

# Euphemism in the Qur'an: A Corpus-based Linguistic Approach

**Sameer Naser Olimat**

*School of Languages/ Centre for Translation Studies  
University of Leeds  
Leeds, LS2 9JT, United Kingdom*

*mlsno@leeds.ac.uk*

---

## Abstract

Euphemism is an important metaphoric resource in language, which has a relatively high functional load in religious texts, such as the Qur'an. This study creates an electronic HTML database of euphemisms in the Qur'an through adopting a more systematic corpus-based approach. The database of Qur'anic euphemisms is released into the public domain and is free for research and educational use (<http://corpus.leeds.ac.uk/euphemismolimat/>). The mechanism of annotating Qur'anic euphemisms relies on certain procedures including developing a set of linguistic guidelines, analysis of the content of the Qur'an using two renowned exegeses of the Qur'an and a comprehensive dictionary, evaluating scholarly efforts on the phenomenon of euphemism in the Qur'an, and consulting academics and religious scholars. The study proposes a broad classification of euphemistic topics on the basis of the data in the Qur'an and former categorisations produced by others. It suggests an effective strategy to check and verify inter-annotator agreement in the annotation of Qur'anic euphemisms. It presents statistical analysis and visualisation of the euphemistic data in the corpus. It has been found that the thirty parts of the Qur'an vary in the number and distribution of euphemisms across verses. Although the Meccan surahs comprise about three quarters of the Qur'an, they have only 518 euphemisms in 440 verses. By contrast, the Medinan surahs, which make up the remainder of the Qur'an, have 400 euphemisms in 263 verses. Sex and death are the most common euphemistic topics in the Qur'an, while feelings, divorce and pregnancy are the least frequent euphemistic topics. The study recommends that the designed corpus of Qur'anic euphemisms should be used to update existing web pages on the Qur'an with extended linguistic information about euphemism encoded with HTML/XML annotation.

**Keywords:** Euphemism, Annotation, The Qur'an, Corpus Linguistics, Corpus-based Approach.

---

## 1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Qur'an, for Muslims, is a divine text composed of rhythmic verses and consistent surahs revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. In Islam, it is the central religious text and the main source of teachings and guidance. Olimat (2018) claims that the Qur'an has a unique discourse with a coherent style, metaphoric language, intratextual information, rhetorical expressions and aesthetic devices. In recent years, much research attention has been directed towards investigating the Qur'an in the areas of computational and corpus linguistics. Nonetheless, developing corpora of some linguistic features in the Qur'an still needs more collaborative considerations and efforts. For instance, there is no corpus of euphemisms in the Qur'an to date [1]. This paper makes a scholarly attempt to create a systematic linguistic model for comprehensively annotating and classifying all euphemistic expressions in the Qur'an within contextual background.

Willis and Klammer (1981, p.193) define euphemism as "a mild or roundabout word or expression used instead of a more direct word or expression to make one's language delicate and inoffensive even to a squeamish person" [2]. Hudson (2000, p.261) considers euphemism as "the extension of ordinary words and phrases to express unpleasant and embarrassing ideas" [3].

Olimat (2018) defines euphemism as the intentional substitution of offensive, unpleasant or stylistically inappropriate expressions with more agreeable or inoffensive expressions for conveying a sensitive idea implicitly [1]. Burchfield (1985, p.29) indicates that any “language without euphemisms would be a defective instrument of communication” [4]. Rawson (1981, p.3) states that “euphemisms are embedded so deeply in our language that few of us, even those who pride themselves on being plain spoken, ever get through a day without using them” [5]. I claim that euphemism is a dominant metaphoric feature in languages generally and religious texts particularly. Compared to other text types, the Qur’an has a relatively high proportion of euphemisms dealing with socially and culturally sensitive issues, such as sex, divorce, death, disability and excretion. Its study using individual cherry-picked examples has its limitations. Euphemisms in the Qur’an have not yet been categorised into well-defined topics. Most of the early studies have only concerned with topics of sex or death, while other topics like commercial relations, slavery, swearing, personal behaviours and punishment have been neglected. There is a serious need for a more systematic corpus-based research, which allows scholars to see general tendencies, typical features, usage and distribution of euphemism in the Qur’an. Therefore, this study comes up with an analytical linguistic investigation of the phenomenon of euphemism in the Qur’an by creating a comprehensive electronic repository of all Qur’anic euphemisms.

Crystal (1997, p.95) defines a language corpus as “a collection of linguistic data, either written texts or a transcription of recorded speech, which can be used as a starting-point of linguistic description or as a means of verifying hypotheses about language” [6]. Richards and Schmidt (2002, p.127) describe corpus linguistics as “an approach to investigating language structure and use through the analysis of large databases of real language examples stored on computer” [7]. Similarly, McEnery et al. (2006, p.7) define corpus linguistics as “a whole system of methods and principles of how to apply corpora in language studies and teaching/learning” [8]. A linguistic corpus is a large collection of written or spoken material stored in an electronic way and used to describe a certain language or a specific linguistic feature within this language as expressed in corpora of real texts. Nowadays corpus linguistics approaches have become a basic tool in the area of translation studies, applied linguistics and language-related disciplines. Generally, the linguistic exploration of euphemism in the Qur’an is still very modest. In this context, to date no study has examined the feature of euphemism in the Qur’an through using a corpus-based approach. Therefore, this paper examines euphemism as a particular linguistic feature in the Qur’an by compiling and classifying all Qur’anic euphemistic expressions in an electronic corpus. The Qur’an has recently received significant research interests in the area of computational linguistics, Arabic linguistics and translation studies. Different sites and search tools have been developed as scientific resources and platforms for researchers who intend to investigate the Qur’an from different perspectives. For example, the Search Truth tool (<https://www.searchtruth.com>) provides users with several translations of the Qur’an allowing them to search one translation at a time. It offers a dictionary-based analysis about a list of Arabic words mentioned in the Qur’an or its translations. It also gives exegetical information, and Islamic knowledge and supplications [9]. The IslamiCity search tool (<http://www.islamicity.com/mosque/quran/>) allows users to search translations of the Qur’an into other languages as well as individual words used in the Qur’an. It also addresses Pillars of Islam, Islamic history and Qur’anic themes [10]. The Qur’anic Arabic Corpus (<http://corpus.quran.com>) is a collaborative linguistic resource offering the Arabic morphological, grammatical and syntactic annotations of huge number of Qur’anic words for researchers who plan to explore the language of the Qur’an, and for those with a general interest in the Arabic language. It further offers annotated translations of the verses of the Qur’an by different translators [11, 12, 13, 14, 15]. There are other beneficial resources, such as Qurany Concept (<http://quranyconcept.appspot.com/>) [16], Qurany Keywords (<http://quranykeywords-hrd.appspot.com/>) [17], Tanzil (<http://tanzil.net/trans/>) [18], and Qurany Analysis (<http://www.qurananalysis.com/>) [19]. Because the representation and visualisation of euphemism in the Qur’an have not been considered yet, this study aims to create an electronic corpus of euphemisms in the Qur’an by annotating and categorising all euphemistic expressions within a contextual background in Arabic and English.

