

Relevance Theory: A Hybrid Model for Analysing Metaphor in *Sūrat al-Takāthur* (Teori Relevans: Model Hibrid untuk Menganalisis Metafora dalam *Surah al-Takāthur*)

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ABSTRACT

This study provides a thematic analysis of metaphorical language in surat al-Takāthur and evaluates the explanatory power and limitations of Relevance Theory (RT) for interpreting Qur'anic metaphoricity. RT, grounded in cognitive pragmatics, provides a framework for understanding how readers infer meaning based on optimal relevance and minimal processing effort. However, when applied to sacred discourse, particularly Qur'anic texts imbued with doctrinal depth and rhetorical intensity, RT encounters significant limitations. Using close textual analysis, the study identifies metaphorically used lexical items across the surah's eight verses and groups them into thematic clusters concerning material obsession, mortality, eschatological certainty, and divine accountability. The analysis involves a close, verse-by-verse reading of the Arabic text supported by the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) to systematically identify metaphorical lexical items, followed by thematic categorisation and inferential-pragmatic interpretation. RT usefully explains how readers derive implicatures through contextual enrichment and inferential processes; however, its core assumption, particularly cognitive economy and a human speaker-hearer model, does not fully capture the spiritual intentionality, intertextual layering, and doctrinal resonance inherent in Qur'anic metaphor. To address these limitations, the study integrates insights from classical Arabic rhetoric (balāgha) and cognitive metaphor analysis, proposing a hybrid model better suited to sacred discourse. The findings indicate that Qur'anic metaphor not only communicates meaning but also shapes moral awareness, encourages reflection (Tadabbur), and directs readers toward eschatological accountability. By proposing a hybrid framework integrating inferential pragmatics, conceptual metaphor theory, and classical Arabic rhetoric, this study offers a replicable model for future analyses of metaphor in sacred texts.

Keywords: *Qur'anic metaphor; Relevance Theory; Surat al-Takāthur; cognitive pragmatics; Arabic rhetoric*

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menganalisis penggunaan bahasa metafora dalam Surah al-Takāthur serta menilai kesesuaian Teori Relevans (TR) dalam memahami maksud ayat-ayat tersebut. Teori Relevans, yang berasaskan pragmatik kognitif, menjelaskan bagaimana pembaca memahami makna berdasarkan konteks dan proses pemikiran. Namun, apabila diaplikasikan kepada wacana al-Qur'an yang sarat dengan dimensi spiritual, retorik, dan doktrinal, teori ini didapati mempunyai beberapa keterbatasan yang signifikan. Melalui analisis teks secara mendalam, kajian ini mengenal pasti dan menganalisis unsur metafora dalam setiap ayat Surah al-Takāthur dengan menggunakan Prosedur Identifikasi Metafora (MIP), diikuti dengan pengelompokan tematik yang merangkumi kecintaan melampau terhadap dunia, kematian, kepastian eskatologi, dan tanggungjawab manusia terhadap Tuhan. Pendekatan ini membolehkan pemahaman yang lebih sistematik terhadap fungsi metafora dalam membina makna. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan

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bahawa walaupun TR berupaya menjelaskan proses inferens dan pembentukan implikatur; kerangka ini tidak sepenuhnya dapat memahami maksud dimensi intensionaliti kerohanian, lapisan intertekstual, serta metafora yang padat dalam al-Qur'an. Sehubungan itu, kajian ini mencadangkan satu model hibrid yang mengintegrasikan Teori Relevans, analisis metafora kognitif, dan retorik Arab klasik (balāghah) bagi menghasilkan kerangka analisis yang lebih komprehensif. Kesimpulannya, metafora al-Qur'an bukan sahaja berfungsi untuk menyampaikan makna, tetapi turut berperanan dalam membentuk kesedaran moral, menggalakkan refleksi (tadabbur) mengingatkan manusia tentang tanggungjawab mereka di akhirat. Model hibrid yang dicadangkan berpotensi menjadi kerangka rujukan dalam analisis metafora bagi teks-teks keagamaan pada masa hadapan.

Kata Kunci: Metafora al-Qur'an; Teori Relevans; Surah al-Takāthur; pragmatik kognitif; retorik Arab

INTRODUCTION

Metaphor plays a foundational role in shaping meaning within sacred discourse. In the Holy Qur'an, metaphor is not merely a linguistic ornament but a core mechanism through which religious, moral, and existential truths are conveyed.

While Relevance Theory (RT) has proven useful in analysing pragmatic phenomena in Qur'anic discourse, such as implicature, indirectness, and relevance triggers (e.g., El-Din & El-Din, 2023; Khairuddin et al., 2024), its application to metaphor remains underexplored and under-critiqued. Studies by Sardaraz and Ali (2020) and Elamin and Alhazmi (2021) highlight how Qur'anic metaphors function not merely to transmit information but to provoke reflection, shape moral consciousness, and convey spiritual states. These metaphors often rely on religious textual interplay, rhetorical intensification, and conceptual mappings such as *light as guidance* or *death as transition*, which challenge the assumptions of cognitive economy and speaker intention foundational to RT. This study seeks to engage critically with these issues by testing the limits of RT in the context of *surat al-Takāthur*, a *surah* whose brief yet conceptually rich structure makes it an ideal candidate for both metaphor analysis and theoretical interrogation.

The study investigates the metaphorical language of *surat al-Takāthur* through a thematic analysis, using RT as a primary interpretive framework. Developed by Sperber and Wilson, RT offers a model of communication in which meaning arises from inferential processes governed by cognitive effort and contextual relevance. Applied to metaphor, RT suggests that hearers construct meaning based on the optimal balance of processing cost and interpretive gain. However, this study takes a critical stance toward the unqualified application of RT in the context of Qur'anic discourse. While RT is useful for highlighting how readers infer meaning, it is less equipped to address the faith-based density, rhetorical complexity, and spiritual intentionality of metaphors in a sacred text. Metaphor in the Holy Qur'an often invites not just efficient inference but prolonged reflection (i.e., *Tadabbur*), spiritual resonance, and moral transformation, dimensions that RT does not fully account for.

Despite the growing use of RT in Qur'anic linguistic studies, there remains a lack of focused research that systematically evaluates its limitations in analysing Qur'anic metaphor and proposes an integrated framework tailored to sacred discourse.

