

## CHAPTER II

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION OF SEMANTICS

#### A. Definition and Development of Semantics

Semantic is the philosophical and scientific study of meaning. The term is one of a group of English words formed from the various derivatives of the Greek verb *se>maino* ('to mean' or 'to signify'). The noun semantics and the adjective semantics are derived from *se>mantikos* ('significant').<sup>1</sup> In more simply understanding, semantics is the science concerning the symbols and signs that express the meaning, and the correlation among such meanings. Study of semantics, therefore, including the meaning of a word, its development, and its change. The meaning is object of semantics study because of its position within the elements of language, namely word, phrase, clause, sentence, paragraph, and discourse.<sup>2</sup> Semanticists examine how words, phrases and sentences combine in ways that are acceptable to language users, observing that appeals to grammaticality alone cannot explain these.

Within linguistic, semantics is concerned with the conveyance of meaning by the grammatical and lexical devices of a language. According to the theoretical descriptive and historical slants of linguistic investigation, semantic problems respectively assume a general, synchronic, or diachronic character. The self-evident systematicity of grammatical phenomena has always been conducive to their relatively reliable semantic analysis. When it comes to the looser domain of vocabulary, however, the obscurity of the underlying structure quickly embroils semantic analysis in some of the more inconclusive epistemological controversies of social science. While vast supplies of raw semantic data repose in dictionaries of various languages, there is no consensus among linguists on a coherent theory

---

<sup>1</sup> *The New Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 16*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., London, 1982, p. 506.

<sup>2</sup> Moh. Sahlan, *Teknik Analisis Tafsir*, at *Metodologi Ilmu Tafsir*, A. Rafiq, (ed.), Teras, Yogyakarta, 2005, p. 79.

in accordance with which this material can be analyzed and compared for purpose of generalization.<sup>3</sup>

The study of signs has been called ‘semiosis’ or ‘semiotics’. However, even among specialists ‘semantics’ is the commonly employed generic name for the field, especially if the subject is restricted to linguistic signs, namely symbols. Symbols occur in at least three distinguishable groups of relations: (a) they are related to other symbols, (b) they are related to things other than symbols by such relations as referring, denoting, meaning, and connoting, (c) they are related to things other than symbols by such relations as using, uttering, responding to, and noticing.

The broad field of semantics is divided into three subjects on the basis of these groups; the first is syntax, the second semantics, and the third pragmatics. The narrower field of semantics is sometimes further divided into two subjects; the theory of reference (denotation, extension) and the theory of meaning (connotation, intension). Cutting across these categories is Carnap’s distinction between descriptive semantics, or the empirical investigation of natural languages, and pure semantics, the analytical study of artificial languages.<sup>4</sup>

The science of linguistics is concerned with the theory of language expressed in terms of linguistic universal, namely features that common to all natural languages. According to the widely adopted schema of the U.S. scholar Charles W. Morris, this theory must embrace three domains: pragmatics, semantics, and syntax—as it was mentioned above. Pragmatics is the study of the language user as such, semantics is the study of the elements of a language from the point of view of meaning, and syntax is the study of the formal interrelations that exist between the elements of a language (sounds, words) themselves.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> David L. Sills, ed., *International Encyclopedia of the Social Science*, The Macmillan Company & The Free Press, New York, 1972, p. 164-165.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. & The Free Press, New York, 1972, p. 348-349.

<sup>5</sup> The New Encyclopedia Britannica, *op. cit.*, p. 510.