## 2. OBJECTIVES AND NOVELTY OF THE RESEARCH

The research aims to analyse the phenomenon of euphemism in the Qur'an through designing a corpus-based linguistic model for comprehensively annotating all euphemistic expressions in the Qur'an. The proposed model also suggests an alternative classification of euphemistic topics in the Qur'an. The corpus will become a data repository for research communities and academics in the areas of Arabic linguistics, computational and corpus linguistics, translation studies and Islamic studies by providing fresh insights into the phenomenon of euphemism in the Qur'an. It could also serve as a useful platform for a wider community of Muslims and non-Muslims who intend to study the feature of euphemism in the Qur'an particularly and the language of the Qur'an generally. The corpus data can be also used to update existing electronic resources on the Qur'an with extended linguistic information about euphemisms encoded with HTML/XML annotation, such as developed by Dukes et al [11, 12, 13, 14]. This corpus stimulates cross-cultural communication and builds bridges between Islam and other religious communities through reflecting the tolerant message of Islam and Muslims' noble values.

The novelty of this research comes from the fact that this is the first study to provide a comprehensive annotation of euphemisms in the Qur'an as an electronic corpus. A few studies conducted previously have taken the linguistic approach to certain common topics of euphemism in the Qur'an. For instance, Al-Omouh (2011) investigated the language of euphemism in the Qur'an through analysing selected verses with euphemism in two sensitive areas only, namely, family relations, e.g. sexual practices, and bodily functions, e.g. defecation [20]. Abdel Haleem (2011) studied the phenomenon of euphemism in the Qur'an by exploring two Qur'anic verses with euphemisms in The Cow surah taking marital relations as a case study [21]. Al-Barakati (2013) addressed the translation of sex-related euphemisms in the Qur'an from a functional perspective [22]. Al-Hamad and Salman (2013) produced a qualitative investigation into the translatability of some euphemistic examples in the Qur'an and classified them into general topics: sex, genitals, women, excretion, sickness and disabilities, death and divorce [23]. Abdul Fattah (2014) conducted a linguistic study on problems of translating Qur'anic euphemisms dealing with illegal sexual relationships, i.e. adultery, sodomy and lesbianism [24]. Almasaeid (2016) examined cultural and lexical problems of translating euphemistic examples in the Qur'an representing some sensitive themes [25]. Ghaeb (2016) evaluated the difficulty of translating a limited number of euphemistic expressions touching upon unspeakable topics in The Cow surah, i.e. marital relationship, disbelief and deviation from the right path [26].

I observe that the scope of the majority of previous studies is restricted to common euphemistic topics. Several euphemistic topics in the Qur'an, such as punishment, destruction, personal behaviours, slavery and swearing, have not received due attention by scholars of linguistics and translation. This study provides a comprehensive classification of all euphemistic topics in the Qur'an. In the majority of earlier studies, euphemisms are implicitly treated as a clearly defined class of expression, where the euphemistic nature is transparent and stable for the intended recipients. In other words, they investigated the mechanism of euphemising in the Qur'an on the word or sentence levels using clear-cut Qur'anic euphemistic examples. Moreover, the selected euphemistic examples, which have been subjected for examination, were extracted from a limited number of surahs in the Qur'an. The investigated sample of euphemistic expressions should be representative for the majority of the surahs and parts of the Qur'an. By contrast, the designed corpus includes all euphemisms in the Qur'an which have been identified according to established criteria and guidelines of annotation. It covers not only trivial euphemisms which can be understood individually out of context, but it also covers non-trivial euphemisms which extend beyond the word or sentence levels and need to be analysed on the textual level, i.e. less clear cases when certain expressions are understood as euphemisms via textual references outside their immediate context, to other parts of the same surah or to other different surahs; the cases where the euphemistic status of an expression is realised via its dynamic interpretation in a wider context, which may be different to different recipients or readers of the Qur'an. As there is a scarcity of similar studies, it is hoped this study will fill in a research gap in the existing literature of computational linguistics of Arabic and the Qur'an.

### 3. PRODUCING CORPUS OF EUPHEMISMS IN THE QUR'AN

The mechanism of producing corpus of euphemisms in the Qur'an in the format of HTML web pages (<http://corpus.leeds.ac.uk/euphemismolimat/>) goes through three stages: euphemism annotation, euphemism verification and euphemism classification.

#### 3.1 Euphemism Annotation

Several procedures are adopted to identify euphemistic expressions in the Qur'an in a systematic way. Euphemisms have been found and annotated in the majority of the surahs of the Qur'an, but few surahs in the Qur'an with no euphemism have been found. The process of annotating euphemisms in the Qur'an relies on:

- 1- Developing a set of linguistic guidelines to simplify the mechanism of annotating euphemisms in the Qur'an. The guidelines address the definition, formation, functions, features and types of euphemism, the differences and similarities between euphemism and other linguistic phenomena, such as metaphor, metonymy, dysphemism, doublespeak and synonym, and the sacred nature, metaphorical language and textual coherence of the Qur'an.
- 2- Analysis of euphemisms within the content of the Qur'an with the help of Almaany online dictionary which was chosen for two main reasons. Firstly, the meaning and usage of vocabularies are exemplified within contextual sentences monolingually and bilingually, i.e. Arabic-Arabic and Arabic-English. Secondly, an entire section is allocated in this dictionary for dealing with the meaning, origin and translation of Qur'anic words according to authentic Islamic resources [27]. I frequently refer to Almaany while annotating euphemisms in the Qur'an since some of the annotation criteria for euphemisms are dictionary-based. In addition, two well-known exegeses of the Qur'an were selected to identify Qur'anic verses with euphemism and their possible interpretations, i.e. *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān* by al-Ṭabarī [28] and *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm* by Ibn Kathīr [29]. These exegetical resources have gained high reputation and importance in the field of Islamic and Qur'anic studies because of their comprehensiveness and citation of multiple sources. They are also notable for their authentic narratives of the Prophet Muhammad (al-Ḥadīth), sayings of saḥābah, i.e. Muhammad's companions, and commentaries of tābi'īn, i.e. companions of Muhammad's companions. The superiority and coherence of the Qur'an, metaphorical connotations of Qur'anic expressions and relevant indications from Arabic culture are examined in these exegetical books.
- 3- Investigating scholarly works including studies, papers, books and theses conducted previously on the phenomenon of euphemism in the Qur'an.
- 4- Consulting Islam scholars and academics with good experience in the areas of Arabic linguistics, and Islamic and Qur'anic studies.

#### 3.2 Euphemism Verification

The development and recognition in annotating euphemisms in the Qur'an are due to refining and making more precise criteria for the identification of euphemisms in the context of the Qur'an. Even though the mechanism of annotating euphemisms has developed and become more precisely defined, an analytical and independent review of euphemisms in the first part (Juz') of the Qur'an has been conducted. Two Arabic-native speakers, with broad knowledge and research interests in the literature of euphemism in the Qur'an, have been asked to annotate euphemistic expressions in the first Juz' of the Qur'an. This Juz' is chosen for checking and verification because it is the first Juz' of the Qur'an. Both annotators have been given helpful techniques and guidelines to support them in annotating euphemisms in the first Juz' including strategies to annotate euphemisms, linguistic background on euphemism, nature of euphemism in the Qur'an, and euphemistic examples from the Qur'an. Based on research ethics and confidentiality, they have been given an information sheet in which the mechanism and goals of the research are explained. They have been also given a consent form assuring that the collected data will be handled anonymously, and that they have the right to ask for further information, take part in this study or not, and withdraw from participating if they felt stressed or unwilling to do so.

