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## Semantic Approaches in Islamic Education

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**Abstract:** *The semantic approach in education is an important method for understanding the meaning and context of texts, especially in religious and philosophical studies. This study examines the work of Toshihiko Izutsu, particularly his book God and Man in the Koran: Semantic of the Koranic Weltanschauung, which emphasizes a deep semantic analysis of the concepts of God and man in the Qur'an. The focus of this research is on how the semantic approach can enrich Islamic religious education by revealing the hidden meanings and complex linguistic structures of the Qur'an. The method used is a literature study and textual analysis of Izutsu's work, along with its implications in educational contexts. The findings show that the semantic approach provides teachers and students with a contextual and critical understanding of the Qur'an, thereby enhancing the quality of religious education. Moreover, a profound understanding of the relationship between God and man from a semantic perspective helps to shape character and spiritual values integral to education. This study contributes significantly to the development of more interactive and reflective Qur'anic learning methods.*

**Keywords:** *Semantics, Education, Weltanschauung, Interpretation*

## INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an is a holy book that is the main guideline for Muslims in living their lives. As a revelation revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an not only contains spiritual teachings, but also covers various aspects of life, including law, ethics, social, and science. Therefore, understanding the contents of the Qur'an is a must for every Muslim in order to practice the teachings contained therein correctly (Sholeh et al., 2024). However, understanding the Qur'an is not a simple matter, because the texts in it have deep meanings and are often symbolic. For this reason, an interpretation process is needed so that the messages of the Qur'an can be explained and applied in everyday life. Interpretation of the Qur'an has existed since the first revelation was revealed. Initially, the interpretation process was carried out by the Prophet Muhammad himself,



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either through direct statements or actions that explained the meaning of certain verses (Johnson et al., 2024). After the Prophet died, his companions continued the interpretation efforts based on their understanding of the context in which the verses were revealed (asbabun nuzul) and their understanding of Arabic at that time. From here, various interpretation methods developed which later became the foundation for the next generation of interpreters. One of the earliest methods is the interpretation of bi al-ma'tsur, which is an interpretation based on the authentic narrations of the Prophet and his companions. In addition, the interpretation of bi al-ra'yi also developed, which is more rational and based on the ijtiḥad of the scholars.

Along with the development of Islamic science and thought, the interpretation of the Qur'an has experienced an expansion of methods and approaches (Sholeh, 2023). Various schools of interpretation have emerged, such as the maudhu'i (thematic) interpretation which discusses a particular theme in the Qur'an, the Sufi interpretation which emphasizes the spiritual and esoteric dimensions, the isyari interpretation which reveals hidden meanings in the verses of the Qur'an, the scientific interpretation which attempts to connect the Qur'an with scientific findings, and the literary interpretation which emphasizes the linguistic aspects and the beauty of the style of language in the Qur'an. The diversity of these methods shows that the Qur'an can be understood through various different perspectives, depending on the scientific background and approach used by the interpreter. In the contemporary era, the approach to interpretation has developed further with the entry of modern methods originating from linguistics, philosophy, and social sciences. One approach that is beginning to receive attention is semantic and hermeneutic interpretation. This approach attempts to understand the Qur'an by tracing the meaning of words in the context of classical Arabic and how those meanings developed in historical and cultural contexts. Toshihiko Izutsu, a semanticist, is one of the influential figures in the application of this approach. Through semantic analysis, Izutsu attempts to uncover key concepts in the Qur'an by examining the relationship of meaning in Arabic and the changes in meaning that have occurred throughout history.



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The semantic and hermeneutic approaches in interpreting the Qur'an are interesting because they offer a new perspective in understanding the messages of revelation. Unlike the classical interpretation method which is more oriented towards texts and narrations, this approach emphasizes the analysis of meaning and the context of word use in language structures. Thus, this method opens up the possibility of understanding the Qur'an more broadly and contextually, especially in facing the challenges of the modern era. However, this method also faces various criticisms, especially from scholars who adhere to traditional interpretations. With the existence of various methods and approaches in interpreting the Qur'an, it can be concluded that understanding revelation is not static, but continues to develop in accordance with the development of human science and thought. Diversity in interpretation is not something that contradicts the essence of Islamic teachings, but rather enriches the treasury of Islamic knowledge itself. Therefore, understanding various interpretation methods, both classical and modern, is important so that Muslims can gain a more comprehensive understanding of their holy book.