To address this gap, the primary objective of this study is to critically evaluate the applicability of RT to the analysis of metaphor in the Qur'anic text, specifically through a detailed case study of *surat al-Takāthur*. By conducting a thematic analysis of the *surah*, the study aims to identify and categorise metaphorical lexical items and examine how meaning is constructed, enriched, or limited within RT's inferential framework. A secondary objective is to test the limits of RT when applied to sacred discourse, and to assess the benefits of supplementing RT with

classical Arabic rhetoric and Conceptual Metaphor Theory to produce a more precise account of Qur'anic metaphoricity.

This research is significant in bridging a key gap in Qur'anic linguistic studies: the need for an integrated theoretical approach that addresses not only the pragmatic dimensions of metaphor but also its spiritual, rhetorical, and doctrinal functions. While RT has been employed in studies of Qur'anic inference, speech acts, and implicature (e.g., El-Awa, 2006; Sallal & Hussein, 2021), few studies have critically examined its limitations in capturing metaphoric meaning in divine texts. This study, therefore, contributes to a growing scholarly interest in adapting modern linguistic theories to religious discourse (Sardaraz & Ali, 2021; Khairuddin et al., 2024) and offers a hybrid analytical framework suitable for sacred, densely metaphorical texts. Moreover, while previous studies have applied RT implicature, translation, coherence, and speech acts in Qur'anic discourse, few have undertaken a sustained, verse-level analysis that critically tests the theoretical limits of RT within a single *surah*. The present study distinguishes itself by combining thematic analysis, inferential pragmatics, and classical rhetorical theory within a focused case study of *surat al-Takāthur*, thereby moving beyond application toward theoretical evaluation and model development.

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What metaphorically used lexical items can be identified in *surat al-Takāthur*, and how are they thematically structured within the *surah*?
2. How does RT account for the inferential interpretation of these metaphors at the verse level?
3. What theoretical limitations emerge when RT is applied to Qur'anic metaphor, and how can these limitations be addressed through an integrated hybrid model incorporating classical Arabic rhetoric and Conceptual Metaphor Theory?

By focusing on the metaphorical lexical items in *surat al-Takāthur* and analysing them both thematically and rhetorically, this study proposes an integrated approach. It supplements RT with insights from classical Arabic rhetoric, offering a model that respects both the cognitive-pragmatic dynamics of communication and the unique demands of interpreting divine speech. Through this lens, *surat al-Takāthur*'s metaphors are examined not only as vehicles of meaning but as instruments of revelation and moral awakening.

LITERATURE REVIEW

RELEVANCE THEORY IN ANALYSING QUR'ANIC DISCOURSE

Research applying RT to Qur'anic discourse spans translation studies, literary analysis, and theological interpretation. RT has been used to conceptualise texts as context-dependent communicative acts shaped by inferential processes (Furlong, 2024), and within Qur'anic studies, it has helped illuminate textual coherence, translation, and figurative language (El-Awa, 2006; Hussein, 2021; Abu-Khader, 2020). Taken together, this body of work highlights RT's value in explaining how readers derive implicit meaning through contextual inference and relevance-based interpretation.

Parallel research in cognitive linguistics and Qur'anic rhetoric further demonstrates the conceptual and stylistic richness of Qur'anic metaphor. Studies drawing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory show that metaphor functions as both a cognitive mechanism and a rhetorical device for conveying theological concepts (Alzyoud et al., 2016; Alhusban & Alkhawaldah, 2018). Similarly, Suri and Tanjung (2025) combine RT and CMT to demonstrate how metaphor enhances both inferential and affective engagement, while Sardaraz and Ali (2021) argue for reconciling classical *balāgha* with modern semantic approaches to better capture the interaction between linguistic form and conceptual meaning.

Despite these contributions, existing studies largely employ RT as an explanatory framework rather than critically evaluating its theoretical limits in relation to Qur'anic metaphor. Several scholars acknowledge that RT may struggle with culturally embedded imagery, theological symbolism, and spiritually loaded language, often recommending supplementation with rhetorical or theological perspectives (El-Awa, 2006; Hussein, 2021; Suri & Tanjung, 2025). However, the literature reveals limited sustained engagement with RT at the verse level within a single *surah*, particularly to test its theoretical boundaries. This gap is particularly evident in shorter, thematically dense texts such as *surat al-Takāthur*, where metaphors carry layered spiritual and eschatological meanings.

PRAGMATIC APPROACHES TO QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION

Recent scholarship increasingly applies pragmatic frameworks to Qur'anic discourse, shifting focus from purely philological analysis to implicit meaning, speaker intention, and contextual interpretation. Studies on indirectness, presupposition, implicature, and speech acts show that Qur'anic verses often communicate beyond literal meaning, relying on contextual enrichment to convey theological and moral significance (Sallal & Hussein, 2021; El-Din & El-Din, 2023; Majeed & Abdulla, 2019). These approaches demonstrate that Qur'anic discourse employs layered communicative strategies that guide reflection rather than immediate propositional clarity.

Research on indirect speech and speaker meaning further underscores the role of inference in interpretation. Khairuddin et al. (2024) argue that understanding prophetic dialogue requires integrating linguistic cues, context, and speaker intention. Similarly, Ali (2013) highlights the varied communicative functions of Qur'anic verses across social and institutional contexts, confirming the text's multi-layered rhetorical and cognitive dimensions.

However, pragmatic models are largely grounded in theories of human communication. While effective in explaining contextual inference, they may underrepresent the spiritual and morally directive dimensions of divine discourse. Indirectness and implicature account for communicative strategy but do not fully capture the theological authority embedded in Qur'anic speech.

This limitation calls for an integrative approach. Accordingly, this study adopts a hybrid framework combining RT with Arabic rhetoric (*balāgha*) to examine metaphor and thematic meaning in *surat al-Takāthur*.

COGNITIVE AND LINGUISTIC APPROACHES TO QUR'ANIC METAPHOR

Research on metaphor in the Holy Qur'an has expanded significantly with the application of cognitive and linguistic theories, especially those that blend traditional rhetorical insights with modern conceptual frameworks. A key concern in this field is the tension between form and meaning—how metaphors simultaneously serve as aesthetic tools and vehicles for deep

theological and spiritual ideas. Recent studies increasingly argue for integrated models that account for both the linguistic beauty and conceptual depth of Qur'anic metaphors.

Sardaraz and Ali (2021) highlight a divide between traditional *balāgha*-based rhetorical analysis and cognitive approaches such as Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). They argue for a unified model that bridges language and thought, supporting the need for integrative approaches to Qur'anic metaphor.

Translation studies provide complementary insights. Fatehi Rad et al. (2024) show that translators often preserve Qur'anic metaphors rather than replace them, reflecting their theological and emotional significance and confirming the complexity of metaphor in sacred texts.