The objective of this analytical review is twofold; firstly, to check the inter-annotator agreement of my annotation of euphemisms in the Qur'an with the two annotators' annotation. Artstein (2017) argues that other annotators' performance can validate and improve annotation schemes and guidelines. It also explores certain ambiguities or difficulties in the annotation process with reasonable explanations and corrects the resulting annotations in some conditions. Secondly, to guarantee that the mechanism of the euphemism annotation is more reliable, objective and comprehensive [30]. This review allows me to find how many Qur'anic euphemisms in the first Juz' have been covered and missed in the corpus, and how many Qur'anic euphemisms need to be excluded or developed in the first Juz'.

The analysis of the two annotator's performance shows a high level of agreement between my annotation and their annotation of euphemisms in the first Juz'. It gives an indication that the majority of euphemisms in the Qur'an are included in the corpus. It also gives evidence that the annotation guidelines are very clear and give somehow the annotators a nicely delineated view on the phenomenon of euphemism in the Qur'an. Of 14 euphemisms, the analytical feedback indicates that 13 euphemisms in the first Juz' are annotated in the corpus while only 1 euphemism needs to be added to the corpus. It also shows that 2 euphemisms annotated in the corpus require to be developed in order to constitute an understandable euphemistic meaning. The development implies either separating a euphemism from other words or combining it with adjacent words. Moreover, the analysis reveals that 2 Qur'anic expressions should be removed from the initial version of the corpus since they do not meet the established criteria required for being euphemisms, i.e. they suggest derogatory connotations. Based on these observations, I make supplementary procedures including (i) a further discussion and digital communication with both annotators about their feedback, (ii) a reconsideration of the concept of euphemism from a linguistic perspective, (iii) and an investigation and re-identification of euphemisms in the Qur'an.

### **3.3 Euphemism Classification**

The euphemisms in the Qur'an have not yet been classified into comprehensive topics. Most of the early studies have mainly investigated common subjects, such as sex or death, while other sensitive issues in the Qur'an have not been given due consideration. After the processes of annotating and verifying Qur'anic euphemisms have been completed, a broad classification of euphemistic topics is suggested. This classification is proposed on the basis of the data in the Qur'an. It is also adopted from former models created by others like al-Tha'ālibī cited in Naaman (2013) [31] and Al-Hamad and Salman (2013) [23]. This alternative classification includes most of societal taboos and unmentionable topics, namely, death, destruction, divorce, excretion, feelings, fighting and wars, finance, health, personal bad behaviours, poverty, pregnancy and giving birth, punishment, religion, sex, slavery and swearing. Sex is divided into sexual act and bodily parts, and personal bad behaviours include lying, injustice, meanness, arrogance, envy, extravagance and mocking. The new categorisation enables researchers to explore the more common and the less-frequent euphemistic themes in the Qur'an easily as well as acquiring deep understanding of possible interpretations of euphemisms.

## **4 HTML CORPUS OF EUPHEMISMS IN THE QUR'AN**

Figure 1 shows a screenshot of the homepage of the corpus of euphemisms in the Qur'an in HTML format. It offers a short introduction and purposes of the corpus. The annotation of euphemisms has been represented according to the thirty parts of the Qur'an. An entire section has been allocated for users in order to provide suggestions or corrections to develop the quality and accuracy of the annotation of euphemisms.

Corpus of Euphemisms in the Qur'an  
Sameer Olimat

Corpus of euphemisms in the Qur'an is a PhD research project at the School of Languages, Cultures and Societies at the University of Leeds carried out by Sameer Olimat. It offers a comprehensive annotation and classification of all euphemistic expressions within a contextual background in the original Standard Arabic of the Qur'an and Abdel Haleem's English translation of the Qur'an (2005). The corpus is a data repository and scientific platform for research communities and academic institutions with general interests in the areas of Arabic linguistics, computational linguistics, corpus linguistics, translation studies, and Islamic studies since it provides fresh insights into the phenomenon of euphemism in the Qur'an in particular and the language of the Qur'an in general.

List of Euphemisms in the Qur'an:

Juz' 1	Juz' 2	Juz' 3	Juz' 4	Juz' 5	Juz' 6	Juz' 7	Juz' 8	Juz' 9	Juz' 10
Juz' 11	Juz' 12	Juz' 13	Juz' 14	Juz' 15	Juz' 16	Juz' 17	Juz' 18	Juz' 19	Juz' 20
Juz' 21	Juz' 22	Juz' 23	Juz' 24	Juz' 25	Juz' 26	Juz' 27	Juz' 28	Juz' 29	Juz' 30

Feedback

FIGURE 1: The homepage of the HTML Corpus of Euphemisms in the Qur'an.

Figure 2 represents a screenshot of a selected sample of annotated euphemisms extracted from the 18<sup>th</sup> Juz' in the corpus. The number of euphemisms and verses with euphemism in the Juz' and the Arabic name and English translation of the Qur'anic surahs are included. Euphemisms have been annotated within a full verse in the original Standard Arabic of the Qur'an and an English translation to offer an access into the contextual background of the verse and intratextual meanings of euphemisms. Because some users prefer finding euphemistic examples in the Qur'an quickly, the annotated euphemism are presented individually. A comprehensive classification of the annotated euphemism is suggested.

Juz' 18						
Number	Surah Name in Arabic	Surah Name in English	Verse Number	Verse with Euphemism in Arabic	Abdel Haleem's Translation of Verse with Euphemism	Euphemistic Expression Classification
1	المؤمنون	The Believers	5	وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرْجِعُهُمْ خَافِظُونَ	who guard their chastity	Sex (sexual act)
2	المؤمنون	The Believers	6	إِلَّا مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ غَيْرُ مَلُومِينَ	except with their spouses or their slaves* — with these they are not to blame, * Cf. 4: 25.	Slavery
3	المؤمنون	The Believers	7	بِمَنْ أَيْتَعَىٰ وَرَاءَ ذَلِكَ فَوَارِدًا هُمْ الْعَادُونَ	but anyone who seeks more than this is exceeding the limits—	Sex (sexual act)
4	المؤمنون	The Believers	13	ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَا نُطْفَةً فِي قَرَارٍ مَّكِينٍ	then We placed him as a drop of fluid in a safe place,	1- Sex (sexual act) 2- Sex (bodily parts)
5	المؤمنون	The Believers	14	ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا النُّطْفَةَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْعَلَقَةَ مُضْغَةً فَخَلَقْنَا عُظْمًا عِظَامًا فَكَسَبْنَا الْعِظَامَ لَحْمًا ثُمَّ أَنْشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا آخَرَ فَبَنَّاكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنَ الْخَالِقِينَ	then We made that drop into a clinging form, and We made that form into a lump of flesh, and We made that lump into bones, and We clothed those bones with flesh, and later We made him into other forms — glory be to God, the best of creators!—	Sex (sexual act)
6	المؤمنون	The Believers	27	فَأَنبَأْنَاهُ فِيهَا مِن كُلِّ ذَنْبٍ مَّا كَانُ فِيهَا وَأَنبَأْنَا الْوَالِدَ أَنَّ عِظْمًا عَلَيْهِ الْقَوْلُ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ وَإِنَّمَا كُنَّا يَوْمَ تَرْسُلِهِ أُنبَاءً	so We revealed to him: 'Build the Ark under Our watchful eye and according to Our revelation. When Our command comes and water gushes up out of the earth, take pairs of every species on board, and your family, except for those on whom the sentence has already been passed— do not plead with me for the evildoers: they will be drowned—	1- Punishment 2- Punishment
7	المؤمنون	The Believers	33	وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِيهَا لَنُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُم بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ	But the leading disbelievers among his people, who denied the Meeting in the Hereafter, to whom We had granted ease and plenty in this life, said, 'He is just a mortal like you— he eats what you eat and drinks what you drink—	Excretion

FIGURE 2: A selected sample of annotated euphemisms in the 18th Juz' in the corpus.

