

A Linguistic Study of Parallelism in Arabic Religious Discourse: Evidence from Selected Verses of the Qur'an

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HOW TO CITE:

Razzaq Nayef Mukheef, Shaymaa A. Abdulameer (2026). A Linguistic Study of Parallelism in Arabic Religious Discourse: Evidence from Selected Verses of the Qur'an

International Journal of Special Education, 41 (19s) 961 - 974

ABSTRACT:

Background: Parallelism (al-tawāzī) and its principal sub-type, tarṣīʿ, are among the most frequently cited rhetorical devices in the classical Arabic balāgha tradition, where they are treated as markers of eloquence and, in the case of the Qur'an, as an aspect of its inimitability (iʿjāz). Although Arab rhetoricians from Al-'Askarī (10th century) to Al-Suyūṭī (15th century) described parallelism extensively, and a substantial comparative literature on parallelism exists in biblical and general linguistic scholarship, the two traditions are rarely brought into dialogue, and Qur'anic parallelism has seldom been analyzed through an explicit, verse-referenced typology.

Aim: This study identifies and classifies the types of parallelism operating in a purposively selected set of Qur'anic verses, and examines how phonological, syntactic, and semantic repetition contributes to rhythmic coordination and rhetorical emphasis.

Method: A qualitative, descriptive-analytical design was used. The corpus comprises sixteen verse-groups drawn from ten Suras (Nūḥ, al-Ghāshiyah, al-Infīṭār, Yā-Sīn, al-Mu'minūn, al-Aḥzāb, al-Raḥmān, Fuṣṣilat, al-Shūrā, and al-Nisā'), selected because they are the instances most frequently cited by classical rhetoricians as canonical examples of tawāzī. Each verse is presented with transliteration, a literal gloss, and a literary translation, and analyzed against a four-part typology developed from the classical taxonomy.

Findings: The analysis identifies four recurrent patterns: (a) lexical-phonological parallelism (tarṣīʿ), in which paired clause-final words match in morphological weight (wazn) and end-rhyme; (b) partial tunic (rhythmic) repetition, in which a fixed syntactic frame recurs across non-adjacent verses; (c) total tunic repetition, in which an entire refrain recurs verbatim, most saliently the sequential structure of Sūrat al-Raḥmān; and (d) temporal-aspectual parallelism, in which parallel clauses shift grammatical tense to mark a semantic transition. These patterns operate simultaneously at phonemic, syntactic, and semantic

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levels, consistent with Jakobson's (1960) account of linguistic parallelism as multi-level equivalence.

Conclusion: Qur'anic parallelism is not a single ornamental device but a layered rhetorical system in which sound, structure, and meaning are coordinated simultaneously. Reading this system alongside the comparative literature on biblical parallelism (Lowth, 1753; Kugel, 1981; Berlin, 1985) suggests a productive direction for future corpus-based and cross-Semitic research.

Keywords: parallelism; tarṣī'; Qur'anic rhetoric; Arabic balāgha; linguistic typology; comparative Semitic poetics

1. Introduction

Parallelism — the patterned recurrence of sound, structure, or meaning across adjacent or non-adjacent stretches of discourse — is a rhetorical device attested across a wide range of literary and religious traditions. In the Arabic rhetorical tradition, parallelism (al-tawāzī) and its more specific manifestation, tarṣī' (lexical-phonological matching), occupy a central place in the study of balāgha, and are treated by classical rhetoricians as contributing directly to the Qur'an's claimed inimitability (i'jāz). The present study examines how parallelism operates in a purposively selected set of Qur'anic verses, with attention to the phonological, syntactic, and semantic levels at which it is realized.

Classical Arab rhetoricians — among them Al-'Askarī, Ibn al-Athīr, Al-Qazwīnī, Al-'Alawī, and Al-Suyūṭī — developed a rich descriptive vocabulary for parallelism, distinguishing tarṣī' (embroidered, weight-matched parallelism), tawāzun (equilibrium without rhyme), and related categories of saj' (rhymed prose). This descriptive tradition remains the primary reference point for Arabic-language scholarship on the subject. At the same time, a substantial body of comparative scholarship on parallelism has developed independently in biblical studies and general linguistics, beginning with Lowth's (1753) foundational description of parallelism in Hebrew poetry and continuing through Jakobson's (1960) linguistic theory of the poetic function, which treats parallelism as the

projection of equivalence relations onto sequential structure at every level of language — phonological, grammatical, and semantic. Kugel (1981), Alter (1985), and Berlin (1985) subsequently refined this account for biblical Hebrew, with Berlin explicitly grounding her framework in Jakobson's linguistics.

These two traditions — classical Arabic balāgha and the Jakobson-influenced comparative study of Semitic parallelism — have developed largely in isolation from one another. Recent work has begun to call for their integration: Ahmad and Ahmad Ghafar (2026), for instance, argue that Qur'anic rhetorical features such as i'jāz and naẓm (textual composition) should be reinterpreted through modern linguistic and corpus-based lenses without discarding the insights of classical balāgha. The present study responds to this call by developing an explicit, verse-referenced typology of Qur'anic parallelism, built on the classical taxonomy but framed in terms compatible with the comparative linguistic literature.

Three research questions guide the analysis: (1) What types of parallelism — phonological, syntactic, and semantic — recur in the selected Qur'anic verses, and how can they be organized into a coherent typology? (2) How does parallelism function rhetorically within these verses, particularly in relation to rhythm, emphasis, and textual cohesion? (3) How does this typology relate to comparable descriptions of parallelism in the broader comparative literature

on Semitic and general linguistic parallelism? Correspondingly, the study aims to (a) classify instances of parallelism in the selected corpus using a replicable typology, (b) analyze the phonological, syntactic, and semantic mechanisms underlying each type, and (c) situate the findings within the wider comparative literature on parallelism.