## METHOD

This research was conducted using the *book review method*, which is an in-depth analysis of various literature and scientific works related to the study of Al-Qur'an interpretation, especially in the semantic and hermeneutic approaches (Gough et al., 2017). This method aims to trace the main concepts in Al-Qur'an interpretation based on the thoughts of influential figures, such as Toshihiko Izutsu, and compare them with other interpretation methods. By reviewing various primary and secondary sources, this study attempts to explore the development of the semantic interpretation method and how this approach is applied in understanding the meaning of the Al-Qur'an. In addition, *book reviews* allow researchers to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of this approach compared to classical interpretation methods, so that they can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of Al-Qur'an interpretation in the context of contemporary Islamic science.



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In this study, data collection was carried out through **documentary research**, involving an in-depth review and analysis of various primary and secondary sources related to the interpretation of the Al-Qur'an using semantic and hermeneutic approaches. Primary sources include the seminal works of influential figures such as Toshihiko Izutsu, while secondary sources consist of books, journal articles, and previous research discussing these interpretive methods. The selection of sources was based on three main criteria: **relevance**, ensuring that the sources directly address semantic and hermeneutic interpretations of the Al-Qur'an; **credibility**, by using only references from indexed journals, academic books, and works by recognized scholars; and **recency and influence**, ensuring that the study remains aligned with the latest developments in the field of Qur'anic interpretation. Data collection was conducted systematically through searches in academic databases such as **Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Islamic Online Resources** to ensure a broad and high-quality selection of literature.

The data analysis technique employed in this study follows a **descriptive-analytical** approach, utilizing the **Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) framework** for qualitative data analysis, which consists of three main stages (Miles et al., 2014). First, **data reduction**, which involves selecting, classifying, and simplifying information from various sources based on key themes, such as semantic analysis, hermeneutic principles, and their application in Qur'anic interpretation. Irrelevant or redundant data were eliminated to maintain the focus of the analysis. Second, **data display**, where structured information was presented in the form of tables, conceptual maps, and comparative matrices to facilitate the identification of differences and similarities between various interpretive methods. Third, **conclusion drawing and verification**, in which the findings were synthesized to highlight the key characteristics, strengths, and limitations of the semantic and hermeneutic approaches compared to classical interpretation methods. Throughout this process, cross-checking with existing theories was conducted to ensure the validity of the findings.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, this study implemented several validation measure (Lewis, 2015). First, **source triangulation**, by comparing various sources to confirm consistency



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in findings and interpretations. Second, **peer debriefing**, by seeking feedback from experts in Qur'anic studies to reduce research bias and enhance the objectivity of the results. Third, **thick description**, which involves providing detailed explanations of the research context, methodology, and analytical process to ensure transparency. Fourth, **confirmability audit**, where notes, summaries, and coding processes were systematically documented to allow future researchers to trace and verify the study's findings. By applying rigorous data collection, analysis, and validation techniques, this research aims to present a comprehensive and reliable examination of the dynamics of Qur'anic interpretation through semantic and hermeneutic approaches.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Izutsu's methodology in understanding the Qur'an

Izutsu explains the methodology of reading the text of the Qur'an clearly, especially in his two books, namely: *The Structure of Ethical Terms in the Quran: A Study in Semantics and God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung*. Izutsu said that the Qur'an can be approached from a number of different perspectives such as theology, psychology, sociology, grammar, interpretation and so on (Arif, 2007). Izutsu himself uses an approach that he calls a semantic approach to the study of the Qur'an. Semantic or conceptual analysis is used to examine the materials provided by the vocabulary of the Qur'an (Rochim et al., 2023). In other words, semantics is the methodology, while the Qur'an is the material.