The Qur'an, A New Translation (2005) by Abdel Haleem [32] is chosen for several reasons. He is a British academic, and a native speaker of Arabic, who has been living in the UK since 1966. Shah (2010, p.2) and Alhaj (2015, p.75) indicate that Abdel Haleem is a lexicographer interested in classical and modern Arabic. When translating the Qur'an into English, he adopted the King James idioms which are the standard idioms of rendering any religious scripture [33, 34]. His translation is easy to read and comprehend because of using modern words, contemporary usage and simple structure of sentence as well as avoiding archaic words and confusing phrases [33]. Mohammed (2005, p.67) indicates that Abdel Haleem has provided a comprehensive analysis of the context of Qur'anic verses intending to produce an accurate, clear and fluent translation. Footnotes and commentary are rarely supplied. The absence of Arabic text and the

lack of footnotes and comments make his translation applicable to research and reading [35]. Al-Barakati (2013, p.79) claims that Abdel Haleem aimed to produce an English text of the Qur'an with an ease and naturalness. Therefore, he avoided literal translation as much as possible since it often produces an incomprehensible content of religious texts. Instead, he has adopted an appropriate degree of freedom in translation which made him ignore an unnecessary adherence to original structures and idioms. He has an academic knowledge and familiarity with the history and context of the Qur'an, different exegetical schools and books, and the linguistic idiosyncrasies of the ST [22].

## 5 ANALYSIS AND VISUALISATION OF THE EUPHEMISTIC DATA IN THE CORPUS

Different approaches of statistical analysis, and qualitative and quantitative interpretations of the euphemistic data are adopted to obtain reliable findings. I use GraphPad Prism 6 software to analyse, graph and present the raw data in the corpus of euphemisms in the Qur'an. The choice of Prism software is due to several reasons. The research communities and scholars of social disciplines broadly use this software to achieve scientific graphing, understandable statistics and data organisation. By one click only, the data graphs can be plotted in several formats, or they can be designed in the same shape and size. This software allows researchers to export graphs to Word or PowerPoint in one click as well. The euphemistic data in the corpus has been visualised and scrutinised from different dimensions including the number of euphemisms and verses with euphemism, the frequency of euphemism in verses with euphemism, the classification of euphemistic topics and the cross-over among euphemistic topics. The language of euphemism in the Meccan and the Medinan surahs has been compared in several circumstances.

### 5.1 Number of Euphemisms and Verses with Euphemism in the Qur'an

#### 5.1.1 The Thirty Parts of the Qur'an

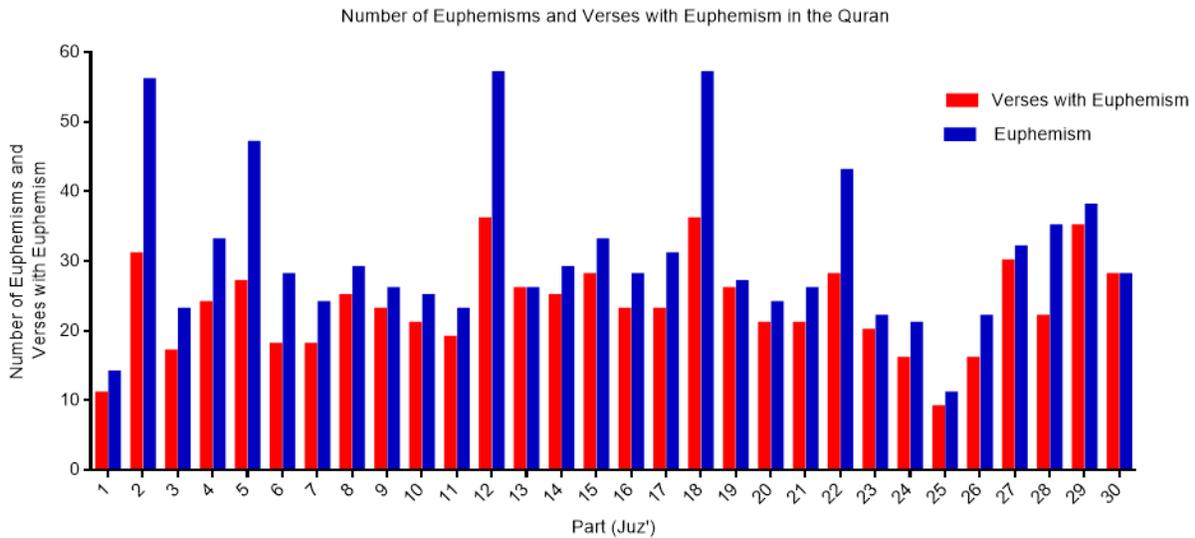


FIGURE 3: Number of euphemisms and verses with euphemism in the thirty parts of the Qur'an.

Figure 3 compares the number of euphemisms and verses with euphemism in the thirty parts of the Qur'an. It shows that the 12<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 22<sup>nd</sup> parts have the highest number of euphemisms in the Qur'an, with 57, 57, 56, 47, and 43 euphemisms respectively. The 12<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> parts have the highest number of verses with euphemism, with 36, 36, 35, 31 and 30 verses with euphemism respectively. These parts address historical narratives in Islam and socially and culturally unspeakable topics, which require more euphemistic expressions. In more detail, the 12<sup>th</sup> part has Joseph surah which includes many sex-related euphemisms dealing

with Yusuf's story with the wife of the Governor of Egypt. The 18<sup>th</sup> part has Light surah that traces the story of accusation of adultery levied against the Prophet Muhammad's wife, Aisha. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> parts include large portions of The Cow and Women surahs respectively which mainly focus on controversial issues in Islam, such as the pilgrimage rules, family relationships, women's rights, sexual act and divorce. The 22<sup>nd</sup> part has The Joint Forces surah that investigates sensitive matters related to sex, divorce and slavery, and The Creator surah that deals with topics of death and punishment. Similarly, the 27<sup>th</sup> part examines taboo and offensive subjects, such as death, sex, and punishment. The 29<sup>th</sup> part has a large number of surahs and verses in the Qur'an, i.e. 11 surahs with 431 verses. Thus, there is a higher possibility of finding more verses with euphemisms.

