

The Thematic Structure of Prophet Adam's Story In the Holy Qur'an

By

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Abstract

One of the most compelling messages of the holy Quran is that God is the only creator, controller, knower of the whole universe; the rest is his creation unable to match his power, competence, and creativity. This research is an attempt to reveal this message through the thematic analysis of Adam's story in the holy Quran.

In this study, it is hypothesized that Adam's story has a local, constant theme as well as a global theme with the message that there is only one God , the creator ,director ,commander of everything .

The data consists of the eight verses (ayah) from 30 to 37 uttered in the cow surah (Al Baqarah) of the holy Quran. Theses verses give the summary of Prophet Adam's story and constitute the whole theme. Other verses in the holy Quran which talk about Prophet Adam are excluded. The model used for the analysis of this data is Danish (1976) and van Dijk (1972, 1977, 1980, 1981, 1984, 1985, and 1990), van Dijk and Kintsch (1983), and Kintsch and van Dijk (1978).

The procedures of the research starts with the meaning of thematic structure and makes a survey of the models that have applied the thematic structures to different texts . Analysis of the data is done and finally the researchers wrap the study with the conclusions .

Key terms : theme, rheme, thematic structures, global macro structure

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1.1 Theoretical Background

1.1.1 The Thematic Structure Meaning

The term “Thematic Structure” refers to the way speakers identify the relative importance of the subject matter in an utterance (Crystal, 1997: 387). This concept goes back to the founder of the Linguistic Circle of Prague , Vilém Mathesius who developed and applied the concept of “Functional Sentence Perspective” (FSP). According to Mathesius, every utterance has *two different* structures: one is *grammatical*, and the other is *informational* termed: “the information-bearing structure of the sentence ” which should be considered

in opposition to its formal structure. Whereas the formal structure concerns the way in which a sentence is composed of grammatical elements, the information-bearing structure concerns the way in which a sentence is integrated into the factual situation during which it was produced. The basic elements of the formal structure of the sentence are the grammatical subject and the grammatical predicate, the basic elements of the information-bearing structure are the foundation of the utterance, and the core of the utterance. (Mathesius;1939: 171)

The basic elements of the formal structure of the sentence are the grammatical subject and the grammatical predicate. Whereas the basic elements of the information-bearing structure are: a. the *foundation* of the utterance a given situation which is *known* or at least *obvious* and thus forms a *point of departure* for the speaker. b. the *core* of the utterance, that is, whatever the speaker *affirms* about the foundation of the utterance or in terms of it.(Ibid.)

The terms “foundation” and “core” are usually replaced, respectively, by “theme”and “rheme” after classical terminology (Garvin, 1969: 264, Vachek, 1974: 106). Unless special effects are aimed at, *theme* usually precedes *rheme* (i.e. theme is unmarked). In marked utterances, rheme is promoted to the *first position* followed by the theme. Thus in the following example

Example1.1

- a) *The man* is coming.
- b) *His hair* I can’t stand.
- c) *Smith* her name was.

theme in (1.1a) is unmarked, but is marked in (1. 1b, c) owing to the *thematization*² of the new information(Crystal, 1997: 351).

1.1.2 The Thematic Progression

. Related to the notion of FSP , the term “Communicative Dynamism” (CD) introduced by Firbas in reference to the extent to which the sentence element contributes to the development of communication. According to Firbas (1974: 270),, an utterance is a process of gradually unfolding meaning wherein each part dynamically contributes to the total communicative effect. Some utterance elements can have high degrees of contributions, others have low ones. The basic distribution of CD in an utterance is that the opening element carries the lowest degree of CD, then gradually passes on to the elements carrying the highest degree of CD. Firbas (ibid.: 24) maintains that *theme* is the element or elements carrying *the lowest degree(s)* of CD within a sentence, and that *rheme* consists in element(s) carrying *the highest degree* of CD within the utterance. He also recognizes various *transitional* utterance elements that are neither “thematic” nor “rhematic”

Daneš (1974: 106) affirms that the relevance of FSP for the organization of discourse is beyond doubt since the choice and the distribution of themes reveal a particular patterning. He coins the term “Thematic Progression” (TP) to refer to *the choice and ordering* of utterance themes, *their mutual relationship* and *hierarchy*, as well as *their links to the main theme* of the macro-structural units (such as the paragraph, scene, chapter. etc) and *the theme of the whole text*.

