

The Linguistic Reanalysis and Reinterpretation of Qur'ānic Verse 37 of Sūrat al-Qiyāmah

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Abstract

Qur'ānic verses have always received new interpretations in light of new historical evidence or scientific discoveries. This paper argues for the thesis that Qur'ānic verses may also receive new interpretations in light of novel construal of their linguistic properties. It proposes new interpretations of verse 37 of sūrat al-Qiyāmah (Resurrection, 75:37) based on a reanalysis of its structure, which leads to re-identifying what was traditionally construed as a verb as an adjective. The paper presents the traditional (standard) interpretations of verse Q. 75:37 and provides three new interpretations. It then argues for the legitimacy of the new interpretations, based on evidence from the Qur'ān and sunnah.

Keywords

Qur'ān, linguistic reanalysis, reinterpretation, construal, verb, adjective.

1. Introduction

The Qur'ān is recognized as Prophet Muḥammad's (peace be on him) eternal miracle.¹ This means that it would be impossible to replicate its literary force and the truth value of its content. This characteristic is directly confirmed in verse 88 of sūrat al-Isrā' (The Night Journey, 17:88), translated in (1).

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¹ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Prophet Muḥammad and His Miracles* (New Jersey: The Light, 2006), 13-14; Abū 'l-Fidā Ismā'īl b. 'Umar b. Kathīr, *Book of Evidences: The Miracles of the Prophet (P.B.U.H)*, trans. Ali Mwinyi Mziwa and Ibn R. Ramadhan (Mansoura: Dār al-Ghad al-Jadīd, 2004), 6.

1. Say: "If the whole of mankind and Jinns were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'ān, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support."²

One understanding of this notion of the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān is that it will continue to reveal scientific facts that our race discovers everywhere, discoveries which are included in what Allah refers to as "His Signs," the signs that should lead human beings to the truth.³ This is expressed in verse 53 of sūrat Fuṣṣilat (Explained-in-detail, 41:53), translated in (2).

2. Soon will We show them Our Signs in the (furthest) regions (of the earth), and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this [what is revealed to Prophet Muḥammad] is the Truth.⁴

Another understanding of this notion is that Qur'ānic verses can have different interpretations and implications depending on how their linguistic structure is parsed. One case in this regard is demonstrated by verse 2 of sūrat al-Baqarah (The Cow, 2:2), in (3) where *waqf* (i.e., stopping the reading) may apply in either of two positions in the verse, as indicated by the three-dot diacritics. This leads to two readings, each with a different interpretation, depending on whether *fīhi* "in it" is pronounced with the phrase before it, which is the standard reading, or the phrase after it, as (4-5) show.

3.

ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٢﴾

4. This is the Book in which there is no doubt, [it is] a guide for the righteous.⁵

5. This is the book, no doubt! In it, there is guidance for those conscious of Allah.

Since the Qur'ān was revealed in the Arabic language, knowledge of Arabic and new understandings of its structures are very essential for unlocking the mysteries of this Book.⁶ Ibn Ḥazm stresses that knowledge of *i'rāb* (morphosyntactic analysis of Arabic) is crucial for

² Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans., *The Holy Qur'ān* (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2007), 196.

³ Nidhal Guessoum, "The Qur'an, Science, and the (related) Contemporary Muslim Discourse," *Zygon* 43, no. 2 (2008): 411-31; Hassan S. Abou-El-Enin, *Scientific Miracles of the Qur'ān: With Signs of Allah in the Heavens and on the Earth* (Pittsburgh: Dorrance Publishing Company, 2009), 8-11; Zakir Naik, *The Qur'ān & Modern Science (Compatible or Incompatible?)* (London: Dar al-Salam, 2014), 5.

⁴ Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān*, 339.

⁵ Talal Itani, trans., *Quran in English*, ed. A (Beirut: ClearQuran, 2014), 1.

⁶ Basil Omar Mustapha Al-Majaydah, "Athar Ikhtilāf al-I'rāb fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm" (master's thesis, Islamic University, Gaza, 2009), 6-9.

the task of interpretation of the Qur'ān.⁷ In this connection, Prophet Muḥammad spoke the *ḥadīth* translated in (6), and his Companion, Caliph Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq spoke the statement translated in (7).

6. Analyze the [language of the] Qur'ān and seek to understand its unforeseen features [wonders].⁸

7. I would prefer to *analyze* [the structure of] a verse from the Qur'ān rather than to memorize one.⁹

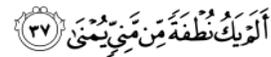
This paper demonstrates that novel understandings of the linguistic structures of Qur'ānic verses may lead to new interpretations. Thus, the Qur'ān should receive new interpretations in every century, ones that might be guided by newly discovered knowledge (in all areas of human thought) as well as by novel construal of the structures of the language of the Qur'ān.

This paper provides new understandings of verse 37 of sūrat al-Qiyāmah (Resurrection, 75:37), based on a novel analysis of the linguistic structure of this verse, an analysis that is different from those related to *waqf*. In other words, new interpretations can emerge if the words are construed or the phrases are parsed in different ways, making use of the scientific study of language, which is linguistics, specifically the offerings of generative syntax.¹⁰ Section 2 presents the traditional interpretations of Q. 75:37; section 3 presents the new interpretations of Q. 75:37; section 4 provides evidence in support of the new interpretations; and section 5 concludes the discussion.

2. The Old Interpretations

This section presents three traditional interpretations of Q. 75:37, in (8), translated in (9).

8.



9. Had he [human being] not been a sperm from semen emitted?¹¹

The first traditional interpretation of Q. 75:37 is in (10).

10. Had the human being not been a sperm of semen emitted (or discharged) into wombs?¹²

⁷ 'Alī b. Aḥmad b. Ḥazm al-Andalusī, *Rasā'il Ibn Ḥazm* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasat al-'Arabiyyah, 1987), 2:162.

⁸ Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *al-Jāmi' li Shu'ab al-Īmān* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2003), 548; the translation is of the author.

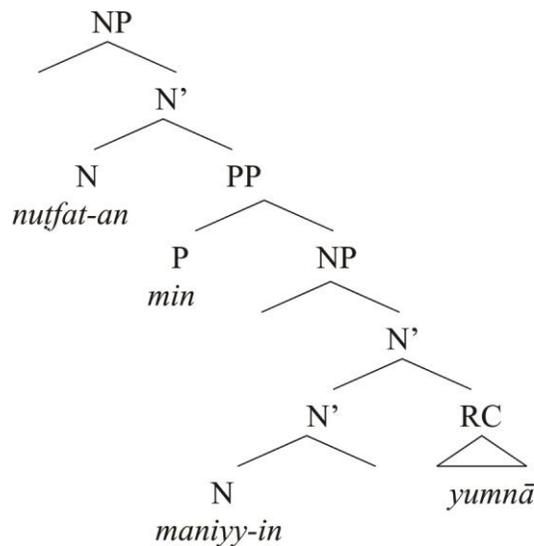
⁹ Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Medina: King Fahd Complex for Printing the Holy Qur'ān, 2005), 2271.

¹⁰ Noam Chomsky, *Lectures on Government and Binding* (Dordrecht: Foris, 1981), 29-39.

¹¹ *The Qur'ān: English Meanings* (Jeddah: Al-Muntada Al-Islami, 2004), 604.

