

THE IDEA OF 'MULTIPLE MEANINGS' IN AL-JURJĀNĪ'S THEORY OF COMPOSITION*

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ABSTRACT

Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī introduces an idea of 'multiple meanings' in the context of his theory of construction (*naẓm*) where he analyzes Arabic syntactic structure and grammatical principles from a semantic point of view. His analysis represents an approach to grammar based on the formal functions of grammatical categories as they affect the surface structure of linguistic utterance (*lafz*), hence the meaning (*ma'nā*) of a statement (*kalām*). For him there is a multiple correspondences and interplay between structure of thought, deep structure and surface structure of a statement. From this standpoint, there is not only one 'meaning' in a text, instead, there are 'meanings' that intertwiningly coexist in one and the same text. The surface structure of the text itself, however, offers only a 'glimpse' of these 'multiple meanings' to a reader in accordance with his own conditions.

Key Words: *Al-Jurjānī, naẓm, f'jaz, lafz-ma'nā relationship, poetic imagery, meaning of meaning, multiple meanings.*

ÖZET

Arap dilinin yapısını ve nahvin prensiplerini, kendisine ait *naẓm teorisi* bağlamında semantik açıdan inceleyen Abdü'l-Ķāhir el-CürĶānī, *kelamda çok anlamlılık* fikrini ortaya koymuştur. CürĶānī analizlerinde, biçimsel gramer kurallarının, kelamın 'üst yapısı' olarak *lafızda* nasıl tezahür ettiğini, dolayısıyla da *manayı* nasıl etkilediğini açıklamaya çalışmaktadır. Ona göre, gramer kuralları ile kelamın görünen yüzü olarak tezahür eden lafız ve onun da 'alt yapısı' olan insan düşüncesinin yapısı arasında çok yönlü bir ilişki ve etkileşim söz konusudur. Bu açıdan bakıldığında, bir *metinde* sadece bir anlam değil, birbiriyle etkileşim içinde, aynı anda birden çok anlam var olagelmektedir. Dolayısıyla bir metin, kendisinde mevcut olan çeşitli anlamlar hakkında, okuyucuya, onun içinde bulunduğu fiziki ve psikolojik duruma bağlı olarak, 'işmar' etmekte olan bir yüzden ibarettir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *CürĶānī, nẓm teorisi, f'cāz, lafız-ma'nā ilişkisi, şiirsel tasvir, şiirsel imgelem, anlamın anlamı, çok anlamlılık.*

* This is a 'research paper' presented at a seminar (*Arabic Literature and Literary Theory* (AMES 434)) at the *University of Pennsylvania* in the fall semester of 1996, as a part of author's graduate studies in the USA. The author anticipates publishing a fully developed 'article' form of the paper, in this or another academic journal, in a later time.

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Introduction

‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī¹ occupies a unique and distinguished place in the classical Arabic linguistic tradition. His contribution to the Arabic linguistic thinking is best represented in his theory of construction (*nazm*) and in his analysis of poetic imagery. Al-Jurjānī’s theory of construction represents the climax of three centuries of explorations on the mysteries of artistic superiority, expressiveness, poetic structure, as well as the nature and function of poetic imagery, the role of individual words in a literary composition, and the relationship between form and content in Arabic writings. These studies initially concerned with the questions related to the verification and explication of the text of the Qur’ān. Grammar, rhetoric, and the allied studies were developed chiefly as a means of adequately interpreting or justifying the linguistic usages of the Qur’ān since from the outset, the Qur’ān has been regarded as the masterpiece of all Arabic writing, being possessed of the quality of ‘inimitability’ (*i‘jāz*).

The thinking of earlier writers on this issue of inimitability, with few exceptions, was dominated by the duality of word (*lafz*) and meaning (*ma‘nā*). Some argued that the inimitability was due to the Qur’ān’s words; others, that it was due to its meaning. Al-Jurjānī, however, rejects the duality between word and meaning, advancing the theory that neither words alone nor meanings alone can explain literary expressiveness in general or the inimitability of the Qur’ān in particular.

