Semantic Prosody in the Qur'an

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Abstract

Semantic prosody refers to lexical items that collocate with semantic classes of words that are either positive or negative. It is the tendency of words to occur in a certain semantic environment. The semantic environment in which words collocate could be positive or negative or sometimes neutral. This phenomenon provides clear pictures of principles of co-selection of words. In addition, it gives a text harmony and cohesion by keeping the discourse together. There has been little work done on collocation and semantic prosody on Arabic. Accordingly, this study participates in shedding the light on the collocational behavior of the Arabic lexical item neighbors, specifically the lexical items in Qur'an. The researcher attempts to answer the following question: Is there semantic prosody in Qur'an? What are the features of this prosody? In other words, do words have a specific semantic behavior such as positive, negative or sometimes neutral? To Answer this question, and with the help of the Qur'anic corpus, the researcher analyses the semantic behavior and the implied attitudinal   meanings   of four verbs in Qur'an which are: ذاق dhāqa *tasted* , كَشفَ kashafa *removed*, مَسَّ massa *touched* and جَاءَ jāa *came*.

Keywords: Semantic prosody, Collocation, Context

1. Background

Semantic prosody refers to the tendency of certain words to collocate with certain semantic classes of words that have either positive or negative meanings. For example, the verb *cause* collocates with unpleasant things such as death, problem, fire, harm, trouble, confusion, accident, etc. This concept has been discovered by (Louw, 1993) when the need for computerized studies into language have been raised.

Semantic prosody studies are connected with the phenomenon of collocational sequence of lexical items that frequently appear together. In other words, this phenomenon is focused on the tendency of words to occur in a certain semantic environment. The semantic environment in which words collocate could be positive or negative or sometimes neutral. In other words, semantic prosody is concerned with tendency of co-occurred words to share either a positive or a negative connotation. For example, you *facilitate* good things such as, support, aid, service, information, money, assistance, care, food, protection, security, etc.

Stubbs (1995) stated, "Words may habitually collocate with other words from a definable semantic set" (p:25). Hunston and Francis agreed with the previous definition and stated, "[A] word may be said to have a particular semantic prosody if it can be shown to co-occur typically with other words that belong to a particular semantic set" (2000, p. 137).

Louw was the linguist who introduced the term *semantic prosody* to the linguistic field. He defined it as "consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates" (1993, p. 157). He mentioned several examples to explain this linguistic issue, such as the adverb *utterly,* which carries negative semantic prosody. Most of collocates that combine with *utterly* are undesirable things, such as depression, sins, destroying, running, etc. His understanding of semantic prosody is based on two significant points, the consistency of collocates and the attituditional function.

> A semantic prosody refers to a form of meaning which is established through the proximity of a consistent series of collocates, often characterisable as positive or negative, and whose primary function is the expression of the attitude of its speaker or writer towards some pragmatic situations. (Louw, 2000, p. 60)

Although Louw (1993) contributed the term semantic prosody to the linguistic field, Sinclair was the first to draw attention to it. He remarked that "Many uses of words and phrases show a tendency to occur in a certain semantic environment. For example, the verb happen is associated with unpleasant things, accidents and the like" (1991, p. 112). He gave this phenomenon a functional feature. He claimed that "The initial choice of semantic prosody is the functional choice which links meaning to purpose; all subsequent choices within the lexical item relate back to the prosody" (1996, p. 86). Sinclair's point of view is that prosody is the reason behind selection of an item rather than another. This is due to the pre evaluation of the action by listener or reader (2000, p.201). It is obvious that Sinclair described semantic prosody from pragmatic level, which means that "the word is associated not with a particular collocating word, but with an attitude which can be expressed in a variety of ways" (2004, pp. 33- 34).

Conversely, Partington (1998) considered semantic prosody as "connotational coloring beyond single word boundaries" (p. 68). He connected strongly between semantic prosody and connotation. He claimed that semantic prosody is a property of a word, and a feature that distinguishes near –synonyms. It is due to the positive or negative meaning a word has or what he called the attituditional meaning. Partington clarified the purpose of semantic prosody, stating that "It evaluates the topic and indicates to the hearer (sometimes unconsciously) how a part of the utterance 'is to be interpreted functionally" (2004, p. 150).

Hunston agreed with the attitudtional meaning a word has when it collocates with a specific semantic set. He saw that this semantic set gives the word the positive or negative prosody (2000,p. 137). He confirmed that:

> Most simply put, it has been argued that if a lexical item most frequently occurs in a context of clearly positive or negative attitudinal meaning, then when it occurs in a different context that positive or negative meaning will colour the interpretation of the given instance. The result is that an additional Attitudinal meaning, derived intertextuality, is implied (2000, p. 205.)