By contrast, the 25<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> parts have the lowest number of euphemisms and verses with euphemism in the Qur'an. They include 11 and 14 euphemisms and 9 and 11 verses with euphemism respectively. They touch upon general topics that do not require a plenty of euphemisms, such as consultation, Resurrection, coherence of the Qur'an, prophecy of Muhammad, and Names and Attributes of God. The 24<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> parts contain only 16, 16 and 17 verses with euphemism, but they have 21, 22 and 23 euphemisms respectively. This indicates that they have some verses with more than one euphemism. The number of euphemisms in the remaining parts of the Qur'an ranges between 23 and 38, while the number of verses with euphemism ranges between 18 and 28.

### **5.1.2 The Surahs of the Qur'an**

It has been found that the Qur'an has 918 euphemistic expressions in 703 verses in the majority of the surahs of the Qur'an. The number of euphemisms in the surahs varies according to their length, topic and type. The surahs that are composed of a large number of verses have a higher possibility to include more euphemisms. For instance, The Cow, which is the longest surah in the Qur'an with 286 verses, has the highest number of euphemisms with 80 examples. Women, which is one of the longest surahs in the Qur'an with 176 verses, has 67 euphemisms. By contrast, some surahs in the Qur'an do not have any euphemistic expression due to their lowest number of verses. They include Solid Lines, The Day of Congregation, The Crashing Blow, The Backbiter, Relief, Clear Evidence, The Opening, The Disbelievers, People, The Night of Glory, The Elephant, Palm Fibre, Quraysh, Purity (of Faith), The Declining Day, Abundance and Help which have 14, 11, 11, 9, 8, 8, 7, 6, 6, 5, 5, 5, 4, 4, 3, 3, and 3 verses respectively. Furthermore, many short surahs in the Qur'an have very few euphemistic expressions. The Hypocrites, The Charging Steeds, The Earthquake, Striving for More, Common Kindnesses and Daybreak, which consist of 11, 11, 8, 8, 7, and 5 verses respectively, have only one euphemism for each. There are also other short surahs in the Qur'an with only two or three euphemisms.

The surah's main topic is an influential factor in the number of euphemisms. For instance, the number of euphemisms in Light and The Heights surahs is equal with 38 examples for each even though the former has 64 verses while the latter occupies the third longest surah in the Qur'an with 206 verses. It has been also found that Light surah has a larger number of euphemisms than The Family of 'Imran surah, which has only 28 euphemisms, despite the fact that it is the fourth longest surahs in the Qur'an with 200 verses. This is because Light surah focuses mainly on a sensitive story related to sex, i.e. accusation of adultery levied against the Prophet Muhammad's wife, Aisha. On the other hand, some surahs in the Qur'an do not have any euphemism although they have a large number of verses, such as Smoke, Those who Give Short Measure, The Jinn, The Overwhelming Event, The Towering Constellations and The Clinging Form. There are also many Qur'anic surahs with only one euphemism even though they have a large number of verses, such as The Announcement, Kneeling, Control, Ripped Apart, The Night, Torn Apart, The Most High, Mutual Neglect, The Night-Corner and The Sun. It has been noticed that these surahs approach general themes which do not require using a lot of euphemisms, such as faith, Final Judgement, Paradise and Hell, and universal phenomena.

The third factor which has a huge impact on the number of euphemisms is the type of surah. The Qur'an has 114 surahs consisting of 6236 verses, and can be classified into the Meccan and the

Medinan. The Meccan surahs were chronologically revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in Mecca before the migration (Hijra) with his companions to Medina. They are composed of 86 surahs with 4613 verses. Table 1 shows that the Meccan surahs have only 518 euphemisms in 440 verses although they comprise about three quarters of the Qur'an. This approximately makes up 56% of the total number of euphemisms and then 63% of the total number of verses with euphemism. This indicates that the relative frequency of finding a euphemism in each verse in the Meccan surahs is % 0.112. This low percentage of euphemisms is because the Meccan surahs deal with acceptable or neutral matters which do not need many euphemisms, such as Islamic doctrines, the prophecy of Muhammad and other messengers, believing in God and His signs, and Day of Resurrection. Abdel Haleem (2005, pp. xvii-xviii) states that:

“In the Meccan period, the Qur'an was concerned mainly with the basic beliefs in Islam—the unity of God as evidenced by His 'signs' (*ayaat*), the prophethood of Muhammad, and the Resurrection and Final Judgement—and these themes are reiterated again and again for emphasis and to reinforce Qur'anic teachings. These issues were especially pertinent to the Meccans.....[and] refers to earlier prophets (many of them also mentioned in the Bible, for instance Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Jesus),<sup>11</sup> in order both to reassure the Prophet and his followers that they will be saved, and to warn their opponents that they will be punished.” [32].

On the other hand, 28 surahs with 1623 verses in the Qur'an were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in Medina after the migration with his companions to Medina. Table 1 shows that even though the Medinan surahs are about a quarter of the Qur'an only, they have 400 euphemisms found in 263 verses. This nearly constitutes 44% of the total number of euphemisms and then 37% of the total number of verses with euphemism. This shows that the relative probability of annotating a euphemism in a single verse in the Medinan surahs is % 0.246. The Medinan surahs touch upon religious and controversial issues governing the Muslim community, such as financial and commercial regulations, social relationships, family system, marriage, sexual practice, divorce, inheritance, fighting and war, and the act of legislation. It is thus necessary to use more pleasant and inoffensive expressions to avoid any possible threat or loss of face for readers or listeners. Abdel Haleem (2005, p. xviii) argues that:

“In the Medinan suras, by which time the Muslims were no longer the persecuted minority but an established community with the Prophet as its leader, the Qur'an begins to introduce laws to govern the Muslim community with regard to marriage, commerce and finance, international relations, war and peace.” [32].

The table also shows that the Meccan surahs have only 64 verses with more than one euphemism with a total of 142 euphemistic expressions, while the Medinan surahs have 75 verses with more than one euphemism with a total of 212 euphemistic expressions. The content analysis reveals the Meccan surahs have concise utterances, and short and clear verses which may not involve an abundance of euphemisms, whereas the Medinan surahs are composed of long verses which may contain more than one euphemism in the same verse. The Meccan surahs have 4173 verses with no euphemism, which constitutes about 90% of the total number of verses in the Meccan surahs, whereas the Medinan surahs have 1360 verses with no euphemism, which constitutes about 84% of the total number of verses in the Medinan surahs.

Comparison	Meccan Surahs	Medinan Surahs	Total
Number of Surahs	86	28	114
Number of Verses	4613	1623	6236
Number of Euphemism	518	400	918
Number of Verses with Euphemism	440	263	703
Number of Verses with More than One Euphemism	64 verses with 142 euphemisms	75 verses with 212 euphemisms	139 verses with 354 euphemisms

TABLE 1: Comparison of the Meccan and the Medinan surahs in terms of the number of euphemisms and verses with euphemism.

## 5.2 Frequency of Euphemisms in Verses with Euphemism in the Qur'an

### 5.2.1 The Thirty Parts of the Qur'an

Figure 4 shows that the horizontal X-axis represents the number of euphemisms per verse (one, two or more), and the vertical Y-axis represents the number of such verses with the given number of euphemisms. Of 703 verses with euphemism, the frequency of verses with one euphemism takes place 564 times in the Qur'an. This means that about 80% of verses with euphemism in the Qur'an have only one euphemistic expression. The figure indicates that 95 Qur'anic verses have two euphemistic expressions. Verses with three euphemisms are found 32 times in the Qur'an. Verses with more than three euphemisms are rarely found in the Qur'an. For instance, there are only five verses with four euphemisms. The case of five or six euphemisms in a single verse is only found twice each in the Qur'an. The case of seven, nine or ten euphemisms in the same verse occurs once each in the Qur'an. No verses with eight euphemisms have been found in the Qur'an. It can be concluded that the Qur'an have 5533 verses with no euphemism which is about 89% of the total number of verses in the Qur'an.