¹ ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 471/1078) is one of the most famous grammarians, rhetoricians, and literary theorists of Arabic literary and linguistic tradition. His contribution to Arabic linguistic tradition is recognized by both traditional Arabic rhetoricians as well as modern writers as one of the most genuine and comprehensive attempt to the understanding of the creative process in a literary product. Thus, he has received from modern scholars, far greater attention and acclaim than any other critic or rhetorician in the classical Arabic-Islamic literary and linguistic tradition, and considered as one of the closest of all classical Islamic critics to the critical spirit and mentality of modern era. Best examples of comparative studies about him and some leading modern linguists and literary critics can be found in the works of Muḥammad Mandūr, M. Z. ‘Ashmāwī, and K. Abu Deeb. For information on al-Jurjānī’s life and works, see Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*, 2nd ed., and (Leiden: 1943-49) 1: 287-88 and *Supplement*, (Leiden: 1937-42) 1: 503-505.

Al-Jurjānī argues that the beauty and expressive power are functions of the interaction between the semantic constituents of a literary composition as they are organized in a specific construction or a specific syntactic pattern, which he calls *nazm*. The *nazm*, he says, is nothing but the fulfillment of the requirements imposed by the grammar of the language. However, grammar here does not represent the set of criteria, which determine correctness, and incorrectness of sentences but the body of rules that organizes the relationships between meanings in a given pattern determined by the structure of experience itself. Thus, *nazm* embodies the structure of experience underlying the composition, and it consists of a single act of formulation. It is, therefore, indivisible into meanings and words. In other words, *nazm* exists and functions as a harmonious totality within which every element interacts with, modifies, and is modified by the total structure. No element is extraneous or superfluous, and any change in the syntactic structure engenders changes in the semantic structure itself.

In his famous *Dalā'il al-i'jāz* (Indications or Proof of Inimitability) al-Jurjānī introduces an idea of 'multiple meanings' in a text.² In this work, he explores the nature of meaning, signification, syntactic patterns, and interplay and correspondence between the structure of thought and the structure of language by concentrating on the deep structure of linguistic utterance (*lafz*). For al-Jurjānī, meaning does not exist outside its own form. Thus, same meaning cannot be expressed in two different ways, one being more eloquent than another is. However, there is not only one meaning in a text but 'meanings' that intertwiningly coexist in one and the same text. The text itself offers only a 'glimpse' of these multiple meanings to a reader according to its own conditions, but it never reveals all that it contains.

This paper will investigate al-Jurjānī's concepts of 'word', 'grammatical meaning', and finally, 'meaning of meaning'.

² Some of Al-Jurjānī's ideas are evident in an embryonic form in the writings of Khattābī (388/998) and 'Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad (d. 415/1025) whose works may have influenced al-Jurjānī's thinking.

A. Meaning of Word (*ma'nā al-lafz*)

One of the main concerns of al-Jurjānī in *al-Dalā'il* is to investigate the origin of the word and the way it indicates the meaning. According to him, the origin of words is arbitrary, and there is no necessary-obligatory relationship between the meaning of a word and the sounds in which the word consists. For example, to designate the concept of hitting in Arabic, the set of sounds *ra-ba-ḍa* instead of *ḍa-ra-ba* would have been as valid as the latter one is, if the language convention had constructed it that way. They would both fulfill that function, the function of indicating the meaning of "hitting."³

On the other hand, according to al-Jurjānī, words do not create meanings but instead they are created to make distinctions between "things" referring by each of them to a particular thing. If this were not the case, and instead meanings were the words' own properties, then, for example when saying the name *zayd* everybody should understand whom we are talking about, whether they know him or not. Alternatively, when we say *rajul*, everyone who hears us, should understand what we mean, whether knows Arabic or not. According to al-Jurjānī:

What proves (the validity) of this principle is that if we alleged that individual words were invented so that the identity of what they symbolize may be known, it would lead to an undoubted absurdity; it would mean that the words which refer to various species (or categories) were invented so that these species themselves may be known and recognized by us. In other words, had the word 'man', 'horse', and 'house' not been created in the language, we would not have had any knowledge of the concepts or objects which these words designate. Similarly had the words 'he does' and 'he did' not been formulated we should not have been able to recognize the essence of the act of 'doing' as a predication. Moreover, if particles had not been invented, we should have been unable to know their meanings or even to understand negation, prohibition, interrogation, and exception. How could that be when a word cannot be set in (the language convention) except to designate a known (object or concept)? For it is absurd to attach a noun or anything other than a noun to something unknown. This is because *giving a name is just like pointing to something* (italics mine).