It is obvious that Hunston demonstrated that semantic prosody depends upon context. Context provides a word with positive, neutral or negative assessment prosody. Accordingly, semantic prosody is not a property of the word, as the word can collocate with different semantic prosodies in different contexts. In other words, context plays an essential role in determining the semantic behavior and the attituditional meaning of words. This view draws attention to the significance of context not only in giving words specific meanings, but collocations and expressions as well.

The notion of semantic prosody was expanded by Stubbs (2001) who called it discourse prosody. He looked at the phenomenon from a pragmatic perspective and saw that semantic prosody reflects speaker's attitude; therefore, it identifies functional discourse units. Accordingly, this term is chosen because of its relation with the speaker and hearer from one side, and its function in creating discourse coherence from the other (Stubbs, 2001, p. 66).

Summing up the above, linguists have connected strongly between collocations and semantic prosodies of lexical items. Colloational restrictions play a significant role in determining what goes naturally with what. Collocates that are determined by these restrictions have mostly the same semantic behavior or what is called prosody. This prosody has different functions, according to the views of different linguists. Sinclair and Stubbs believed that this phenomenon has pragmatic function, while Partington said that semantic prosody has attituditional function. Others, like Hunston, see that the semantic prosody of a word is determined by context.

In this paper, the researcher studies four verbs in Qur'an to see the attituditional meanings they have and the role of context in determining this semantic behavior. The researcher attempts to study the attituditional prosodies of these four verbs and the contextual role behind these prosodies.

2. Semantic prosody in Arabic

There has been little work done in Arabic on collocation in general and semantic prosody in particular. There are plenty of examples of collocations in Arabic ancient books; however, the phenomenon itself has not taken a place under a linguistic term in these books. Accordingly, we cannot find studies addressing semantic prosody in Arabic. Recently, some work has been done in the field of collocation; however, semantic prosody as a branch of this phenomenon has not been studied or discussed so far.

The researcher found a study titled by *Collocation and Synonymy in Classical Arabic* (Elewa, 2004) that is an attempt to explain some issues in semantic relations, particularly synonymy, which can be accounted for in terms of collocations by using a computerized concordance that enable large quantities of text to be searched for all occurrences of a particular lexical items. Through corpus analysis, the researcher wanted to show whether two items are intended absolute synonyms or not by checking their relations in all available contexts. In his study, he mentioned the term semantic prosody when he compared between two synonyms, sanah, *year,* and 'aam, *year.* He noticed that the corpus provides many unpleasant collocates that occur with sanah. The unpleasant or negative words that collocate with sanah are punishment, inflation, hardship, drought, infertility, destruction, worse, wars, weakness, and epidemics. These lexical items refer to bad experience or common crisis that happened during a year. Conversely, the corpus shows positive examples that collocate with 'aam, such as goodness, bride, provision, fertile, support. He did not give more details or other examples for the semantic behavior or prosody of other lexical items (p. 64).

This linguistic area is still new in Arabic. It needs more studies to cover its semantic implications. As what has been mentioned before, this paper is considered as one of the early studies in semantic prosody in Arabic in general and in Qur'an in particular.

3. Methodology

The attituditional functional approach by Partington was adopted in this study. In addition, the researcher used Hunston's approach that is based mainly on the context in determining the semantic behavior of lexical items.

The researcher looked up four verbs in the exegesis (the explanation books of Qur'an) and the books of meanings to know their central and marginal meanings. The four verbs were مَسَّ massa *touched*, ذاق dhāqa *taste* , كَشَف kashafa *removed* and جَآءَ jāa *brought*. Then the frequent co-occurrence of each verb was extracted and the collocates that come with them as well. The analysis of the four verbs was based not only on collocates which are immediately next to the focal word, but the researcher also looked for collocates that are found within a contextual window, which is called span. This contextual window is the four or five words to the left and to the right of the core word. Accordingly, the researcher used the context or the long distance from the node (focal word) to extract collocates to which the nodes refer. Some nodes do not have collocates; rather they refer to collocates which are mentioned in previous verses. Finally, the researcher compared the dictionary meanings of the verbs with the Qur'anic meanings to see if the meaning is desirable or undesirable. By the comparison, the

researcher answered two specific questions:

1. Do Qur'anic words have negative or positive properties?

2. What is the role of context in determining the semantic prosody of lexical items?

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 The Verb مَسَّ Massa -- Touched

The verb مسَّ *touched* in the Qur'anic corpus occurs fifty-six times in the Qur'an. The meaning of touch is to put the hand on something; however, it is used metaphorically in the Qur'an, in sense of befalling disbelievers with evil and calamity (Ibn Ashoor, 1984). It is noticed that the verb مسَّ *touched* comes in the Qur'an collocating with different lexical items such as evil, hell, man and good. The meaning of the verb is changed according to collocates they occur with touch. Table 1 clarifies these collocates and the meanings.