According to this interpretation, the word *yumnā* is construed as a passive voice verb meaning “emitted” and related to the preceding noun *maniyy* meaning “semen,” and in total phrase meaning “semen emitted.” The syntactic tree in (11) depicts the structural relations between the components of the noun phrase (NP) *nutfat-an min maniyy-in yumnā* “sperm from semen emitted.”¹³ Here, *yumnā*, construed as a passive voice verb, signifies a relative clause (RC) which provides a description of the noun *maniyy* “semen,” hence is inside the NP projected by the noun *maniyy*; the relative clause reads like: “semen that is emitted.”

11.



The construction in (11) is called a “pseudopartitive construction.”¹⁴ This construction denotes a measured unit or amount (i.e., *nutfah*) of the substance referred to by the noun in the prepositional phrase (PP) *min maniyy-in*, which is *maniyy*.¹⁵ This makes the prepositional phrase a complement for the noun *nutfah*.

¹² Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li Aḥkām al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 2006), 21:441; Ismā‘īl b. ‘Umar b. Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm* (Riyadh: Dār Ṭaybah, 1999), 8:283; Al-Ḥusayn b. Mas‘ūd al-Baghawī, *Ma‘ālim al-Tanzīl* (Riyadh: Dār Ṭaybah, 1989), 8:287; Muḥammad Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Fakhr al-Rāzī* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 30:234.

¹³ The theoretical syntax component of the proposal advanced in this paper is made as accessible as possible to the general reader.

¹⁴ Helen Stickney, “From Pseudopartitive to Partitive,” Conference Paper, 2007, 406-15; Stickney, “The Emergence of DP in the Partitive Structure” (PhD diss., University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2009), 42-46.

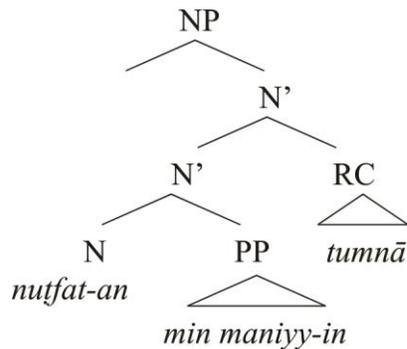
¹⁵ It is worth noting that nothing in the proposal advanced in this paper is contingent on any specific analysis of partitives or pseudo-partitives.

The second traditional interpretation of Q. 75:37 results from another reading of the Qur'ān.¹⁶ This reading allows the verb *yumnā* to be pronounced in feminine form, as *tumnā* ('t-' being the feminine verbal marker), hence related to the feminine noun *nutfah*, meaning “sperm,” rather than to the masculine noun *maniyy*, meaning “semen,” as in (12).

12. “Had the human being not been an emitted sperm of semen?”¹⁷

Thus, *nutfat-an tumnā* means “sperm emitted” or “emitted sperm” (rather than “semen emitted”). The syntactic tree in (13) provides a structural description of the relations between the components of the noun phrase *nutfat-an min maniyy-in tumnā* according to this reading. The verb *tumnā* still makes a relative clause (RC), but now it describes the noun *nutfah* “sperm” (sperm that is emitted); thus, it is inside the NP projected by the noun *nutfah*.

13.



According to a third traditional interpretation, *yumnā/tumnā* is still construed as a passive voice verb, but it means “created,” in the sense that the “sperm” or “semen” is “created into” a human being.¹⁸ This third interpretation has a tree similar to the earlier ones, depending on what *yumnā/tumnā* is describing, *maniyy* or *nutfah*.

Thus, in all traditional understandings, the word *yumnā* is interpreted as a verb in the passive voice, perceived to be derived from the origin *manā*, which is derived from the root “m-n-y,” meaning “to create” or “to destine/decreed” or “to try/test” or “to emit semen.”¹⁹ The

¹⁶ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Zangalah, *Ḥujjat al-Qirā’āt* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 1997), 737.

¹⁷ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’ li Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, 21:441; Al-Baghawī, *Ma’ālim al-Tanzīl*, 5:287; Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Fakhr al-Rāzī*, 30:234; Naṣr b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Samarqandī, *Tafsīr al-Samarqandī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1993), 3:428.

¹⁸ ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq b. Ghālib al-Andalusī, *al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz fī Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-‘Azīz* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2001), 5:407; Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Fakhr al-Rāzī*, 30:234.

¹⁹ Muḥammad b. Ya’qūb al-Fayrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ* (Beirut, Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 2005), 1336.

derived noun *maniyy* literally means “the liquid from which man is destined/decreed to be created.”

The fact that *yumnā* in Q. 75:37 is immediately preceded by the noun *maniyy* “semen,” which is derived (as traditionally understood) from the same root, “*m-n-y*,” could be one reason why scholars were tempted to link *yumnā* to *maniyy* and treat *yumnā* as a passive verb rather than as an adjective. Another reason for this temptation is related to why *yumnā* is needed in the first place.

Whether *yumnā* or *tumnā*, the question remains as to why it is needed since it is obvious that “semen”/“sperm” is emitted anyway; that is, conception does not take place unless “sperm”/“semen” is emitted. This non-trivial question is raised in several exegesis books and answered in the following manner.²⁰ However, I will demonstrate the inadequacy of their answer (i.e., justification for the presence of *yumnā*), which should lead to the conclusion that *yumnā* should not be construed as a verb, therefore providing support for my interpretation, to be presented in the next section.

These Qur’ānic commentators maintain that *yumnā/tumnā* is there in Q. 75:37 to remind the human being of where he/she came out, the urine passage so that he/she would not disobey Allah and rebel against Him. In other words, the human being should always remember his/her “despised” origin (i.e., very tiny substance coming out of the urine passage). They connect this justification to two other verses. The first is verse 20 of sūrat al-Mursalāt (The Unleashed, 77:20), in (14) translated in (15). The second is verse 8 of sūrat al-Sajdah (The Prostration, 32:8), in (16), translated in (17).

14.

أَلَمْ نَخْلُقْكُمْ مِنْ مَّاءٍ مَّهِينٍ ﴿٢٠﴾

15. Did We not create you from a liquid *disdained*?²¹

16.

ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَا نَسْلَهُ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ مِنْ مَّاءٍ مَّهِينٍ ﴿٨﴾

17. Then He made his posterity out of the extract of a liquid *disdained*.²²

²⁰ Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Fakhr al-Rāzī*, 30:234; ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Baghdādī al-Khāzin, *Tafsīr al-Khāzin* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2004), 4:374; Al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Nīsābūrī, *Gharā’ib al-Qur’ān wa Raghā’ib al-Furqān* (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1996), 6:406-407; ‘Umar b. ‘Alī b. ‘Adil al-Dimashqī, *al-Lubāb fī ‘Ulūm al-Kitāb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1998), 19:578.

²¹ *The Qur’ān: English Meanings*, 609.

²² *Ibid.*, 404.

The connection here is made to the word *mahīn*, translated as “disdained,” which is interpreted in the aforementioned sources to mean “despised” or “humiliated” or “abased.”²³ Nonetheless, I think this word does not mean “humiliated”/“disdained,” since there is no reason why Allah would humiliate us, having also said in the Qur’ān verse 70 of sūrat al-Isrā’ (The Night Journey, 17:70), translated in (18).