Cognitive research also identifies recurring conceptual patterns. Elamin and Alhazmi (2021) demonstrate that the metaphor of *nūr* (light) consistently represents knowledge, guidance, and spiritual clarity, indicating that Qur'anic metaphor forms a coherent conceptual system rather than isolated expressions.

Together, these studies highlight the need for analytical models that combine pragmatic inference, conceptual mapping, and rhetorical analysis. Accordingly, this study adopts a hybrid framework integrating RT, CMT, and Arabic rhetoric (*balāgha*) to analyse metaphor in *surat al-Takāthur*.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative thematic analysis combined with an inferential-pragmatic framework. Thematic analysis is a suitable method for identifying, analysing, and organising patterns of meaning within a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is particularly appropriate for Qur'anic discourse because it enables the systematic grouping of metaphorical expressions into broader conceptual and thematic clusters. In the present study, thematic analysis is used to identify recurring metaphorical patterns across the verses of *surat al-Takāthur* and to examine how these patterns contribute to the *surah*'s overarching moral and eschatological themes. In addition, metaphorically used lexical items were identified using the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), a structured and widely adopted protocol that enhances transparency and reliability in metaphor identification (Pragglejaz Group, 2007).

This thematic approach is integrated with an inferential-pragmatic framework grounded in Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), which explains how readers derive implicit meaning through contextual inference and cognitive relevance. RT was selected because it provides a well-established model for analysing how metaphor generates meaning through contextual enrichment and inferential processes, and it has been successfully applied to Qur'anic discourse in studies of coherence, implicature, and translation (El-Awa, 2006; Hussein, 2021). However, because Qur'anic metaphor also carries strong rhetorical and conceptual dimensions, RT is supplemented with classical Arabic rhetoric (*balāgha*) and cognitive metaphor analysis to capture rhetorical intensification and recurring conceptual mappings.

SAMPLE

The study focuses on *surat al-Takāthur*, an eight-verse *surah* of the Holy Qur'an selected through purposeful sampling as a single-*surah* qualitative case study. Purposeful sampling is appropriate for qualitative textual research when the aim is depth of analysis rather than statistical representativeness, and when a text is chosen for its analytical richness and theoretical relevance (Patton, 2015). *Surat al-Takāthur* was selected because it provides a compact yet conceptually dense unit in which metaphors and rhetorical devices are tightly concentrated, allowing for verse-level analysis and theory testing within a manageable dataset.

The *surah*'s semantic and rhetorical complexity is operationalised through three indicators. First, it contains multiple metaphorically used lexical items that structure its thematic progression (e.g., rivalry, visiting graves, seeing Hellfire, certainty, accountability), enabling systematic metaphor identification and clustering. Second, it features rhetorical intensification through emphatic repetition and warning structures (e.g., *kallā*, repeated future certainty), recognised in Arabic rhetoric as devices that amplify admonition and moral force rather than merely add propositional content (Abdel Haleem, 2010). Third, it moves swiftly from worldly distraction to eschatological certainty, creating thematic compression that heightens interpretive density and reflection. These features accord with scholarship describing Qur'anic metaphor as conceptually rich and rhetorically layered (Sardaraz & Ali, 2021; Elamin & Alhazmi, 2021). Accordingly, *surat al-Takāthur* offers a focused case for testing the explanatory scope and limits of RT.

DATA VALIDATION

To enhance analytical credibility, several validation procedures were implemented. First, metaphorical expressions were identified using the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), ensuring systematic and transparent selection. Second, coding was iterative: lexical items were checked against their basic meanings and re-evaluated after thematic clustering to maintain consistency. Third, interpretations were cross-checked with the original Arabic text, the selected English translation, other authoritative translations, and classical *tafsīr* to reduce misinterpretation of culturally and theologically loaded terms. Fourth, an audit trail documented lexical items, contextual meanings, classification rationale, and thematic assignments to ensure transparency and replicability. Finally, themes were evaluated for internal coherence and clear distinction in line with qualitative thematic analysis standards.

TRANSLATION CHOICE: SAHEEH INTERNATIONAL

This study utilises the *Saheeh* International translation of the Holy Qur'an for its English rendering of *surat al-Takāthur*. This translation was selected because it aims to balance literal accuracy with contemporary readability, preserving the semantic structure of Arabic terms while remaining accessible to modern readers. *Saheeh* International is widely used in linguistic and thematic studies due to its relatively neutral style and minimal interpretive interpolation, especially when compared with Yusuf Ali's more exegetical and poetic rendering and Arberry's archaic literary style (Abdel Halim, 2004; Kidwai, 1987; Saeed, 2008). In addition, the translation adheres closely to the syntactic and lexical structure of the Arabic source text, which facilitates verse-level linguistic analysis and supports systematic metaphor identification and comparison with the original Arabic (Saeed, 2008). For these reasons, *Saheeh* International provides an appropriate and methodologically consistent English reference for the present study.

METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis was carried out in three stages. First, the Arabic text of the *surah* was annotated using MIP, which allows for consistent identification of metaphorically used lexical items. Supporting material included authoritative English translations (e.g., Arberry, Yusuf Ali) and classical commentaries (*tafsīr*), which help clarify semantic ambiguity in metaphorical phrases. The second stage involved categorising metaphorical expressions into conceptual domains based on their thematic function (e.g., materialism, death, epistemic certainty), informed by Kövecses's (2013) four-stage model of metaphor meaning construction. This enabled the study to go beyond surface-level metaphors and explore the deeper cognitive mappings underlying Qur'anic metaphorical expressions. Finally, the third stage involved applying RT to these metaphors to assess how meaning is generated through inferential enrichment and contextual activation. To counterbalance RT's emphasis on processing efficiency, the analysis was supplemented by *balāgha*, which emphasises deliberation (*Tadabbur*) and rhetorical force, especially in divine speech (Suri & Tanjung, 2025).

THEMATIC AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SURAT AL-TAKATHUR

Below is a close reading along with a critique of each verse from *surat al-Takāthur* using RT, supported by comparative literature and alternative rhetorical or cognitive frameworks.

VERSE 1:

Arabic: أَلْهَاكُمْ التَّكَاثُرُ

Translation (Saheeh International): Competition in [worldly] increase diverts you.

This verse introduces the central metaphor of the *surah*: *takāthur* (competitive accumulation) as a state of psychological diversion.

From a classical *balāgha* perspective, the verb *alhā* belongs to the semantic field of distraction and heedlessness (*lahw*), which classical scholars identify as a rhetorical strategy used to depict spiritual negligence (al-Qazwīnī, 2003; al-ʿAskarī, n.d.). By attributing the act of distraction to “accumulation,” the verse performs a form of personification (*tashkhīṣ*), transforming an abstract social practice into an active agent that captures human attention.

Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (n.d.) explains that Qur'anic metaphor often assigns agency to abstract states to intensify moral warning, allowing the listener to perceive moral failure as an experiential reality rather than an abstract concept.

From an RT perspective, the metaphor triggers inferencing about social rivalry. However, classical *tafsīr* expands this interpretation by linking the verse to the concept of *ghaflah* (i.e., spiritual heedlessness), a recurring Qur'anic theme emphasised by Ibn Kathīr (1999) and al-Saʿdī (2000). Thus, the metaphor frames material competition as cognitive and spiritual blindness, not merely social distraction.

VERSE 2:

Arabic: حَتَّىٰ زُرْتُمُ الْمَقَابِرَ

Translation: Until you visit the graveyards.

The verb *zurtum* (“you visited”) represents a key rhetorical substitution (*istiʿārah*). Classical rhetoricians stress that lexical substitution in Qur'anic discourse is never arbitrary; it signals subtle theological meanings (al-Rummānī, n.d.; al-Qazwīnī, 2003).

The choice of “visit” instead of “enter” implies temporality and transition. *Tafsīr* literature consistently interprets this wording as evidence that death is a passage rather than a final state (Ibn Kathīr, 1999; al-Sa‘di, 2000).

This rhetorical choice, therefore, encodes the eschatological doctrine of resurrection through metaphor, demonstrating how Qur’anic language integrates theological meaning within lexical selection.

VERSES 3–4

كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ / ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ

Translation: No! You are going to know. Then no! You are going to know.

The repetition of *kallā* exemplifies rhetorical repetition (*takrār*), a major persuasive device in Arabic rhetoric. Classical scholars explain that repetition serves emotional intensification and moral emphasis rather than informational redundancy (al-‘Askarī, n.d.; al-Qazwīnī, 2003). Al-Rummānī (n.d.) specifically identifies repetition in Qur’anic discourse as a strategy of warning and admonition, designed to heighten emotional engagement and provoke reflection. Within the framework of *balāgha*, repetition functions as a gradual escalation of warning, guiding the listener from inattentiveness to heightened awareness and emotional readiness. It therefore contributes to the persuasive and transformative intent of Qur’anic discourse rather than merely reinforcing propositional content. Thus, repetition creates escalating emotional pressure, something RT alone cannot fully explain.

VERSE 5:

كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ

Translation: No! If you only knew with knowledge of certainty...

This verse introduces *‘ilm al-yaqīn*—a highly loaded metaphysical concept. Classical *tafsīr* treats *yaqīn* as a technical epistemological term describing graded levels of certainty (Ibn Kathīr, 1999; al-Sa‘di, 2000). Exegetes explain that the expression *‘ilm al-yaqīn* does not simply denote strong knowledge, but a form of certainty grounded in compelling evidence that prepares the believer for direct experiential witnessing in the Hereafter.

Balāgha scholarship further notes that pairing knowledge with certainty signals a transition from abstract awareness to experiential conviction (al-Qazwīnī, 2003). From a rhetorical perspective, the construction represents an intensifying genitive structure that elevates the semantic force of knowledge and moves it beyond ordinary cognition toward transformative awareness.

This formulation participates in a broader Qur’anic epistemological progression—*‘ilm al-yaqīn*, *‘ayn al-yaqīn*, and *ḥaqq al-yaqīn*—which classical scholars interpret as successive stages in the journey from cognition to witnessing and finally to existential realisation (Ibn Kathīr, 1999; al-Sa‘di, 2000).

This supports the conceptual metaphor KNOWLEDGE IS VISION, widely recognised in cognitive and Qur’anic metaphor studies. In this framework, certainty becomes not merely an intellectual state but a perceptual and experiential reality, reinforcing the Holy Qur’an’s pedagogical strategy of guiding the reader from understanding to conviction. As such, RT cannot model such ontological depth (Alhusban & Alkhawaldah, 2018).

VERSE 6:

Arabic: لَتَرَوُنَّ الْجَحِيمَ

Translation: *You will surely see the Hellfire.*

Classical exegetes explain that “seeing” Hellfire refers to experiential witnessing rather than literal sight (Ibn Kathīr, 1999; al-Ṭabarī, 2001; al-Sa‘di, 2000). These *tafsīr* sources consistently interpret the verb tarawunna as indicating inevitable confrontation and direct experiential encounter, emphasising certainty and immediacy rather than simple visual perception.

Arabic rhetorical theory recognises such expressions as metaphorical extension (*majāz*) in which sensory perception represents experiential reality (al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, n.d.). Within *balāgha*, vision is frequently employed as a rhetorical vehicle to intensify emotional impact, transforming abstract theological concepts into vivid experiential imagery that the listener can imaginatively perceive.

Conceptual Integration Theory further explains how vision, experience, and punishment merge into a blended conceptual structure (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). Through this blending, the act of “seeing” becomes synonymous with fully experiencing the consequences of human actions, thereby linking perception, accountability, and suffering within a single conceptual frame.

This layered metaphor demonstrates how Qur’anic language converts eschatological belief into an experiential cognitive scenario, strengthening moral urgency and reinforcing the inevitability of divine judgment.

VERSE 7:

Arabic: ثُمَّ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ

Translation: *Then you will surely see it with the eye of certainty.*

This verse strengthens the epistemic-visual metaphor cluster. Classical scholars interpret this expression as marking the transition from knowledge to direct witnessing (al-Sa‘di, 2000). Within the Qur’anic epistemological framework, ‘*ayn al-yaqīn*’ (i.e., eye of certainty) represents a higher degree of certainty than ‘*ilm al-yaqīn*’, indicating a shift from inferential knowledge to experiential perception (Ibn Kathīr, 1999; al-Ṭabarī, 2001).

Balāgha scholarship explains that the metaphor of the “eye” functions as a rhetorical intensifier that transforms abstract certainty into vivid perceptual imagery (al-Qazwīnī, 2003; al-‘Askarī, n.d.). By invoking vision, the verse converts theological belief into an experiential cognitive scene, allowing the listener to imagine the reality of the Hereafter as if it were directly observed.

Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (n.d.) notes that Qur’anic metaphor frequently relies on sensory imagery to bridge the gap between the unseen and the witnessed, a strategy that enhances persuasion and emotional engagement. This aligns with the broader Qur’anic epistemological progression from knowledge (‘*ilm*’) to witnessing (‘*ayn*’) and ultimately to existential realisation (*ḥaqq al-yaqīn*), widely documented in classical *tafsīr* (Ibn Kathīr, 1999; al-Sa‘di, 2000).