³ 'Abd al-Qāhīr al-Jurjānī, *Dalā'il al-lafz fi 'ilm al-ma'ānī* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1994) 51.

And just as when you say, 'take that', the demonstrative pronoun will never convey to the listener the identity of the thing pointed to itself, but only let him know that this particular object is the one you have in mind out of all the objects within eyesight, thus it is exactly the same in the case of a word and what it was set to indicate.⁴

Al-Jurjānī here lays the foundation for a new theory that rejects the theory dominant in his time that stressed the idea of superiority of the *lafz* (utterance) over *ma'nā* (meaning). Before al-Jurjānī, literary discussions focused on the utterance and its meaning giving superiority either to the utterances or their meanings. The eloquence of an expression came from either a word's sound system or what it contains as meaning. However, al-Jurjānī, unlike his predecessors, argued that eloquence does not derive from word nor does utterance or meaning. For if this were true, then the same word should not be more eloquent in a different context (it should always have the same level of eloquence). Therefore, it is not sufficient to take the issue in that narrow point of view. Al-Jurjānī asks:

... Is it conceivable that two words can be better or worse than each other as far as their power to signify is concerned? And that one of them signifies the meaning which it was created to signify in a better way than another word can refer to its own meaning? Is it conceivable that the word 'man' refers more adequately to its meaning than the word 'horse' to its own meaning?" "...is it conceivable that with two names which conventionally apply to the same thing, one of them is more adequate to express it and to reveal its image than the other, [so that the word *laith* for instance, can be more adequate in referring to the known animal *sab'* (lion), than (its synonym) *asad* ?].⁵ Or that in comparing two languages such as Arabic and Persian we are justified in saying that *rajul* (man) refers to this human being more adequately than its Persian equivalent?⁶

According to al-Jurjānī, the meaning of words reaches us conventionally and if we take the words individually in terms of indicating meanings, they do not have any kind of superiority over each other. On the other hand, when we

⁴ *Dalā'il* 344-45.

⁵ Abu Deeb translates the sentence, *fa yakun laith mathalan adalla 'ala al-sab' al-ma'lūm min asad* as "so that the word '*layih*' (lion), for instance, can be more adequate in referring to the known animal than (its synonym) '*sab'*.'" I think my translation, given above in brackets, is closer to the original text.

⁶ *Dalā'il* 46-47.

use a word in an expression, it is as if we give it a new meaning that is different from its conventional meaning and the meanings it bears in other places. For al-Jurjānī, this new meaning comes from the way in which we use the word. What determines this particular way is the structure of our grammatical process which also determines the grammatical structure of the sentence in which that particular word occurs. Thus the meaning of a word depends on the structure of the expression. For example take a very simple sentence like *kharaja zaydun* to indicate the departure of Zayd. If you say *kharaja* and *zayd* without connecting them, the meaning is not conveyed. Furthermore, according to al-Jurjānī, not only does the meaning of a word depend on the structure of the expression but also its eloquence. For example, if we change the order of the words in Imr' al-Qays's famous line *qifā nabki min dhikrā habībin wa-manzūli* we retain neither the line's meaning nor the eloquence.⁷

Al-Jurjānī concludes that the exclusive focus on words in determining the literary value of a text is not appropriate. He recognizes the need for a more sophisticated and comprehensive approach to a text and its meaning. Consequently, he redefined textual meaning by analyzing the creative process using a new psychological approach. In the next two sections, I will explore two concepts of meaning introduced by al-Jurjānī: "grammatical meaning" and "meaning of meaning."