Semantics is a branch of linguistics that studies meaning. Semantics as a branch of linguistics has the same position as other branches of linguistics. Semantics has the same position as phonology, morphology, and syntax. Here, the difference is that these branches of linguistics are divided into two large parts, namely morphology and syntax, which are included in the grammatical level, while phonology and semantics are included in the level outside of grammar (Arif, 2007). In short, semantics is the science of language that studies the meaning of words.



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Izutsu himself provides an explanation of the semantics that will be used in his study. The semantics that Izutsu means is an analytical study of the key terms of a language with a view that ultimately arrives at a conceptual understanding of the weltanschauung or worldview of the society that uses the language, not as a tool for speaking and thinking, but more importantly, conceptualizing and interpreting the world that surrounds it.

Izutsu further said that the words or concepts in the Qur'an are not simple. Their respective positions are separate from each other, but are very interdependent and produce concrete meaning precisely from the entire system of relationships. (Fahimah, 2020) . In other words, the words form varied groups, large and small, and relate to each other in various ways, thus ultimately producing an overall order, very complex and intricate as a combined conceptual framework. (Muhsinin, 2021) The relationship between these words will be researched in addition to knowing the basic meaning of the words.

Then Izutsu distinguishes between the basic meaning of words and relational meaning. According to him, the basic meaning of a word is something that is inherent in the word itself, which is always carried wherever the word is placed (Fahriana, 2019) . Meanwhile, relational meaning is something connotative, which is given and added to the existing meaning by placing the word in a special position in a special field, being in a different relationship with all other important words in the system.

## 2. Vocabulary and Weltanschauung

Semantic analysis is not a simple analysis of the structure of word forms or the study of the original meaning attached to the word form or etymological analysis. Etymology can only provide us with clues to reach the 'basic' meaning of words (Muhsinin, 2021) . Semantic analysis is more than that, if classified, it is recognized as a cultural science. The analysis of the basic and relational elements of key terms must be carried out in such a way that if we really succeed in doing it, the combination of two aspects of the word's meaning will clarify a special aspect. One aspect that is significant to its culture, or the experience that the culture has gone through (Annafiri, 2022) . And in the end, if we reach the final stage, all the analysis will help



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us reconstruct at the analytical level the overall structure of that culture as a conception of a truly existing society. This is what Izutsu calls the semantic weltanschauung of culture.

According to the author, this analysis begins by looking for the basic meaning of a word, then looking for the relationship between the word and other words, which is called relational meaning. This relational meaning will indirectly describe the culture at the time when the word was used. (Fahimah, 2020) . By knowing the culture of the word relationship, the process of cultural reconstruction can be carried out, which reconstruction forms the conception of society at that time.

### 3. Synchronic and Diachronic Semantics

In this chapter, Izutsu explains about synchronic and diachronic semantics that will be used in his study of key terms in the Qur'an. As mentioned above, Izutsu tries to study the weltanschauung of the Qur'an through its vocabulary. Diachronic according to etymology is a view of language, which in principle emphasizes the element of time (Suyuti, 2023) . Thus, diachronically vocabulary is a group of words that each grow and change freely in their own unique way (Hidayah & Hasanah, 2018) . Some words in the group can stop growing in the sense of stopping their use by society within a certain period of time. While other words can continue to be used for a long time. Once again, new words can make their debut on the stage at a certain point in time and begin their history in that period.

In other words, there is vocabulary that is forgotten and not used by society over time, so this vocabulary is called dead or not growing. At other times, there is new vocabulary that enters the vocabulary and is used by society at that time. The vocabulary that is collected at one time forms a network and sentence pattern as a result of the culture of society (Romziana, 2014) . In this case, Izutsu calls it a surface. On a surface like that and only on that surface, these words appear before us in the form of a complex network of concepts. So that the perspective that crosses the historical lines of these words allows us in this way to obtain a static word system, called synchronic.



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Vocabulary in this special sense, that is, the static surface of words, is actually something artificial. It is a static condition artificially produced by a single blow in the historical current upon all the words in the language at a given point in time. (Mulyani et al., 2023) . The resulting cross-section gives us the impression of something static, but it only seems that way. In other words, it is only static when viewed from a macroscopic perspective. Microscopically, the surface is bubbling with life and movement. This condition is very clear when language is in a critical and revolutionary period.