From a cognitive perspective, this verse completes the conceptual metaphor KNOWING IS SEEING, reinforcing the Holy Qur’an’s pedagogical strategy of guiding the audience from intellectual understanding to experiential conviction.

VERSE 8:

Arabic: ثُمَّ لَنَسْأَلَنَّ عَنْ الْنَّعِيمِ

Translation: *Then you will surely be asked that Day about pleasure.*

This verse concludes the *surah* with a powerful metaphor of accountability framed through interrogation. Classical *tafsīr* consistently interprets the verb *tus'alunna* as referring to divine questioning on the Day of Judgment concerning worldly blessings and how they were used (Ibn Kathīr, 1999; al-Ṭabarī, 2001; al-Sa'dī, 2000). The concept of *al-na'im* (i.e., pleasure or blessings) is therefore recontextualised as a moral trust rather than a neutral experience.

From a rhetorical perspective, this interrogative construction represents *istifhām taqrīrī* (i.e., confirmatory interrogation), a device in Arabic rhetoric used not to request information but to affirm guilt and intensify moral responsibility (al-Qazwīnī, 2003). In *balāgha*, such questioning functions simultaneously as warning and indictment, creating a strong emotional and ethical impact on the listener (al-ʿAskarī, n.d.).

Al-Rummānī (n.d.) emphasises that Qur'anic interrogatives often serve a persuasive and admonitory function, guiding the audience toward self-reflection and moral accountability. Thus, the verse metaphorically frames worldly enjoyment as a trust subject to divine audit, transforming everyday experience into a scene of eschatological judgment.

This rhetorical shift completes the thematic movement of the *surah*, from distraction, to death, to certainty and finally to accountability, demonstrating how Qur'anic metaphor operates as a cohesive moral narrative rather than isolated figurative expressions.

SUMMARY OF CRITIQUE

This verse-by-verse analysis shows that RT, while valuable for modelling contextual inference, is insufficient as a standalone framework for Qur'anic metaphor. RT assumes cognitive economy, human speaker intention, and inferential immediacy (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), whereas classical scholarship emphasises that Qur'anic discourse is multilayered, rhetorical, and pedagogical (al-Rummānī, n.d.; al-Qazwīnī, 2003). Therefore, analysing metaphor in *surat al-Takāthur* requires a hybrid framework integrating RT with *balāgha* and CMT.

Classical rhetorical works highlight that Qur'anic metaphor serves persuasive, emotional, and moral functions beyond semantic enrichment (al-Qazwīnī, 2003; al-ʿAskarī, n.d.). While pragmatic approaches treat interpretation as probabilistic, *tafsīr* traditions present Qur'anic discourse as teleological and guidance-oriented (Ibn Kathīr, 1999; al-Sa'dī, 2000), where metaphor bridges the unseen and the witnessed (al-Rummānī, n.d.; al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, n.d.).

The Holy Qur'an's hierarchy of certainty *ilm al-yaqīn*, *ʿayn al-yaqīn*, and *ḥaqq al-yaqīn* illustrates how metaphor transforms knowledge into experiential conviction (Ibn Kathīr, 1999; al-Sa'dī, 2000). Thus, Qur'anic metaphor functions as an epistemological tool guiding ethical reflection and moral transformation (al-Qazwīnī, 2003; al-ʿAskarī, n.d.; al-Ṭabarī, 2001). Accordingly, a hybrid model combining inferential pragmatics, Arabic rhetoric, and cognitive metaphor theory is necessary to capture both the linguistic and theological dimensions of Qur'anic discourse.

HOW TO CONDUCT A FOUNDATIONAL CRITIQUE OF RT IN LIGHT OF THE DISCOURSE'S SANCTITY

THE ONTOLOGY OF THE SPEAKER

RT is fundamentally built on a model of human communication that assumes a human speaker operating within a shared and limited cognitive environment (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). In contrast, Qur'anic discourse is traditionally understood within Islamic scholarship as Divine speech, whose communicative scope extends beyond the temporal to the eschatological. Classical scholars of Qur'anic rhetoric emphasise that the Holy Qur'an cannot be analysed solely through the lens of ordinary conversational pragmatics because its communicative intent is intrinsically linked to guidance and revelation (al-Rummānī, n.d.; al-Qazwīnī, 2003).

This shift fundamentally alters the concept of intention. Whereas RT assumes conjectural and context-dependent human intention, classical *tafsīr* describes Qur'anic intention as purposeful, precise, and teleologically oriented toward guidance (Ibn Kathīr, 1999; al-Sa'dī, 2000). Consequently, the interpretive framework must account for a communicative model in which meaning is not merely inferred but deliberately structured to guide belief and behaviour.

THE TELEOLOGY OF THE DISCOURSE (THE PURPOSE)

RT evaluates communication in terms of efficiency and optimal relevance, whereas classical Islamic scholarship emphasises that Qur'anic discourse is fundamentally teleological, aimed at guidance (*hidāyah*), moral testing, and behavioural transformation (al-Ṭabarī, 2001; al-Sa'dī, 2000). Within the *tafsīr* tradition, the Holy Qur'an is understood as a text revealed to guide ethical and spiritual development rather than merely transmit information.

Arabic rhetorical scholarship similarly views Qur'anic language as intentionally persuasive and transformative, employing repetition, metaphor, warning, and vivid imagery to influence cognition, emotion, and behaviour simultaneously (al-Qazwīnī, 2003; al-ʿAskarī, n.d.; al-Rummānī, n.d.). Consequently, communicative success is measured not by minimal processing effort but by cognitive-affective transformation that moves the audience from heedlessness to awareness and ethical action.

This teleological orientation prioritises reflection (*Tadabbur*) over rapid comprehension, challenging RT's efficiency-based model and highlighting that Qur'anic metaphor seeks to reshape perception, cultivate responsibility, and guide readers toward moral accountability (Ibn Kathīr, 1999; al-Sa'dī, 2000).

THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE OUTPUTS

The outputs of RT are probabilistic and defeasible since interpretation remains open to contextual revision (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). In Qur'anic discourse, however, metaphor does not leave the recipient in a state of interpretive ambiguity; rather, it progressively guides the reader toward a structured hierarchy of certainty documented in classical *tafsīr* (Ibn Kathīr, 1999; al-Sa'dī, 2000).

