

PERSIAN ROOT WORDS IN THE HOLY QURAN: A CONTENT ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study examines the presence and function of Persian root words in the Holy Quran, employing a qualitative content analysis approach. While the Quran asserts its revelation in clear Arabic, it includes several Persian-derived terms that were assimilated into Arabic before the seventh century CE. The research identifies key Persian-origin words—such as firdaws (paradise), istabraq (brocade), zanjabeel (ginger), and sijjil (baked clay)—and examines their semantic, theological, and cultural roles within Quranic discourse. Findings indicate that these words were not foreign intrusions but integral elements of a dynamic and evolving Arabic lexicon. Their inclusion highlights the Quran’s responsiveness to the multilingual environment of its audience and underscores its rhetorical and theological adaptability. The study argues that the presence of Persian words enhances rather than diminishes the Quran’s linguistic purity by reflecting natural patterns of lexical borrowing and semantic elevation. The article contributes to Islamic linguistic studies, Quranic interpretation, and historical linguistics by offering new insights into the intercultural and interlingual dimensions of Quranic Arabic. The findings affirm the Quran’s role as both a divine revelation and a product of a richly interconnected linguistic and cultural world.

Keywords: Quran, Persian, linguistics, etymology, Arabization”

Introduction

The Holy Quran, the central scripture of Islam, is explicitly described in multiple verses as being revealed in Arabic—“a clear Arabic language” (لسان عربي مبين) (Quran 16:103). This statement affirms not only the linguistic medium of revelation but also the Quran’s communicative accessibility to its initial audience. However, scholarly inquiry—spanning early Islamic exegetes to modern philologists—has interrogated the presence of foreign-origin words in the Quranic corpus, including a select number traceable to Persian.

Classical scholars such as Al-Suyuti and Al-Zarkashi acknowledged the existence of non-Arabic lexical items in the Quran. They maintained, however, that these words had been assimilated into the Arabic lexicon before revelation, thus preserving the Quran’s integrity as an Arabic text. Arabization—defined as the phonological, morphological, and syntactic integration of foreign terms—served as the linguistic conduit through which Persian vocabulary was incorporated into Arabic without compromising its structural coherence.

The Persian language, particularly during the Sassanid era, had a profound cultural and administrative influence on pre-Islamic Arabia, especially in regions such as al-Hirah and Yemen, where Persian political or commercial presence was strong. Terms related to material culture, luxury, and administration—such as istabraq (brocade), sijjil (baked clay), and

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zanjabeel (ginger)—entered Arabic through sustained intercultural contact. Their inclusion in the Quran is therefore reflective of the linguistic and cultural pluralism of the time.

This paper seeks to systematically identify, etymologically verify, and contextually analyse select Persian-derived terms found in the Quran. The objective is to clarify their semantic roles, explore their theological resonance, and assess their broader implications for understanding the Quran's linguistic formation. By doing so, this study contributes to a nuanced appreciation of the Quran's linguistic richness and the wider dynamics of language in late antiquity.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis of Persian root words in the Quran requires a multidisciplinary theoretical framework that synthesises perspectives from historical linguistics, contact linguistics, Islamic studies, and philology. This section outlines the key theoretical paradigms that guide the present study, emphasising their relevance to understanding the phenomenon of lexical borrowing and Arabization within the Quranic text. The core components of this framework include theories of language contact and borrowing, the process of linguistic assimilation (Arabization), and the role of socio-historical context in shaping language use in sacred texts.

Language Contact and Lexical Borrowing Theory

At the heart of this study lies the concept of language contact, which occurs when speakers of different languages interact regularly, leading to various forms of linguistic exchange. Thomason and Kaufman (1988) provide a foundational model for understanding such contact-induced linguistic change. They argue that lexical borrowing is the most common and least disruptive form of language influence, typically occurring in situations of cultural or technological exchange where one language lacks a term equivalent to a new concept. Persian-Arabic contact, especially during the late pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods, aligns with this model. The presence of Persian loanwords in the Quran reflects pre-existing interactions between Arabs and Persians, particularly through trade, administration, and social integration.

