of *balāghah*, *thibāq* and *muqābalah* are classified as stylistic devices that operate through semantic contrast.[18] Both belong to the domain of *badīʿ maʿnawī*, where rhetorical effect is achieved through the arrangement of meaning rather than through phonetic similarity. Their function lies in sharpening conceptual distinctions, strengthening emphasis, and guiding interpretation through opposition and balance.

Thibāq (الطِّبَاق) is generally defined as the juxtaposition of two opposing meanings within a single utterance or structure. Classical rhetoricians describe it as:

$$الجَمْعُ بَيْنَ الشَّيْءِ وَضِدِّهِ فِي الْكَلَامِ$$

This definition emphasizes that *thibāq* brings together a concept and its opposite in order to clarify meaning through contrast.[19] According to al-Sakkākī in *Miftāḥ al-ʿUlūm*, *thibāq* is not intended merely to beautify expression, but to intensify semantic focus by presenting meaning across its opposing poles.[20] Through this opposition, the intended message becomes more precise and cognitively accessible.

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[16] Aisy Najiha Khurin'in, "Tafsir Sastra Kontemporer Oleh Amin Al-Khuli Dan Aisyah Abdurrahman Bint Al-Syathi'," *Al Furqan: Jurnal Ilmu Al Quran Dan Tafsir* 6, no. 1 (June 30, 2023): 62–71, https://doi.org/10.58518/alfurqon.v6i1.1743.

[17] Nur Hamidah, "Al-Manhaj Al-Adabi 'Inda Sayyid Qutb Fi Kitabihi 'At-Taswir Ala-Fanni Fi Al-Qur'an'" (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2015).

[18] Rumadani Sagala, *Balaghah*, البلاغة و النقد الأدبي (Fakultas Tarbiyah & Keguruan IAIN Raden Intan Lampung, 2016), https://doi.org/10.12816/0021621, h.171.

[19] Aḥmad ibn Ibrahīm ibn Muṣṭafa al-Hāshimī, *Jawāhir Al-Balāghah Fī Al- Maʿānī Wa Al-Bayān Wa Al-Badīʿ* (Bayrūt: al-Maktabah al-ʿAsriyyah, 1999), h.303.

[20] Daud Lintang, "Epistemologi Balagah; Studi Atas Miftah Al-Ulum Karya Al-Sakaki" (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, 2017), h.138.

Classical *balāghah* distinguishes two main types of *thibāq*. The first is *thibāq ijābī*, which occurs when two directly opposing words are stated explicitly,[21] such as life and death, light and darkness, or belief and disbelief. This type produces immediate semantic contrast and is frequently employed in Qur'anic discourse to underscore moral and theological binaries.[22] The second type is *thibāq salbī*, which arises through affirmation and negation,[23] often involving particles such as لا (*lā*), ما (*mā*), or لم (*lam*). In this form, contrast is produced between an affirmed meaning and its negated counterpart,[24] for example knowing and not knowing, or believing and not believing. Although less symmetrical at the surface level, *thibāq salbī* remains rhetorically effective because it frames meaning through denial and confirmation. From a stylistic perspective, *thibāq* operates by activating comparison in the reader's cognition. The presence of opposing meanings compels reflection and evaluation, making the message more vivid and memorable. In Qur'anic discourse, this effect is particularly significant in contexts of moral instruction and warning, where clarity of distinction plays a central role.

Muqābalah (الْمُقَابَلَة) is etymologically derived from the root *qābala*, meaning to face or to correspond.[25] In *balāghah*, it refers to the arrangement of two or more meanings followed by their corresponding opposites in an ordered structure.[26] Al-Sakkākī defines *muqābalah* as a stylistic form in which contrast is extended beyond a single pair to encompass multiple elements, producing a balanced rhetorical configuration.[27] Unlike *thibāq*, which involves one oppositional pair, *muqābalah* relies on a broader structural pattern.[28] Classical examples often display clear lexical symmetry, where each element in the first sequence is matched by its opposite in the second. However, rhetoricians also recognize implicit forms of *muqābalah*, commonly referred to as *muqābalah maʿnawiyyah*. In this form, contrast is not realized through explicit lexical pairing, but

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[21] Sagala, *Balaghah*, h.202.

[22] Titis Dian Handika and Agus Karim, "Alfadz Al-Thibaq Fi Surah Al-Ra'd," *Ta'lim Al-'Arabiyyah: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab Dan Kebahasaaraban* 3, no. 2 (2019): 209–23.