18. We have *honored* the sons of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favors, above a great part of Our Creation.²⁴

Also, the word *mahīn* does not literally mean “humiliated” or “despised,” since “humiliated” in Arabic is *muhān*, which is the passive participle (adjective) derived from the passive verb *yuhān* “to be humiliated.” The “humiliator” is *muhīn*, which is the active participle derived from the active verb *yuhīn* “to humiliate”; *yuhīn* is the present tense of *ahāna* which means “to insult,” and *mahīn* is *not* one of its derivatives.²⁵

Thus, the adjective *mahīn* should *not* be interpreted as “humiliated” or “disdained,” but rather as “humble” in the sense of “weak” or “lowly” (since “semen” is a weak version of water, having other doctoring elements within it). And, by the way, this is al-Ṭabarī’s interpretation of *mahīn* in both Q. 77:20 and Q. 32:8;²⁶ he says that *mahīn* means *ḍa’īf* “weak” and *raqīq*, which means “delicate/flimsy/thin.” Also, al-Qurṭubī and al-Baghawī say that *mahīn* means *ḍa’īf* “weak” in their interpretations of Q. 32:8.²⁷ *Mahīn*, which is derived from the root “*m-h-n*” (from which the word *mihnah* “profession/craft” is derived), means “weak,” “little,” and “lacking good opinion and proper judgement,” as well as *ḥaqīr*, which means either “insignificant” (weak in terms of size) or “despicable” (weak in terms of status).²⁸ So, why did the scholars choose the last meaning, though the first and second are more logical? “Semen” is a very “little” amount of a “weak” variety of water.

²³ It is worth mentioning that another translation of the Qur’ān interprets this word, *mahīn*, to mean “insignificant,” which makes reference to size and importance, rather than origin, in line with the current proposal. Q. 77:20 has the translation in (i), and Q. 32:8 has the translation in (ii).

i. Did We not create you from an *insignificant* fluid? Itani, *Quran in English*, 228.

ii. Then made his reproduction from an extract of an *insignificant* fluid. Ibid., 156.

²⁴ Ali, *The Holy Qur’ān*, 195.

²⁵ Al-Fayrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, 1240.

²⁶ Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 1994), 7:432; 6: 143.

²⁷ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’ li Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, 17:15; Al-Baghawī, *Ma’ālim al-Tanzīl*, 6:301.

²⁸ Al-Fayrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, 1236.

The proposed understanding of *mahīn* receives support from the other two occurrences of this word in the Qur’ān. The first is in verse 52 of sūrat al-Zukhruf (The Decorations, 43:52), in (19), translated in (20). The second is in verse 10 of sūrat al-Qalam (The Pen, 68:10), in (21), translated in (22).

19.

أَمْ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِّنْ هَذَا الَّذِي هُوَ مَهِينٌ وَلَا يَكَادُ يُبِينُ ﴿٥٢﴾

20. Or am I [not] better than this one [i.e., Moses] who is *insignificant* and hardly makes himself clear?²⁹

21.

وَلَا تَطِعْ كُلَّ حَلَّافٍ مَّهِينٍ ﴿١٠﴾

22. And do not obey every *worthless* habitual swearer.³⁰

The contexts of these two verses support an interpretation of *mahīn* as “weak,” rather than as “humiliated” or “disdained.” In verse Q. 43:52, *mahīn* (Pharaoh’s description of Prophet Moses [peace be on him]) is translated as “insignificant,” and it actually means “unfortunate” or “physically weak” (since he also cannot express himself well), being also “without physical resources,” compared to his opponent, Pharaoh, who has an army. Also, in verse Q. 68:10, *mahīn*, translated as “worthless,” may be interpreted to mean “wicked” or “morally weak,” or “weak” in terms of his/her arguments, those not being strong enough; and anyway, people who usually resort to swearing (by God) are those who are either not telling the truth or those whose arguments are weak.

Thus, the “water/liquid” from which Allah creates us, given (77:20) and (32:8), is not “humiliated” or “disdained,” but rather “weak” in nature/texture (i.e., in its resemblance to normal water), though the “sperm”/“semen” is emitted through the urine passage. Also, if we accepted the “humiliated conception” theory, we will have to accept a possible “humiliated birth,” since, again, we are born through the urine passage. And even if we accepted the “humiliated conception” theory for the disobedient and rebellious people or even normal human beings, can we accept it for the most honourable human beings, the prophets? By no means can these be humiliated!

This “humiliated conception” theory becomes even less acceptable when we consider verse 4 of sūrat al-Tīn (The Fig, 95:4), translated in (23). Basically, if the “design” in which we are created is the best possible, then the “process” which actualizes this design (i.e., conception as well as birth) should also be the best possible. Getting out of the urine

²⁹ *The Qur’ān: English Meanings*, 491.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 582.

passage twice is not humiliation, but rather the “best method” possible, given our “best design.”³¹

23. We created man in the *best design*.³²

The above discussion leads to the conclusion that the word *yumnā/tumnā* in Q. 75:37 is not there to remind us of a “humiliated” origin, hence is *not* a verb (or a relative clause that describes “the emitting” of “semen” or “sperm”). This, therefore, indicates that *yumnā* is there in Q. 75:37 to signify another meaning, to prompt another understanding, hence the new interpretations, in the next section.

3. The New Interpretations

If the inclusion of *yumnā* in verse Q. 75:37 is not to remind us of an “abased” origin, can it be parsed as another part of speech, which may tell us something insightful about our conception (or creation)? I argue, yes. The phrasing of Q. 75:37 supports a new interpretation, according to which the word *yumnā* may be construed as an adjective in the feminine form (*yumnā*, but not *tumnā*). As an adjective, *yumnā* can mean either “right” (as opposed to “left”) or “blessed,” modifying the feminine noun *nutfah* meaning “sperm,” and in total phrase meaning “a right-side sperm”/“a sperm cell from the right-side,” or “a blessed sperm,” as in (24).

24. Had the human being not been a “right-side” or “blessed” sperm of semen?

A survey of the exegesis books of the Qur’ān reveals that none of them says that the word *yumnā* may also be construed as an adjective that modifies the noun *nutfah* “sperm.”³³ Another possible reason for the traditional construal of *yumnā* as a passive voice verb related to *maniyy*, and not as an adjective modifying *nutfah*, is that *yumnā* is separated from *nutfah* by the intervening prepositional phrase (PP) *min maniyy-in* “from semen.” This prepositional phrase serves as a complement for the noun *nutfah* in the pseudopartitive construction in (25), which denotes a measured amount (i.e., *nutfah*) of the noun in the prepositional phrase,

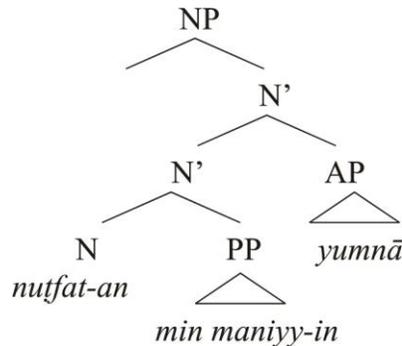
³¹In fact, getting out of our parents’ urine passages is one reason for us to recognize their higher status, so that we live for their service.

³²Itani, *Quran in English*, 237.