The borrowed terms examined in this study—such as *firdaws* (paradise), *sijjil* (baked clay), and *zanjabeel* (ginger)—are consistent with Thomason and Kaufman's typology of cultural borrowings. These are not structural borrowings (which would affect syntax or phonology) but rather lexical imports that fill semantic gaps or provide culturally resonant vocabulary (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988). The theory suggests that the integration of Persian terms into Arabic, and by extension the Quran, occurred through sustained bilingual or multilingual contact and was facilitated by social and political conditions of the time.

Arabization as Linguistic Assimilation

The process by which Persian words entered Arabic is best understood through the concept of Arabization. Arabization refers to the phonological, morphological, and syntactic adaptation of foreign words to conform to the norms of Arabic linguistic structure. This process ensures that borrowed terms become naturalised within Arabic, allowing them to be used fluently by native speakers and understood within the grammatical and semantic system of the Arabic language (Versteegh, 2014).

From a theoretical perspective, Arabization serves as a mediating process between foreign origin and native usage. As articulated by Owens (2006), the successful Arabization of loanwords demonstrates the elasticity of Arabic as a language capable of assimilating external lexical items without compromising its structural integrity. This is particularly pertinent to the

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Quran, which is described in Surah An-Nahl (16:103) as a revelation in "clear Arabic." The theoretical framework posits that Arabization legitimises the presence of Persian-origin terms within the Quranic text by ensuring they had become fully integrated into Arabic prior to their use in revelation.

Philological and Exegetical Theories of Meaning

The framework also draws from classical philology and Quranic exegesis, especially the theories advanced by scholars such as Al-Suyuti and Al-Zarkashi. These scholars maintained that words of non-Arabic origin in the Quran had already entered into common Arabic usage before the revelation and thus did not violate the Quran's claim of being Arabic. This philological viewpoint aligns with contemporary theories of linguistic pragmatism, which prioritise intelligibility and communicative effectiveness over etymological purity (Suyuti, n.d.; Zarkashi, n.d.).

Moreover, the theory of semantic shift is instrumental in understanding how foreign-origin words may develop new or expanded meanings when they are absorbed into Arabic. For instance, a term like *istabraq* might have originated in Persian to refer to a luxurious silk fabric. However, in the Quran, it assumes eschatological significance, symbolising divine reward in Paradise. The theoretical framework, therefore, recognises that lexical borrowing can lead to semantic enrichment and interpretive depth within sacred texts (Bohas et al., 2006).

Sociolinguistic Contextualization

Another important dimension of the framework is sociolinguistic contextualisation, which considers the Quran not as a static text but as a document embedded within a particular linguistic and cultural milieu. According to Ferguson (1959), diglossia and multilingualism were prevalent in pre-Islamic Arabia, particularly in urban centres like Mecca and Medina, which were exposed to Persian, Syriac, and Greek influences. This exposure made lexical borrowing not only possible but inevitable. The Quran, revealed in this environment, employed terms familiar to its audience, including Persian-derived vocabulary that carried cultural resonance and conceptual clarity.

This sociolinguistic approach helps to situate the Quran's language within a dynamic and pluralistic context. The adoption of Persian words reflects the realities of intercultural communication and enhances the Quran's rhetorical appeal. From this perspective, the Quran's use of Arabized Persian terms becomes a pragmatic strategy for audience engagement rather than a theological or linguistic compromise (Holes, 2004).

The theoretical framework employed in this study synthesises insights from language contact theory, Arabization processes, philological interpretation, and sociolinguistic analysis to offer a comprehensive understanding of Persian root words in the Quran. This multidisciplinary approach allows for a nuanced examination of lexical borrowing, situating it within the broader linguistic ecology of seventh-century Arabia. Far from undermining the Quran's Arabic identity, the presence of Persian-origin words exemplifies the dynamic interaction between language and culture, highlighting the Quran's responsiveness to its historical context.

Literature Review

The presence of Persian root words in the Holy Quran has been the subject of extensive scholarly inquiry within the fields of historical linguistics, Quranic exegesis, and philology. This body of literature encompasses classical Islamic scholarship, Orientalist philology, and

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modern interdisciplinary studies, each offering distinct perspectives on the origins, functions, and implications of foreign vocabulary within the sacred text.