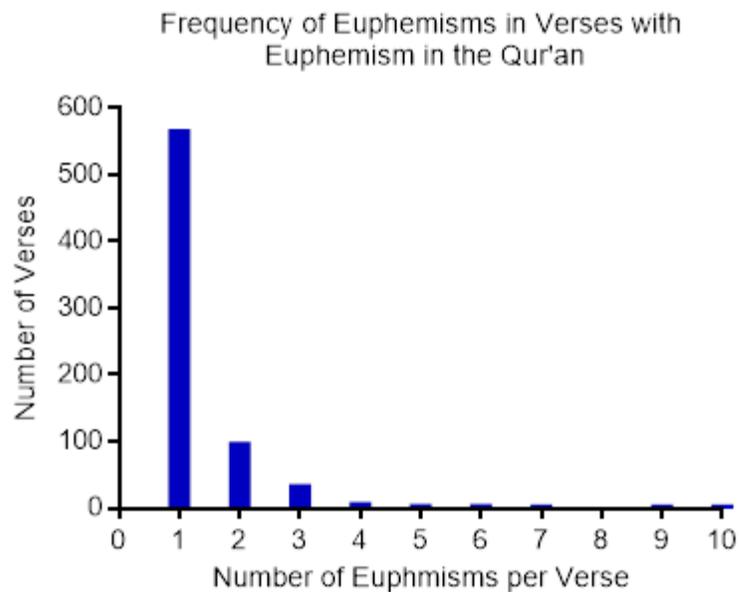


FIGURE 4: Frequency of euphemisms in verses with euphemism in the thirty parts of the Qur'an.

### 5.2.2 The Surahs of the Qur'an

Figure 5 compares the frequency of euphemisms in verses with euphemism between the Meccan and the Medinan surahs by investigating the number of verses that contain the given number of euphemisms from one to ten. It shows that the number of verses with one euphemism in the

Meccan surahs is exactly double that in the Medinan surahs. That is, 376 verses in the Meccan surahs have one euphemism which makes up 85% of the total number of verses with euphemism in the Meccan surahs and 67% of the total number of verses with one euphemism in the Qur'an. By contrast, the Medinan surahs have 188 verses with one euphemism which is almost equal to 71% of the total number of verses with euphemism in the Medinan surahs and 33% of the total number of verses with one euphemism in the Qur'an. The high density of verses with one euphemism in the Meccan surahs is due to the fact that they are composed of concise, clear and short verses. The Meccan surahs have slightly more verses with two euphemisms than the Medinan surahs. They have 52 verses with two euphemisms which comprises about 12% of the total number of verses with euphemism in the Meccan surahs and 55% of the total number of verses with two euphemisms in the Qur'an. In the Medinan surahs, the number of verses with two euphemisms is approximately twice as many verses with three euphemisms. Nonetheless, roughly two-thirds of verses with three euphemisms in the Qur'an are found in the Medinan surahs.

There are five verses with four euphemisms in the Medinan surahs, but none in the Meccan surahs. The case of verse with five euphemisms is found only once either in the Meccan or the Medinan surahs. The case of verse with six euphemisms is attested only twice in the Medinan surahs, but none in the Meccan surahs. The cases of seven, nine and ten euphemisms in a single verse have been found once each in the Medinan surahs, but they are not attested in the Meccan surahs. No verses with eight euphemisms have been found either in the Meccan or the Medinan surahs. It can be concluded that verses with more than two euphemisms in the Medinan surahs are more popular because they have long verses which may involve many euphemistic expressions at the same verse.

Frequency of Euphemisms in Verses With Euphemism in the Meccan and the Medinan Surahs

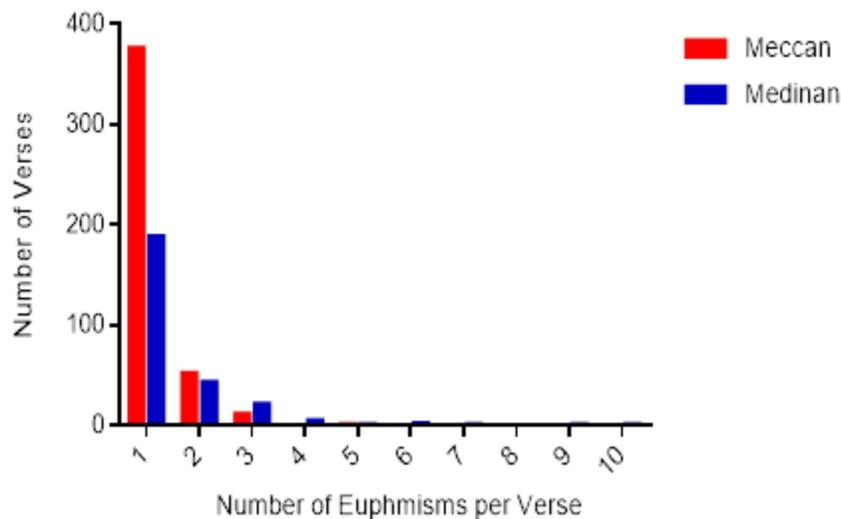


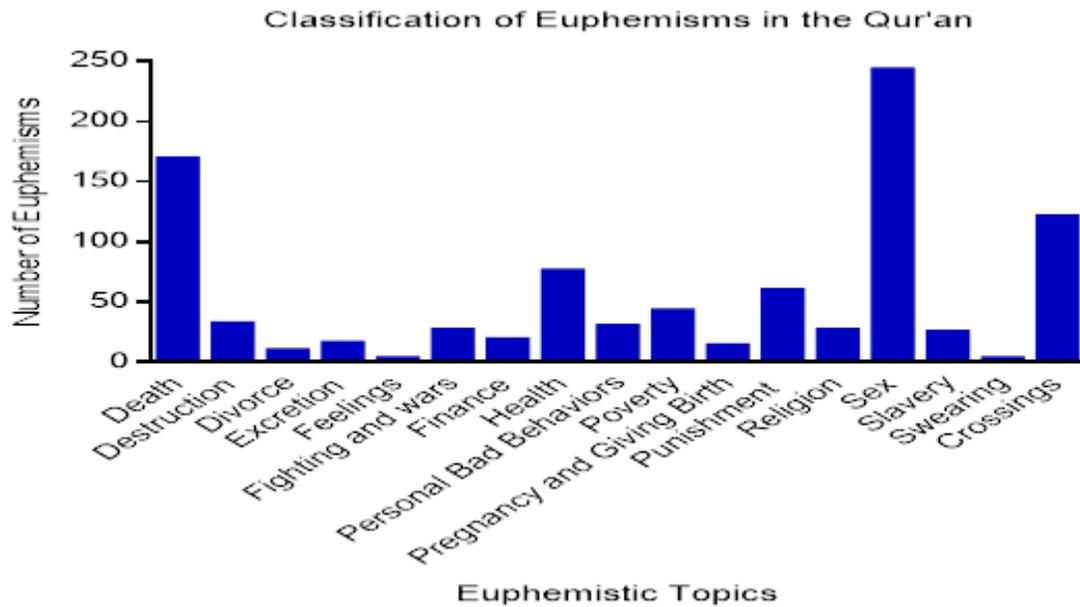
FIGURE 5: Frequency of euphemisms in verses with euphemism in the Meccan and the Medinan surahs.