The contribution of the study is twofold. First, it offers a typology of Qur'anic parallelism that is anchored to specific, identifiable verses rather than illustrated through isolated, decontextualized examples, which allows the analysis to be checked and extended by other researchers. Second, it positions Qur'anic parallelism within the broader international literature on linguistic and biblical parallelism, addressing a gap noted in recent scholarship on Qur'anic discourse. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews the classical Arabic literature on parallelism alongside the comparative linguistic literature; Section 3 describes the corpus and analytical procedure; Section 4 presents the analysis; Section 5 discusses the findings in relation to the literature; and Section 6 concludes with limitations and directions for future research.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Historical background of parallelism in the Arabic rhetorical tradition

Jakobson (1988) traces parallelism as a stylistic pattern in the ancient Near East to Babylonian literature, citing the Epic of Creation, the Epic of Gilgamesh, and Sumerian hymns as early instances of structurally paired lines. Within the Arabic literary tradition, parallelism is closely associated with rhymed prose (*saj'*), and is widely attested in the Qur'an, in Hadith, and in pre-Islamic and classical poetry and prose. Two illustrative examples from the classical corpus are commonly cited: the paired Qur'anic clauses in which the community's victory and its receipt of scripture are matched in structure and rhyme (Ali, 1983, p. 1195), and a saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad in which three parallel conditional clauses — regarding hospitality, kinship ties, and speech — are joined by the

recurring formula 'whoever believes in God and the Last Day.' Crystal (1965) similarly observes that Arabic rhymed prose serves the same aesthetic function that rhyme serves in poetry, achieved through the twin mechanisms of homophony and homography.

2.2 The concept of parallelism

Classical Arab rhetoricians defined parallelism in varying, though overlapping, terms. Ja'far describes it simply as a rhetorical figure among the most prominent in the tradition. Al-Maṣṣī uses the term *mumāthala* (correspondence) to describe the phenomenon, defining it as correspondence between recurring elements. Al-Qazwīnī, by contrast, uses the term *muwāzana* (equilibrium), defining it as the case in which two separate sentences or phrases are equal in rhythmic weight, and illustrates the definition with paired Qur'anic clauses describing raised couches and placed goblets (Ali, 1983, pp. 1727-1728).

It is worth distinguishing this rhetorical sense of parallelism from the mathematical sense, in which the symbol (*//*) denotes parallel lines that never meet. Rhetorical parallelism, unlike its mathematical counterpart, does not denote equality or identity; rather, it denotes a structural correspondence between elements that remain distinct in meaning. Hamood (2012) frames this as a form of stylistic deviation: parallelism creates the impression of innovation across phonemic, syntactic, and pragmatic levels simultaneously, which places it in dialogue with — rather than in opposition to — other rhetorical devices such as metaphor (*isti'āra*) and antithesis (*ṭibāq*); parallelism does not replace these devices but co-occurs with them, since, as Jakobson repeatedly argued, poetic language is fundamentally the construction of continuous parallelism.

2.3 The meaning of parallelism in Arabic lexicography

Arabic dictionaries record several related senses for the root underlying the term *muwāzāt* (parallelism): a sense of collection or gathering; a sense of straightness or height, as in the expression describing a wall standing upright; and

a sense of provocation or anger. The same root also yields the word for goose (al-wazz) and the term muwāzāt itself, glossed as 'meeting' or 'facing' (muqābala, muwājaha) — a usage attested in the poetry of Al-Buḥturī, who describes standing 'parallel to the enemy' in the sense of meeting and confronting him. Al-Ḥayyānī (2002) notes that the same root underlies the expression 'I parallel him' in the sense of following him.

Later definitions refine this lexical core in different directions. Kanoonī (1999) defines parallelism as a similarity found between two extremes within the same linguistic series, where the two extremes represent sentences sharing a common structure on the basis of either similarity or opposition. Muftāḥ (1997) defines parallelism as similarity in structure combined with difference in meaning, while Farḥān (1998) frames it as correspondence or opposition at the level of sets. Logort (1982) offers a more philosophical gloss, describing parallelism among philosophers as 'unity in disposition,' also termed al-muḥādhāh (close parallelism). Foreign arts dictionaries, per Rababeh (1995), likewise distinguish a linguistic sense of parallelism (neighboring or parallel disposition) from an idiomatic sense (repetition of equal parts).

2.4 Ways of expressing parallelism: the classical taxonomy

Al-'Askarī (d. 395 AH), Ibn al-Athīr (d. 637 AH), Al-Qazwīnī (d. 739 AH), Al-'Alawī (d. 745 AH), and Al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH) treat parallelism as a subtype of saj' (rhymed prose). Al-Ḥayyānī (2002) identifies four categories of saj': tarṣī' (embroidered parallelism, in which paired expressions are equal in morphological weight), tawāzī proper (parallel), al-hāmishī (marginal or border), and equilibrium (tawāzun). Tarṣī' specifically requires that paired expressions be equal in weight (wazn) and agree in the final letters that mark rhyme — a criterion illustrated by the paired verbs 'has been created / has been raised / has been fixed / has been spread out' describing camels, sky, mountains, and earth respectively (Qur'an 88:17-20), each ending in the same feminine-marked rhyme.