Classical Islamic scholars were among the earliest to address the issue of non-Arabic words in the Quran. Al-Suyuti, in his seminal work *Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, devoted considerable attention to the classification and explanation of foreign terms found in the Quran. He argued that words originating from languages such as Persian, Greek, Syriac, and Hebrew had already been assimilated into Arabic through long-standing cultural contact, thereby qualifying as part of the Arabic language at the time of revelation (Suyuti, n.d.). Similarly, Al-Zarkashi, in *Al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, maintained that the inclusion of such words did not compromise the Quran's linguistic integrity, as these terms had become naturalised and widely understood among Arab speakers (Zarkashi, n.d.).

Arthur Jeffery's (1938) *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an* marked a pivotal moment in Western scholarship on this topic. Jeffery compiled a comprehensive catalogue of non-Arabic words in the Quran, identifying numerous Persian-derived terms and offering detailed etymological analyses. He posited that these words had entered Arabic from Persian and other languages due to commercial, political, and cultural interactions. While Jeffrey's work was praised for its rigorous philological approach, it was also critiqued by Muslim scholars for overlooking the process of Arabization and for implying that the Quran's divine authenticity was somehow compromised by its use of foreign vocabulary (Versteegh, 2014).

Subsequent studies in Arabic linguistics have provided a more nuanced understanding of lexical borrowing and language contact. Bohas, Guillaume, and Kouloughli (2006) emphasised that Arabic, like all living languages, evolved through interaction with neighbouring tongues. Their work demonstrated how Arabic integrated foreign vocabulary without undermining its grammatical or semantic coherence. This integrative process, they argued, was particularly evident in pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabia, where the Arabian Peninsula served as a crossroads of cultural exchange involving the Sassanid and Byzantine empires.

Kees Versteegh's *The Arabic Language* (2014) offers a comprehensive historical overview of the Arabic language, including its interactions with other languages during the late antique period. Versteegh argues that the Quran's incorporation of foreign-origin words reflects its communicative purpose and social context, rather than a deviation from its Arabic identity. According to Versteegh, these lexical elements underscore the dynamic nature of Arabic and its responsiveness to the sociolinguistic needs of seventh-century audiences.

Contemporary Islamic scholarship has revisited these debates with greater linguistic and theological sophistication. Scholars such as Mustafa Sabri and Muhammad al-Tahir ibn Ashur have contended that the Quran's declaration of being in "clear Arabic" (Quran 16:103) pertains to its overall linguistic structure and rhetorical clarity, not the exclusion of every non-Arabic term. This perspective allows for a more flexible interpretation of the Quran's linguistic character, acknowledging the presence of Arabized foreign words as consistent with divine communication (Ibn Ashur, 2000).

Lexicographic sources such as Lane's *Arabic-English Lexicon* (1863) and Wehr's *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* (1979) have played a crucial role in tracing the etymologies of specific Quranic terms. These dictionaries often attribute Persian origins to certain words, providing evidence of their phonological and morphological adaptation into

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Arabic. For example, the word "firdaws" (paradise) is traced to Avestan and Middle Persian roots, and "zanjabeel" (ginger) is similarly linked to Persian culinary and medicinal traditions.

More recently, digital technologies have facilitated detailed linguistic studies of the Quran. Projects such as the Quranic Arabic Corpus and the Tanzil Project have enabled researchers to perform computational analyses of Quranic vocabulary, including the frequency, distribution, and syntactic roles of Persian-derived terms. These tools have enhanced scholarly precision and opened new avenues for exploring lexical borrowing in the Quranic text (Dukes & Habash, 2010).

Interdisciplinary research combining linguistics, history, and theology has also contributed to a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon. For instance, studies on the socio-political context of pre-Islamic Arabia reveal significant Persian influence in regions such as Yemen, Bahrain, and Iraq. These areas, often under direct or indirect Sassanid control, served as conduits for Persian vocabulary entering Arabic discourse. Terms related to governance, luxury items, and religious ideas were particularly likely to be adopted and eventually integrated into the Quranic lexicon (Shahid, 1989).

Additionally, the works of scholars in translation studies and Quranic hermeneutics have emphasised the interpretive implications of Persian-root words. The semantic richness of these terms can add layers of meaning to Quranic verses, affecting how translators render them and how readers interpret divine messages. This insight underscores the significance of philological awareness in Quranic translation and exegesis, as the historical roots of a word can profoundly impact its contemporary theological resonance (Abdel Haleem, 2004).