### 5.3 Classification of Euphemistic Topics in the Qur'an

#### 5.3.1 The Thirty Parts of the Qur'an

Figure 6 shows a broad classification of the annotated euphemisms in the Qur'anic corpus. Sex and death are the most common euphemistic topics in the Qur'an with 243 and 169 expressions respectively. The abundance of sex- or death-related euphemisms in the Qur'an refers to their sensitive status in Arab culture. The Qur'an employs 76 health-related euphemisms representing different aspects of sickness and disability, such as visually and hearing impairment, mental illness and physical handicap. This shows the civility and respect of Islam towards people who suffer from such problematic conditions. The Qur'an uses 60 euphemisms dealing with the topic

of punishment in order to avoid undesirable effects upon readers or listeners. They mainly suggest World and Hereafter punishments of previous nations whose people refused to believe in God and His signs. The topic of poverty in the Qur'an is tackled by 43 euphemisms to enable Muslims to deal with poor people appropriately.

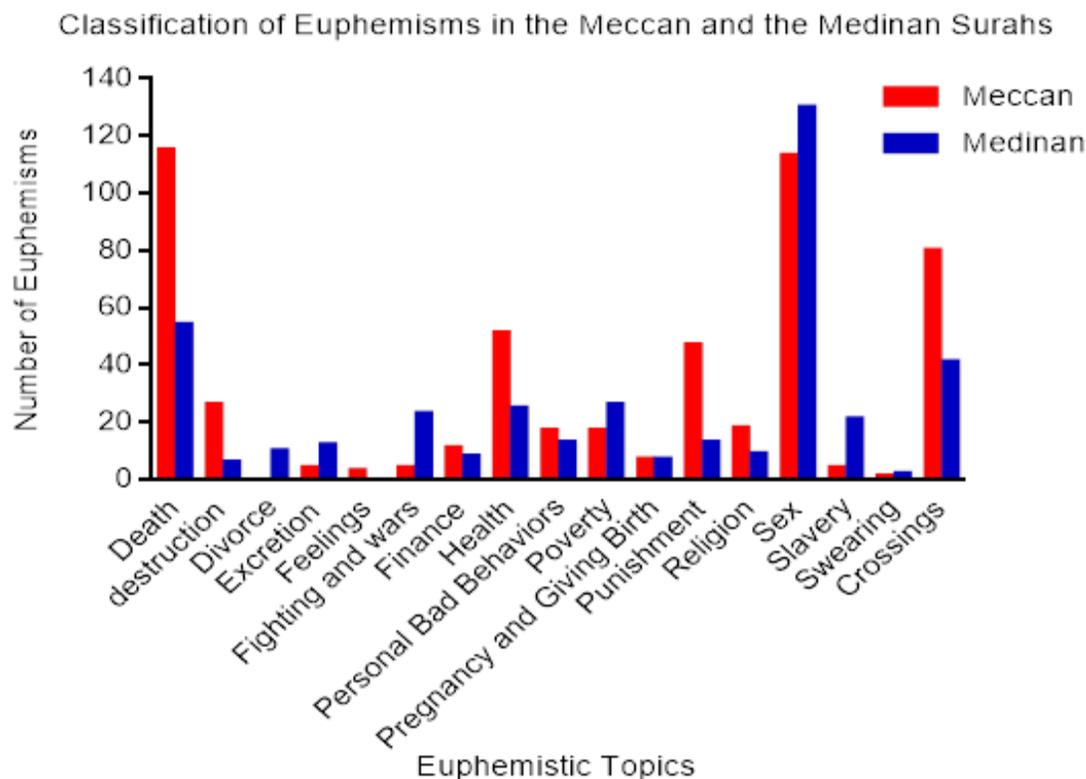


**FIGURE 6:** Classification of euphemistic topics in the Qur'an.

By contrast, feelings, swearing, divorce, pregnancy and giving birth, excretion and finance are the lowest frequent euphemistic topics in the Qur'an with 3, 3, 10, 14, 16 and 19 examples respectively. They are hardly discussed in the Qur'an and overlap with other euphemistic topics in some circumstances. The remaining euphemistic topics range from 25 to 32 expressions. One of the surprising findings is the intersection among euphemistic topics. There are 121 cases addressing two or more offensive topics by the same euphemism. The most common cross-over has been found between punishment and death.

**5.3.2 The Surahs of the Qur'an**

Figure 7 tackles the classification of the annotated euphemisms in the Meccan and the Medinan surahs, with focus on the highest and lowest euphemistic topics, which allows us to gain fresh insights into the phenomenon of euphemism and the development of linguistic behaviours before and after the Prophet Muhammad's immigration. Sex has the biggest number of euphemistic expressions in both the Medinan and the Meccan surahs, with 130 and 113 examples respectively. Four Medinan surahs, namely, Women, Light, The Cow, and The Joint Forces have 33, 25, 24 and 14 sex-related euphemisms respectively. They constitute almost three quarters of the total number of sex-related euphemisms in the Medinan surahs. Women surah handles several sensitive matters, such as social affairs, wife-husband relationship and sexual intercourse. Light surah narrates the story of accusation of adultery levied against the Prophet Muhammad's wife. The Cow surah involves offensive issues related to sex and family system. The Joint Forces surah touches upon legislative and regulatory conditions in Islam, such as the veil (hijab), the concept of family and the deterrent punishment for the act of adultery. On the other hand, The Heights, Joseph and Mary are Meccan surahs in which many euphemisms are used to deal with the sensitivity of sex, bodily parts and adultery.



**FIGURE 7:** Classification of euphemistic topics in the Meccan and the Medinan surahs.

Death remains hardly the go-to-topic of linguistic communication in most societies and cultures. Death-related euphemisms are more common in the Meccan surahs than the Medinan surahs. Using many death-related euphemisms permits Muslims to freely talk about this social taboo and to avoid the fear of loss. The topic of health in the Meccan surahs has approximately twice as many euphemisms as in the Medinan surahs. Three quarter of the total number of euphemisms dealing with punishment in the Qur'an are employed in the Meccan surahs. The Medinan surahs use slightly more poverty-related euphemisms than the Meccan surahs. The majority of euphemisms touching upon the topics of slavery, and fighting and wars are identified in the Medinan surahs. This is because most Qur'anic surahs, which call for releasing slaves and fighting enemies, were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in Medina after the Islamic state had developed and became very strong.