Al-'Askarī (1984) uses the term parallelism in two distinct senses: a purely linguistic sense denoting meeting or encounter, and a rhetorical sense in which parallelism functions as a synonym for equality — the two matched parts being equal in length, with agreement in their final letter and no addition or omission on either side. Ibn al-Athīr (1983) largely agrees with this equational sense, illustrating it with a passage from Al-Ḥarīrī's Maqāmāt in which two clauses are matched in weight and ending, though he differs from Al-'Askarī in treating tarṣī' (embroidering) as the general category and parallelism as one of its subtypes rather than the reverse. Al-Suyūṭī (1988) summarizes the relationship concisely: correspondence (al-mumāthil) relates to embroidering (al-muraṣṣa') as equilibrium (al-mutawāzin) relates to parallelism (al-tawāzī).

A further distinction concerns rhythm. Hamood (2012) treats rhythm as a special, condensed case of parallelism: when parallelism operates at the level of clause structure, its influence is transmitted directly into the rhythmic texture of the passage (Al-Malā'ika, 1993), with the repetition of sound and the repetition of temporal structure jointly signalling coordination and unity, terminating in a phonemic pause at the end of each unit (Al-Abyaḍ, 1998).

2.5 Parallelism in comparative and general linguistic theory

The classical Arabic taxonomy described above developed independently of a substantial body of comparative scholarship on parallelism that emerged from the study of biblical Hebrew poetry and, later, general linguistics. Lowth (1753) was the first to describe parallelism systematically as the defining structural feature of Hebrew sacred poetry, classifying paired lines as synonymous, antithetic, or synthetic according to the semantic relation between them. Jakobson (1960) subsequently generalized the concept within linguistics, arguing that the 'poetic function' of language consists in the projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection onto the axis of combination — that is, elements that are normally alternatives (phonemes, grammatical categories, lexical items)

come to be placed in sequence, creating parallelism at any linguistic level simultaneously.

Building on Jakobson's framework, Berlin (1985) developed an account of biblical parallelism as operating concurrently at phonological, grammatical, and semantic levels, moving beyond Lowth's static three-way semantic classification. Kugel (1981) offered a competing account, arguing that the second line of a parallel pair does not merely restate the first but characteristically advances or intensifies it — summarized in his formula 'there is A, and what's more, there is B.' Alter (1985) similarly emphasized semantic intensification over strict equivalence, while Watson (1984) catalogued the formal techniques of Hebrew parallelism in terms directly comparable to the classical Arabic taxonomy of *sajʿ* and *tarṣīʿ*.

Reading the Qur'anic material against this comparative background suggests both a convergence and a point of contrast with the biblical tradition. The convergence lies in the shared recognition, across both traditions, that parallelism is multi-level rather than confined to a single linguistic dimension. The contrast lies in emphasis: whereas Lowth's, Kugel's, and Alter's accounts of biblical parallelism foreground the semantic relation between paired lines (synonymy, antithesis, intensification), the classical Arabic taxonomy of *tarṣīʿ* foregrounds phonological and morphological symmetry — equality of *wazn* (morphological weight/pattern) and end-rhyme — as the primary criterion, with semantic pairing (as in 'the righteous' / 'the wicked,' or 'bliss' / 'the fire') often reinforcing, but not solely defining, the parallel structure. This distinction is developed further in the Discussion (Section 5).

2.6 Positioning of the present study

Recent scholarship on Qur'anic discourse has explicitly called for the kind of integration attempted here. Ahmad and Ahmad Ghafar (2026) argue that classical rhetorical categories such as *naẓm* and *iʿjāz* should be reinterpreted through modern linguistic and corpus-assisted

methods without abandoning the insights of classical *balāgha*, describing this as a still-emerging direction in the field. The present study responds to this gap: rather than treating the classical Arabic taxonomy of parallelism and the Jakobson-derived comparative literature as separate bodies of scholarship, it applies both to a common set of Qur'anic verses, with each verse explicitly identified, transliterated, and glossed so that the analysis is reproducible and open to extension by other researchers — an explicitness that is largely absent from the illustrative, non-corpus-referenced treatments typical of the classical secondary literature on the subject.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study follows a qualitative, descriptive-analytical design, consistent with established practice in Arabic rhetorical (*balāgha*) scholarship and in comparable qualitative studies of parallelism in biblical Hebrew poetry (e.g., Berlin, 1985; Kugel, 1981). The design is exploratory and classificatory rather than statistical: its purpose is to develop and illustrate a typology of parallelism grounded in close reading of specific verses, rather than to quantify the frequency of parallelism across the Qur'anic text as a whole. This scope is stated explicitly here because it defines the limits of what the findings can support; a corpus-wide quantitative survey is identified as a direction for future research in Section 6.

3.2 Corpus and sampling

The corpus comprises sixteen verse-groups drawn from ten Suras of the Qur'an. Verses were selected purposively, on the criterion that they are the instances most frequently cited by classical Arab rhetoricians (Al-'Askarī, Ibn al-Athīr, Al-Qazwīnī, Al-Suyūṭī) as canonical examples of *tarṣīʿ* and *tawāzī*, and that they collectively illustrate each of the four analytical categories described in Section 3.4. Table 1 lists the corpus in full.