Classical exegetes explain that the Holy Qur'an explicitly articulates three ascending degrees of certainty—*ʿilm al-yaqīn*, *ʿayn al-yaqīn*, and *ḥaqq al-yaqīn*—as epistemological stages that move the believer from cognitive awareness to direct witnessing and finally to existential realisation (Ibn Kathīr, 1999; al-Ṭabarī, 2001; al-Sa'dī, 2000).

- *ʿIlm al-Yaqīn* (Certainty of Knowledge): Conviction grounded in evidence and rational recognition.
- *ʿAyn al-Yaqīn* (Certainty of Sight): Conceptualisation experienced as if directly witnessed.
- *Ḥaqq al-Yaqīn* (Certainty of Truth): An existential, faith-based realisation internalised in being.

Balāgha scholars note that Qurʾanic figurative language facilitates this progression by converting abstract doctrines into perceptible imagery, thereby intensifying cognitive conviction and emotional engagement (al-Qazwīnī, 2003; al-ʿAskarī, n.d.).

Al-Rummānī (n.d.) further emphasises that Qurʾanic rhetorical structures are designed to move the audience from theoretical acknowledgement to embodied awareness, demonstrating that metaphor operates as a vehicle of epistemological elevation rather than interpretive relativity. Thus, unlike RT’s defeasible interpretive model, Qurʾanic metaphor participates in a teleological epistemology aimed at certainty rather than probabilistic inference.

METAPHOR AS AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL BRIDGE BETWEEN THE WITNESSES AND THE UNSEEN

Classical Qurʾanic scholarship emphasises that metaphor functions as a bridge between the unseen (*al-ghayb*) and the witnessed (*al-shahāda*), enabling abstract theological realities to be understood through familiar sensory experience (al-Rummānī, n.d.; al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, n.d.). Within *tafsīr* literature, such imagery is interpreted not literally but pedagogically, making eschatological and metaphysical concepts cognitively accessible (al-Ṭabarī, 2001; Ibn Kathīr, 1999).

Qurʾanic metaphors frequently render the unseen through vivid sensory imagery, such as rivers, gardens, and fruits, without reducing transcendence to materiality. Classical rhetoricians describe this as *majāz*, where abstract realities are conveyed through familiar sensory domains (al-Qazwīnī, 2003; al-ʿAskarī, n.d.), thereby strengthening belief through experiential cognition (al-Rummānī, n.d.).

Tafsīr sources also highlight the gradual pedagogical role of metaphor in guiding readers from worldly experience toward eschatological awareness (al-Saʿdī, 2000; al-Ṭabarī, 2001). For example, describing death as a “visit” reframes it as a transitional stage, preparing the audience for resurrection and accountability (Ibn Kathīr, 1999). Through such layered imagery, Qurʾanic metaphor progressively moves readers from observable reality to deeper theological understanding.

METHODOLOGICAL RULES FOR REGULATING THE ‘CERTAINTY OF METAPHOR’ IN SACRED DISCOURSE

The Rule of Intentional Transcendence: Classical Qurʾanic rhetoric consistently treats metaphor as a purposeful vehicle of guidance rather than a purely aesthetic device. Works in *balāgha* emphasise that figurative language in the Holy Qurʾan is designed to persuade, admonish, and guide the audience toward moral awareness (al-Qazwīnī, 2003; al-ʿAskarī, n.d.). *Tafsīr* literature likewise presents Qurʾanic expression as teleological, oriented toward *hidāyah* (guidance) and ethical formation rather than stylistic ornamentation (al-Ṭabarī, 2001; al-Saʿdī, 2000). Accordingly, Qurʾanic metaphor must be interpreted primarily as serving the broader purpose of spiritual instruction and moral transformation.

The Rule of Certainty Progression: Classical exegetes document the Qur’anic hierarchy of certainty—*‘ilm al-yaqīn*, *‘ayn al-yaqīn*, and *ḥaqq al-yaqīn*—as a structured epistemological progression guiding the believer from conceptual knowledge to experiential witnessing and ultimately to existential realisation (Ibn Kathīr, 1999; al-Sa’dī, 2000). Within this framework, metaphor functions as a pedagogical mechanism that moves the recipient between these levels of certainty, transforming abstract doctrines into vivid cognitive and perceptual scenarios (al-Rummānī, n.d.). Rather than leaving the audience in conjecture, Qur’anic metaphor progressively reinforces conviction and clarity.

The Rule of Behavioural Transformation: Arabic rhetorical theory recognises that figurative language influences cognition, emotion, and behaviour simultaneously (al-‘Askarī, n.d.; al-Qazwīnī, 2003). By transforming abstract concepts into experiential imagery, metaphor generates mental representations that shape judgment and ethical decision-making. *Tafsīr* scholars frequently emphasise that Qur’anic imagery aims to inspire reflection, self-evaluation, and moral accountability (al-Ṭabarī, 2001; Ibn Kathīr, 1999). Consequently, the function of metaphor extends beyond sensory representation to behavioural transformation, reinforcing the Holy Qur’an’s broader pedagogical and ethical aims.

Through this foundational framework, metaphor in the Qur’an is not a purely relative literary device capable of producing unlimited interpretive equivalence; rather, it functions as a directed rhetorical mechanism aimed at cultivating certainty and moral awareness. This necessitates, methodologically, that a *surah* such as *surat at-Takathur* (i.e., The Rivalry in Worldly Increase) be read within an epistemological-teleological model that returns pragmatic relativism to the absoluteness of guidance and certainty.

Classical rhetoric views Qur’anic figurative language as pedagogical and purposive, guiding audiences from sensory experience to theological understanding (al-Rummānī, n.d.; al-Qazwīnī, 2003). *Tafsīr* likewise frames Qur’anic discourse as oriented toward guidance and moral transformation (al-Ṭabarī, 2001; Ibn Kathīr, 1999; al-Sa’dī, 2000). Within this perspective, metaphor serves as a cognitive bridge between the witnessed (*al-shahāda*) and the unseen (*al-ghayb*), translating metaphysical realities into experiential imagery that fosters internalised belief (al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, n.d.).

RESULTS

This verse-by-verse examination highlights both the contributions and shortcomings of RT in analysing metaphor within Qur’anic discourse. RT effectively models contextual enrichment and inference-based comprehension, making it useful for identifying how readers might construct meaning from metaphoric propositions. However, its underlying assumptions limit its explanatory power in sacred texts.

First, RT prioritises cognitive economy, aiming for minimal processing effort. Yet the Holy Qur’an often intends prolonged reflection (*Tadabbur*) rather than quick comprehension (Suri & Tanjung, 2025; al-Ṭabarī, 2001; al-Sa’dī, 2000). Verses are designed to linger in the heart and intellect, not merely to yield immediate propositional meaning (al-Qazwīnī, 2003).