In linguistics, semantics has its beginnings in France and Germany in the 1820s when the meanings of words as significant features in the growth of language was recognized. Among the foremost linguistic semanticists of the 20th cent. are Gustaf Stern, Jost Trier, B. L. Whorf, Uriel Weinreich, Stephen Ullmann, Thomas Sebeok, Noam Chomsky, Jerrold Katz, and Charles Osgood. In the linguistics of recent years an offshoot of transformational grammar theory has reemphasized the role of meaning in linguistic analysis. This new theory, developed largely by George Lakoff and James McCawley, is termed generative semantics. In anthropology a new theoretical orientation related to linguistic semantics has been developed. Its leading proponents include W. H. Goodenough, F. G. Lounsbury, and Claude Lévi-Strauss.<sup>6</sup>

In philosophy, semantics has generally followed the lead of symbolic logic, and many philosophers do not make a distinction between logic and semantics. In this context, semantics is concerned with such issues as meaning and truth, meaning and thought, and the relation between signs and what they mean. The leading practitioners have been Gottlob Frege, Lady Welby, Bertrand Russell, Otto Neurath, Rudolf Carnap, Alonzo Church, Alfred Tarski, C. I. Lewis, Ludwig Wittgenstein, J. L. Austin, W. V. Quine, P. F. Strawson, Steven Schiffer, John Searle, H. P. Grice, Saul Kripke, Donald Davidson, and Gilbert Harman.

Since the publication of the influential *The Meaning of Meaning* (1925) by C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, semantics has also become important to literary criticism and stylistics, in which the way that metaphors evoke feelings is investigated and differences between ordinary and literary language are studied. A related discipline, general semantics (so called to distinguish it from semantics in linguistics or philosophy), studies the ways in which meanings of words influence human behavior. General semantics was developed by Alfred Korzybski. The key term in Korzybski's system is evaluation, the mental act that is performed by the hearer when a word is spoken. Among the most prominent followers of Korzybski are Stuart Chase, S. I. Hayakawa, and H. L. Weinberg.

---

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.reference.com/browse/semantics>

It has been three theories in semantics: lexical and conceptual semantics, lexical semantics, and computational semantics.<sup>7</sup> Lexical and conceptual semantics theory is an effort to explain properties of argument structure. The assumption behind this theory is that syntactic properties of phrases reflect the meanings of the words that head them. With this theory, linguists can better deal with the fact that subtle differences in word meaning correlate with other differences in the syntactic structure that the word appears in. The way this is gone about is by looking at the internal structure of words. These small parts that make up the internal structure of words are referred to as semantic primitives.

Lexical Semantics is a linguistic theory that investigates word meaning. This theory understands that the meaning of a word is fully reflected by its context. Here, the meaning of a word is constituted by its contextual relations. Therefore, a distinction between degrees of participation as well as modes of participation are made. In order to accomplish this distinction any part of a sentence that bears a meaning and combines with the meanings of other constituents is labeled as a semantic constituent. Semantic constituents that can not be broken down into more elementary constituents is labeled a minimal semantic constituent.

Computational semantics is focused on the processing of linguistic meaning. In order to do this concrete algorithms and architectures are described. Within this framework the algorithms and architectures are also analyzed in terms of decidability, time/space complexity, data structures which they require and communication protocols.

## **B. Semantic Analysis towards the Qur'ān and Its Principles**

In the context of Qur'anic interpretation, structurally, the primary data of research of *tafsir* is consisting of one or more simple sentences or wide ones. The wide sentences are consisting of primary sentences and secondary ones called as clause. In lower level, it is consisting of phrase and word. By this, a verse of

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semantics>

Qur'an is formed from. Every element of the verse has its own meaning as a semantic aspect.<sup>8</sup> In addition, caused research object of *tafsir* is the data from Qur'anic verses, so such data is analyzed by following order: word or vocabulary of Qur'an, phrase of Qur'an, clause of Qur'an, the complete verse of Qur'an, and interrelation among such elements.<sup>9</sup>

The elaboration of semantic method employed to analyze and understand Qur'an in this passage is most derived from the method laid down by Toshihiko Izutsu. He has explained and applied his method to some of Qur'anic concepts about certain problem. The works written by him concerning this method are *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, *God and Man in the Koran: A Semantical Analysis of the Koranic Weltanschauung*, and *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology*.