[23] Sagala, *Balaghah, h.202.*

[24] Yayan Nurbayan dan Mamat Zaenuddin, *Pengantar Ilmu Balaghah* (Bandung: PT Refika Aditama, 2023), h.183.

[25] Tria Wulandari et al., "Seni Muqabalah Dalam Al-Qur'an Surat Al-Mulk," *Akhlak : Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam Dan Filsafat* 2, no. 2 (January 23, 2025): 251–59, https://doi.org/10.61132/akhlak.v2i2.669.

[26] Mujiyato Nurkhalis dkk, *Terjemahan Balaghah Waadhihah*, Cetakan XVI (Bandung: Sinar Baru Algesindo, 2020), h.40.

[27] Lintang, "Epistemologi Balagah; Studi Atas Miftah Al-Ulum Karya Al-Sakaki."

[28] Suhaimi, "Keindahan-Keindahan Makna Dalam Al-Qur'an (Analisis Tentang Thibaq Dan Muqabalah)", h.43.

through contextual implication, where stated meanings invite the reader to infer their unstated opposites.

Within al-Sakkākī's framework of *muṭābaqat al-kalām li-muqtaḍā al-ḥāl*, *muqābalah maʿnawiyyah* is particularly effective in discourses of warning. By foregrounding only one side of a contrast, such as punishment without explicit mention of reward, the text intensifies rhetorical impact and directs attention toward the intended moral urgency. Meaning is thus constructed through presence and absence, inviting *tadabbur* rather than passive reception. In the context of this study, *thibāq* and *muqābalah* are treated as complementary stylistic mechanisms. *Thibāq* sharpens meaning at the micro level through direct opposition, while *muqābalah*, especially in its implicit form, organizes broader rhetorical movement across multiple verses. Together, they form a stylistic system that supports the theological and persuasive aims of *Surah Al-Mulk*.

Thibāq in *Surah Al-Mulk*

In *Surah Al-Mulk*, *thibāq* operates as a deliberate stylistic mechanism that strengthens warning discourse (*inzār*) and theological affirmation by framing key meanings through opposition. In the perspective of al-Sakkākī, rhetorical force is achieved when linguistic form corresponds to communicative context (*muṭābaqat al-kalām li-muqtaḍā al-ḥāl*). Within this framework, semantic contrast in *Al-Mulk* is not treated as decorative symmetry, but as a strategy that sharpens moral dichotomies, organizes theological emphasis, and directs the reader toward reflective awareness of divine sovereignty and accountability. A foundational instance appears in *QS. Al-Mulk (67)* 2:

الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا ۚ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْغَفُورُ

The opposition between *al-mawt* (death) and *al-ḥayāh* (life) constitutes *thibāq ijābī* in its direct form. Stylistically, the pairing activates the full semantic range of human existence and frames it as a created reality under divine control, thereby aligning the verse with the surah's larger theological orientation. The sequence that places *al-mawt* before *al-ḥayāh* can be read as a rhetorically meaningful *taqdīm*, foregrounding finitude and accountability before the experience of life itself. This ordering does not require speculative claims about psychology; it is sufficient to note that, within *balāghah*,

prioritization often functions to direct attention and intensify thematic emphasis.[29] In al-Sakkākī's terms, the contrast gains persuasive force because it corresponds to the *maqām* of warning and testing (*ibtilā'*), where the audience is reminded that existential extremes are equally governed by Allah. A second explicit contrast appears in *QS. Al-Mulk (67) 13*:

$$وَأَسِرُّوا قَوْلَكُمْ أَوِ اجْهَرُوا بِهِ ۖ إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ$$

Here, the opposition between *asirrū* (conceal) and *ijharū* (declare openly) forms *thibāq ijābī* through two contradictory verbal actions. The rhetorical ordering again places concealment before openness, which functions as a meaningful *taqdīm*: if the concealed is encompassed by divine knowledge, the manifest is even more clearly included.[30] This structure reinforces the divine attribute of *al-ʿAlīm* and extends accountability from outward speech to inner intention, fitting the surah's warning tone.[31] Read through al-Sakkākī's approach, the verse does not merely state a doctrine; it structures meaning so that the two extremes of expression delimit a complete field, leaving no space outside divine knowledge. *Thibāq* also appears through oppositional states in *QS. Al-Mulk (67) 19*:

$$أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَى الطَّيْرِ فَوْقَهُمْ صَافَّاتٍ وَيَقْبِضْنَ ۚ مَا يُمْسِكُهُنَّ إِلَّا الرَّحْمَٰنُ$$