³³A survey of all the interpretations in the Golden Quran website and application, below, which features more than 50 interpretations, yields the same results. <https://goldenquran.org/ar/quran/578?quranCopy=4&aya=37&sora=75&details=show§ion=tafseer>.

which is *maniyy*.³⁴ The tree in (25) depicts these structural relations. While the prepositional phrase is a complement to *nutfah*, informing us about the substance from which the measured amount comes, *yumnā*, which makes an adjective phrase (AP), is a modifier (i.e., adjunct), telling us some extra property of that measured amount. The AP *yumnā* is inside the NP projected by the noun *nutfah*, hence modifying *nutfah*.

25.



In other words, the availability of the complement prepositional phrase might have obscured the other possibility, though complements are always closer to the noun than the modifiers that follow the noun.³⁵ This is because complements are generally obligatory, being important both syntactically and semantically for the noun, whereas adjuncts are always optional since they just modify the noun (i.e., say extra information about it). Since the order of the components of the noun phrase *nutfat-an min maniyy-in yumnā* (i.e., noun-complement-adjunct) is the logical one, speaking for the perfection of the language of the Qur’ān, this separation of the prepositional phrase should not interrupt the modification relationship between the noun *nutfah* and the adjective *yumnā*.

Another verse from the Qur’ān demonstrates that this separation (of the adjective from the noun that it modifies) by a prepositional phrase

³⁴ The main point here is that the adjective *yumnā* modifies the noun *nutfah* “sperm,” not *maniyy* “semen.” Also, since the measured unit (*nutfah*) is able to restrict the description of the adjective only to itself (i.e., the adjective cannot also modify the noun in the prepositional phrase), I will consider the measured element a fully lexical element, labelling it “N” (noun) in the tree. This is the only way the present treatment of this pseudo-partitive construction differs from standard treatment.

³⁵ Peter W. Culicover, *Principles and Parameters: An Introduction to Syntactic Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 140; Norbert Hornstein, Jairo Nunes, and Kleanthes K. Grohmann, *Understanding Minimalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 186-88.

does not constitute a problem for the new interpretation. This is clear from the interpretation of verse 31 of sūrat al-Zukhruf (Decorations, 43:31), in (26), translated in (27).

26.  وَقَالُوا لَوْلَا نَزَّلَ هَذَا الْقُرْآنُ عَلَى رَجُلٍ مِّنَ الْقَرْيَتَيْنِ عَظِيمٍ

27. Also, they say: “Why is not this Qur’ān sent down to some leading man in either of the two (chief) cities?”³⁶

As the translation shows, the modification relationship is between *rajul* “a man” and ‘*azīm* “great” despite the fact that the prepositional phrase *min al-qaryatayn* “from [one of] the two cities” separates the noun *rajul* apart from its modifying adjective ‘*azīm*; that is, the modification relationship is not interrupted. In fact, it is not possible to understand that ‘*azīm* “great” could modify the noun *al-qaryatayn* “the two cities” because ‘*azīm* is singular and masculine, whereas *al-qaryatayn* is dual and feminine.

This is the same pattern found with the phrase “sperm—from semen—right/blessed” in Q. 75:37; both *nutfah* and *yumnā* are feminine, whereas *maniyy* is masculine. And, anyway, Arabic does not allow a masculine form to be modified by a feminine form, which is why *bayt jamīlah* “a beautiful house” is an ungrammatical mixture of masculine, *bayt*, and feminine, *jamīlah*, forms. Accordingly, the feminine adjective *yumnā* (“right” or “blessed”) can only relate grammatically, in a modification relationship, to the feminine noun *nutfah* and not to the masculine noun *maniyy*.

The origin of the adjective *yumnā* is *yumn*, derived from the root “y-m-n,” and is associated with the two above-mentioned meanings, newly brought to bear.³⁷ The first is *ayman*, which means “blessed,” and the second is *yamīn*, which means “right” (as opposed to “left”), both being the masculine forms of *yumnā*. This latter meaning of *yumnā* (i.e., “right”) also includes connotations of “power” and “high status,” which are both associated with the right-hand position.

Both meanings of *yumnā*, as an adjectival form, appear in the Qur’ān, but in their masculine forms. Verse 17 of sūrat Ṭā-Hā (20:17), in (28), translated in (29), shows that *yamīn* means “right” (hand).

28.  وَمَا تِلْكَ بِيَمِينِكَ يَا مُوسَىٰ

³⁶ Ali, *The Holy Qur’ān*, 346.

³⁷ Al-Fayrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, 1241; ALAC [Arabic Language Academy in Cairo], *al-Mu’jam al-Wasīṭ* (Cairo: International Sunrise Press, 2004), 1066-67.

29. And what is that in your *right* hand, O Moses?³⁸

The meaning of “blessed” for *ayman* is seen in verse 52 of sūrat Maryam (Mary, 19:52), in (30), translated in (31).

30.

وَنَدَيْنَاهُ مِنْ جَانِبِ الطُّورِ الْأَيْمَنِ وَقَرَّبْنَاهُ مِمَّا


31. And We called him from the right side of Mount (Sinai), and made him draw near to Us, for mystic (converse).³⁹

Although *al-ayman* is interpreted to mean only the *right* side of the Mount in several exegesis books,⁴⁰ al-Sa’dī maintains that *al-ayman* could mean either “the *right* side of Moses [as he was walking],” or “the more *blessed* side of the mountain.”⁴¹ The interpretation where *al-ayman* means “the blessed (side)” may be supported by the statement in verse 30 of sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ (The Narrations, 28:30), in (32), translated in (33).

32.

فَلَمَّا أَتَاهَا نُودِيَ مِنْ شَاطِئِ الْوَادِ الْأَيْمَنِ فِي الْبُقْعَةِ الْمُبْرَكَةِ مِنَ الشَّجَرَةِ أَنْ
 يَمْسُكَ الْإِنْفِ أَنَا اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ


33. When he reached it, he was called from the right side of the valley, at the *Blessed* Spot, from the bush: “O Moses, it is I, God, the Lord of the Worlds.”⁴²

The meaning component of “power” is demonstrated by the meaning of *yamīn* in verse 45 of sūrat al-Ḥāqqah (The Reality, 69:45), in (34), translated in (35).

34.

لَاخْذِنَا مِنْهُ بِالْيَمِينِ


35. We would have surely seized him by the *right* hand.⁴³

Although the word *yumnā* in its adjectival form does not appear in the Qur’ān in any verse other than Q. 75:37, it features in multiple *ḥadīths* of the Prophet, like the one in (36).

³⁸ Ali, *The Holy Qur’ān*, 214.

³⁹ Ibid., 210.

⁴⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 5:163; Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’ li Ahkām al-Qur’ān*, 13:462; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, 5:237; Al-Baghawī, *Ma’ālim al-Tanzīl*, 5:236.

⁴¹ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Nāṣir al-Sa’dī, *Taysīr al-Karīm al-Raḥmān fī Tafsīr Kalām al-Mannān* (Riyadh: Dār al-Salām, 2002), 577.

⁴² Ali, *The Holy Qur’ān*, 146.

⁴³ *The Qur’ān: English Meanings*, 588.