Sūra	Verse(s)	Classical category	Feature illustrated
Nūḥ (71)	10-11, 13-14	Tarṣī'	End-rhyme + morphological weight-matching
Al-Ghāshiyah (88)	13-16, 17-20, 25-26	Tarṣī'	Weight-matched clause-final rhyme
Al-Infiṭār (82)	13-14	Tarṣī'	Antithetic semantic pairing (bliss / fire)
Yā-Sīn (36)	33, 37, 41	Partial tunic repetition	Recurring frame 'wa-āyatun lahum...'
Al-Mu'minūn (23)	57-60	Partial tunic repetition	Anaphoric clause-initial repetition
Al-Aḥzāb (33)	37	Partial tunic repetition	Root repetition across clause boundary
Al-Raḥmān (55)	1-16, 17, 33, 35, 39, 46-48	Total tunic repetition	Verbatim refrain; dual-form patterning
Fuṣṣilat (41)	53	Total tunic repetition / foregrounding	Fronted prepositional-phrase symmetry
Al-Shūrā (42)	30	Temporal-aspectual parallelism	Past/present tense shift across clauses
Al-Nisā' (4)	100	Temporal-aspectual parallelism	Perfective/imperfective clause pairing

Table 1. Corpus of Qur'anic verses analyzed in this study, organized by classical rhetorical category.

3.3 Transliteration, glossing, and translation conventions

Each Qur'anic example is presented in four lines: (1) the Arabic text; (2) a simplified transliteration following IJMES conventions; (3) a literal, word-for-word gloss; and (4) the literary English translation of Ali (1983), cited by page number as in the original secondary sources consulted. The gloss line is included specifically because the phonological and morphological parallelism under analysis (e.g., matching verb patterns and end-rhyme) is frequently not recoverable from the literary translation alone; presenting the Arabic structure directly, with a literal gloss, allows the reader to verify each structural claim

independently of translation choices. A full morpheme-by-morpheme interlinear gloss following the Leipzig Glossing Rules was considered but not adopted, since it would require specialist morphological segmentation beyond the scope of this study; this is noted as a possible refinement for future work in Section 6.

3.4 Analytical typology

Four categories, derived from the classical taxonomy described in Section 2.4 and cross-read against Jakobson's (1960) multi-level account of equivalence, structure the analysis:

(a) Lexical-phonological parallelism (tarṣī'): paired clause-final words matching in

morphological weight (*wazn*) and end-rhyme, with or without accompanying semantic antithesis.

(b) Partial tunic (rhythmic) repetition: a fixed syntactic frame that recurs across non-adjacent verses, punctuating a passage at regular intervals.

(c) Total tunic repetition: verbatim recurrence of an entire clause or refrain, typically marking structural divisions within a *Sūra*.

(d) Temporal-aspectual parallelism: structurally parallel clauses that shift grammatical tense or aspect to mark a semantic or temporal transition.

3.5 Procedure

Each verse in the corpus was: (1) identified and checked against its *Sūra* and verse number; (2) transliterated and glossed following the conventions in Section 3.3; (3) classified under one of the four categories in Section 3.4, based on the phonological, syntactic, and semantic features present; and (4) interpreted with reference to the classical rhetorical commentary associated with that verse and, where relevant, to the comparative literature reviewed in Section 2.5. Classification was carried out by the authors jointly through discussion until agreement was reached; a formal inter-rater reliability check was not conducted, and this is noted as a limitation in Section 6.

4. Analysis and Findings

This section presents the analysis organized under the four categories introduced in Section 3.4. For each category, one example is presented in full (Arabic text, transliteration, literal gloss, and literary translation) to illustrate the analytical procedure; supporting examples are presented more concisely, in Arabic with transliteration and translation, consistent with standard practice for corpus-referenced linguistic analysis.

4.1 Lexical-phonological parallelism (*tarṣīʿ*)

The clearest instance of *tarṣīʿ* in the corpus is the antithetic pair describing the righteous and the wicked in *Sūrat al-Infīṭār*:

Example 1 — *Al-Infīṭār* 82:13-14

إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ، وَإِنَّ الْفُجَّارَ لَفِي جَحِيمٍ

Inna al-abrāra la-*fī* naʿīm, wa-inna al-fujjāra la-*fī* jaḥīm

indeed the-righteous surely-in bliss, and-indeed the-wicked surely-in fire

"Truly the righteous will be in Bliss, and the Wicked — they will be in the Fire" (Ali, 1983, p. 1701)

The two clauses are structurally identical (*inna* + definite plural noun + *la-*fī** + indefinite noun), and the clause-final nouns *naʿīm* and *jaḥīm* share the *faʿīl* morphological pattern and the *-īm* end-rhyme, while *abrār* and *fujjār* likewise share the *fuʿāl* pattern. The parallelism is thus doubled: *tarṣīʿ* operates on both the subject noun and the predicate noun of each clause, while the antithetic pairing (righteous/wicked, bliss/fire) supplies the semantic dimension that Lowth (1753) would classify as antithetic parallelism — illustrating the convergence between the classical Arabic and comparative biblical descriptions noted in Section 2.5.

A comparable structure appears in *Sūrat al-Ghāshiyah*, where the noun pair *iyābahum*/*ḥisābahum* is matched in both weight and rhyme:

إِنَّ إِلَيْنَا إِيَابَهُمْ ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا حِسَابَهُمْ

Inna ilaynā iyābahum, thumma inna ʿalaynā ḥisābahum — 'indeed to-Us (is) their-return, then indeed upon-Us (is) their-reckoning'

"For to Us will be their return; then it will be for Us to call them to account" (Al-Ghāshiyah 88:25-26; Ali, 1983, p. 1729)

Parallel elements: *iyābahum* / *ḥisābahum*, both nouns on the *fiʿāl* pattern with the possessive suffix *-hum*, sharing the end-rhyme *-ābahum*.