Table 1. Frequency of Selected Collocates in the Qur'an

No.	Language		Frequency
	Arabic	English	
1	نار	Hell , fire	4
2	ضراء	Adversity	5
3	نساء	Women	3
4	سوء	Harm	6
5	عذاب	Penalty or punishment	8
6	قرح	Wound	2
7	ضَر	Affliction	11
8	شر	Evil	4
9	بشر	Man	2
10	نصب	Toil	2
11	لغوب	Weariness	2
12	الكبر	Old age	1
13	الشيطان	Devil	2
14	حسنة، خير	Good	3

Table 1 shows that negative collocates of مسَّ are in the majority (85%), compared with the positive collocate (good) and neutral collocates (women and men) of touch, with percentages of 5% and 9 % respectively. Table 2 summarizes these results.

Table 2. Distribution of Semantic Prosody of Massa -- Touch

	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Massa - *touch*	3 5. 3%	48 85. 7%	5 9%

Among the times the verb *touched* is mentioned in Qur'an, it has a negative attituditional meaning or negative prosody fifty times. Even in the verses that do not include direct collocates; the context itself reflects a negative prosody, which gives the verb this attitudtional meaning. In other words, the verb مسَّ *touched* is mentioned mostly in contexts of mentioning disbelievers or the punishment in the Day of Judgment.

4.2 The Verb ذاق Thaqa -- Tasted

ذاق *tasted* occurs thirty-six times in the Qur' an. The direct meaning of this verb is *to taste*; however, in the Qru' an, the verb is used metaphorically in most of its appearances. It is used to show that the feeling of pain and suffer is like a person' s sense of foods' taste (Ibn Adel, 1998). For that, it is noticed that *taste* collocates most frequently with undesirable meanings of words such as penalty, torment, hell and fire (Table 3).

Table 3. Frequency of Collocates of Dhāqu Tasted in   the Qur'an

No	Language		Frequency
	Arabic	English	
1	عَذَاب	Penalty	10
2	عَذَاب الحَريق	The burning fire	3
3	وَبَال أمْرِ	Evil consequences	4
4	البَأس	Wrath	1
5	عَذَابُ النَّار	Torment	6
6	سَقَر، النَّار	Hell	5
7	عَذَاب الخُلْد	Hell of eternity	2
8	الموْتَة الأوْلَى	The first death	1
9	الفِتْنَة	Trial	1
10	السُّوء	Evil	1
11	الشَجَرَة	The tree	1
12	(لا يذُوقون فيها) بَرْداً (ولا) شراباً	(No) cool or drink	1

Table 3 shows that negative collocates of ذاق *taste* in the majority in the Qur' an (97. 2%) as compared with positive uses. Even when it collocated with positive words such as *cool* or *drink*, the verb comes in its negative form (not). Conversely, ذاق *taste* collocates with a positive meaning once, which is with *the tree*. Thus, the percentage of collocating with positive meanings is very low (Table 4).

Table 4. Distribution of Semantic Prosody of   Dhāqu   -- Taste

	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Dh ā qu - taste	1 2.8%	35 97. 2%	0 0%

Context plays a very significant role in determining the attituditional semantic meaning of lexical items. Some of the verses the verb Dhaqa *tast* is used in do not include a direct collocate; However, the context reflects the semantic prosody of this verb. For example:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ شَاقُّوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَمَن يُشَاقِقِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ ﴿١٣﴾ذَٰلِكُمْ فَذُوقُوهُ وَأَنَّ لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابَ

النَّارِ ﴿١٤﴾

> This because they contended against Allah and his messenger, If any contend against Allah and His messenger, Allah is strict in Punishment * That (is the award) so taste it and (know) that for disbelievers is the torment of fire. (Qu'ran 8:13-14)

In the previous Qur'anic verses, the central meaning of the two verses is the punishment for disbelievers who opposed Allah and his messenger. Accordingly, the verb taste refers to something mentioned in the verse before, which is the punishment (Al-zamakhshari, 1995).