According to Toshihiko Izutsu, semantics is analytical study of key terms of certain language by means of the views that finally aimed to reach the *weltanschauung* or world-view of the society who utilize such language. It is used to not only speak and think, but the more significant thing, mapping the concept and interpreting the world around it. Semantics, in this understanding, is like such *weltanschauung-lehre*, study of characteristics and world-view structures of a nation at recent time or the significant period of their history, by means of devices of methodological analysis towards the primary concepts produced by them for themselves in which crystallize into key words of such language.<sup>10</sup>

In semantic study, in which the terms of a language are structured, it is needed for further investigation towards 'basic meaning' and 'relational meaning'. Basic meaning is the meaning that is contained within certain word and is always adhered in which context and situation it is employed. Whether relational meaning is connotative meaning which is attributed to the meaning has existed by placing

---

<sup>8</sup> Moh. Sahlan, *loc. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Moh. Sahlan, *op. cit.*, p. 79-80.

<sup>10</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, *Relasi Tuhan dan Manusia: Pendekatan Semantik terhadap al-Qur'an*, Transl. Agus Fahri Husein, Supriyanto Abdullah, and Amirudin, PT Tiara Wacana, Yogyakarta, 1997, p. 3.

it in special position and context that has different relation with other words in whole system.<sup>11</sup>

In semantic method, the analysis which is applied to the Qur'anic data is to make the Qur'an interprets its own concepts and speak for itself. In other words, what is central in the inquiry is not so much the material as the method of linguistic analysis applied to that material, the specific point of view from which it attempts to analyze the semantic structure of the value words of the Qur'an in the field of conduct and character.<sup>12</sup>

The concept of "Qur'an interprets its own concepts and speaks for itself" just elaborated is seemingly similar with the concept of "*al-Qur' ān yufassiru ba'd}uhu ba'd}an*" laid down by the classical scholars of *tafsir*, such Qatādah. In his opinion, the verses of Qur'an are united in certain topic. By this, the verses of Qur'an explain each others. For instance is surah al-Ah}zāb (33:22), which is explained widely by another verse in Qur'an, namely surah al-Baqarah (2:214).<sup>13</sup>

Semantic analysis towards certain concept in the Qur'an is operated by describing the semantic category of a word in terms of the conditions in which it is used. What features of the environment are necessary if the word is to be used properly to designate a given event? Only by attempting to answer such a question can we arrive at the correct meaning of a given word.<sup>14</sup>

In further operation of semantical method towards the Qur'an, Toshihiko Izutsu applies and explains it to the concept of ethico-religious within Qur'an. It is begun by setting out to observe minutely all the available instances of the actual use of ethico-religious terms, analyze carefully the situational contexts, construct hypotheses, which in turn we must check against further evidence and revise if necessary. By this way, we hope to arrive at a satisfactory solution to the

---

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, McGill University Press, Montreal, 1966, p. 3-4.

<sup>13</sup> Dr. Phil. M. Nur Kholis Setiawan, *Al-Qur'an Kitab Sastra Terbesar*, eLSAQ Press, Yogyakarta, 2005, p. 141-142.

<sup>14</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

problem.<sup>15</sup> In another passage of his book, Toshihiko has also elaborated the steps in analyzing semantically towards certain concept in the Qur'an. Those steps are: to bring the verses together, compare, and put in relation all the terms that resemble, oppose, and correspond with each other.<sup>16</sup>

Besides the method just elaborated above, there are also seven cases in which any passage clearly assumes a strategic importance for the method of semantic analysis.<sup>17</sup> Those are:

1. Contextual Definition

It is the case in which a passage is semantically relevant occurs when the precise meaning of a word is elucidated concretely in its context by means of verbal description. The example is the concept of *al-birr* in surah al-Baqarah (2: 177). In such verses, *al-birr* is verbally described obviously. The passage declare most emphatically that *al-birr* is the true sense does not consist in observing outwardly the rules of religious formalism, but is that kind of social righteousness that naturally arises from a deep monotheistic faith in God.