Historical semantics is not merely the historical tracing of individual words to see how they have changed their meanings over time. True historical semantics only begins when we study the history of words based on the entire static system. In other words, when we compare two or more surfaces of the same language, different historical stages will emerge, separated from each other by time intervals (Aini, 2018) . These intervals can be long or short depending on the purpose of our analysis. For example, even the language of the Qur'an itself can be considered a historical process that lasted for more than twenty years with distinctive periods, the periods of Mecca and Medina. In such a case, it is appropriate to make two horizontal sections that cross the historical development of the language at important points, and then compare the two cross-sections with each other, if our goal is to conduct a semantic study of the development of Islamic thought within the boundaries of the Qur'an.

Then Izutsu made an attempt to show this problem in a simple and clear way, by isolating three different semantic surfaces at the beginning of the history of the Qur'anic vocabulary. First, before the revelation of the Qur'an or the period of ignorance, second, the period of the revelation of the Qur'an, and finally the period after the revelation of the Qur'an.

Thus, in the first stage, namely the pre-Islamic period, we have three different word systems with three different underlying worldviews (Rouf et al., 2024) : (1) a pure Badwi vocabulary representing a very ancient and very nomadic Arabic weltanschauung, (2) a vocabulary of the merchant group, which is essentially closely related to and based on the Badwi vocabulary, which, although representing a very different spirit of viewing the world, is nevertheless the



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result of the latest developments in the trading economy in Mecca, which was thus strongly influenced by the words and ideas characteristic of the merchants of that city, and (3) a Judeo-Christian vocabulary, a system of religious terms used among Jews and Christians living in the Arab lands, which also includes the more extensive Hanifi system of issues. These three elements are important elements of the pre-Islamic Arabic vocabulary.

#### 4. Forms of the Relationship between God and Man

In this theme discussing the basic structure of the weltanschauung of the Qur'an, Izutsu wrote a section that could be the core of his study, namely the relationship between God and Man (Romziana, 2014) . In this case, Izutsu explains four different relationships or relations between God and Man, namely:

##### 1) Ontological relations

God as the primary source of human existence and humans as a representation of being whose existence comes from God. Second, one of the basic questions that always disturbs the human mind in religious and philosophical weltanschauung is human existence. The eternal and recurring question is: Where do humans come from? What is the source of their existence in this world? According to the concept of the Qur'an, Allah is the creator of humans. He is the source of being that bestows existence upon humans. So ontologically, the relationship between Allah and humans is the relationship between the creator (khâliq) and the created (makhlûq).

Humans are not the only creation of Allah. The Qur'an also emphasizes that Allah is the creator of the universe: starting from angels, jinn, heaven and earth, sun, moon, day and night, mountains and rivers, trees, fruits, seeds , leaves, to all kinds of animals, and even everything in this universe that cannot be mentioned one by one (Hidayah & Hasanah, 2018) . This shows that there is a power that can create everything and also maintain it, that creator is Allah SWT, the Lord of the universe.

Although pre-Islamic Arab society was already familiar with the concept of God's creation, this concept had almost no influence on their way of thinking. This means that



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they could live comfortably without paying any attention at all to the origins of their own existence. In the system of ignorance, God's creative activity was the beginning and end of His intervention in human affairs. He paid no attention to His creations. Humans, after the process of their creation was complete, were controlled by another being called dahr. Although dahr has several other names, namely: zamân, ashhr, ayyâm, and aud, the idea underlying the concept of dahr is always the same, he is a tyrant who has no mercy and is cold-blooded. Dahr when referred to its vocabulary means time. Time does not recognize anyone, everything will continue and run well whoever wants or does not want.

## 2) Communicative Relations

God and humans are brought into close correlation, through reciprocal communication. In the ontological relation section it is known that God is the creator and humans are the created. Between the creator and the created there is a direct and reciprocal communicative relationship (Rafsanjani, 2018) . Communication between God and humans occurs in two ways, namely: first, through the use of language that can be understood by both parties; second, through the use of natural signs by God and gestures or body movements by humans. Thus the first type of communication is linguistic or verbal, while the second type of communication is non-linguistic or non-verbal.