The contrast between *ṣāffāt* (wings spread) and *yaqbiḍna* (drawing them in) presents two opposing yet complementary movements. This is a stylistic opposition that guides observation into theological inference without requiring the text to spell out additional claims. In al-Sakkākī's terms, the verse exemplifies how arrangement and contrast can produce meaning appropriate to context: the alternation of stillness and motion becomes a sign of sustaining governance, culminating in the attribution to *al-Raḥmān*.[32] The contrast is rhetorically effective because it compresses a broader meaning into a concise image, corresponding to the *ījāz* valued in *balāghah*. A sharply visual instance is *QS. Al-Mulk (67) 22*:

$$أَفَمَن يَمْشِي مُكِبًّا عَلَىٰ وَجْهِهِ أَهْدَىٰ أَمَّن يَمْشِي سَوِيًّا عَلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ$$

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[29] Muhammad Mutawali Al-Sya'rawi, *Tafsir Al-Sya'rawi* (tk: Al-Akhbar al yaum, 1991), h,1626.

[30] Al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ Al-Maʿānī Fī Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-ʿAẓīm*, Juz 29 (Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d.),27-28.

[31] M Ṭ I ʿĀshūr, *Tafsīr Al-Taḥrīr Wa-Al-Tanwīr: Al-Maʿrūf Bi-Tafsīr Ibn ʿĀshūr*, Tafsīr Al-Taḥrīr Wa-Al-Tanwīr Al-Maʿrūf Bi-Tafsīr Ibn ʿĀshūr (Mu'assasat al-Tārīkh, 2000).

[32] Lintang, "Epistemologi Balagah; Studi Atas Miftah Al-Ulum Karya Al-Sakaki."

The contrast between *mukibban* (walking on one's face) and *sawiyyan* (walking upright) functions as *thibāq ijābī* with strong imagistic force. The rhetorical question structure intensifies the evaluative dimension: the reader is invited to compare the two states and arrive at an ethical conclusion through reasoning rather than mere assertion. This is consistent with al-Sakkākī's view that rhetorical arrangement can function argumentatively, not only aesthetically. The opposition is not an ornament; it is a mechanism that sharpens guidance versus misguidance into a cognitively accessible comparison and reinforces the surah's moral orientation.[33] A subtler case appears in *QS. Al-Mulk (67) 30*:

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتُمْ إِنْ أَصْبَحَ مَاؤُكُمْ غَوْرًا فَمَنْ يَأْتِيكُمْ بِمَاءٍ مَعِينٍ

The semantic opposition between *ghawran* (water that sinks and becomes unreachable) and *maʿīn* (visible, flowing water) illustrates a form of implicit contrast often described as *thibāq khafī*.[34] The pairing is not laid out as a symmetrical lexical match, yet the oppositional meaning is activated through context and function. In a Sakakian reading, such implicit opposition can be understood through rhetorical *talwīḥ* (hinting) and meaning-making by inference: the verse constructs dependence on divine provision by moving between absence and availability, helplessness and relief, without prolonged exposition. The rhetorical question format further reinforces the theological point by compelling the reader to recognize the limits of human control.

These instances show that *thibāq* in *Surah Al-Mulk* operates across explicit and implicit levels, and its repeated presence contributes to a coherent rhetorical pattern. The device sharpens theological meanings by structuring them as contrasts that correspond to the surah's communicative purpose, while maintaining semantic density through concision. Within al-Sakkākī's framework, this supports the view that stylistic contrast in Qur'anic discourse functions as a meaning-producing strategy aligned with context rather than as an ornamental feature.

Muqābalah in *Surah Al-Mulk* (6–9)

In *Surah Al-Mulk*, *muqābalah* appears most prominently in verses 6–9, where the discourse concentrates on warning (*inzār*) through vivid depictions of punishment and accountability. Unlike explicit lexical symmetry often associated with *muqābalah*

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[33] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-ʿAẓīm*, Juz 29 (Riyadh: Dār Ṭayyibah, 1999),h.288.
[34] Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf Al-Sakkākī, *Miftāḥ Al-ʿulūm*, 1489.