Being the skeleton of the plot, TP has three types: i) *simple linear TP*; ii) *TP with a constant theme*; and iii) *TP with derived themes* (ibid.: 109). In simple linear TP, the rheme (R₂) of the first utterance appears in the next as its theme (T₂). Eggins (2004:324) called it Zig Zag pattern of thematic progression .In other words, each r becomes the t of the succeeding one as shown in the following figure:

- T1 → R1
- T2(R1) → R2
- T3(R2) → R3

Figure (1) TP with Linear Thematic Progression of Rhemes (Daneš, 1974: 118)

In TP with a constant theme, the same theme appears in a series of utterances as diagrammed hereunder:

- T1 → R1
- T1 → R2
- T1 → R3

Figure (2) TP with Constant Theme (Daneš, 1974: 118)

Finally, in TP with derived themes, the latter are derived from the *main theme*TM or “the hyper theme” as shown in the diagram below:

- T1TM → R1
- T2TM → R2
- T3TM → R3

Figure (3) TP with Derived Theme (ibid.: 119)

Daneš concludes that the generalized structure of the text could be described in terms of the underlying thematic progression, as well as in terms of the rhematic sequences of the semantic relations obtaining between particular rhemes (ibid.: 127).

Following the Prague School terminology, Halliday (1994) defines thematic structure as the organization of the message into “*theme*” and “*rheme*”. Within the Theme + Rheme configuration, the theme is the starting-point for the message; therefore, part of the meaning of any clause lies in that element which is chosen as its theme (ibid.: 39). A theme, then, is what speakers / writers use as their point of departure. Formally, it is the left-most constituent of the sentence as realized in the grammar of English.

A theme is not necessarily a nominal group, it may also be an adverbial group or a prepositional phrase (ibid.). In many unmarked cases, the theme of the declarative sentences will be a noun phrase; that of interrogatives: the interrogative word; and that of the imperatives: the imperative form of the verb. He(ibid:39) further classified Theme into three types: simple Theme, clause Theme, and multiple Theme.

Simple Theme refers to the Theme only consisting of one structural element, such as a word, a phrase, or a group and it cannot be divided in the internal structure it is realized usually by only one element---one nominal, prepositional or adverbial component” (ibid.). It is an independent unit which can no longer be further divided into smaller functional unit. For example:

Example1.2

1. My sister (T) | has been assigned that task by the boss(R).
2. Very carefully (T) | she jumped over the fence (R) .
3. On Fridays (T) | I go back home from school. (R)

Clause Theme: Just as the name shows, a clause serves as Theme here, either main clause or subordinate clause. In addition, the internal structure of the clause Theme can be divided into another Theme and Rheme as in the following example

Example 1.3

Everyone (T) tends to think that he (T) is not sufficiently appreciated (R).(R)

Multiple Theme: Just as the name shows, a clause serves as Theme here, either main clause or subordinate clause. In addition, the internal structure of the clause Theme can be divided into another Theme and Rheme. In other words, if Theme includes two or more structural elements, it is called multiple Theme.

Example:1.4

Ali who(T) was my best friend(R) (T)became the man of the year(R).

In his analysis of a biographical text, Halliday (1994: 40) shows how theme could be traced clause by clause throughout each orthographic paragraph in the text. The scheme of the thematic structure reveals “paragraph themes”, all contributing to the characterization of thoughts and actions. The theme that occupies more paragraphs is distinguished as “the dominant theme.