فِيهَا سُرُورٌ مَرْفُوعَةٌ وَأَكْوَابٌ مَوْضُوعَةٌ

Fihā sururun marfūʿatun wa-akwābun mawḍūʿatun — 'therein (are) thrones raised, and-goblets placed'

"Therein will be thrones raised on high, goblets placed ready" (Al-Ghāshiyah 88:13-14; Ali, 1983, p. 1727)

Parallel elements: marfū'atun / mawḍū'atun, both passive participles of the maf'ūl pattern.

وَمَكَرْتُ مَصْفُوفَةً وَزَّرَبِي مَبْثُوثَةً

Wa-namāriqu maṣṣūfatun wa-zarābiyyu mabthūthatun — 'and-cushions arranged-in-rows, and-carpet spread-out'

"And cushions set in rows, and rich carpets spread out" (Al-Ghāshiyah 88:15-16; Ali, 1983, p. 1728)

Parallel elements: maṣṣūfatun / mabthūthatun, matched participial weight and end-rhyme, continuing the same rhyme scheme as the preceding verse pair.

فَقُلْتُ اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ غَفَّارًا يُرْسِلِ السَّمَاءَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِدْرَارًا

Fa-qultu istaghfirū rabbakum innahu kāna ghaffāran, yursili l-samā'a 'alaykum midrāran — 'so-I-said seek-forgiveness-of your-Lord, indeed-He was Oft-Forgiving; He-will-send the-sky upon-you in-abundance'

"Ask forgiveness from your Lord, for He is Oft-Forgiving; He will send rain to you in abundance" (Nūḥ 71:10-11; Ali, 1983, p. 1614)

Parallel elements: ghaffāran / midrāran, both on the intensive fa'āl(-an) pattern with matching final rhyme.

مَا لَكُمْ لَا تَرْجُونَ لِلَّهِ وَقَارًا وَقَدْ خَلَقَكُمْ أَطْوَارًا

Mā lakum lā tarjūna lillāhi waqāran, wa-qad khalaqakum aṭwāran — 'what (is) to-you, not you-hope for-Allah reverence, while indeed He-created-you in-stages'

"What is the matter with you, that you place not your hope for kindness in God, seeing that He has created you in diverse stages" (Nūḥ 71:13-14; Ali, 1983, p. 1615)

Parallel elements: waqāran / aṭwāran — rhyme in the final -ārā(n) is present, but the two words differ in morphological pattern (maṣdar vs. broken plural), illustrating the weaker sub-type in

which only end-rhyme, not full weight-matching, is required.

Finally, the corrected reading of the camel/sky/mountains/earth sequence in Sūrat al-Ghāshiyah shows that its parallelism is carried not by a noun pair (as the original classroom gloss of this passage suggested) but by four rhymed passive-perfective verbs:

أَفَلَا يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَى الْإِبِلِ كَيْفَ خُلِقَتْ وَإِلَى السَّمَاءِ كَيْفَ رُفِعَتْ وَإِلَى الْجِبَالِ كَيْفَ نُصِبَتْ وَإِلَى الْأَرْضِ كَيْفَ سُطِحَتْ

A-falā yanẓurūna ilā al-ibili kayfa khuliqat, wa-ilā al-samā'i kayfa rufi'at, wa-ilā al-jibāli kayfa nuṣibat, wa-ilā al-arḍi kayfa suṭihat

"Do they not look at the camels, how they are made? And at the sky, how it is raised high? And at the mountains, how they are fixed firm? And at the earth, how it is spread out" (Al-Ghāshiyah 88:17-20; Ali, 1983, pp. 1728-1729)

Parallel elements: khuliqat / rufi'at / nuṣibat / suṭihat — four Form I passive-perfective, third-person feminine singular verbs sharing the fu'ilat pattern and the -at end-rhyme. This example recurs in Section 4.2 under partial tunic repetition, since the same four-part structure also punctuates the passage at regular syntactic intervals.

4.2 Partial tunic (rhythmic) repetition

Partial tunic repetition involves a fixed syntactic frame recurring across non-adjacent verses, with the semantic content of each instance varying. The clearest example is the triad of 'sign' verses in Sūrat Yā-Sīn:

Example 2 — Yā-Sīn 36:33, 37, 41

وَأَيُّهُمُ الْأَرْضُ الْمَيِّتَةُ أَحْيَيْنَاهَا وَأَخْرَجْنَا مِنْهَا حَبًّا فَمِنْهُ يَأْكُلُونَ

Wa-āyatun lahumu al-arḍu al-maytatu aḥyaynāhā wa-akhrajnā minhā ḥabban fa-minhu ya'kulūn

and-a-sign for-them (is) the-earth the-dead: We-gave-it-life and-brought-forth from-it grain, so-from-it they-eat

"And a Sign for them is the earth that is dead: We do give it life, and produce grain from it, of which you eat" (Ali, 1983, p. 1177)

وَأَيَّةٌ لَهُمْ اللَّيْلُ نَسْلَخُ مِنْهُ النَّهَارَ فَإِذَا هُمْ مُظْلِمُونَ

"And a Sign for them is the Night: We withdraw therefrom the Day, and behold, they are plunged in darkness" (Ali, 1983, p. 1178)

وَأَيَّةٌ لَهُمْ أَنَّا حَمَلْنَا ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ فِي الْفُلِّ الْمَشْحُونِ

"And a Sign for them is that We bore their race in the loaded Ark" (Ali, 1983, p. 1179)