lafẓiyyah, the contrast in this passage is primarily realized through meaning and context. This pattern corresponds to what classical rhetoricians describe as *muqābalah ma ʿnawiyyah*, where one side of an opposition is stated explicitly while its counterpart is left to inference.[35] Within al-Sakkākī's framework, such a configuration reflects *muṭābaqat al-kalām li-muqtaḍā al-ḥāl*, since the communicative situation demands emphasis on threat rather than balance. The passage begins with a clear declaration of consequence:

وَلِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ عَذَابُ جَهَنَّمَ ۖ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ

This verse establishes one pole of meaning, disbelief and its outcome in punishment, without introducing an explicit counterstatement regarding faith and reward. The rhetorical focus is deliberately narrow. From a stylistic perspective, the absence of the opposing pole does not weaken contrast; instead, it activates it implicitly. The reader is guided to infer the unstated alternative, namely salvation and acceptance, through awareness of what is presented as its opposite. In al-Sakkākī's terms, this is an instance of rhetorical *talwīḥ*, where meaning is suggested rather than fully articulated. The warning is intensified through sensory imagery in the following verse:

إِذَا أُلْقُوا فِيهَا سَمِعُوا لَهَا شَهِيقًا وَهِيَ تَفُورُ

The auditory and kinetic descriptions of Hell deepen the emotional force of the discourse. Stylistically, these images function as extensions of the initial contrast. By elaborating the experience of punishment, the text reinforces the negative pole while leaving the positive pole unstated. This arrangement exemplifies *ījāz*, rhetorical economy, as the discourse expands meaning through accumulation rather than through explicit opposition. Verse 8 continues this progression:

تَكَادُ تَمَيَّزُ مِنَ الْغَيْظِ ۖ كُلَّمَا أُلْقِيَ فِيهَا فَوْجٌ سَأَلَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا أَلَمْ يَأْتِكُمْ نَذِيرٌ

Here, *muqābalah ma ʿnawiyyah* operates through dialogic structure. The question posed by the guardians of Hell evokes the absent concept of guidance that was rejected. The contrast between the presence of warning and the denial of it is constructed across verses rather than within a single syntactic frame. In a Sakakian reading, this dispersed

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arrangement still qualifies as *muqābalah*, since the opposition is organized sequentially and coherently within the discourse. The response of the condemned completes the contrastive structure:

قَالُوا بَلَىٰ قَدْ جَاءَنَا نَذِيرٌ فَكَذَّبْنَا وَقُلْنَا مَا نَزَّلَ اللَّهُ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِنْ أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَالٍ كَبِيرٍ

This confession articulates denial and misguidance explicitly, while the opposite meanings, acceptance of warning, faith, and guidance, remain implicit. The stylistic effect lies in allowing the reader to reconstruct the full contrast through inference. According to al-Sakkākī, such rhetorical strategy enhances engagement by entrusting part of the meaning to the audience's interpretive activity. The discourse does not enumerate all possibilities; it structures meaning so that the absent pole becomes cognitively present through contrast.

From a rhetorical standpoint, the sequence of verses 6–9 demonstrates how *muqābalah maʿnawiyyah* can function as an integrated argumentative pattern.[36] Each verse adds a layer to the negative pole of the contrast, punishment, rejection, and regret, while the positive pole is consistently withheld. This one-sided emphasis is appropriate to the *maqām* of *inzār*, where warning is strengthened through focus rather than balance.[37] The absence of explicit mention of reward or salvation does not neutralize the contrast; instead, it sharpens it by compelling reflection.

Within the framework of Qur'anic stylistics, this pattern illustrates that *muqābalah* need not rely on surface symmetry to be rhetorically effective. In *Surah Al-Mulk*, implicit contrast functions as a persuasive mechanism that aligns linguistic form with theological purpose. The discourse achieves depth through controlled omission, reinforcing awareness of accountability and the consequences of disbelief. Read through al-Sakkākī's theory, verses 6–9 exemplify how semantic contrast can be distributed across a passage to construct meaning that is coherent, economical, and contextually appropriate.

Thibāq and *Muqābalah* as an Integrated Stylistic System in *Surah Al-Mulk*

The analysis of *thibāq* and *muqābalah* in *Surah Al-Mulk* indicates that these two rhetorical devices do not function as isolated stylistic ornaments, but operate as an integrated system of semantic contrast that structures the surah's theological and

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[36] Azis, Umyanah, and Mukhtar.