2. Synonym

When a word X is substituted for a word Y in the same passage or in exactly the same kind of verbal context, whether its range of application be wider or narrower than that of Y, the substitution is helpful in investigating the semantic category of either word. For example is surah al-A'rāf (7:94-95). From a comparison of verse 94 and verse 95 it will be readily seen that the whole phrase *ba'sā'* and *d}arrā'* in the former is replaced in the latter by *sayyi'ah* without any essential change of meaning. And to see this is to know for certain that the word *sayyi'ah*, which is recognizing a near equivalent of 'evil' or 'bad', may be used in certain contexts to convey the meaning of something like 'hardship', 'misery', or 'distress'. We observe further that this *sayyi'ah* is contrasted in 95 with *h}asanah*, usually meaning 'good', which is

---

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37-41.

in turn replaced in the same passage by *sarrā*’, meaning approximately ‘joy’ or ‘happiness’.

### 3. Antonym or Contrast

We might mention the case in which the semantic structure of a given term is elucidated by contrast. The word *khayr* for instance, is perhaps the nearest equivalent of the English word ‘good’ in the moral sense. But there are in Arabic many other words that appear to participate concurrently in the general connotation of goodness, of which we have actually seen one in the preceding section, *h}asanah*. The difference between *khayr* and *h}asanah* will be made clear to a considerable extent by the knowledge that *khayr* is generally used in opposition to *sharr* whereas *h}asanah* is opposed to *sayyi’ah*. If we can ascertain the precise meaning of anyone of the four terms, we shall become surer also about the meaning of the remaining three.

### 4. Negative Form

The case in which the semantic structure of an obscure word X is cleared up in terms of its negative form, not-X. The verb *istakbara* is one of the most important terms of negative evaluation in the Qur’an. Roughly it means ‘to be big with pride’ , ‘to act haughtily and scornfully’, and is used to refer to a characteristic feature of the *kāfir*. In the following example this verb appears in its negative form and describes from behind, so to speak, the conduct of one who behaves ‘haughtily’. Like as surah 32:5. What line of conduct do ‘those who are not haughty’ adopt? How do they actually behave when they find themselves face to face with divine signs? To know something positive and concrete about this is to know many things about the nature of that special kind of haughtiness which is designated by the word *istakbara*.

### 5. Semantic Field

It is any set of patterned semantic relations between certain words of a language. A word rarely stands aloof from others and maintains its existence all alone, on the contrary, words manifest everywhere a very marked tendency to combine with certain others in the context of occurrence. Every word has, as it were, its own choice of companions, so much so that the entire



vocabulary of a language forms an extremely tangled web of semantic groupings. From the standpoint of semanticist, any passage is semantically significant that contributes in some way or other towards determining the bounds of a field of meaning. For example is the words *iftarā-kādhīb-z}ālim*. The verb *iftarā* (to invent to forge) most frequently takes as its grammatical object the noun '*kādhīb*' (lie), thus forming a well-nigh inseparable group. To join this group comes the word *z}ālim*. In fact the expression 'who does more wrong, or who is more unjust, (*az}lam*), than he who forges (*iftarā*), against God a lie (*kādhīb*)?' is one of the set phrase of Qur'an. The words *iftarā-kādhīb-z}ālim*, therefore, is a peculiar group or combination in the Qur'an, a semantic field in the sense just explained.

#### 6. Rhetorical Parallelism

Very often the rhetorical device of parallelism reveals the existence of a semantic relationship between two or more words. There are a number of passages where parallelism helps to bring out a particular aspect of some semantic field. See at surah 5:44, 45, and 47. Here the three words *kāfir*, *z}ālim*, and *fāsiq* are put semantically on a par with one another in respect to not giving judgment according to what God has revealed. Thus it will be evident that these words define a specific phase of a wider semantic field, that of 'unbelief'.