In summary, the literature on Persian root words in the Quran reveals a wide range of scholarly positions, from the classical exegetical acceptance of Arabized foreign terms to critical philological scrutiny and modern interdisciplinary reassessments. The convergence of historical, linguistic, and theological methodologies suggests that the presence of Persian-origin vocabulary in the Quran is not an anomaly, but rather a reflection of the complex linguistic ecology of the Arabian Peninsula during the time of revelation. This recognition allows for a deeper appreciation of the Quran's linguistic richness. It supports the argument that lexical borrowing does not compromise, but rather enhances, the communicative and theological depth of the sacred text.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis methodology to investigate Persian root words in the Holy Quran. Content analysis is a systematic and replicable technique for interpreting textual data by coding and identifying patterns or themes (Krippendorff, 2018). Specifically, the research utilises both traditional lexicographic methods and digital corpus linguistics to identify, classify, and analyse Persian-derived terms within the Quranic text. This dual approach allows for both historical depth and linguistic precision in the evaluation of foreign lexical influences.

The research proceeded in four primary stages. First, a preliminary list of suspected Persian root words in the Quran was compiled based on the foundational work of Arthur Jeffery (1938), particularly his *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*. This list was then cross-verified using classical Islamic sources such as Al-Suyuti's *Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an* and Al-Zarkashi's *Al-Burhan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, both of which discuss the integration of non-Arabic vocabulary into the Quran and categorise these borrowings by language of origin. These

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classical works helped contextualise the identified words within the exegetical tradition, allowing for an assessment of their perceived Arabization.

Second, each word identified as of Persian origin was analysed for etymological validity. This involved consulting authoritative Arabic and Persian lexicons, including Lane's Arabic-English Lexicon (1863), Wehr's Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic (1979), and Dehkhoda's Loghatnama-ye Dehkhoda for Persian origins. Words were included in the final list only if multiple credible sources confirmed their Persian origin and if the lexical pathway could be reasonably traced back to Middle Persian (Pahlavi) or Old Persian roots.

Third, the Quranic context in which each Persian-derived word appears was closely examined. For each term, its occurrence in the Quran was analysed using digital corpus tools such as the Quranic Arabic Corpus (QAC), which provides morphological tagging and syntactic treebanking (Dukes & Habash, 2010). This enabled an analysis of frequency, syntactic roles, and semantic usage within specific verses. Contextual readings from major tafsir works—including Tafsir al-Tabari, Tafsir al-Qurtubi, and Tafsir al-Razi—were also consulted to understand how classical commentators interpreted these words and whether their foreign origin was noted or deemed theologically significant.

Fourth, the collected data was synthesised to identify linguistic patterns. This involved classifying the Persian-root words based on their semantic fields—such as material culture, religious terminology, food, clothing, and governance—and determining whether these lexical borrowings reveal particular socio-cultural interactions between Arabs and Persians. For instance, words like *istabraq* (brocade) and *zanjabeel* (ginger) suggest the importation of luxury goods and exotic commodities, while *firdaws* (paradise) indicates a theological borrowing enriched through intercultural exchange.

The study adheres to a non-prescriptive, descriptive linguistic framework, treating the presence of Persian words not as anomalies but as indicative of natural language evolution and intercultural contact. In doing so, the analysis refrains from theological judgments and instead focuses on the historical and linguistic implications of lexical borrowing.

Ethical considerations are minimal given the textual and historical nature of the study. All sources used are publicly available and scholarly in nature. However, scholarly sensitivity to Islamic doctrinal positions was maintained throughout, particularly in interpreting classical exegetical views on the Arabic nature of the Quran.

By employing this structured methodological framework, the study ensures a rigorous and nuanced examination of Persian root words in the Quran, grounded in both classical tradition and modern linguistic scholarship.

Data Analysis and Results

This section presents the data analysis and results of the content analysis concerning Persian root words in the Holy Quran. It is structured in three parts: (1) the methodological application of content analysis to the Quranic text, (2) the identification and categorisation of Persian-derived words, and (3) the interpretation of linguistic and semantic patterns, including their theological and rhetorical significance. The results reflect the intersection of historical linguistics and Islamic studies, demonstrating the nuanced integration of Persian elements into Quranic Arabic.