36. When any of you puts on his shoes, he should put on the right one first; and when he takes them off, he should begin with the left. Let the right shoe be the first to be put on and the last to be taken off.⁴⁴

Another concept that the word *yamīn* “right” may refer to is that of “oath”;⁴⁵ for one thing, oaths involve the use of the “right” hand (placed on a book, or on one’s chest, or raised in the air); for another, it is a “strong” (i.e., solemn) statement/declaration.

Besides these two new interpretations of Q. 75:37 (i.e., “sperm from the right side” and “blessed sperm”), a third possible interpretation and one compatible with modern science and based on the “power” connotation of the adjective *yumnā* is as in (37):

37. Had the human being not been a “strong” sperm of semen?

Embryologists now tell us that out of the millions of sperm cells that are discharged, only the “strongest” or “healthiest” (in terms of motility and velocity, for example) will be able to reach the egg (ovum) and fertilize it.⁴⁶ So the imagery of the root “y-m-n” with its meanings of power (*yamīn*) or blessing (*ayman*) could be addressing this scientific fact.

The relevant point here is that the feminine forms of both masculine derivatives, *ayman* and *yamīn* (derived from the same root, “y-m-n”) are the same: *yumnā*. In other words, *yumnā* in Q. 75:37 may be properly interpreted to mean “right” (side) or “blessed,” or “the blessed right-side,” a finding to be capitalized on in the next section.

4. Support for the New Interpretations

Given the above discussion, this question arises: How do the new meanings of the word *yumnā* fit into the context of verse Q. 75:37? In other words, what makes the construal of *yumnā* as an adjective meaning either “right-side” or “blessed,” or both of them together, better than construing it as a passive voice verb meaning “emitted” or “created”? This section provides evidence that the two new meanings of *yumnā* (i.e., “right” and “blessed”), as well as their related connotations (e.g., “strong”), are legitimate.⁴⁷ This is achieved through demonstrating that

⁴⁴ Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaḥīḥ li ‘l-Bukhārī* (Cairo: al-Maṭba‘ah al-Salafiyyah, 1980), 66. The translation is of <https://sunnah.com/riyadussalihin:723>.

⁴⁵ Al-Fayrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, 1241.

⁴⁶ R. John Aitken et al., “The Correlates of Fertilizing Capacity in Normal Fertile Men,” *Fertility and Sterility* 38, no. 1 (1982): 68-76.

⁴⁷ It might be argued that these proposed “positive” meanings and connotations are not supported by the general tone of the *sūrah*, which is one of reprimand and censure, as revealed by the earlier verse, Q. 75:36, translated in (i).

i. Does man think that he will be left without purpose?” Itani, *Quran in English*, 227.

the new understanding of verse Q. 75:37 is compatible with various Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīths* of the Prophet, and through providing novel and insightful understandings of some related Qur'ānic verses.

4.1. Direct Evidence

The arguments in this section will discuss either one of the two new meanings separately or both of them taken together. The arguments will appeal to the fact that we, mankind, are created “blessed” (having the whole universe at our service), and also to the special status of the “right-hand” or “right-side” of the human body. These arguments lead to the conclusion that human beings are the production of “blessed” sperm that is very likely to come from the “right” side of the human body.

That we are created “blessed” is clearly stated in many verses in the Qur'ān. These verses from sūrat al-Jāthiyah (The Kneeling Down, 45:12-13), translated in (38), provide an example of these “blessings.”

38. It is Allah Who has subjected the sea to you, that ships may sail upon it by His command, that you may seek of His Bounty, and that you may be grateful. And He has subjected to you, as from Him. All that is in the heavens and on earth: behold, in that are Signs indeed for those who reflect.⁴⁸

Although the tone is an important factor in the interpretation of the Qur'ān, it is not a concrete linguistic element; it is not like words, phrases, and sentences. Therefore, people coming from different backgrounds or assumptions may reach different understandings of the same verse, regardless of the tone of the *sūrah* or the context of the verse. Another understanding of verse Q. 75:36 is as follows:

Allah has not [created man with two conflicting options and] left him *alone, neglected and abandoned to face [the temptations of life and the devil] on his own*, [but rather created him with natural readiness to resist these tempters and follow the right path (which is the concept of creation according to *fiṭrah*)]. And then Allah explains in verse Q. 75:37 what He means by not leaving man alone in his/her worldly resistance against tempters; it is by creating man honoured, being the creation from a right-side sperm-cell, strengthened, being the creation from a strong sperm-cell, and blessed with *fiṭrah*, God-given straight nature.

In addition, the content and context of sūrat al-Qiyāmah is not all negative. For example, verse Q. 75:2 talks about the “blaming soul,” which is responsible for reminding man of Allah’s blessings, thus prompting man not to disobey Allah or deny the Day of Judgement. Besides, verses Q. 75:16-19 talk about the Qur'ān, which is a mercy, and so talk about the Qur'ān is meant to remind man of Allah’s greatest blessing, which is the religion and Prophet that came with the Qur'ān. Also relevant are verses Q. 75:22-23, which talk about the condition of believers’ faces on the Day of Judgement, radiant. Finally, it is true that most of sūrat al-Qiyāmah is reprimanding, but Allah is the Merciful, and His reprimanding is *not* against man, but rather *for* man, to show him/her the negative aspects of his/her behaviour, with the purpose of driving him/her away from the devil and closer to Allah.

⁴⁸ Ali, *The Holy Qur'ān*, 352.

The fact that the physical “right” side is associated with correctness, preference, privilege, honour, and righteousness is clear in the following *ḥadīths*, which show that Prophet Muḥammad used his right hand or started with his right side for positive actions and left hand/side for negative ones. In the *ḥadīth* in (39), the Prophet instructs Muslims to use their right hands for eating and drinking:

39. When any one of you intends to eat (meal), he should eat with his right hand. and when he (intends) to drink he should drink with his right hand, for the Satan eats with his left hand and drinks with his left hand.⁴⁹

The *ḥadīth* in (40) reports that the Prophet used to glorify Allah with his right hand only.

40. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Amr says, “I saw the Prophet counting the glorification of his Lord on his right hand.”⁵⁰

In the *ḥadīth* in (41), the Prophet is reported to have prohibited his Companions from touching their private parts with their right hands.

41. Whenever anyone of you makes water he should not hold his penis or clean his private parts with his right hand. (And while drinking) one should not breathe in the drinking utensil.⁵¹

Besides these actions, Prophet Muḥammad reserved his right hand for shaking hands and giving charity and his right foot for entering the mosque and getting out of the bathroom and used his left foot for leaving the mosque and entering the bathroom. Thus, the “right” side is regarded as “privileged” or “more blessed.”

The meaning component of “power” (i.e., “strong”) is compatible with the command that we take the Divine messages with determination and steadfastness, as stated in verse 63 of sūrat al-Baqarah (The Cow, 2:63), translated in (42). In other words, we are created from a “strong” sperm so that we take Allah’s teachings “earnestly.”

42. Take what We have given you earnestly, and remember what is in it, that you may attain righteousness.⁵²

Although we are created with the free will of choosing either path, good or evil, Allah had bestowed His blessings on us to make the “good” path look more appealing to us. To illustrate, the Qur’ān tells us that Allah created mankind with an inclination to conflicting paths, both good and evil; this is clear in these verses from sūrat al-Shams (The Sun,

⁴⁹ Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1991), 1598. The translation is of <https://sunnah.com/muslim/36/139>.