The clause-initial frame *wa-āyatun lahum* ('and a sign for them') recurs verbatim at verses 33, 37, and 41, each time introducing a different proof (the earth, the night, the ark) and each time followed by a first-person-plural verb. Three further proofs (not analyzed here) complete the total of six instances of the frame within the Sūra. This is the paradigm case of partial tunic repetition: the phonemic and syntactic frame is fixed, while its propositional content varies — structurally similar to what Kugel (1981) describes in biblical parallelism as a fixed formula bridging semantically distinct content.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ هُمْ مِنْ خَشْيَةِ رَبِّهِمْ مُشْفِقُونَ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ يُؤْمِنُونَ وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِرَبِّهِمْ لَا يُشْرِكُونَ

Inna alladhīna hum min khashyati rabbihim mushfiqūn, wa-lladhīna hum bi-āyāti rabbihim yu'minūn, wa-lladhīna hum bi-rabbihim lā yushrikūn

"Verily those who live in awe for fear of their Lord; those who believe in the signs of their Lord; those who join not partners with their Lord" (Al-Mu'minūn 23:57-59; Ali, 1983, p. 884)

Parallel elements: the anaphoric frame *wa-lladhīna hum* ('and those who') recurs at the head of three successive verses, each followed by a prepositional phrase and a finite verb — partial tunic repetition realized through a repeated pronoun-headed relative clause rather than a repeated noun phrase.

وَتَخَشَى النَّاسَ وَاللَّهُ أَحَقُّ أَنْ تَخْشَاهُ

Wa-takhshā al-nāsa wa-llāhu aḥaqqu an takhshāhu

"You did fear the people, but it is more fitting that you should fear God" (Al-Aḥzāb 33:37; Ali, 1983, p. 1117)

Parallel elements: *takhshā / takhshāhu* — the same root (kh-sh-y, 'to fear') is repeated within a single verse, with the rhyme carried on different final elements (the bare imperfective vowel in *takhshā*, the object suffix *-hu* in *takhshāhu*). This illustrates tunic repetition compressed within a single verse rather than distributed across several.

4.3 Total tunic repetition

Total tunic repetition involves the verbatim recurrence of an entire clause. The paradigm case in the Qur'an is the refrain of Sūrat al-Raḥmān, which recurs thirty-one times across the Sūra's seventy-eight verses, beginning after the first twelve verses enumerate a sequence of divine favors:

Example 3 — Al-Raḥmān 55:1-16

الرَّحْمَنُ (١) عَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ (٢) خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ (٣) عَلَّمَهُ الْبَيَانَ (٤) الشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ يَحْسَبَانِ (٥) وَالنَّجْمُ وَالشَّجَرُ يَسْجُدَانِ (٦) وَالسَّمَاءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ الْمِيزَانَ (٧) أَلَّا تَطْغَوْا فِي الْمِيزَانِ (٨) وَأَقِيمُوا الْوَزْنَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا تُخْسِرُوا الْمِيزَانَ (٩) وَالْأَرْضَ وَضَعَهَا لِلْأَنَامِ (١٠) فِيهَا فَاكِهَةٌ وَالنَّخْلُ ذَاتُ الْأَكْمَامِ (١١) وَالْحَبُّ ذُو الْعَصْفِ وَالرَّيْحَانُ (١٢) فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ (١٣) خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ صَلْصَالٍ كَالْفَخَّارِ (١٤) وَخَلَقَ الْجَانَّ مِنْ مَّارِجٍ مِّن نَّارٍ (١٥) فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ (١٦)

... fa-bi-ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān (v. 13, 16)

so-which of-favors-of your-two-Lord(s) do-you-both-deny

"Then which of the favours of your Lord will you deny?" (Ali, 1983, p. 1474)

The refrain *fa-bi-ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān* recurs verbatim after each enumerated favor, functioning as a structural punctuation mark across the Sūra. Its dual verb form (*tukadhdhibān*, addressed jointly to jinn and humankind) is itself echoed throughout the Sūra in a series of dual noun and verb forms, several of which are listed below.

رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقَيْنِ وَرَبُّ الْمَغْرِبَيْنِ

Rabbu al-mashriqayni wa-rabbu al-maghribayn — "Lord of the two Easts and Lord of the two Wests" (55:17)

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ صَلْصَالٍ كَالْفَخَّارِ وَخَلَقَ الْجَانَّ مِنْ مَّارِجٍ مِنْ نَارٍ

Khalaqa al-insāna min ṣalṣālīn ka-l-fakḥkhār, wa-khalaqa al-jānna min mārijīn min nār — "He created man from clay like pottery, and He created the Jinn from a smokeless flame of fire" (55:14-15)

يَا مَعْشَرَ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنْسِ إِنِ اسْتَطَعْتُمْ أَنْ تَنْفُذُوا مِنْ أَقْطَارِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ فَانْفُذُوا لَا تَنْفُذُونَ إِلَّا بِسُلْطَانٍ

Yā ma'shara al-jinni wa-al-insi in istaṭa'tum an tanfudhū min aqṭāri al-samāwāti wa-al-arḍi fa-anfudhū, lā tanfudhūna illā bi-sulṭān — "O company of Jinns and men, if you can pass beyond the zones of the heavens and the earth, then pass; you will not pass except with authority" (55:33)