The residual topics in the Meccan and the Medinan surahs employ few euphemisms. The Meccan surahs use slightly more personal behaviour- and finance-related euphemisms than the Medinan surahs. They also have about four times more destruction-related euphemisms than the Medinan surahs. By contrast, the Medinan surahs have exactly three times more excretion-related euphemisms than the Meccan surahs. The number of euphemisms which deal with pregnancy and giving birth is equal in the Meccan and the Medinan surahs, with 7 expressions for each. An interesting finding is that no divorce-related euphemism has been found in the Meccan surahs because The Cow, Women, The Joint Forces and Divorce surahs, which examine divorce-related affairs, were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in Medina. Even though feeling-related euphemisms have been just attested 3 times in the Qur'an, they all have been found in the Meccan surahs. The number of euphemisms relating to religion in the Meccan surahs is double that in the Medinan surahs. The matter of swearing in the Qur'an is euphemised only once in the Meccan surahs and twice in the Medinan surahs. One of the key findings is that euphemising two or more offensive topics through a single expression is a predominant feature in the Qur'an generally and the Meccan surahs particularly. The cross-over among euphemistic topics in the Meccan surahs is nearly double that in the Medinan surahs.



euphemisms vary according to certain factors related to the content of the Qur'an. For future research, it would be interesting to adopt the mechanism and guidelines used in annotating and classifying euphemisms in the Qur'an to identify euphemisms in a wider range of different genres in Arabic, or to identify other linguistic features in the Qur'an, such as metaphor or metonymy. In addition, I suggest developing a comprehensive linguistic model for analysing the euphemistic data in the corpus structurally, morphologically and semantically. Qur'anic euphemisms can be analysed according to their structural length, such as single-word euphemism, two-word euphemism, and multi-word euphemism, according to their word class, such as verb, noun, adjective, adverb, verb plus noun, noun plus noun, adjective plus noun and sentence, or according to their semantic type, such as particularisation (particular-for-whole), implication, metaphor, metonymy (general-for-specific), reversal (irony), understatement (litotes), overstatement (hyperbole), omission and circumlocution.

## 7 REFERENCES

- [1] S. Olimat. "Developing a model for translating euphemism in the Qur'an: an intratextual- and contextual-based approach." *Advances in Language and Literary Studies (ALLS)*. Vol 9, No 6, pp.101-111, Dec. 2018.
- [2] H. Willis and E. Klammer. *A brief handbook of English*. New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1981, p. 193.
- [3] R. Hudson. *Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 261.
- [4] R. Burchfield. "An outline history of euphemisms in English," In: *Fair of speech: the uses of euphemism*. D.J Enright, Ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp.13-31.
- [5] H. Rawson. *A dictionary of euphemisms and other doubletalk*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1981, p. 3.
- [6] D. Crystal. *A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics*. 4th ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, p. 95.
- [7] J.C. Richards and R. Schmidt. *Longman dictionary of language teaching and applied linguistics*. 3rd ed. Harlow: Longman, 2002, p.127.
- [8] T. McEnery, R. Xiao and Y. Tono. *Corpus-based language studies: an advanced resource book*. London: Routledge, 2006, p. 7.
- [9] "Search Truth Tool". Internet: <https://www.searchtruth.com/>, [Feb. 15, 2019].
- [10] "IslamiCity Search Tool." Internet: <http://www.islamicity.com/mosque/quran/>, [Feb. 15, 2019].
- [11] K. Dukes. "Arabic Quranic Corpus." Internet: <http://corpus.quran.com/>, [Feb. 15, 2019].
- [12] K. Dukes, E. Atwell and N. Habash. "Supervised collaboration for syntactic annotation of Quranic Arabic." *Language resources and evaluation*. Vol 47, No 1, pp. 33-62, Mar. 2013.
- [13] K. Dukes and E. Atwell. "LAMP: a multimodal web platform for collaborative linguistic analysis." *Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation (LREC 2012)*, 23-25 May 2012, Istanbul, Turkey. Paris: European Language Resources Association (ELRA), 2012, pp. 3268-3275.
- [14] K. Dukes and T. Buckwalter. "A dependency treebank of the Quran using traditional Arabic grammar." *2010 The 7th International Conference on Informatics and Systems (INFOS)*, 28-30 Mar 2010, Cairo, Egypt. US: IEEE, 2010. pp. 1-7.

- [15] K. Dukes and N. Habash. "Morphological annotation of Quranic Arabic." Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation (LREC 2010), 17-23 May 2010, Valletta, Malta. Paris: European Language Resources Association (ELRA), 2010, pp. 2530-2536.
- [16] E. Atwell. "Qurany Concept." Internet: <http://quranyconcept.appspot.com/>, [Feb. 15, 2019].
- [17] E. Atwell. "Qurany Keywords." Internet: <http://quranykeywords-hrd.appspot.com/>, [Feb. 15, 2019].
- [18] "Tanzil." Internet: <http://tanzil.net/trans/>, [Feb. 15, 2019].
- [19] "Qurany Analysis." Internet: <http://www.qurananalysis.com/>, [Feb. 15, 2019].
- [20] A. Al-Omouh. "Euphemism in the language of the Holy Koran." MA thesis, Al-albayet University, Jordan, 2011.
- [21] M.A.S. Abdel Haleem. "Euphemism in the Qur'an: a case study of marital relations as depicted in Q. 2:222-3". *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*. Vol 13, No 1, pp. 125-131, 2011.
- [22] M. Al-Barakati. "Translation of sex-related Qur'anic euphemism into English." Ph.D. thesis, University of Leeds, UK, 2013.
- [23] M.Q. Al-Hamad and A.M. Salman. "The translatability of euphemism in the Holy Quran." *European Scientific Journal*. Vol 9, No 2, pp. 190-214, Jan. 2013.
- [24] M, Abdul Fattah. *Translating euphemisms of sexual taboos in the Qur'an*. Saarbrücken, Germany: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2014.
- [25] A, Almasaeid. *Qur'anic euphemisms: a pragmatic and translational analysis*. Saarbrücken, Germany: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing, 2016.
- [26] R, Ghaeb. "Euphemism in translation: an assessment of three translations of euphemistic expressions in Surat Al-Baqarah." *Al-Ma'mon College Journal*. Vol 27, pp. 273-297, 2016.
- [27] "Almaany online dictionary." Internet: <https://www.almaany.com>, [Feb. 15, 2018].
- [28] M. al-Ṭabarī. 1984. *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*. [On-line] Available: <http://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/tabary/sura1-aya1.html> [Aug. 1-30 2018].
- [29] I. Ibn Kathīr. 1987. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'azīm*. [On-line]. Available: <http://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/katheer/sura1-aya1.html> [Aug. 1-30 2018].
- [30] R. Artstein. "Inter-annotator agreement," In: *Handbook of linguistic annotation*. N. Ide and J. Pustejovsky, Eds. Netherlands, Dordrecht: Springer, 2017, pp. 297-313.
- [31] E. Naaman. "Women who cough and men who hunt: taboo and euphemism (kināya) in the medieval Islamic world." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. Vol 133, No 3, pp. 467-493, Jul-Sep. 2013.
- [32] M.A.S. Abdel Haleem. *The Qur'an: a new translation*. 2nd ed. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. xvii-xviii.
- [33] M.S. Shah. "A critical study of Abdel Haleem's New Translation of the Holy Qur'an." *Al-Qalam*. Vol 1, No 1, pp. 1-15, 2010.
- [34] A. Alhaj. *New theory of the Holy Qur'an translation: a textbook for advanced university student of linguistics and translation*. Hamburg: Anchor Academic Publishing, 2015, p.75.

- [35] K. Mohammed. "Assessing English translations of the Qur'an." *The Middle East Quarterly*. Vol 12, No 2, pp. 58-71, 2005.