[37] Al-Sakkākī, *Miftāḥ Al-ʿulūm*.

persuasive discourse. From the perspective of classical *balāghah*, this integration reflects a deliberate alignment between linguistic form and communicative intent, consistent with al-Sakkākī's principle of *muṭābaqat al-kalām li-muqtaḍā al-ḥāl*.[38]

At the micro-linguistic level, *thibāq* appears through direct oppositions embedded within individual verses, such as life and death, secrecy and publicity, uprightness and inversion, and visible and inaccessible provision.[39] These oppositions function to sharpen meaning immediately and locally. For example, in Q. 2 and Q. 13, explicit lexical contrasts activate rapid cognitive recognition and emotional response, drawing the reader into awareness of divine power, omniscience, and moral accountability. In al-Sakkākī's terms, this form of contrast intensifies meaning by presenting a concept together with its opposite, allowing neither to be understood in isolation.

At the macro-discursive level, *muqābalah*, particularly in its *maʿnawiyyah* form, operates across a sequence of verses rather than within a single syntactic unit.[40] In Q. 6–9, the discourse constructs a sustained contrast through selective emphasis. Punishment, rejection, and regret are articulated explicitly, while their opposites, guidance, acceptance, and salvation, are withheld. This asymmetrical arrangement is not a stylistic deficiency but a rhetorical strategy. It corresponds to the surah's dominant mode of *inzār*, where warning requires concentration rather than balance. Through this structure, the reader is guided to infer the absent meanings, completing the contrast internally.

When viewed together, *thibāq* and *muqābalah* form a layered stylistic system. *Thibāq* ensures clarity and immediacy at the level of individual statements, while *muqābalah* extends contrast across the discourse, shaping thematic coherence and cumulative rhetorical force. The interaction between these two devices demonstrates that Qur'anic stylistics relies not only on surface symmetry, but also on strategic distribution of meaning. Explicit contrast prepares the reader for implicit contrast, and implicit contrast deepens the impact of what has already been made explicit.

From a theological perspective, this stylistic integration reinforces the central message of *Surah Al-Mulk*: absolute divine sovereignty and human accountability. Linguistic contrasts repeatedly confront the reader with fundamental oppositions that

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[38] Al-Sakkākī.

[39] Aḥmad ibn Ibrahīm ibn Muṣṭafa Al-Hāshimī, *Jawāhir Al-Balāghah Fī Al-Maʿānī Wa Al-Bayān Wa Al-Badīʿ*, Cet-15 (Beirut: Dar Al-Fikr, 2002),h.378-379.

[40] Tria Wulandari et al., "Seni Muqabalah Dalam Al-Qur'an Surat Al-Mulk."

define existence, guidance and misguidance, security and vulnerability, life and its negation. By organizing these oppositions through both explicit pairing and deliberate omission, the surah guides reflection without resorting to exhaustive explanation. Meaning emerges through interaction between text and reader, a process that al-Sakkākī regards as a hallmark of effective rhetoric.[41]

Accordingly, the stylistic system formed by *thibāq* and *muqābalah* in *Surah Al-Mulk* demonstrates that Qur'anic rhetoric achieves its persuasive power through coherence rather than redundancy. Contrast is not repeated mechanically, but varied in form and scope to match the communicative situation. This finding supports the view that Qur'anic stylistics should be understood as a contextual and functional discipline, where rhetorical devices operate in relation to discourse purpose, audience engagement, and theological orientation, rather than as isolated formal features.

Conclusion

This study finds that semantic contrast in *Surah Al-Mulk* functions as a deliberate stylistic strategy that supports the surah's theological emphasis on divine sovereignty, accountability, and *inzār*. The analysis shows that *thibāq* appears through explicit oppositional pairings and also through contextual contrasts that sharpen meaning at the micro-textual level. In Q. 6–9, *muqābalah* is expressed mainly in an implicit (*maʿnawiyyah*) form, where counter-meanings are prompted through selective emphasis and semantic absence rather than through symmetrical lexical pairing. Read through al-Sakkākī's principle of *muṭābaqat al-kalām li-muqtaḍā al-ḥāl*, these patterns indicate that contrast operates in close relation to rhetorical situation: the wording is shaped to fit the warning discourse and to encourage reflective inference. The study is limited to one surah and two rhetorical devices within classical *balāghah* categories. Further work may apply this approach to other surahs, expand the set of devices, or examine reception to describe how readers process contrast in different interpretive contexts.

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[41] H Abdul-Raof, *Qur'anic Stylistics: A Linguistic Analysis*, Languages of the World (Lincom Europa, 2004).

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