1.1.3 Theme as Main Topic / Character Entity

Some discourse analysts take the view that the term “*theme*” refers to the *grammatical subjects* of a series of sentences. Among these analysts are Perfetti and Goldman (cited by Brown & Yule, 1983:135) who view *thematization* as “the discourse process by which a *referent* comes to be developed as the *central subject* of the discourse”.

Accordingly, the term theme does not refer to the constituent itself, but to the referent of the constituent, i.e. an individual’s name could be thematized when identified in the discourse by the repetition of the same name, using pronouns or equivalent words. For example, Dr. Jones could be thematized by using the expression “Dr. Jones” or “he” or “the surgeon” or “the doctor” (ibid.). In short, theme refers to the constituent that occupies the subject slot in a series of sentences and consequently becomes the *main character* or *the topic entity* of the discourse.

Brown and Yule (1983: 33) share this view with Perfetti and Goldman and assert that thematization is a *discoursal* rather than a *sentential* process, and that by collecting the recurrent grammatical subjects in sequence one would establish the thematic structure of the whole text (ibid.: 141). They support their argument by offering the following example:

This rug comes from the village of Shalamazar in southern Chahar Mahal, but the design is woven in many of the villages. The design is one of those that fit into several possible categories, involving as it does elements of bird, tree, vase and prayer types. The prayer-mihrab may be omitted in some cases, but the vase is always present, as are the strikingly drawn birds... In rugs of this type excellent natural dyestuffs are very often found, and the quality varies from medium to quite fine. Outstanding examples...

The sequence of the grammatical subjects would have the following form:

*This rug
(illustrated) the
design
The design
The prayer
mihrab the vase
In rugs of this type
the quality
Outstanding
examples*

and the writer's *topic area* would be *a specific type of rug*. The organization of the discourse moves from a *particular* example of a rug type, through characteristic design, to generalizations about rugs of this type. The co-authors (ibid.: 132) state that the presence of theme in certain thematic devices, such as the title, will influence the interpretation of the text that follows it. They assume two main functions for the theme:

- i) Connecting back and linking into the previous discourse in order to maintain a coherent point of view;
- ii) Serving as a point of departure for the further development of the discourse.

They (ibid.: 140) add that the analyst may find other text-specific thematic devices, such as headings and sub-headings, in the text. What these thematic devices have in common is that they do not only provide *starting points* for paragraphs in a text, but also divide up the whole text into smaller chunks. This *chunking* effect is one of the most basic of those achieved by thematization in discourse (ibid.).

1.1.4 Theme as a Message

Among the comprehensive approaches to the study of theme as a message are the works of van Dijk (1972, 1977, 1980, 1981, 1984, 1985, and 1990), van Dijk and Kintsch (1983), and Kintsch and van Dijk (1978).

Van Dijk (1981: 3) presents a number of arguments about the properties of sentential sequences. First, an adequate description of the properties of sentences should take into account the structures of other sentences in the discourse. Second, sentence sequences have important linguistic features such as connection, coherence, topics and changes of topics, turn-taking systems in conversation, and so on. Third, language use should not only be accounted for in terms of sentences or sequences of sentences, but also in terms of more comprehensive units such as texts or discourses

as wholes. Finally, the levels and dimensions of discourse analysis should be approached in terms of theories of narrative, style, conversation, rhetoric...etc, or as van Dijk (ibid.) puts it:

A more adequate linguistic theory should pertain to sequential and textual structures of utterances and should be connected with other theories, which account for certain properties of discourse and language use.

Van Dijk (1977: 132; 1981:4) considers the terms “topic of discourse”, “theme”, “being about” and “aboutness ” to be synonymous in that they are used alternatively to denote one and the same phenomenon in discourse, namely: “what the message is about”. Theme could be derived from the passage itself in a form of a quasi-paraphrase of the same underlying semantic representation or the abstract relations holding between the propositions that are expressed by the sentences of the discourse in relation to some possible world(s), and relative to some set of knowledge or other cognitive information (van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983: 150).