Second, RT assumes a human speaker-hearer model, while the Holy Qur'an is divine, and its audience includes both immediate hearers and eschatological subjects. RT struggles with divine intentionality and intertextuality, which are essential to Qur'anic rhetoric (El-Awa, 2006; Khairuddin et al., 2024; al-Rummānī, n.d.; al-ʿAskarī, n.d.).

Third, RT downplays the emotive and performative functions of language. Studies like El-Din & El-Din (2023) and Sallal & Hussein (2021) show that Qur'anic metaphor often functions to convict, console, and compel—goals that surpass RT's inferential model. The Holy Qur'an uses metaphor not merely to inform but to reshape consciousness, an act rooted in theological and affective dynamics (al-Qazwīnī, 2003; al-ʿAskarī, n.d.).

Fourth, Elamin & Alhazmi (2021b) demonstrate that metaphorical systems in the Holy Qur'an are coherently repeated across more than one *surah*, not isolated inferential events. RT lacks the tools to model these macro-level conceptual structures, which are better explained by CMT and Frame Semantics.

For these reasons, this study proposes a hybrid model—RT for inferential scaffolding, *balāgha* for rhetorical depth, and CMT for thematic mapping—better suited for capturing the multilayered metaphoricity of the Holy Qur'an.

The metaphorical analysis of *surat al-Takāthur* revealed three dominant conceptual patterns, each tied to broader Qur'anic themes: material obsession, mortality and death, and epistemic certainty. These themes are not only lexically marked but also tightly structured around metaphorical concepts that demand layered interpretation.

The opening verse, *أَلْهَاكُمْ التَّكَاثُرُ* “*al-hākumu al-takāthur*” (“Your competition for [worldly] increase distracts you”), uses a nominal form (*takāthur*) to metaphorise greed as a state of cognitive delusion (Ibn Kathīr, 1999; al-Saʿdī, 2000). While RT can account for how the metaphor prompts inferencing about social rivalry and distraction, it overlooks the spiritual disorientation the metaphor aims to evoke—something that *balāgha* and classical *tafsīr* traditions emphasise (Elamin & Alhazmi, 2021; al-Ṭabarī, 2001).

Another key metaphor is found in *حَتَّىٰ زُرْتُمُ الْمَقَابِرَ* “*hattā zurtum al-maqābir*” (“until you visit the graves”). The act of visiting death metaphorically frames mortality not as a final state but as a transitional phase, implying temporality and moral accountability (Ibn Kathīr, 1999; al-Ṭabarī, 2001). Under RT, this can be seen as an enrichment of the base proposition—i.e., death is metaphorically implied to be a “visit”—but it struggles to address the existential urgency and didactic force that the metaphor carries. Previous research has shown that Qur'anic death metaphors serve to soften fear while instilling accountability, creating an emotive duality (Alhusban & Alkhawaldah, 2018), which RT's cognitive-economy model doesn't fully capture.

The closing verses—particularly *ثُمَّ لَنَسْأَلَنَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَنِ النَّعِيمِ* “*thumma latus'alunna yawma'idhin 'ani al-na'im*” (“Then you will surely be asked that Day about pleasure”)—frame worldly pleasures as divine accountability, a key example of the metaphors analysed in this study (see Table 1). Here, metaphor operates by transferring abstract eschatological judgment into the realm of forensic questioning, a motif that relies heavily on cultural and theological context (al-Qazwīnī, 2003). RT explains this in terms of contextual inference (i.e., understanding “pleasure” as material indulgence), but again, it underrepresents the intertextual and theological scaffolding required for such an interpretation (Khairuddin et al., 2024; Sallal & Hussein, 2021).

TABLE 1. Identified Metaphorical Expressions

Verse	Arabic Term	Literal Meaning	Metaphorical Concept	Theme
1	التَّكَاثُرُ (takāthur)	Accumulation/Competition	Greed as distraction	Materialism
2	زُرْتُمْ (zurtum)	You visited	Death as temporary visit	Mortality
5	عِلْمُ الْيَقِينِ ('ilm al-yaqīn)	Knowledge of certainty	Epistemic certainty as vision	Certainty & judgment
6	تَرَوْنَ (tarawunna)	You will see	Hellfire as experiential vision	Eschatology
8	تُسْأَلُونَ (tus'alunna)	You will be asked	Pleasure as divine accountability	Ethical responsibility

CRITIQUE OF RELEVANCE THEORY IN QUR'ANIC METAPHOR ANALYSIS

While RT is a powerful tool for analysing communication and implicature, its application to Qur'anic metaphor, particularly in a thematic analysis setting, has serious limitations. Its central assumption that hearers process language by seeking the most relevant interpretation with the least cognitive effort often misaligns with the Holy Qur'an's communicative strategy, which prioritises reflection (i.e., *Tadabbur*) over inferential immediacy (Sardaraz & Ali, 2021; al-Ṭabarī, 2001; al-Sa'dī, 2000). This is especially problematic in metaphorical verses where theological concepts are layered and often meant to evoke not quick comprehension but spiritual transformation. Moreover, RT is built on the premise of human speaker intention, whereas the Holy Qur'an is believed to be divine speech. This shift in speaker ontology affects the inferential framework: while RT assumes a shared cognitive environment between speaker and hearer, Qur'anic metaphors frequently rely on transcendent meanings that resist secular models of context and intention (El-Din & El-Din, 2023; al-Rummānī, n.d.). These limitations—including its inadequate speaker model and its underrepresentation of theological and emotional meaning—are systematically outlined in Table 2, which contrasts RT's framework with a more comprehensive hybrid model. Several studies (e.g., El-Awa, 2006; Suri & Tanjung, 2025) have emphasised that Qur'anic coherence and metaphor are structured around divine attributes and eschatological themes, a dimension that RT cannot adequately address without significant theological supplementation, as the table demonstrates. Classical rhetoric similarly emphasises the coherence and persuasive force of Qur'anic figurative language (al-Qazwīnī, 2003; al-ʿAskarī, n.d.).

Additionally, Elamin and Alhazmi (2021) and Alhusban and Alkhawaldah (2018) revealed that Qur'anic metaphors often draw on fixed conceptual mappings—such as *light* = *guidance* or *death* = *transition*—that recur across the Holy Qur'an. While RT can model localised relevance, it lacks tools to capture such cross-*surah* thematic coherence. Furthermore, metaphorical clusters such as *light*, *death*, and *pleasure* encode affective and epistemic meanings that go beyond cognitive inference. This supports the need for a hybrid model—one that uses RT's strengths in contextual analysis but integrates classical rhetoric and cognitive semantics for a fuller account.