يُرْسَلُ عَلَيْكُمَا شَوْاظٌ مِنْ نَارٍ وَنُحَاسٌ فَلَا تَنْتَصِرَانِ

Yursalu 'alaykumā shuwāẓun min nārin wa-nuḥāsun fa-lā tantaṣīrān — "On you will be sent a flame of fire and smoke, and you will not be able to defend yourselves" (55:35)

فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَا يُسْأَلُ عَنْ ذَنْبِهِ إِنْسٌ وَلَا جَانٌّ

Fa-yawma'idhin lā yus'alu 'an dhanbihi insun wa-lā jānn — "On that Day no question will be asked of man or Jinn as to his sin" (55:39)

وَلَمْ يَخَفْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ جَنَّاتٍ --- دَوَاتَا أَفْنَانٍ

Wa-li-man khāfa maqāma rabbihi jannatān ... dhawātā afnān — "But for such as fear the time when they will stand before their Lord, there will be two Gardens ... containing all kinds of trees and delights" (55:46, 48)

A further instance of total tunic repetition, realized through foregrounding rather than verbatim recurrence, appears in Sūrat Fuṣṣilat:

سَنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْأَفَاقِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَبَيَّنَ لَهُمْ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ

Sa-nurihim āyātīnā fī al-āfāqi wa-fī anfusihiḥ ḥattā yatabayyana lahum annahu al-ḥaqq

"Soon will We show them Our signs in the furthest regions of the earth, and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that it is the truth" (Fuṣṣilat 41:53; Ali, 1983, pp. 1302-1303)

Parallel elements: fī al-āfāqi / wa-fī anfusihiḥ — two parallel prepositional phrases (the macrocosm and the microcosm) are foregrounded before the main verb, each governed by the same preposition fī, producing a balanced structural pair independent of end-rhyme.

4.4 Temporal-aspectual parallelism

The fourth category involves structurally parallel clauses in which grammatical tense or aspect shifts to mark a semantic transition.

Example 4 — Al-Shūrā 42:30

وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِيمَا كَسَبْتُمْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَيَعْلَمُ عَنْ كَثِيرٍ

Wa-mā aṣābakum min muṣībatin fa-bi-mā kasabat aydīkum wa-ya'fū 'an kathīr

and-whatever befell-you of misfortune, (it is) for-what earned your-hands; and-He-pardons much

"Whatever misfortune happens to you is because of what your hands have earned, and He pardons much" (Ali, 1983, pp. 1310-1311)

The clause pivots from the perfective verbs aṣābakum and kasabat (a completed misfortune, traced to a completed cause) to the imperfective ya'fū (an ongoing divine attribute of pardon). The syntactic parallelism between the two halves of the verse is thus paired with a deliberate aspectual shift, which marks the movement from a bounded past event to an unbounded, continuing disposition.

Example 5 — Al-Nisā' 4:100

وَمَنْ يُهَاجِرْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ يَجِدْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُرَاعًا كَثِيرًا وَسَعَةً

"He who forsakes his home in the cause of God finds in the earth many a refuge, wide and spacious" (Ali, 1983, p. 212)

وَمَنْ يُخْرِجْ مِنْ بَيْتِهِ مُهَاجِرًا إِلَى اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ يُدْرِكْهُ الْمَوْتُ فَقَدْ وَقَعَ أَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ

"And he who goes forth from his home as an emigrant to God and His Messenger, and death overtakes him, his reward becomes due and sure with God" (Ali, 1983, p. 212)

The two clauses share an identical conditional frame (wa-man + jussive verb ...), but the resolution shifts from the open, ongoing jussive/imperfective forms (yuhājir, yajid) in the first clause to the completed perfective faqad waqa'a ('his reward has already fallen due') in the second — again pairing syntactic parallelism with an aspectual shift that marks the transition from

an ongoing condition to a guaranteed, settled outcome.

Table 2 summarizes the sixteen verse-groups analyzed above, organized by category, illustrating that the four types are not mutually exclusive: several instances (notably the Ghāshiyah camel verses and the Sūrat al-Raḥmān refrain) exhibit features of more than one category simultaneously, which is itself consistent with Jakobson's (1960) claim that linguistic parallelism operates at multiple levels at once rather than at a single level in isolation.

Category	Linguistic level(s)	Instances analyzed	Illustrative Sūra(s)
Tarṣī' (lexical-phonological)	Phonological + morphological (weight/rhyme); often co-occurs with semantic antithesis	7	Nūḥ, al-Ghāshiyah, al-Infīṭār
Partial tunic repetition	Syntactic (fixed frame) + phonological (recurring rhythm)	4	Yā-Sīn, al-Mu'minūn, al-Aḥzāb, al-Ghāshiyah
Total tunic repetition	Phonological + syntactic (verbatim recurrence or foregrounding)	8	Al-Raḥmān, Fuṣṣilat
Temporal-aspectual parallelism	Syntactic + semantic (tense/aspect shift)	2	Al-Shūrā, al-Nisā'

Table 2. Summary of parallelism types identified in the corpus, by linguistic level and illustrative Sūra.

5. Discussion

The analysis identifies four recurrent, though not mutually exclusive, patterns of parallelism in the corpus, addressing the first research question. Returning to the second research question — how parallelism functions rhetorically — the findings suggest that its function differs by category. Tarṣī' operates primarily at the level of rhythm and closure, marking the end of paired clauses with matched sound and weight, often reinforcing a semantic antithesis (as in na'im/jahīm). Partial tunic repetition operates cohesively, using a fixed frame to bind together a series of otherwise distinct propositions (as in the Yā-Sīn triad), a function comparable to what Al-Ghalāyīnī (as discussed in recent Qur'anic

discourse scholarship) describes as takrār operating as a cohesive device. Total tunic repetition, exemplified by the Sūrat al-Raḥmān refrain, functions structurally, punctuating a long passage into discrete rhetorical units. Temporal-aspectual parallelism functions semantically, using a shift in grammatical aspect to mark a conceptual transition (from a bounded past event to an unbounded present disposition, or from an open condition to a settled outcome) within an otherwise symmetrical syntactic frame.