⁵⁰ Sa’īd b. ‘Alī b. Wahf al-Qaḥṭānī, *Ḥiṣn al-Muslim* (Riyadh: King Fahd National Library, 2006), 151. The translation is of <https://sunnah.com/hisn/267>.

⁵¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 71. The translation is of <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/4/20>.

⁵² Itani, *Quran in English*, 4.

91:7-8), translated in (43). Verse 29 of *sūrat al-Kahf* (The Cave, 18:29), translated in (44), states that we, human beings, decide which path to follow.

43. And the soul and He who proportioned it. And inspired it with [discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness.⁵³

44. And say, “The truth is from your Lord. Whoever wills—let him believe. And whoever wills—let him disbelieve.”⁵⁴

This means that it is left to us to deliberate in our selection of the “righteous” path or the “wicked” one, but that Allah would *not* make our decisions for us, as long as we are able to decide.⁵⁵ Although Allah would not weigh our decision in either direction (good or evil), He has bestowed His “blessings” on us (in an attempt to prompt us to choose the “right” path), even before we could decide, that is, at the time when we are conceived (or even before). This way, Allah “blesses” us all, children of Muslims and children of non-Muslims, by making us the production of the “right” side (a notion to be elaborated on soon).

This understanding of the concept of “blessing” is compatible with the *ḥadīth* translated in (45), where *fiṭrah* or “true nature” might refer to “the straight path” since the two are intimately related by the design of Allah. Prophet Muḥammad said,

45. There is none born but is created in accordance with his *true nature* (i.e., the ways of Islam). It is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian. [This happens] quite as beasts produce their young with their limbs perfectly formed. Do you see anything deficient in them? Then Abū Hurayrah quoted the Qur’ān [30:30]: “. . . [according to] *the nature designed/made by Allah* in which He has created men—there is no altering of Allah’s creation—that is the right religion.”⁵⁶

The proposed relationship between the “blessed” and “right(-side)” components of the meaning of *yumnā* in Q. 75:37 raises the anatomical question as to whether the sperm (*nuṭfah*) from which we are conceived is manufactured somewhere on the “right” side of the body or in the “right” testicle. This way, the sperm made in the left testicle would be there for pure pleasure. Or, it could be the case that the sperm from which we are conceived is manufactured in both testicles, but that it is emitted from a vessel on the “right” side of the body. It is obvious that this requires technical evidence that goes beyond the scope of this

⁵³ Ibid., 236.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 108.

⁵⁵ Rashid Al-Balushi, “On the Subject of ‘*Yashā*’ in Some Qur’ānic Verses,” *Journal of Islamic Research* 33, no. 2 (2022): 596-616.

⁵⁶ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 416-17.

article. I will, nonetheless, present some facts that are compatible with this understanding.⁵⁷

The proposed understanding is more plausible because it also addresses a more “technical” aspect of the issue raised in Q. 75:37. My interpretation is related to a question that I long had in my mind, but neither had an answer for nor could I design an experiment to find an answer to. It is basically related to the fact that when we Muslims shower after having sexual intercourse (i.e., perform *ghusl*), we first have to wash the “right” side of our bodies, and then the left side. I had been wondering about the reason, and now I suspect that something in our creation could explain this.

There seems to be a principle involved, which is not explained to us, but whose reason mankind may eventually discover. I, therefore, believe that one possible reason that we wash the “right” side first with *ghusl* as cleansing from sexual intimacy, which is the pathway leading to the creation of new life, is because Allah procreates each new life from the “blessedness” of the “right” side sperm. The fact that we also start with washing the “right” side when we do *wuḍū'* (ablution) in preparation for prayers, that is, when sexual intercourse is not involved, points out that the difference between *wuḍū'* and *ghusl* is that while *wuḍū'* is related to what follows it (prayers), *ghusl* is related to what precedes it (sexual intercourse). Starting with the “right” side when we perform *wuḍū'* is like the “thank-you” to Allah for making us the production of the “blessed right” side.

In other words, we wash the “right” side first when we perform *ghusl* in honour of the fact that the sperm from which we are conceived comes from the “blessedness” of the “right” testicle/side. We have to follow the same *ghusl* procedure, even if we are not planning pregnancy. Basically, just as prayer is part of fulfilling the needs of our true nature (*fiṭrah*) hence beginning with the “right” side, so begetting children and protecting our race from extinction is the main purpose of sexual intercourse (not pleasure for its own sake). So then we have to follow the same self-cleansing procedure.

⁵⁷ This question serves to raise possibilities for further scientific investigation. Is it possible that the “sperm” of “blessed” reproduction literally comes from the “right” testicle? While this may strike some as unlikely in terms of today’s popular knowledge, it should not be dismissed out of hand. In fact, there is evidence that the two testicles are different. For example, the varicoceles condition, which is very likely to lead to testicular dysfunction and infertility, occurs in the left side in 85% to 90% of cases of testicular pain. Koji Chiba et al., “The Varicocele: Diagnostic Dilemmas, Therapeutic Challenges and Future Perspectives,” *Asian Journal of Andrology* 18, no. 2 (2016): 276.

Furthermore, the positive association of the “right-side” and the negative association of the “left-side” is not restricted to our practices in this world. This concept is also related to the Hereafter. These verses from sūrat al-Ḥāqqah (The Reality, 69:19-37), translated in (46), tell us that people heading to paradise are given, on the Day of Judgement, the record (of their deeds) in their “right” hand, and those who are heading to Hellfire are given their record in their “left” hand.

46. As for him who is given his book in his right hand, he will say, “Here, take my book and read it. I knew I would be held accountable.” So he will be in pleasant living. In a lofty Garden. Its pickings are within reach. “Eat and drink merrily for what you did in the days gone by.” But as for him who is given his book in his left hand, he will say, “I wish I was never given my book. And never knew what my account was. If only it was the end. My money cannot avail me. My power has vanished from me.” “Take him and shackle him. Then scorch him in the Blaze. Then with a chain which length is seventy cubits tie him up.” For he would not believe in Allah the Great. Nor would he advocate the feeding of the destitute. So he has no friend here today. And no food except scum. Which only the sinners eat.⁵⁸

So, again, the concept of a distinction between “right” and “left” positions is so crucial that it is used to indicate one’s destiny; recall that one of the meanings of the verb *manā* (derived from “*m-n-y*”) is “to destine.” This is because by being created (from *maniyy* “semen”), we are given the choice between two “destinies” (i.e., we are *not* assigned a specific destiny by Allah). Another relevant derivative of *manā* is *maniyyah*, which means “death,” since by being “created” and given life, one is also “destined” to undergo a death at the end of a certain term.

Thus, when we are still *nuṭfah* (i.e., have not yet made a choice), we are referred to as *yumnā* (“blessed” sperm from the “right” side). However, when we are at the accountability stage, having made all our decisions, we are either *aṣḥāb al-yamīn* (companions of the pre-approved [by Allah] “right” [path]) or *aṣḥāb al-shimāl* (companions of the misguided “left” [path]).

A possible way to view this issue follows along these lines: Those who have honoured Allah’s decision to have them begotten from the “right” sperm (by subsequently following Allah’s path in being “strong” against the evil inclination) get to receive their record in their “right” hand. Those who did not honour that early “blessing” (conception from a “right” sperm), do not get to receive their record in their “right” hand.