The process of general theme derivation can be done at two levels: i) the microstructural level which is presented by the local semantic coherence, ii) macrostructural level that is denoted by the global semantic coherence.

Local semantic coherence is identified in terms of the semantic relationships set up between the successive sequences of sentences of a discourse, or rather the propositions (idea units) they express. The local coherence refers to the meaningful inter-sentential connections that are signaled by a number of correlates such as word order, the use of connectives, sentential adverbs, verb tenses and pronouns (van Dijk, 1985: 108).

Global coherence is concerned with the meaning of large discourse chunks, or whole discourses that are indicated by a smaller set of higher level propositions (or macropropositions). Van Dijk (1981:4) defines global coherence as:

... higher level semantic structures which are derived from the propositional sequences of the text by a number of macrorules. Macrostructures define the intuitive notion of the “global meaning”, (theme) or “topic” of a text or of a fragment of the text.

More specifically, theme is derived by decomposing the text constituent clauses into micropropositions (local themes). These are then condensed into a higher level macroproposition through the application of *semantic information reduction* rules

which include the recursive operations of *deletion*, *generalization*, and *integration*. The resultant highest level macrostructure denotes the global coherence which gives the discourse its overall unity, and signals its main general theme. The following example offered by van Dijk (1981: 4) shows how the semantic reduction rules function in deriving the global semantic macrostructure of a text:

Example (3.2):

- a. Peter went to the station.
- b. Peter bought a ticket.
- c. Peter went to the platform...etc.

By applying the macro reduction rules, the single macrostructure “Peter took the train” can be derived from the above text.

Van Dijk (1979: 161) admits that his definition of topic is imperfect in that it does not make explicit all the intuitive notions, which the analyst tries to capture. Furthermore, *different* global meanings could be assigned to the same discourse owing to the differences in the reader’s background knowledge, attitudes, sets of beliefs and preferences which all may lead to different evaluation about what is relevant or important information in the discourse (van Dijk, 1985: 117). Still, he concludes that, generally speaking, global semantic structures or themes have a tendency to keep *uniform* in that divergences in interpretation are kept at a minimum since certain interpretations of a discourse will always emerge as *more preferable* than others, regardless of all the subjective factors (ibid.).

2.0 Data and Methodology

The data consists of the eight verses (ayah) from 30 to 37 uttered in the cow surah (Al Baqarah) of the holy Quran. Theses verses give the summary of Prophet Adam's story and constitute the whole theme. Other verses in the holy Quran which talk about Prophet Adam are excluded. Nevertheless sometimes are mentioned throughout the analysis as elaborative and supportive references of what is going on in the story. The methods applied in the analysis may be detected as follows:

1. The unit of the analysis is the ayah since it is a sentence with a complete thought.
2. Each ayah is written in Arabic and its translation to English¹.
3. Each ayah has its own thematic structure analysis which includes the micro and macro themes as well as the classification of the type of theme.
4. The macro themes will be subjected to the structural semantic rules of generalization, reduction and deletion in order to get the macro global theme .

¹ The verses are translated by <http://al-quran.info/#home> online translation and commentary

2.1 Analysis of the Data

2.1.1 Adam's Story : Synopsis

Allah is the creator of everything, He creates the mountains, animals, heavens, stars, the sun , the moon and the angels. The angels are like Allah's servants and they do everything He orders them.

At the beginning of the creation, Allah decided to make a man (the father of humanity) whom He called Adam. Allah taught Adam many things so that Adam had more knowledge than the angels. There was one Jinn, called (Satan) Iblis who thought that he was better than Adam . Satan was punished by Allah and he was not allowed to stay with the other angels.

Satan blamed Adam for what had happened to him and was very angry. Allah let Adam live in a beautiful place because he was good. The place was called Paradise. It was a very nice place but Adam was a little lonely for being on his own all of the time. Allah decided to help Adam. He made Hawa (the mother of humanity) to be Adam's wife. Both Adam and Hawa were happy and liked living in Paradise. There was, however, one thing they were not allowed to do. There was a special tree that Allah had told not to eat any fruit from it. At first Adam and Hawa were very good and kept away from the tree.