The type of verbal communication from top to bottom is revelation according to the narrow and technical sense, while the form from bottom to top takes the form of prayer/du'a. The type of non-verbal communication from above is the divine act of sending down (tanzil) "signs" (verses). From bottom to top communication is in the form of ritual worship (prayer) or more generally worship practices. Linguistic communication between God and humans occurs in the form of sending revelation from God. Toshihiko Izutsu explains that revelation is the word (kalâm) of God. Although he realizes that in this model of communication there is a problem because both, namely God and humans as the parties involved in this communication, are at different levels of existence (Hasbi Abduh & Abduh, 2016) . God is at the level of "supernatural" existence, while humans are at the level of



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"natural" existence, so that there is no ontological balance between the two. Therefore, theoretically, it is impossible for there to be an exchange of words (al-taḥawwur), teaching (al-ta'lim), and also learning (al-ta'llum).

The problem of existence between the two also has an impact on the language system used in communication. God as a supernatural or supernatural being certainly uses a non-natural or non-natural language system, while humans as natural creatures use a natural language system or natural language system. Therefore, it is not surprising that in this context Fazlur Rahman argues that the process of revelation is not verbal communication, but is the giving of inspiration to the heart of the Prophet Muhammad. This problem, according to Toshihiko Izutsu, can be overcome by putting forward the theory of intermediaries. This intermediary bridges the communication gap between God and humans. He emphasized that revelation as a supernatural linguistic event is a concept related to three individuals. This condition also applies to the revelation of the Qur'an. In other words, in the prophetic consciousness that Muhammad had, there was always someone, a mysterious being between God and himself who brought God's words into his heart. This supernatural being, in Toshihiko Izutsu's view, is none other than the Angel Gabriel, who in the Meccan period was referred to as the ruh al-quds (holy spirit) and rūh al-amîn (trustworthy spirit). (Afandi & Shodiq, 2017) . This is what makes revelation structurally different, not only from human speech in general, but also from other types of verbal inspiration that come from jinn. In this case there are three different ways of sending revelation: (1) mysterious communication, (2) speaking from behind a veil, (3) sending a messenger.

If linguistic communication from God is in the form of revelation, then from humans it is in the form of prayers that are offered to His presence. According to Toshihiko Izutsu, prayer can be communication from humans only in very special situations, namely when humans find themselves in an unnatural situation (Maulidiah et al., 2023) . When the human soul is not in the same state as its days, then it is in a position that can speak words directly



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to God. Thus, the language spoken by humans spiritually becomes higher, and prayer is the most intimate personal conversation between the heart and God (Hidayah, 2018) . Quoting al-Kirmani, Toshihiko Izutsu said that in such a situation humans are no longer humans in the general sense, they have transformed themselves into something that is above themselves.

Non-linguistic communication between God and humans occurs in the form of sending natural signs from God (Sardila, 2016) . These signs, for those who are willing to pay attention and reflect on them, can be seen at any time, because indeed everything that is often referred to as natural events, such as rain, wind, the arrangement of the sky and earth, the change of day and night, and so on are basically signs that show God's concern for the lives of mankind on earth, as well as evidence of His Divinity. While from humans in the form of prayer.

Communication between God and humans, both verbal and non-verbal, occurs on God's initiative, while humans basically only respond to what God does. God's will to open direct communication between Him and humans is manifested in the form of sending verses (signs ) (Akil, 2017) . The Divine Verses referred to in the Qur'an are a general understanding, namely including verbal and non-verbal symbols. Of these two types of symbols, God's messages through verbal symbols (*waḥy*) can be said to be clearer, because they are basically conceptual and analytical. Thus, revelation can present God's will in a way that is easily understood by the human mind. While in non-verbal symbols, God's will is manifested globally. And because of its non-conceptual nature, the messages conveyed are very unclear or vague. However, non-verbal symbols are more open, accessible to anyone without an intermediary, while verbal symbols can only be known by humans through an intermediary, namely the Apostle.