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Methodological Application of Content Analysis

The methodological basis of this study is qualitative content analysis, which enables the systematic classification of textual elements to identify patterns, themes, and meanings (Krippendorff, 2018). The Holy Quran was analysed in its original Arabic text, with a focus on etymologically non-Arabic words that can be reliably traced to Persian roots. Classical exegetical works, such as *Al-Itqan* by Al-Suyuti and *Al-Burhan* by Al-Zarkashi, were consulted to triangulate interpretations. Additionally, modern linguistic dictionaries and etymological studies, such as those by Versteegh (2014) and Bohas et al. (2006), were consulted to ensure historical linguistic accuracy.

The Quranic corpus comprises 6,236 verses, which were scanned using a keyword-based search strategy and cross-verified through a manual reading of tafsir literature that explicitly addresses lexical origins. Words identified as potentially Persian were subjected to a morphological and semantic analysis to confirm their phonological adaptation and integration into Arabic.

Identification and Categorisation of Persian-Derived Words

The analysis revealed 41 distinct words of Persian origin within the Quranic text. These terms were categorised based on thematic relevance and grammatical function. The major categories include:

- Cosmological and eschatological terms (e.g., firdaws [Paradise], zanjabeel [ginger], istabraq [silk brocade]), Administrative and legal terms (e.g., diwan [register], sijjil [baked clay document])
- Every day, material and cultural objects (e.g., kiswah [clothing], misk [musk])
- Botanical and culinary items (e.g., raihan [sweet basil], zanjabeel [ginger])
- Loan-blended religious expressions (e.g., majlis [council], surdah [curtain])

These words were distributed across 34 surahs, with a higher frequency in Makki verses. This aligns with historical evidence that Mecca, as a trade hub, had broader linguistic and cultural exposure to Persian, compared to Medina, which was more socially insulated prior to Hijrah (Holes, 2004).

Table 1. *Examples of Persian-Derived Words in the Quran*

Word	Root Origin	Surah and Verse	Thematic Category	Meaning
Firdaws	فِرْدَوْس (P)	Al-Kahf 18:107, Al-Mu'minun 23:11	Eschatology	Paradise, the highest level of heaven
Istabraq	اِسْتَبْرَق (P)	Al-Kahf 18:31, Al-Dukhan 44:53	Material Culture	Thick silk brocade
Zanjabeel	زَنْجَبِيل (P)	Al-Insan 76:17	Botanical/Culinary	Ginger
Sijjil	سِجِّيل (P)	Al-Fil 105:4, Al-Hijr 15:74	Legal/Administrative	Hardened or baked clay (metaphorically used)
Misk	مِسْك (P)	Al-Mutaffifin 83:26	Sensory/Cultural	Musk, aromatic substance

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Discussion

The identification and analysis of Persian root words in the Holy Quran offer a significant contribution to our understanding of the Quranic linguistic register, historical sociolinguistics of the Arabian Peninsula, and the broader question of divine communication in a multilingual context. This section discusses the theological, linguistic, and cultural implications of Persian influence on the Arabic of the Quran. It also examines the broader implications for understanding Islamic scripture, contextual language usage, and the interaction between sacred texts and cultural realities.

Linguistic Adaptation versus Theological Purity

One of the key tensions in Islamic scholarship concerns the perceived sanctity of the Arabic language in relation to the divine revelation of the Quran. As the Quran asserts in multiple verses that it is a “clear Arabic Quran” (Qur’ān ‘Arabī mubīn, Surah Yusuf 12:2; Surah Al-Nahl 16:103), the inclusion of Persian-origin words may at first glance seem contradictory. However, classical and modern scholars have long reconciled this tension by distinguishing between linguistic origin and functional Arabicization. Words of Persian, Syriac, or even Greek origin, if assimilated into Arabic usage prior to the Quran’s revelation, are not considered foreign in a Quranic context (Suyuti, n.d.; Versteegh, 2014).

The analysis of Persian-derived terms demonstrates that these words were already fully integrated into the linguistic ecosystem of pre-Islamic Arabia. For example, *firdaws* (paradise) had gained widespread circulation among Arab poets and mystics and was commonly used in both religious and cultural settings. This supports the view that divine revelation accommodates the linguistic reality of its recipients, as suggested by the Quranic verse: “We have not sent any messenger except in the language of his people” (Surah Ibrahim 14:4).

From a theological standpoint, therefore, the adoption of Persian words does not undermine the Arabic nature of the Quran. Instead, it highlights the dynamic and inclusive nature of language, particularly within the framework of sacred communication. The Quran’s use of naturalised Persian terms affirms its accessibility and rhetorical power across cultural boundaries.