Satan decided to do something very evil. He told them they were silly to keep away from the tree. He said nothing would happen if they ate its fruit. He said the fruit was delicious and they should try it. After a while they began to listen to Satan and thought they would have just a little taste of the fruit, just to see what it was like.

Satan was very happy because he had made them disobey Allah. As soon as they had eaten the fruit, Adam and Hawa realized that they had done a very big mistake and they felt guilty for what they had done. Allah forgave them but He wouldn't let them stay in Paradise any more So He sent them to live on earth.

2.1.2 The Thematic Structure Analysis

2.1.2.1 Verse 1: The Cow 30

سَبَّحَ	وَأَذْرَبًا قَالَ لِيَهْمُ بِأَحْمُ دَكَ قِ دُو و	رَبِّكَ إِذْ لِيَهْمُ قَالَ إِذْ أَسْ نَلِ ه ع	رَضِي خَيْرًا فَأَنَّا أَنْ جَاعِمُنِي أَلِ نَاعَهُ مُيَنَ مَالِ	وَيَسْفُلُ إِنْدِمَاءَ هَوْدِ فِيهَا سِجِّ
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1. The Translation

When your Lord said to the angels „Indeed I am going to set a viceroy on the earth,“they said, Will You set in it someone who will cause corruption in it, and shed blood, while we celebrate Your praise and proclaim Your sanctity?“He said, Indeed I know what you do not know.“

2. The Local Theme

- a. God decides to create a successive authority .
- b. The angles make a comparison between the bad characteristics of this creation, and their good characters
- c. God knows what others don't know .

3. The Global Theme

God creates a mankind.

4. Classification of the theme

The theme is simple linear with zigzag structure with the following formula:

$$T1-----R1(T2)-----R2(T3)-----R3(T4)-----R4$$

in which I (God) is the first theme with the creation of human kind as the first rheme . This creation comes the second theme for the angles who describe him as someone who causes corruption and sheds blood . The second rheme is the comparison with the angles who celebrate and praise God .Nevertheless, angles' ignorance is the fourth theme beside being the third rheme. The Final Rheme is that God Knows everything. The pattern is shown in the following table:

Table (1)The simple Linear structure of the Cow (30)

Clause	Theme	Rheme
, God decides to create a successive authority	I (God)	decides to create a successive authority
The successive authority causes corruption and sheds bloods	The successive authority	causes corruption and sheds bloods which makes it different from angles
Angles celebrate , praise God and proclaim his sanctity	Angles	celebrate , praise God and proclaim his sanctity
.Angles don't know , God knows	Angels don't Know	God knows

2.1.2.2 Verse2: The Cow(31)



1. The Translation

And He taught Adam the Names, all of them;¹then presented them² to the angels and said, „Tell me the names of these, if you are truthful.

2. The Local Theme

- a. God taught Adams all the names
- b. God proposed the names to the angles
- c. God commanded the angles to identify the names.

3. The Global Theme

God teaches Adam all the names

4. Classification of the Theme

The theme in this verse is a constant theme presented by the word God exemplified in the following formula :

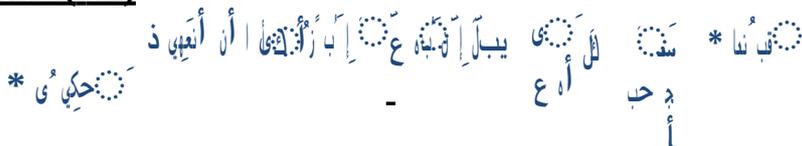
T1-----R1
 T1-----R2
 T1----- R3

The constant theme shows that God is the controller who teaches , proposes and commands . The thematic structure is explained in the following table :

Table (2) The Constant theme of the Cow (31)

Clause	Theme	Rheme
God taught Adams all the names	God	Taught Adams all the name
God proposed the names to the angles	God	Proposed the names to the angles
God told the angles to identify the names	God	Command the angles to identify the names

2.1.2.3 Verse3: The Cow(32)



1. The Translation

. "They said, „Immaculate are You! We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed You are the All-knowing, the All-wise.

