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Semantic Interpretation According to Dr. Muhammad Hussein Ali Al-Saghir: (Definition – Concept – Broadness of Concept)

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ABSTRACT: This research aims to elucidate the semantic interpretation of Dr. Muhammad Hussein Ali Al-Saghir by defining and explaining its concept, and highlighting its breadth. Semantic interpretation refers to the interpretation that stems from the theory of the meaning of meaning, indicating the primary meaning and extending it to a secondary or additional meaning. A verse may be open to both primary and secondary meanings, resulting in a meaning of meaning that is extended. Semantic interpretation, therefore, inherently possesses an intentional semantic dimension. This is its definition, while its concept applies to several instances, such as primary and secondary meanings, and the meaning of meaning. It also applies to some theories of semantics and semantic relations. Furthermore, it can be considered synonymous with explaining the meanings of Quranic words within linguistic interpretation. The concept of semantic interpretation, in its synonymy with linguistic interpretation and its search for primary and secondary meanings, is within narrow and specific limits. However, it can expand through its pursuit of primary and secondary meanings, relying on central and peripheral semantics and their role in clarifying meaning and interpreting Quranic words. This concept also expands through its reliance on semantic opposition. Its application lies in explaining the meaning of Quranic verses or words, or through its reliance on the theory of semantic fields. In its narrow sense, semantic interpretation focuses on primary and secondary meanings, or is synonymous with linguistic interpretation. In its broader sense, it takes several forms, such as the meaning of meaning, marginal and central significance, semantic opposition, and semantic fields. This is what this research attempts to clarify.

FIRST: DR. AL-SAGHIR'S DEFINITION OF SEMANTIC INTERPRETATION

We have previously discussed semantic interpretation as understood by Dr. Al-Saghir in the preamble, when addressing the terminology of semantics in his work. According to Dr. Al-Saghir, semantic interpretation refers to the interpretation that arises from the theory of the 'meaning of meaning,' where it points to the primary meaning and then transcends it to a secondary or additional meaning. A verse, or a word within a verse, may encompass both a primary and a secondary meaning, producing a 'meaning of meaning' that extends in illumination and clarity. Dr. Al-Saghir's reference to semantic interpretation comes within his tracing of the exegetical efforts of the two Imams: Imam Al-Baqir (peace be upon him) and Imam Al-Ridha (peace be upon him). In their exegetical elaborations, both Imams affirm the primary meaning of the noble verse, and likewise affirm the secondary and additional meaning where the verse can bear such meanings. Thus, in accordance with a meaning that may be evident, there may also exist a 'meaning of meaning' in terms of illumination and elucidation. Within the semantic dimension of words, we observe that Dr. Al-Saghir points to the role of semantic interpretation in elucidating the meanings of Quranic words and explaining their primary and secondary meanings through semantic interpretation. He describes it as "the pioneering foundation in indicating primary and secondary meanings, as it encompasses them through what the word evokes in its position within the sentence, phrase, or paragraph. It may give you the meaning and the additional meaning simultaneously, causing you to pause at the text as you read it as if you are touching it, drawing the overall meaning alongside the word in vibrancy and clarity, and gathering its dimensions in quality and selection." Subsequently, Dr. Al-Saghir defines semantic interpretation as: "the interpretation in whose folds one reads an intentional semantic dimension, and it usually rests on a new observation in the induction of the unknown and the length of discourse." He then focuses on the exegetical effort of Imam Al-Ridha (peace be upon him) in semantic interpretation and its originality, stating under the heading "Semantic Interpretation According to Imam Al-Ridha": "Perhaps the most remarkable thing found in Imam Al-Ridha's approach to the features of interpretation is that articulate analysis resonant with its semantic effects, before the term 'semantics' was even discovered – eleven centuries ago." Dr. Al-Saghir then elaborates on semantic interpretation and what is generated from it – or through it – in terms of what is known as the theory of the 'meaning of meaning,' saying: "This is the interpretation in whose folds one reads an intentional semantic dimension, and it usually rests on a new observation in the induction of the unknown and the divisions of discourse." He then grounds the exegetical effort of Imam Al-Ridha (peace be upon him) and his scientific precedence, stating: "Through it, the theory of the 'meaning of meaning' may emerge – a theory which Westerners embraced more than a thousand years after the Imam. You find in the Imam's illumination and elaboration an emphasis on the primary meaning and an intimation of the secondary meaning of the verse. This requires artistic sensibility