⁵⁸ Itani, *Quran in English*, 221.

4.2. Indirect Evidence

This section provides three arguments for the proposed interpretation of Q. 75:37, based on more insightful understandings of relevant Qur'ānic verses. One argument for the new interpretations comes from the fact that the notion of “emitting” the sperm is arguably mentioned in verse 46 of sūrat al-Najm (The Star, 53:46); the word *tumnā* in this verse may be construed in no way other than as a passive voice verb, with the possible meanings of “emitted” and “created.” Here are verses (53:45-46), which are interrelated, quoted in (47), and translated in (48).

47.

وَأَنَّهُ خَلَقَ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنثَىٰ ﴿٤٥﴾ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ إِذَا تُمْنَىٰ ﴿٤٦﴾

48. And that it is He who created the two kinds—the male and the female. From a sperm drop, when emitted.⁵⁹

Now, the fact that sūrat al-Najm (The Star, 53), order of revelation: 23rd, was revealed before sūrat al-Qiyāmah (Resurrection, 75), order of revelation: 31st, indicates that while the earlier verse signifies one meaning, the latter verse should prompt a further understanding, e.g., “blessing” (in congruence with the view that repetition in the Qur'ān is never meaningless).⁶⁰ In fact, the fact that the word *yumnā* in verse Q. 75:37 has another variant, *tumnā*, hence has two pronunciations (i.e., two forms), should indicate that verse Q. 75:37 should convey at least two meanings.

Another argument for the “right-side” and “blessed” understandings of *yumnā* in Q. 75:37 is also related to the notion of “order of revelation.” This keyword appears in the Qur'ān in three verses. It appears in Q. 53:46 and Q. 75:37, as shown earlier, as well as in verse 58 of sūrat al-Wāqī'ah (The Inevitable, 56:58), in (49), translated in (50).

49.

أَفَرَأَيْتُمْ مَا تُمْنُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

50. Have you seen what you ejaculate?⁶¹

Considering the order of revelation, while the order of sūrat al-Najm (The Star, 53) is 23rd, the order of sūrat al-Qiyāmah (Resurrection, 75) is 31st, and the order of sūrat al-Wāqī'ah (The Inevitable, 56) is 46th. This order of revelation as well as the morphosyntax (i.e., voice and

⁵⁹ Ibid., 203.

⁶⁰ Muḥammad ‘Azzah Darwazah, *al-Tafsīr al-Ḥadīth: Tafīr al-Suwar Ḥasab al-Nuzūl* (Cairo: Dār Ihyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 2000).

⁶¹ Itani, *Quran in English*, 208.

inflection) that this word exhibits in the three verses should have implications for the logical order of human (pro)creation and conception, and thus for the possible interpretations of this word in the three verses.

To illustrate, Q. 53:46 features this word as *tumnā*, Q. 75:37 features it mainly as *yumnā*, and Q. 56:58 features it as *tumnūn*. While *tumnā* in Q. 53:46 is in the passive voice and singular form, *tumnūn* in Q. 56:58 is in the active voice and plural form. This points out that the agent (i.e., doer of the action) of *tumnā* in Q. 53:46 is very likely to be Allah, whereas the agent (doer) of *tumnūn* refers to human beings. Therefore, a more plausible interpretation of *tumnā* in Q. 53:46 is “created/decreed” (hence derived from the root “*m-n-y*”), since this is a description of an earlier stage in the creation of the human being, which is in line with the fact that *sūrat al-Najm* is the earliest revealed *sūrah* among these three *sūrahs*. Also, the meaning that reflects the human role, which is a much later stage in this process, is revealed by Q. 56:58 where *tumnūn* is correctly translated as “ejaculate” (hence still derived from the root “*m-n-y*”), marking the human role (which is providing the “sperm”/“semen”).

Now, a more plausible interpretation of *yumnā* in 75:37 should refer to a stage in the creation of the human being that is between “Allah’s decree to create him/her” and the “ejaculation/emitting stage.” Thus, *yumnā* should be interpreted as an adjective that means “made from the right-side” or “made blessed” or “made strong,” or all of these together (hence derived from the root “*y-m-n*”), a stage also determined by Allah, since the human role has not begun yet. Therefore, *yumnā* in Q. 75:37 should be construed as an adjective, but not as a verb that means “create,” since this meaning is signified by *tumnā* in Q. 53:46, nor as a verb that means “emit,” since this meaning is signified by *tumnūn* in Q. 56:58. This is because this latter meaning (i.e., human role) is discussed in the last revealed *sūrah*, which is in line with the fact that the human role applies at the end after Allah “*decrees the creation*” and “*gives it His blessings*.” Therefore, the order in which these three *sūrahs* are revealed should not be viewed as a coincidence, but rather as intended to reveal more insight into this issue.

This logic, namely that the first two occurrences of this word in the Qur’ān (i.e., *tumnā* in [Q. 53:46] and *yumnā* in [Q. 75:37]) describe the Divine role, may also receive support from a more plausible understanding of verse 24 of *sūrat al-Ḥaṣhr* (The Mobilization, 59:24), in (51), translated in (52).

52. He is Allāh, the Creator, the Inventor, the Fashioner.⁶²

The main point here is related to the word *al-Bāri'*, which is usually translated as “The Creator,” “The Inventor,” “The Maker,” “The Initiator,” “The Evolver,” or other similar words which revolve around the notion of “making.” For example, al-Qurṭubī states that *al-Bāri'* means *al-Munshi'* “The Initiator” and *al-Mukhtari'* “The Inventor.”⁶³ Al-Ṭabarī states that *al-Bāri'* refers to the fact that it is Allah who brings us into existence.⁶⁴ Likewise, al-Baghawī says that *al-Bāri'* means “The Initiator who brings into existence.”⁶⁵ Similarly, al-Rāzī states that *al-Bāri'* means “The Maker” “who brings into existence” but it signifies “the invention of the bodies.”⁶⁶

Nonetheless, since the word *al-Bāri'* is derived from the root “*b-r-*,” which means “to create,” “to heal,” “to be guiltless,” and “to keep away from evil,” it is possible that this word does not mean “to create” in this context.⁶⁷ One reason is that this meaning is already delivered by the earlier word in the verse, *al-Khāliq* “The Creator.” Also, other meanings associated with *bara'a* (from which *al-Bāri'* is derived) include “to clear from,” “to heal,” and “to purify.”⁶⁸ This indicates that *al-Bāri'* means “the One who purifies the human being, making him/her guiltless, and prepared to stay away from evil,” and these qualities are related to creation from a “right-side” sperm that is made “strong” against evil and also created “blessed” with God-given innocence.⁶⁹

This “purifying” stage follows the stage of “destining the creation,” which is signified by the word *al-Khāliq*, which is represented by verse 46 of sūrat al-Najm (The Star, 53:46). This indicates that *al-Bāri'* is related to what verse 37 of sūrat al-Qiyāmah (Resurrection, 75:37) signifies, which

⁶² *The Qur'ān: English Meanings*, 562.

⁶³ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, 20:393.

⁶⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 7:269.

⁶⁵ Al-Baghawī, *Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl*, 8:88.

⁶⁶ Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Fakhr al-Rāzī*, 29:295.