The third research question concerns how this typology relates to the comparative literature on parallelism reviewed in Section 2.5. Two points of convergence and one point of contrast emerge. First, consistent with Jakobson's (1960)

account, no single instance in the corpus is confined to a single linguistic level: even the most straightforwardly phonological example (na'im/jahim) carries semantic antithesis, and even the most straightforwardly syntactic example (the wa-āyatun lahum frame) carries a consistent phonological rhythm. Second, the compressed, root-repetition pattern found within a single verse (takhshā/takhshāhu in al-Aḥzāb 33:37) has a structural analogue in what Kugel (1981) describes as intra-line intensification, where a single line rather than a line pair carries the parallel structure. Third, and by contrast, the corpus confirms the point anticipated in Section 2.5: where Lowth's (1753), Kugel's (1981), and Alter's (1985) accounts of biblical parallelism foreground the semantic relation between paired lines, the Qur'anic tarṣī' examples in this corpus are held together at least as strongly by morphological weight-matching and end-rhyme as by semantic relation — several pairs (marfū'atun/mawḍū'atun; maṣfūfatun/mabthūthatun) are near-synonymous descriptively rather than antithetic, with the phonological match, not the semantic one, carrying the rhetorical weight.

This last point has a further implication, relevant to translation studies: because English translations such as Ali's (1983) necessarily prioritize semantic content, they cannot preserve the phonological symmetry that this analysis identifies as central to several of the corpus's tarṣī' instances. A reader relying solely on the English translation of, for example, marfū'atun/mawḍū'atun ('raised' / 'placed ready') would have no access to the shared morphological pattern and rhyme that classical rhetoricians treat as the defining feature of the passage. This reinforces the methodological point made in Section 3.3: analysis of this phenomenon needs to work from the Arabic structure directly, not from translation.

The findings also speak to the classical concept of i'jāz. Rather than treating inimitability as a single, undifferentiated property, the typology developed here suggests that Qur'anic rhetorical distinctiveness, at least with respect to

parallelism, is cumulative: it results from the simultaneous operation of phonological, syntactic, and semantic patterning within the same short span of text, a density of multi-level equivalence that Jakobson's (1960) framework predicts should be characteristic of maximally 'poetic' language use, and which recent Qur'anic-discourse scholarship (Ahmad & Ahmad Ghafar, 2026) frames as inviting exactly this kind of cross-theoretical description.

Limitations.

Three limitations should be noted. First, the corpus was purposively sampled from verses already identified as canonical by classical rhetoricians; the findings describe the character of parallelism in these verses and cannot be generalized, without further work, to the frequency or distribution of parallelism across the Qur'an as a whole. Second, classification of examples into the four categories was carried out jointly by the authors through discussion rather than through an independent, quantified inter-rater reliability procedure; a degree of interpretive judgment is therefore built into the typology, as is standard in qualitative rhetorical analysis but worth flagging explicitly. Third, the glosses provided in Section 4 are literal, word-for-word renderings rather than full morpheme-by-morpheme interlinear glosses following the Leipzig Glossing Rules; a specialist morphological analysis could refine several of the weight- and pattern-matching claims made above.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to classify and analyze parallelism in a purposively selected set of Qur'anic verses, and to situate the analysis within the broader comparative literature on linguistic and biblical parallelism. Four categories were identified — lexical-phonological parallelism (tarṣī'), partial tunic repetition, total tunic repetition, and temporal-aspectual parallelism — each operating simultaneously across phonological, syntactic, and semantic levels, consistent with Jakobson's (1960) account of linguistic parallelism as multi-level equivalence. The analysis further suggests that Qur'anic tarṣī'

places comparatively greater weight on phonological and morphological symmetry than the semantically-oriented accounts of biblical parallelism developed by Lowth (1753), Kugel (1981), and Alter (1985), a point of contrast that may be of interest to comparative Semitic poetics more broadly.

Future research could extend this work in three directions: (a) a corpus-wide, ideally computationally assisted, survey of parallelism across the full Qur'anic text, building on the kind of corpus-assisted methodology called for by Ahmad and Ahmad Ghafar (2026), to establish frequency and distribution rather than the illustrative pattern established here; (b) a formal inter-rater reliability study of the classification typology proposed in Section 3.4; and (c) a systematic comparison of Qur'anic and biblical Hebrew parallelism using a shared analytical framework, building on the point of contrast identified in Section 5. Such work would further clarify the relationship between the classical

Arabic rhetorical tradition and the comparative linguistic study of parallelism, a relationship this study has sought to open rather than close.

Declarations

Funding: *[Authors to state whether this research received any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors, or declare that no funding was received.]*

Conflicts of interest: *[Authors to declare any known conflicts of interest, or state that none exist.]*

Data availability: *The primary data analyzed in this study are verses of the Qur'an, which are publicly and universally available. The authors' transliteration, glossing, and classification tables are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.*

Author contributions: *[Authors to specify individual contributions, e.g., following the CRediT taxonomy: conceptualization, analysis, writing.]*

Acknowledgements: *[Authors to add any acknowledgements, or omit this line.]*

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