on one hand and additional exegetical effort on the other. Imam Al-Ridha (peace be upon him) rose to this task triumphantly, recorded a scientific precedence in it, and through it innovated an objective intellectual framework.” From the foregoing, we observe that Dr. Al-Saghir focuses on the semantic interpretation of the Quran through the theory of the ‘meaning of meaning’ in the exegetical efforts of Imam Al-Baqir (peace be upon him) and Imam Al-Ridha (peace be upon him). The emphasis on this theory in the Holy Quran may be attributed to the Quran’s abundance of knowledge, truths, and multiple scattered meanings that make the realization of meaning and its deeper layer a natural outcome in Quranic semantic interpretation. As stated: “The knowledge of the Quran consists of vast truths scattered throughout the fragrant bouquets of its verses, such that they are difficult to enumerate and count. They are so abundant that proving it requires no argument. In every verse there are rare epistemic glimpses, and in every chapter there are thousands of scientific, cultural, guiding, and reminding semantic dimensions – as if you draw them out while pursuing them, and they overflow with knowledge, example, reason, purity, and wisdom.” Furthermore, psychological suggestion plays its role in generating this theory and its importance in Quranic interpretation. Dr. Al-Saghir states: “Psychological suggestion manifests in its calm and expansive forms, conscious interweaving harmonizes across its paragraphs and phrases, and rhetorical enchantment implies more than one new meaning – creating from the appropriate word a position for the appropriate meaning, adding to it a deeper, more comprehensive semantic dimension, and directing rhetoric toward the horizons of meanings rich with suggestion, harmony, and additional knowledge. The meaning may be clear, and there is the meaning of meaning.” In what Dr. Al-Saghir previously mentioned regarding semantic interpretation, its importance, and its role in explaining the semantic dimension of words, he pointed to a fundamental issue: the theory of the ‘meaning of meaning.’ This theory is broad in our Arabic heritage for explaining what is intended by it, as it oscillates between the literal and the figurative, and between the primary and secondary meaning. It also expands among contemporary scholars between central and peripheral meaning, or between the primary and the fundamental meaning, or between meaning and the shadows of meaning. “Shadows of meaning,” or what is called marginal meaning, is one of the fundamental topics connected to the science of ‘general meaning.’ The terms ‘central meaning’ and ‘peripheral meaning’ refer to what is known as the ‘meaning of meaning.’ The importance of central meaning – as some contemporary scholars see it – lies in the depth of this semantic dimension and its status in the Arabic heritage, in addition to the attachment of modern scholars to this designation. Further to this is the multiplicity of its designations among ancient and modern scholars: among the ancients, it is called literal meaning, or true meaning, or customary/legal truth, or linguistic truth; among modern scholars, it is referred to variously as the primary, fundamental, central, conceptual, cognitive, symbolic, or selective meaning – as opposed to the peripheral meaning, which is the secondary meaning that ancient linguists call the secondary meaning or the meaning of meaning. ‘Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani states: “You say ‘the meaning’ and ‘the meaning of meaning.’ By ‘the meaning’ you intend what is understood from the outward form of the word and what you reach without intermediary. And by ‘the meaning of meaning,’ you understand from the word a meaning that then leads you to another meaning, as I have explained to you.” What al-Jurjani mentioned indicates the ancient Arabs’ awareness of this theory, which may manifest in the literal and figurative, or the central and peripheral, or the primary and secondary. This perhaps explains the multiplicity of designations. Figurative meaning thus falls under peripheral meaning or the meaning of meaning, as is evident from the foregoing. Just as the ancients were interested in this theory, so too were modern scholars. Central meaning represents a shared and clear quantum in people’s minds for mutual communication, as Dr. Ibrahim Anis holds – and this quantum is what the linguist is concerned with and records in his lexicon so that it represents central meaning. Peripheral meaning, on the other hand, consists of shadows of that central meaning, manifesting and being determined according to what exists in the listener’s mind from experiences and feelings regarding a particular word. The moment the speaker produces a word before the listener to convey a certain idea, a specific semantic dimension forms in the listener’s mind, acquired from his prior experiences. This is what Dr. Ibrahim Anis mentioned. This is perhaps what led Dr. Ahmad Mukhtar Omar to view the primary or central meaning as the principal meaning of linguistic communication, the true representative of the fundamental function of language – namely, the conveyance of ideas and mutual understanding. In contrast to this meaning stands the additional or secondary meaning: a meaning that a word achieves through what it evokes alongside its particular conceptual meaning. Beyond the central meaning, there are other meanings according to what they indicate within the psychological, suggestive, or stylistic dimension of the individual. This is perhaps what caused Dr. Muhammad Muhammad Yunus to distinguish between central and peripheral meaning: he holds that central meaning is shared by the general populace belonging to the speaker’s linguistic environment, while peripheral meaning is held exclusively by some individuals of that environment and not others. This is the first distinction. The second is that central meaning is closely connected to the most important function of language – communication – while peripheral meaning is connected to the function of influence. This is perhaps what led Dr. Al-Saghir to emphasize the importance of this theory in his semantic interpretation.