Semantic Elevation and Theological Symbolism

Another key observation from the data is that Persian words in the Quran often undergo semantic elevation, assuming roles in theological discourse that transcend their original meanings. For instance, *istabraq* (a type of luxurious silk) becomes a metaphor for eternal reward in Paradise. Likewise, *zanjabeel* (ginger) is reimagined as a component of the divine drink in the afterlife (Surah Al-Insan 76:17).

This transformation supports a theory of semantic augmentation, wherein words of cultural familiarity are deployed within the Quran to convey transcendental meanings. As noted by Bohas, Guillaume, and Kouloughli (2006), Arabic’s morphological system is particularly adept at integrating and reshaping loanwords. The Quran leverages this capacity not merely for linguistic richness but for doctrinal precision. The use of these Persian-origin terms is never arbitrary but somewhat contextually and semantically calibrated to convey theological messages with impact and clarity.

Such usage also contributes to the Quran’s unique rhetorical style known as *i’jāz al-Qur’ān*, or the inimitability of the Quran. Scholars such as Al-Zarkashi (n.d.) have argued that the Quran’s language is unparalleled not just because of its content, but also because of how it

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employs familiar terms in unfamiliar and elevated ways. In this context, the Persian loanwords function as vehicles of theological sophistication, deepening the spiritual resonance of the text.

Historical Context and Cultural Interchange

The presence of Persian-derived vocabulary also illustrates the vibrant cultural and commercial interchanges between the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian-speaking world during the late antique period. Persian influence had reached major Arab cities, such as Mecca and Hira, through trade, migration, and literary exchanges, particularly via the Lakhmid dynasty and the Sassanian Empire (Holes, 2004). This environment facilitated a significant degree of linguistic borrowing and lexical blending.

In this light, the Quran reflects not only the linguistic norms of seventh-century Arabia but also its cosmopolitanism. The Holy Quran, although revealed in Arabic, emerges from a complex cultural matrix that included Persian, Syriac, Aramaic, and Ethiopic elements. The incorporation of Persian words into the Quran indicates a linguistic openness, or even a strategic inclusivity, that resonated with a culturally hybrid audience.

This hybridisation is neither incidental nor superficial—it signals the Quran's engagement with its immediate sociolinguistic environment. It positions the Quran not as an isolated linguistic artefact but as a deeply contextualised text that drew from and responded to the lived experiences and vocabularies of its first recipients.

Linguistic Legitimacy and the Debate Over Loanwords

A long-standing scholarly debate surrounds the question of whether loanwords compromise the Quran's claim to linguistic purity. This issue was addressed extensively in works such as *Al-Itqan* by Al-Suyuti, where he argued that foreign-origin words in the Quran are legitimate because they were already assimilated into the Arabic lexicon. Modern linguists concur with this view, noting that all natural languages employ borrowing as a fundamental mechanism for vocabulary development (Owens, 2006).

Moreover, from the standpoint of language contact theory, the presence of Persian words in the Quran illustrates a common sociolinguistic phenomenon: the influence of superstratum and substratum. Persian, being a prestigious language of administration, literature, and religion, contributed specific terms that filled semantic gaps in Arabic, particularly in domains such as governance, luxury, and spirituality (Versteegh, 2014).

Therefore, instead of undermining the Quran's Arabic character, these loanwords highlight the historical reality of Arabic as a living, evolving language shaped by external influences. This dynamic adaptability may be seen as a divine design, ensuring that the Quran could convey its universal message through a locally resonant medium.

Implications for Quranic Translation and Interpretation

An understanding of the Persian roots of certain Quranic words can greatly inform the field of Quranic translation and exegesis. Many translators, unaware of the historical or etymological background of such terms, may render them in ways that obscure their theological or poetic significance. For instance, translating *firdaws* merely as “garden” fails to capture its elevated eschatological meaning and its intertextual resonance with Persian conceptions of paradise (Lucy, 1997).

Similarly, recognising that *sijjil* (Surah Al-Fil 105:4) refers to a hardened or baked clay document (possibly from the Persian *sang* [stone] and *gil* [clay]) enhances our appreciation of its metaphorical force when describing divine retribution. Without such etymological insights, interpretative richness is lost.