Another example is:

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَهُمْ نَارُ جَهَنَّمَ لَا يُقْضَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ فَيَمُوتُوا وَلَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُم مِّنْ عَذَابِهَا كَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِي كُلَّ كَفُورٍ ﴿٣٦﴾وَهُمْ

يَصْطَرِخُونَ فِيهَا رَبَّنَا أَخْرِجْنَا نَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا غَيْرَ الَّذِي كُنَّا نَعْمَلُ أَوَلَمْ نُعَمِّرْكُم مَّا يَتَذَكَّرُ فِيهِ مَن تَذَكَّرَ وَجَاءَكُمُ النَّذِيرُ فَذُوقُوا

فَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِن نَّصِيرٍ ﴿٣٧﴾

> But as for those who disbelieve, for them is fire of hell: No term shall be determined for them, so should they die, nor shall its penalty be lightened for them. Thus do we reward every ungrateful one * They will cry (for assistance) "Our Lord! Release us: we will do right. Not the deeds we used to do.   Did not we grant you a long life, so that whosoever would receive admonition, could receive it? And the warner came to you. Now taste, for evil doers have no helper. (Qu'ran 35:36-37

It is obvious that the context of the two verses is about the punishment disbelievers get

because of their deeds; thus, the verb taste means to taste the flavor of their deeds, which, according to the verses before, is the fire of hell. The verb comes as an order to them to show that they cannot get rid of that hell (Ibn Ashoor, 1984).

4.3 The Verb كشف *Kashafa - Removed*

Kashafa *removed* occurs twenty-times in the Qu'ran, in five derived forms; fourteen times as the verb كَشَفَ kashafa, once as the noun كَشْف kashf, and five times as the active participle, كَاشِف kāshif, كُشِفُت kāshifā, كَاشِفَة kāshifat). The dictionary meaning of كشف *removed* is to lift the cover (Ibn Ashoor, 1984). It is a metaphor to mean removal (Ibid). It has been collocated mostly with negative words. The meaning of كشف *removed* is to remove something good or bad; however, when it collocates with negative words in Qur'an, the meaning of the collocation or the sematic prosody of the expression became positive. For example, penalty has a negative semantic prosody, but it becomes positive when it collocated with the verb *remove* to mean end the punishment.

Table 5. Frequency of Collocates of **Kashafa** Remove in the Qu'ran

No.	Language		Frequency
	Arabic	English	
1	عَذَاب	Penalty	5
2	السُّوء	Evil	1
3	الرجز	Terror	2
4	ساقيها	Legs	1
5	ساق	Shin	1
6	غطاء	Cover	1
7	الضُّر	Harm	8
8	الأزفة	The day of resurrection	1

Table 5 shows that the verb كشف *removed* collocates with negative words eighteen times. These negative collocates in the Qur'an comprise 83.4% of the total number of uses, compared with neutral collocates (leg, shin, cover) representing 16.6%. No positive prosodies of lexical items collocate with the verb كشف remove (Table 6).

Table 6. Distribution of semantic prosody of kashafa – removed

	Positive	Negative	Neutral
kashafa *removed*	0 0%	17 83.4%	3 16.6%

It is obvious that the verb كشف removed does not have this positive or negative meaning. What we are trying to say here is that the short context (the collocational context) and the general context of the surahs (chapters) and verses are the ones that give the verb this attituditional meaning or the specific sematic prosody. To clarify, collocates that come with remove (Table 5) are mostly undesirable (penalty, evil, harm, terror). In spite of this fact, meanings of the combinations are positive, which is to remove bad things. This fact proves that the verb itself

does not have this prosodic meaning. The short context inside the overall context gives the verb this specific prosody. The following example clarifies this point.

قُلْ أَرَأَيْتَكُمْ إِنْ أَتَاكُمْ عَذَابُ اللَّهِ أَوْ أَتَتْكُمُ السَّاعَةُ أَغَيْرَ اللَّهِ تَدْعُونَ إِن كُنتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾بَلْ إِيَّاهُ تَدْعُونَ فَيَكْشِفُ مَا

تَدْعُونَ إِلَيْهِ إِن شَاءَ وَتَنسَوْنَ مَا تُشْرِكُونَ﴿٤١﴾

> Say: can you see yourselves, if the punishment of Allah comes upon you or the Hour come upon you, (calling upon other than Allah)? Do you then call for help to any other than Allah? (Answer than) if you are truthful. * No, on Him would you call. And if it is His will, He would remove (the distress) which occasioned your call upon Him, and you would forget (the false god) which you join with Him (Qu'ran 6:40-41)

The context is about the punishment on disbelievers who claim that other gods than Allah can cause good or harm (Attabari 2000.) so that when the hour of punishment comes, disbelievers call Allah to remove their suffering and pain. The punishment was mentioned in the first verse and the verb *remove* in the next verse refers to it.