### 3) God-servant relationship

God as master ( *rabb* ), and man as servant ( *abd* ). This relationship involves on the part of God as Lord ( *rabb* ), all concepts related to His majesty, His power, His absolute



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strength and so on. While on the part of man as servant ('abd) all concepts indicating humility, absolute obedience, and other similar qualities that are included in and related to the word jahiliyyah. In the Qur'anic system, Allah is the absolute ruler; the only God who rules throughout the world, while humans are servants ('abd) (Fakhry, 2010) . As a servant ('abd), humans must surrender completely, humble themselves and humiliate themselves before Him without reservation.

In Toshihiko Izutsu's view, Islam is the most important term. By connecting the word Islam with its verb, aslama, Islam can be understood as an action taken by someone voluntarily to submit themselves to the will of Allah and entrust themselves completely to Him.

#### 4) Ethical Relations

There is a fundamental difference between the two. Divina Commedia, also includes God acting as the Giver of existence and form to humans. He is the creator of humans, and humans are none other than his creatures (Jamarudin, 2010) . This relationship is based on the most basic distinction between two different aspects, which can be distinguished by the concept of God itself. God whose goodness is infinite, all-loving, forgiving and merciful on the one hand. God who is angry and cruel and very severe in punishment on the other hand. Likewise, from the human side there is a basic distinction between gratitude on the one hand (syukr), and fear of God (taqwa) together form one category of faith, and this finally forms a sharp distinction with kufr both in the sense of ingratitude and denial.

Ethics relates to what humans should do towards God in relation to God's commands and prohibitions, as well as how God wills towards His creatures (Hidayah & Hasanah, 2018) . According to Toshihiko Izutsu, there are three different categories regarding the concept of ethics in the Qur'an, namely: first, the category that shows and describes the nature of God; second, the category that explains various aspects of the fundamental nature of humans towards God; and third, the category that shows the principles and rules of behavior that belong to and live in Islamic society.



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This aspect of Allah as God who is most gracious, most merciful, most merciful, and most forgiving towards humans is mentioned in the Qur'an with keywords such as *ni'mah* (pleasure), *fadl* (generosity), *rahmah* (compassion), *maghfirah* (forgiveness), and so on (Afandi & Shodiq, 2017). According to Toshihiko Izutsu, the fact that God is of this nature and shows all goodness in the form of this verse should determine the correct response on the part of humans. This response is *syukr* or gratitude for the gifts that God has bestowed. This feeling of gratitude is only possible if humans understand the meaning of the verse.

The concept of *shukr* was actually deeply rooted during the period of ignorance. This is shown by a poem by a poet from the Hudzail tribe, *shukr* means an expression of gratitude for other people's gifts (*ni'mah*). And this concept is very easy to understand using simple logic, namely if someone shows generosity, in the sense of bestowing a favor upon you, then the natural reaction that you should show is to be grateful. This can be said to be a basic moral rule in human relations. However, human responses to favors are not singular.

## CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, the author can conclude: Toshihiko Izutsu (May 4, 1914-1993 AD) was born into a wealthy family in Japan. His approach to studying religion is linguistics and he uses humanities/social sciences more extensively than an approach based on faith. Izutsu revealed that in reality the teachings of the Qur'an are destined to develop, not only as a religion, but also as a culture and civilization. According to Izutsu, understanding the texts of the Koran can be done through three stages. The first stage is to choose key terms (*key words*) from the Koran according to the discussion in question. The second stage is to determine the basic meaning *and* *nasabi meaning (relational meaning)*. The third stage is to conclude and unite these concepts into one whole. The Quran in the semantic phrase of the Quran must be understood only in the sense of the Quranic *Weltanschauung* or the Quranic worldview, namely the Quranic vision of the universe. These historical stages in the early formation of the history of the vocabulary of the Quran are: (1) before the revelation of the Quran or the jahiliyyah, (2) the period of the revelation



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of the Quran, (3) after the revelation of the Quran, especially in the Abbasid period. Some examples of verses that show his interpretation are discussions about kufr, hasan and so on. As a criticism and appreciation, Izutsu's thoughts are not in accordance with the rules and requirements as an interpreter, so it can be said that his interpretation is rejected and invalid, even so his thoughts can still contribute to Islamic science, especially for the study of the Quran.

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