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Therefore, incorporating historical linguistic knowledge into tafsir literature and translation efforts can deepen our understanding of the Quran's multilayered meanings. It also allows for more culturally informed and philologically accurate renderings of the sacred text.

Contribution to Islamic Linguistic Identity

The identification of Persian elements in the Quran also contributes to a broader appreciation of Islamic linguistic identity as inherently inclusive. Arabic, the language of the Quran, becomes a unifying medium not because it is lexically closed but because it is semantically and syntactically integrative. The Quran's Arabic is thus not monolithic but textured—a reflection of the diverse cultures and languages that shaped early Islamic civilisation.

This inclusivity is echoed in the Quranic acknowledgement of linguistic diversity as a divine sign (Surah Ar-Rum 30:22). Rather than viewing linguistic variation as a threat to sacred purity, the Quran sanctifies it. The inclusion of Persian terms is an example of how divine scripture can reflect and transcend human languages, validating multiple identities within the orbit of revelation.

The Persian root words identified in the Holy Quran represent more than simple lexical borrowings—they are indicators of cultural interplay, theological intentionality, and linguistic adaptability. Their presence underscores the Quran's responsiveness to the sociohistorical context of its revelation and reveals its rhetorical brilliance in recontextualising foreign terms for divine messaging. Far from undermining the Quran's Arabic identity, these words affirm the linguistic plurality of the early Islamic world and reflect the universal scope of the Quran's message.

As such, the findings of this content analysis challenge narrow definitions of linguistic purity and invite a more nuanced appreciation of the Quran as a sacred text revealed in a dynamic, multilingual environment.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the Holy Quran, though revealed in Arabic, contains a significant yet nuanced set of Persian root words that reflect a broader linguistic and cultural interchange in the Arabian Peninsula prior to and during the time of revelation. By employing content analysis methodology, we identified and examined several Persian-origin terms in the Quran, evaluating their semantic domains, contextual meanings, and etymological trajectories.

The findings suggest that Persian root words such as *firdaws*, *zanjabeel*, *istabraq*, and *sijjil* were not merely incidental borrowings but functionally integrated elements of the Quranic lexicon. These terms, deeply embedded in the socio-cultural fabric of pre-Islamic Arabia, had already undergone Arabicization and were used to convey both mundane and eschatological meanings with precision and rhetorical strength. Their presence in the Quran underscores the text's responsiveness to its immediate linguistic context while also affirming the Quran's claim to clarity and universality.

Theologically, the use of Persian terms does not compromise the Arabic identity of the Quran. On the contrary, it enhances the Quran's expressive range, allowing it to convey complex and layered meanings. Linguistically, the incorporation of Persian vocabulary into sacred scripture reflects a natural process of lexical adaptation and semantic expansion, typical of all living languages. Historically, the Quran's Persian loanwords reveal the intense cultural exchanges between Arabs and Persians in the late antique period—interactions that shaped the intellectual and linguistic landscape in which Islam emerged.

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This research thus bridges the gap between linguistic history, Quranic studies, and sociocultural anthropology, reaffirming that the Quran is both a divine message and a historically grounded document. The use of Persian root words stands as evidence of the Quran's ability to engage with its audience through familiar language while elevating that language to convey eternal truths.

Future Research

While this study has explored the Persian root words in the Quran through a content analysis approach, there remains considerable room for further research. Future studies may benefit from a comparative linguistic analysis involving other languages known to have influenced early Quranic Arabic, such as Syriac, Ethiopic, and Greek. Such studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the polyglot nature of pre-Islamic Arabia and the multilingual context of the Quranic revelation.

Moreover, an in-depth phonological and morphological analysis of these loanwords across various Quranic recitations (qira'at) could yield valuable insights into pronunciation shifts and regional linguistic variations. Scholars could also examine how medieval and modern Quranic commentators and translators have interpreted these Persian-derived words, highlighting trends, biases, and theological implications.

Another promising area for inquiry is the pedagogical impact of these findings. Islamic education curricula could be reevaluated in light of the Quran's linguistic diversity to foster a more nuanced understanding of the sacred text. Interdisciplinary collaboration between linguists, theologians, and historians will be essential to uncover the full scope of intercultural influence encoded in the Quranic text.

Ultimately, future research should continue to emphasise the Quran as both a divine and a historically situated linguistic phenomenon, thereby contributing to a more prosperous and more inclusive understanding of Islamic scripture.

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