B. Grammatical Meaning (*ma'nā al-naḥw*)

Al-Jurjānī defines meaning as "what is understood from the outer appearance of the utterance, and what you reach without any kind of intermediary [that is, directly]" (*Al-ma'nā al-majhūm min zāhir al-lafz wa-alladhī taṣil ilayh bi-ghayri wāṣiṭah*).⁸

In this definition, the key word is *al-majhūm*. We can translate it as 'a single conceptual complex'. Al-Jurjānī says elsewhere: "When you say 'Zayd hit 'Amr on Friday very hard in order to correct him', you get the combination of these

⁷ *Dalā'il* 262-63.

⁸ *Dalā'il* 177.

words as a *mafḥūm* (a single conceptual complex) which is one meaning and not several meanings, as people imagine. That is because you do not use these words for the sake of their isolated meanings, but to show the ways in which relations are established between the verb 'hit' (*daraba*) and the word it governs and to show also the implications and consequences (*al-aḥkām*) generated by these relations."⁹

If you change these relations the meaning will also change. For instance, if you say *ʿAmr* first instead of *Zayd* the meaning of the sentence will be completely reversed. The order of the sentence is not accidental nor is it coincidental but it is determined by the order of the image in the psyche of the speaker. For al-Jurjānī, the arrangement of the words in a particular construction

.. is not what you direct your mental powers towards achieving, but is an inevitable result of the first construction (the construction of meanings). Since words are the bearers of the meanings it is inevitable that words should take the same positions as their meanings. That is, if a meaning demands to be placed first in psyche, the word which refers to it should be placed first in the utterance.¹⁰

In other words, one meaning cannot be expressed in two different ways. Any syntactic change in a composition generates changes on the semantic level. Thus, it is possible to replace the words with their synonyms, or to translate the whole sentence to another language, but, if you want to save the meaning, you must retain the grammatical order of the sentence. Only in this way can you save the meaning which corresponds to the image which occurred in the speaker's psyche or his/her mind. On the other hand, as a reader, only this meaning reaches us "directly" or in al-Jurjānī's own words *bi-ghayr wāsiṭah*.

The basic idea in this analysis is that the meaning of discourse comes from its order, not from independent utterances. If we change the order of a sentence whether we lose its meaning completely or partially, or we lose the eloquence. Al-Jurjānī asks, for instance, if we were to take Imr' al-Qays's famous line *qifā nabki min dhikrā habibin wa manzili*, and change its order to *min nabki qifā habibin dhikrā manzili* would it have the same eloquence, and would it lose its

⁹ *Dalā'il* 265.

¹⁰ *Dalā'il* 52-53.

meaning too? He argues that, if we change the order of the words in a line, not only will the eloquence be lost but also the meaning will be lost.¹¹ He explains it thus: "This particular pattern occurs in the words following the arranged meanings in the psyche (*nafs*) which have an order presupposed by the intellect (*'aql*)."¹²

Thus the creative process which begins in the mind of the poet by the rise of a mental image finds its expression in the utterances which are ordered in a certain way. If we change this particular order, the meaning will also change or be completely lost, even if the same words are preserved.

With these examples, al-Jurjānī shows the importance of the relationship between the order of words, meaning and eloquence in a sentence. If we lose order, we lose everything. According to al-Jurjānī, the very order of the discourse comes from the inner state of the speaker. The order of the speaker's feelings and imaginations determine the structure of the sentence during the creative process. In other words, the "surface structure" of the sentence is determined by the "deep structure" which represents the inner state of the speaker as an implicit relationship and arrangement of the meanings.

Al-Jurjānī calls the very order of words and the order of their archetypes *nazm*. The concept *nazm* is used to link content and form inseparably. It is usually translated as "construction." It is also translated by some writers, such as Rammuny, as discourse or speech. The description of *nazm*, in the translation of Rammuny, is as follows: "*Nazm* (discourse, speech) is no more than linking up words one to another and making some of them consequent upon others."¹³ *Laysa al-nazm siwā ta'liq al-kalim ba'dahā bi-ba'd wa ja'l ba'dahā bi-sabab min ba'd.*¹⁴ Rammuny also explains, "The Arabic term *nazm* literally means 'or-

¹¹ *Dalā'il* 301.