#### 7. Non-Religious Using

The key ethical terms in the Qur'an are generally used in contexts of deep religious import. Sometimes, however, we find them used in non-religious contexts which reveal the purely secular aspects of their meanings. These cases naturally furnish the semanticist with extremely valuable material for advancing his studies of the structure of the words concerned. The instance is surah 26:18-19 in which the Pharaoh said to Moses in a patently non-religious context of meaning, when the latter has slain an Egyptian subject of the former. Nothing indeed throws such a clear light on the basic elements of 'ingratitude', which constitutes the original semantic core of the root *k.f.r.*

### C. Significance of Semantic Analysis towards the Qur'ān

Every word in certain language has its own typical intrinsic meaning. It represents and embodies a particular world-view which transforms the raw material experience into a meaningful or interpreted world. Such meaning is also used in certain context and environment, which cannot be replaced by another word even it is the synonym. In the other words, each one of the words represents a particular perspective in which we see the word, and what is called a 'concept' is nothing but the crystallization of such a subjective perspective, that is to say it is a more or less stable form assumed by the perspective.

Of course the perspective above in question is not subjective in the sense that is individual; it is not individual but social, for it is one common possession of a whole community, handed down from preceding ages by historical tradition. And yet it is subjective in the sense that it brings in something of the positive human interest which makes our conceptual representation of the world not an exact duplicate of objective reality. In this context semantics holds a role as an analytical study of such perspectives crystallized into words.

By this, translating roughly the certain word of a language—in particular foreign language—into our language is not proper way to get understanding. For example is translating the Greek word *areté* with 'virtue' in English word in discussing Aristotle's view of the 'virtuous' man. The English word 'virtue', which is used almost exclusively as the equivalent of *areté*, is very misleading. The danger of this attempt is patent. Taking the wrong equivalence *areté*=virtue, and without stopping a moment to question the validity of this formula, it might be led into futile discussions about the nature of the Greek 'virtue' or about the divergences of opinion between the English and Greek peoples on the essence of 'virtue'.<sup>18</sup> *Areté*, in this context, would be more accurately rendered as 'excellence', the object of admiration.

As well as in the context of Qur'an, deriving roughly a word from it verses and translating it into not-Arabic language drives to the misleading of

---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4-5.

understanding. In this way the Arabic *kāfir* might be explained as meaning the same as ‘misbeliever’ in English, *z}ālim* as ‘evil doer’, *dhanb* as ‘sin’, etc. There can be no question that there is recognizably some sort of semantic equivalence in each case. On the other hand, anyone acquainted with the Arabic language will have to admit on reflection that these apparently nearest equivalents are far from being able to do justice to the original words. A *z}ālim* is not exactly an ‘evil doer’, as well as *kafir* and ‘misbeliever’, there is a difference too important to be ignored. Such understanding can be obtained by analyzing it by means of semantic method.

There is, to be sure, no denying that the semantic category of the Arabic word *kāfir* itself contains an important element of ‘belief’. But, it must be remembered, this is not the only basic semantic constituent of the word, nor is it the original one. An examination of pre-Islamic literature discloses that the real core of its semantic structure was by no means ‘unbelief’, but rather ‘ingratitude’ or ‘unthankfulness’. The word *kafir* was originally the contrary of *shākir*, ‘one who is thankful’.

In Islam, one of the keynotes of belief is gratitude, thankfulness. And this is the counterpart of the Qur’anic conception of God as the gracious, merciful Lord of men and all beings. In fact the Qur’an never tires of emphasizing that purely gratuitous act of benevolence on the part of Almighty God, which He bestows upon all beings. In return, man owes Him the duty of being thankful for His grace and goodness. *Kāfir* is a man who does not, would not show any sign of gratitude in his conduct.<sup>19</sup>

The elaborations just elucidated above, therefore, implied the significance of semantic method towards the Qur’an. Studying the Qur’an by means of semantic method drive us to the right and proper understanding towards certain concepts contained by the Qur’an. So we hope that the complete and comprehensive understanding of Qur’an will come to be true in the sphere of Qur’anic interpretation. [\*]

---

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.