أَزِفَتِ الْآزِفَةُ ﴿٥٧﴾لَيْسَ لَهَا مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ كَاشِفَةٌ ﴿٥٨﴾

> The day of resurrection draws near * There shall be none besides Allah to remove it. (Qu'ran 53: 57-58)

Alazifah is the day of resurrection (Ibn Ashoor, 1984) and no one can reveal its time but Allah, so كشف *remove* refers to the day of resurrection, which has been mentioned in the verse before.

4.4 The Verb جَاءَ jāa – Brought

The root jīm yā hamza (ج ي أ) occurs two-hundred seventy-eight times in the Qu'ran as the verb jāa (جَاءَ). The literal meaning of the verb is *came*; however, it has other contextual meanings, such as, brought, came, did, reached and produced. The researcher focused on the verb meaning of *brought*. The verb occurs twenty-nine times in the Qur'an having the meaning *brought*. It collocated frequently with positive prosodic meanings such as: the book, the prophet, the proof, the guidance, the witness and the truth.

Table 7. Frequency of the Collocates of جَآءَ *Brought*

No.	Language		Frequency
	Arabic	English	
1	الحَقّ	Truth	5
2	النبيين	Messengers	1
3	كِتَاب	Book	2
4	آيَة ، أيَات	Revelations	1
5	بَيِّنَة، بِّنَات	Proof	3
6	شهيد	Witness	4
7	وعد الآخِرة	Promise of the hereafter	1
8	عجل	Calf	1
9	الصِّدق	The truth	2
10	الإفك	Lie	1
11	البحر	The sea	1
12	دم	Blood	1
13	السحر	Sorcery	1
14	شيء مبين	Something clear	1
15	بأهدى	Better guidance	1
16	شيئاً فرياً	Terrible unheard thing	1
17	صواع الملك	The great beaker of the king	1
18	بكم	(Jussive's family)	1

Table 7 shows that the positive prosodic attitude of the verb جاء *brought* is mentioned twenty-two times, representing 76% of its uses (Table 8). Conversely, جاء *brought* appeared with negative attituditional meanings (lie, terrible thing, sorcery, blood) four times (14%). The verb collocates with other words that do not have obvious semantic prosody three times (calf, the beaker of the king, Jussive's family (10%).

Table 8. Distribution of Semantic Prosody of جَآءَ -- Brought

	Positive	Negative	Neutral
	22	4	3
jāa brought	76%	14%	10%

As mentioned before, collocates may appear directly after the focal word or appear three or four words before or after. What helped to understand the reference of the verbs is context as in the following example.

وَلَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ يُوسُفُ مِن قَبْلُ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَمَا زِلْتُمْ فِي شَكٍّ مِّمَّا جَاءَكُم بِهِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا هَلَكَ قُلْتُمْ لَن يَبْعَثَ اللَّهُ مِن

بَعْدِهِ رَسُولًا كَذَٰلِكَ يُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَنْ هُوَ مُسْرِفٌ مُّرْتَابٌ ﴿٣٤﴾

And verily Joseph came to you with clear Signs, but you ceased not to in doubt concerning what he brought to you till, when he died, you said: Allah will not send any messenger after him. Thus Allah deceived him who is a prodigal, a doubter. (Qu'ran 40:34)

The verb brought is mentioned two times in the above verse. In the first time, it collocates with *signs*. In the second time, no lexical item collocates with it; however, the contextual meaning shows that it refers to the same collocate *signs* that is mentioned in the first usage.

5. Conclusion

From what has been discussed above, the following points could be concluded:

1) The four verbs under study have negative and positive sematic prosodies, not because they have these attitudes, but rather that they are surrounded by a negative or positive sematic environment. We call this environment collocates, or the textual window a word has. Textual window, or what is called span, is the four or five words before and after the core word. These collocates give the focal word a specific prosody because of the desirable or undesirable meanings they have.

2) Context plays an essential role in determining the semantic prosody of words. In this paper, the analysis was based mainly on the short context (collocations) in the external context and the general context to determine the semantic prosody of the four verbs.

3) Semantic prosody is one of the most important semantic issues in the study of text meaning because it uncovers the semantic behavior of words and the semantic set around these words, which in its turn create harmony and cohesion for the text.

The study of this phenomenon is new in the Arabic linguistic field. More research is required to understand the different dimensions of this issue and its role in linguistics in general and semantics in particular.

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