2. The Local Theme

- a. The angles admits that they don’t know how identify the names
- b. God is the all knowing and the all wise

3. The Global Theme

God is the teacher of all the creatures

T1-----R1
 T1-----R2
 T1----- R3

The constant theme shows that God is the controller who gives and forgives because he is the clement and merciful .. The thematic structure is explained in the following table :

Table (8) The Constant theme of the Cow (37)

Clause	Theme	Rheme
God gives Adam certain words	God	gives Adam certain words
God forgives Adam	God	forgives Adam
God is the all clement ,all merciful	God	is the all clement ,all merciful

2.1.3 The Macrostructural Theme

As previously sketched in, the semantic constructs are postulated to capture the higher level global structures underlying whole sequences of interrelated discourses. Macrostructures are arrived at through the *recursive* application of *macro rules* that define what is most prominent in the semantic information of whole texts. i.e., their general themes. Discourses that do not have macrostructures are unacceptable in communicative contexts since the lack of global information organization renders the semantic unity of discourse fragmentary (van Dijk, 1985: 117).

Macro-rules are transformations that *reduce* the semantic information of discourse into fewer, more general macrostructures through *deletion*, *generalization*, and *construction*. The first two rules are selective or deletive, while the third is substitutive. Without the application of these rules, no macrostructures could be obtained, and no global coherence could be defined (van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983: 190). The collected global themes can be shown in the following table

NO. OF AYA	Types of theme	The global theme
30	Simple linear	God creates a mankind
31	Constant theme	God teaches Adam all the names
32	Simple linear	God is the teacher of all the creatures
33	Constant theme	God teaches Adam everything which makes Adam 's intellectual capacity better than the angles
34	Simple linear	God honored Adam

35	Constant theme	God allowed Adam and Eve to live in paradise but with the condition of not approaching the tree.
36	Constant theme	Though Satan misguided and deceived Adam and eve but the final decision taken by god that they live on earth for a certain time .
37	Constant theme	God is the giver, forgiver and the merciful

In applying the rules of macrostructure the global or the final message will be :
God is the creator, teacher , the decision maker. and the forgiver and the merciful.

3.0 Conclusions

Thematic structure is the organization of the message into “*theme*” and “*rheme*”. Theme is considered the starting-point for the message; therefore, part of the meaning of any clause lies in that element which is chosen as its theme. A theme, then, is what speakers / writers use as their point of departure. Formally, it is the left-most constituent of the sentence as realized in the grammar of English.

Theme is also considered “what the message is about”. Theme could be derived from the passage itself in a form of a quasi-paraphrase of the same underlying semantic representation or the abstract relations holding between the propositions that are expressed by the sentences of the discourse in relation to some possible world(s), and relative to some set of knowledge or other cognitive information .

Theme could be classified into two levels: i) the microstructural level which is presented by the local semantic coherence, ii) macro structural level that is denoted by the global semantic coherence . *Local* semantic coherence is identified in terms of the semantic relationships set up between the successive sequences of sentences of a discourse, or rather the propositions (idea units) they express. The local coherence refers to the meaningful inter-sentential connections that are signaled by a number of correlates such as word order, the use of connectives, sentential adverbs, verb tenses and pronouns .*Global* coherence is concerned with the meaning of large discourse chunks, or whole discourses that are indicated by a smaller set of higher level propositions (or macropositions).

The two macro semantic levels are realized by the three types of theme : simple linear, constant and multiple . The analysis shows that the percentage of constant is 62.5% ,whereas the percentage of the simple linear theme is 37.5% . There is no instant of multiple theme. This leads to the global macro structural theme that God is the creator, teacher , the decision maker. and the forgiver and the merciful validate the message of the holy Quran.

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