TABLE 2. Limits of Relevance Theory vs. Proposed Model

Aspect	Relevance Theory	Hybrid Model (RT + CMT + <i>Balāgha</i>)
Speaker model	Human conversationalist	Divine speech; eschatological audience
Focus	Cognitive efficiency, inference	Cognitive, theological, rhetorical
Treatment of metaphor	Contextual enrichment	Layered conceptual and moral meaning
Emotional/performative use	Underrepresented	Central to analysis (esp. warnings, threats)
Intertextuality	Minimal attention	Accounted for via CMT and Arabic rhetoric

The contrasts in Table 2 highlight a key gap when RT is used alone. Moving from a human speaker model to a divine communicative context reshapes assumptions about intention and audience (El-Awa, 2006; al-Rummānī, n.d.). While RT emphasises inferential efficiency, Qur'anic discourse operates through layered cognitive, rhetorical, emotional, and theological purposes (al-Qazwīnī, 2003; al-ʿAskārī, n.d.). Rather than simple contextual enrichment, Qur'anic metaphors function as moral and conceptual structures guiding reflection and behaviour (al-Ṭabarī, 2001; Ibn Kathīr, 1999). Their emotional force and recurring intertextual patterns further support adopting a hybrid framework that integrates RT, CMT, and Arabic rhetoric (Elamin & Alhazmi, 2021; Alhusban & Alkhawaldah, 2018).

DISCUSSION

The analysis of *surat al-Takāthur* revealed that Qur'anic metaphors are conceptually dense, theologically layered, and rhetorically powerful, demanding an interpretive model that can accommodate both inferential logic and spiritual intentionality. While RT offers a solid framework for explaining how meaning is inferred in context, this study demonstrates that RT alone is insufficient for capturing the full communicative function of metaphor in the Holy Qur'an (El-Awa, 2006).

Classical *tafsīr* and *balāgha* scholarship emphasise that Qur'anic figurative language serves guidance and ethical transformation, not merely efficient communication. Exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī (2001), Ibn Kathīr (1999), and al-Saʿdī (2000) view Qur'anic imagery as a pedagogical tool for cultivating moral awareness and strengthening faith. Likewise, rhetoricians describe Qur'anic discourse as deliberately persuasive, employing metaphor, warning, repetition, and vivid imagery to shape cognition, emotion, and behaviour (al-Qazwīnī, 2003; al-Rummānī, n.d.). These perspectives support the need for a hybrid model that integrates inferential pragmatics with theological and rhetorical analysis.

The analysis also shows that many Qur'anic metaphors function within recurring conceptual systems that extend across chapters. Metaphors of light, certainty, and death are intertextual and cumulative rather than isolated. Elamin and Alhazmi (2021) demonstrate this coherence in their study of light as a source domain, indicating that Qur'anic metaphor operates systemically. By contrast, RT focuses on individual utterances in a local context and lacks tools for modelling such macro-level conceptual mappings.

In addition, the metaphors analysed—such as *takāthur* (i.e., rivalry in worldly increase), *ziyārah* (i.e., visiting the grave), and *ʿilm al-yaqīn* (i.e., knowledge of certainty)—were shown to function as epistemic, affective, and ontological devices. These metaphors are not just about conveying information but about shaping consciousness and provoking reflection. This aligns with Sallal and Hussein's (2021) analysis of implicit meaning in *Surat Yusuf*, where they argue that Qur'anic language often invites delayed understanding rather than instant inference—challenging RT's premise of optimal relevance through minimal effort.

Furthermore, RT's reliance on the notion of a human speaker with discernible intentions falters in the context of divine communication. The Holy Qur'an, presented as the speech of Allah, the Almighty, does not always follow the pragmatic logic of conversational implicature. As Khairuddin et al. (2024) note, divine discourse is asymmetrical—meaning is layered, contextually dynamic, and not always bound by the conventions of human-to-human communication. Thus, applying RT without accounting for the ontological uniqueness of the Holy Qur'an leads to interpretive reductionism.

This study supports a growing consensus in Qur'anic linguistics that a single theoretical model cannot account for the Holy Qur'an's rhetorical, cognitive, and spiritual complexity. Instead, a hybrid approach is required—one that uses RT for identifying contextual inferences, CMT for mapping recurring conceptual structures, and classical Arabic rhetoric (*balāgha*) for understanding stylistic and theological intent. This triangulated methodology enables a richer, more faithful interpretation of metaphor in the Holy Qur'an.

CONCLUSION

This study critically evaluated RT as a tool for analysing metaphoricity in *surat al-Takāthur* and found that while RT contributes meaningfully to our understanding of contextual inference, it is not robust enough to handle the theological depth, emotional charge, and rhetorical strategy of Qur'anic metaphor. By conducting a verse-by-verse thematic analysis using the *Saheeh* International translation and by identifying metaphorical expressions, the study highlighted the limitations of a purely pragmatic model when applied to divine discourse.

Through engagement with prior scholarship—including the works of El-Awa (2006), Alhusban and Alkhawaldah (2018), and Sardaraz and Ali (2021)—this research demonstrated that Qur'anic metaphors function as vehicles of spiritual transformation, not just cognitive enrichment. The findings support a hybrid interpretive model that integrates RT with cognitive metaphor theory and Arabic rhetoric, offering a more comprehensive framework for understanding how metaphors shape meaning in the Holy Qur'an.

Future research should explore this hybrid model across larger Qur'anic corpora, testing its applicability to other texts in the Holy Qur'an that feature metaphorical clusters—such as those involving *light*, *guidance*, *fire*, and *vision*. Moreover, cross-linguistic studies comparing how different Qur'anic translations render metaphor can further reveal the interpretive tensions between literal preservation and theological exposition.

This study makes several contributions to the field of Qur'anic linguistics and metaphor research. First, it provides a focused verse-level case study that moves beyond the application of RT toward a critical evaluation of its theoretical limits in sacred discourse. Second, it develops and operationalises a hybrid analytical framework that integrates inferential pragmatics, CMT, and Arabic rhetorical tradition, offering a replicable model for future research. Third, by combining thematic analysis with classical *tafsīr* and *balāgha* insights, the study bridges modern linguistic theory and traditional Islamic scholarship, demonstrating how interdisciplinary approaches can yield a more comprehensive understanding of Qur'anic metaphor. In doing so, the research contributes methodological clarity and theoretical advancement to ongoing discussions on the adaptation of contemporary linguistic models to religious texts.

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