SECOND: THE CONCEPT OF SEMANTIC INTERPRETATION ACCORDING TO DR. AL-SAGHIR

The concept of semantic interpretation according to Dr. Al-Saghir applies to several semantic instances, including: the instance of primary and secondary meaning, and likewise the instance of the ‘meaning of meaning,’ which arises through reference to the primary meaning and then transcending it to the secondary meaning so that the meaning of meaning is produced – that which a Quranic word or verse carries in terms of one or more meanings that it can bear. It also applies to some theories of semantics and semantic relations. Moreover, the concept of semantic interpretation – as Dr. Al-Saghir sees it – carries within it an intentional semantic dimension; that is, this concept in Dr. Al-Saghir’s view was not coincidental or inadvertent, but is deliberately intended through the induction of the unknown and the achievement of discourse. The concept of semantic interpretation in Dr. Al-Saghir’s usage – as observed from the foregoing – has as its domain the interpretation and elucidation of the meanings of Quranic words. It may be synonymous with – or serve as a companion to – explaining the meanings of Quranic words within the linguistic and semantic interpretation of the Holy Quran. As one scholar stated: “The term ‘semantic interpretation,’ like its counterpart ‘linguistic interpretation,’ has a foundation and an authentic depth in concept and content, even if this term did not appear among the ancients. Ibn Abbas is our arbitrator in this matter, because his general exegetical school followed this approach. The designation we have preferred over other terms here is a matter of tolerance and flexibility in usage, not of strict commitment and agreement.” This is what some contemporary scholars said regarding the term ‘semantic interpretation.’ However, the matter for Dr. Al-Saghir is not one of flexibility and tolerance; he used the term on the basis that interpretation has a semantic dimension, or relies on semantics to clarify meanings – focusing on the primary and secondary meaning to arrive at the meaning of meaning, or focusing on central and peripheral meaning, or on semantic relations or semantic fields in interpreting the Quran – employing semantics in the service of meaning. This is perhaps what causes the concept of semantic interpretation to expand with Dr. Al-Saghir. Thus, semantic interpretation is a term used by Dr. Al-Saghir to refer to interpretation that contains a semantic dimension or employs semantics in the service of meaning. This appears in his exegetical methodology named ‘Al-Tafsir Al-Manhaji lil-Quran Al-Adhim’ (Methodological Interpretation of the Holy Quran), where

he states in the preface of his commentary: "I have embarked on this interpretation in its illumination and named it Al-Tafsir Al-Manhaji lil-Quran Al-Adhim. In it, I have endeavored to avoid obscurity in expression... and I have not overlooked the rhetorical depth of the Quran, nor the semantic dimension in its phrases, nor the suggestive indication in its verses." Elsewhere in this commentary, we observe Dr. Al-Saghir pointing to the elucidation of linguistic features and Arabic phenomena, and the explanation of the meanings of words within exegetical fragments on Surat al-Fatiha, where he says: "These fragments of narrative commentary on portions of Surat al-Fatiha revolve around some linguistic features, Arabic phenomena, and the explanation of the meanings of words through two cognitions: the general comprehensive meaning and the specific applied feature. This is by way of applying concepts to instances, and deriving secondary meanings from primary meanings. All of this does not contradict the universality and comprehensiveness of the Quran for what is broader than it, and God knows best." What Dr. Al-Saghir mentioned regarding the explanation of word meanings through two cognitions – the general comprehensive meaning and the specific applied meaning – is the practice of most commentators. They mention the verses, then state the general meaning of the verse's words, then mention the specific meanings of the words of each verse when interpreting it. This is also observed in Al-Tusi's commentary Al-Tibyan in his interpretation of Surat al-Fatiha. From the foregoing, we observe that the term 'semantic interpretation' in Dr. Al-Saghir's usage did not arise by chance or oversight – it is deliberate. Furthermore, this term was not used by Dr. Al-Saghir out of flexibility or license; rather, he intends by it the interpretation in which semantics plays a role. This concept may narrow with Dr. Al-Saghir to become synonymous with linguistic interpretation, and may expand to encompass types of semantic dimensions, semantic relations, and theories of semantics. This is what will be observed in the broadness of the concept of semantic interpretation in Dr. Al-Saghir's thought.

THIRD: THE BROADNESS OF THE CONCEPT OF SEMANTIC INTERPRETATION ACCORDING TO DR. AL-SAGHIR

Through the foregoing, we observe that semantic interpretation in Dr. Al-Saghir's thought may be synonymous with linguistic interpretation, and may expand to encompass issues of semantics and their role in Quranic interpretation. It may refer to the interpretation that traces the primary meaning and the secondary meaning until it arrives at the meaning of meaning. It may also refer to the interpretation that relies on elucidating central and peripheral meaning and their roles in clarifying meaning and interpreting Quranic words. It may further refer to the interpretation that relies on semantic opposition, employing it to explain the meaning of verses or Quranic words. It may additionally refer to the interpretation that relies on the theory of semantic fields, employing it to explain and interpret Quranic verses and words.

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