⁶⁷ Al-Fayrūzābādī, *al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, 34.

⁶⁸ ALAC, *al-Muġam al-Wasīṭ*, 46.

⁶⁹ It could be argued that *bara'a*, which is claimed here to mean “to purify,” is intransitive; that is, *barra'a*, which is used in Standard Arabic to mean “make/show to be innocent,” is the transitive form. Nonetheless, this argument may not be a valid one, since Qur'ānic Arabic allows *fa'ala* (Form I) and *fa'ala* (Form II) verbal forms to be used interchangeably (at least in certain contexts), as the two readings of verse 7 of sūrat al-Infīṭār (The Shattering, 82:7) in (i-ii) show. Ibn Zangalah, *Hujjat al-Qirā'āt*, 752-53.

i. “Al-ladhī khalaqaka fa sawwāka fa 'adalaka.” ‘Āṣim, Ḥamzah, and al-Kisāṭ's reading

ii. “Al-ladhī khalaqaka fa sawwāka fa 'addalaka.” Other readings

is “cleansing the human being from dirt and weakness (which are associated with the left side) as well as sins (which result from lack of blessing), and strengthening him/her against evil.”⁷⁰ Then comes the *al-Muṣawwir* stage (the following word in Q. 59:24), which is translated as “The Fashioner,” “The Designer,” “The Shaper,” or “The Former,” and which logically waits until the human role applies, which is signified by verse 58 of *sūrat al-Wāqī‘ah* (The Inevitable, 56:58).⁷¹

It is true that *al-Muṣawwir* is an active participle, meaning that it is Allah who fashions the looks and designs the shape of the body, but then the fact that children usually carry physical and personality resemblance to their parents indicates that there is some human role. This human role is still controlled by Allah, since He decides which part follows the father (or forefathers) and which follows the mother (or foremothers).

The proposed relation between the new understanding (and translation) of *al-Bāri’*, which is “The Purifier,” and its proposed connection to verse Q. 75:37 is supported by the other context in which this word occurs in the Qur’ān, which is verse 54 of *sūrat al-Baqarah* (The Cow, 2:54), in (53), translated in (54).

53. وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ ۖ يَتَقَوَّمُوا عَنِّي فَأَنِسُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ وَأَتَّخِذُوا مِن دُونِي كُفْرًا كَثِيرًا وَلَا تَتْلُوا آيَاتِ هَٰذَا الْكِتَابِ وَلَا تُخَيِّرُوا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَلَا تَكُونُوا مِنَ السَّاغِيَةِ
بَارِيكُمْ فَأَقْتُلُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ ذَلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ عِنْدَ بَارِيكُمْ فَنَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ إِنَّهُ هُوَ النَّوَّابُ
الرَّحِيمُ ﴿٥٤﴾

54. And [recall] when Moses said to his people, “O my people, indeed you have wronged yourselves by your taking of the calf [for worship]. So repent to your Creator and kill yourselves [i.e., the guilty among you]. That is best for [all of] you in the sight of your Creator.” Then He accepted your repentance; indeed, He is the Accepting of repentance, the Merciful.⁷²

In verse Q. 2:54, Prophet Moses says to his people, “Repent to your Purifier (*Bāri’*),” which is translated (or rather mistranslated) in (54) as

⁷⁰ The connection between “weakness” and the “left-side” is illustrated by the fact that they are derived from the same root, *y-s-r*; *al-yasār*, which is the Arabic word for “left-side” also means “easiness.” ALAC, *al-Mu‘jam al-Wasīf*, 1064.

⁷¹ Despite the fact that the verb *tumnūn* in Q. 56:58 is in the active voice, making the human being the subject, verse Q. 56:58 still speaks of a minimal role for the human being in the procreation process. This is illustrated by the following verse, Q. 56:59 translated in (i).

i. Is it you who create it, or are We the Creator? Itani, *Quran in English*, 208.

This “minimal role” assigned to the human being is in fact stressed by the proposed understanding of verse Q. 75:37, which construes *yumnā* as an adjective, not as a verb.

⁷² *The Qur’ān: English Meanings*, 8.

“Creator.” Nonetheless, the connection between the “necessity for repenting” and “being created” by Allah is less obvious. The stronger connection is between the “necessity for repenting” and “being purified” before birth and “blessed” with the Book/Scripture, to seek the right path, hence the need for repenting.

Another argument for this proposed connection between the Divine attribute (*al-Bāri*) and the new understanding of verse Q. 75:37 is supported by the interpreters who maintain that this attribute is only mentioned with regard to the creation of human beings, but not to other creatures. The interpretations of verse 22 of sūrat al-Ḥadīd (Iron, 57:22), in (55), translated in (56), provided by al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Samarqandī, state that the pronoun in *nabra'a-hā* refers to the “souls” rather than to the “hardships” or the “earth.”⁷³

55. مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَبْرَأَهَا
 إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ ﴿٢٢﴾

56. Whatever hardships you face on earth and in your souls were written in the Book before the creation of the souls. This is certainly easy for God⁷⁴

5. Conclusion

It thus seems that verse Q. 75:37 is intentionally phrased in a way that intrigues our minds and that gives rise to new insights. This phrasing, which results in possible interpretations (inspiring or inspired by scientific discoveries and novel linguistic analyses), should speak for the linguistic power of the Qur'ān. It could, therefore, be argued that the five interpretations of *yumnā*, old and new, are not mutually exclusive (since sperm/seed is actually “emitted” and man is “created”), for a simple reason, which is that none of them contradicts the Qur'ān, authentic *sunnah*, or science. Nonetheless, given the kind of evidence presented in section 4, where *yumnā* is understood to mean “blessed” and coming from the “right” side as well as “strong”, thus providing more insight into the stages of human procreation, the interpretation proposed in this

⁷³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 7:230; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, 8:26; Al-Samarqandī, *Tafsīr al-Samarqandī*, 3:328. Other interpreters say that the pronoun in *nabra'ahā* is related to either or all three preceding nouns. For instance, see al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li Ahkām al-Qur'ān*, 20: 263; al-Baghawī, *Ma'ālim al-Tanzīl*, 8:40; al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Fakhr al-Rāzī*, 29:237-38; al-Andalusī, *al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz*, 5:268; and al-Khāzin, *Tafsīr al-Khāzin*, 4:251.

⁷⁴ Muhammad Sarwar, *Quran: English Translation* (online), 540.

paper is more comprehensive since it incorporates more evidence from the relevant verses and *sūrah*s.

But, should there be multiple interpretations of the Qur'ān? I believe yes. Had Allah meant every verse in the Qur'ān to have a single interpretation or meaning, He would have phrased it in such a way that would make it prompt one interpretation only, or He would have instructed the Prophet to interpret the Qur'ān verse-by-verse. The fact that the Prophet did not leave for us a definitive and narrow interpretation of the Qur'ān means that this task is left for knowledgeable and qualified minds. Of course, there could be incorrect interpretations, and these will be excluded given other verses, *ḥadīth*s, scientific facts, or language-based insights. In other words, Allah wanted there to be a dialogue between our minds and the Qur'ān, a dialogue that continues for as long as we live and think, a dialogue that should prove to us as well as to others that this Book may never run out of wonders for inquisitive minds.

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