¹² 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Asrār al-Balāghah*, ed. Helmut Ritter (Istanbul: Wazārat al Ma'ārif, 1954) 4.

¹³ Raji M. Rammuny, "The Role of al-Jurjānī's Concept of *ta'liq* in the Development of Arabic Grammatical Theory and Linguistic Analysis," *International Journal of Islamic and Arabic Studies* 3/1 (1986) 28.

¹⁴ *Dalā'il* 15.

derly arrangement'. This term is equivalent to the standard terms "discourse, speech" used in modern linguistics."¹⁵

By using this concept, as well as the concept of *ma'ānī al-naḥw* (meanings of the grammar) which he uses as nearly synonymous to *naẓm* (construction),¹⁶ al-Jurjānī rejects the idea of separating a text's elements into disparate meanings and words and look for its eloquence in either meanings or words. Al-Jurjānī, refusing this dualistic approach, argues that eloquence and expressiveness are functions neither of meaning nor of words but of the construction of linguistic elements into the harmonized syntactic patterns determined by a set of rules which form the grammar of the language. In other words, construction is nothing but *murā'āt ma'ānī al-naḥw*, observing the meanings of grammar.¹⁷

Al-Jurjānī's insistence on grammatical meaning does not preclude the other possible meanings of a text. He merely aims to overcome the dualism between the words and meaning or the form and content which prevailed in literary discussions of his time. Moreover, his analysis of creative process made an influential contribution in solving the other dualistic issues mostly originated from the "everlasting" conflict between the ancient and the modern, namely, the issue of the truthfulness and untruthfulness (*al-sidq wa-al-kidhb*) and the naturalness and artificiality (*al-ṭab' wa-al-ṣun'*). These issues are beyond the scope of this study and each deserves a broader and more detailed investigations. For him, some other possible meanings, other than grammatical meaning, could also be understood from the same sentence although grammatical meaning has crucial importance in the production of these (secondary) 'other' meanings. Especially in metaphorical expressions like metonymy (*kināyah*) metaphor (*iṣṭi'ārah*) and analogy (*tamthīl*) or simile (*tashbīh*), usually the real intention of the speaker is not the direct meaning but one of these secondary meanings which we cannot reach directly, which is *bi-ghayr wāsiṭah* in Arabic. We can reach it only by a *wāsiṭah*, an intermediary.

¹⁵ Rammuny, "The Role of al-Jurjānī's" 40.

¹⁶ *Dalā'il* 240.

¹⁷ Kemal Abu Deeb, "Abd al-Qāher Jorjānī" in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (London: Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982) 135-37.

The *wāsītah*, according to al-Jurjānī is a second thinking which requires the recognition of the context and conditions. But to achieve this secondary meaning or meanings, we still need something to rely on. This is the direct grammatical meaning of the sentence. Also, if we do not understand the direct meaning correctly, we cannot go beyond that and realize the intention of the speaker which is the indirect meaning. Al-Jurjānī names this “indirect meaning” or “secondary meaning” as *maʿnā al-maʿnā* which I will analyze it in the next section.

C. Meaning of Meaning (*maʿnā al-maʿnā*)

Al-Jurjānī developed yet another concept of meaning: *meaning of meaning* (*maʿnā al-maʿnā*). By this he means what we indirectly understand from the discourse. In this section I will discuss this concept and its relationship with the grammatical meaning.

Al-Jurjānī calls what we understand directly from a discourse ‘meaning’. But sometimes this immediate meaning of a sentence does not indicate the speaker’s intention. This usually occurs in figurative usage of language like metonymy, metaphor and analogy or simile. In these cases we need a second thinking based on the first immediate meaning to reach the intention of the speaker, the real meaning of the discourse.

Al-Jurjānī calls this second, indirect meaning *maʿnā al-maʿnā* (meaning of meaning). Most of the time it requires not only more subtle reading of the text and a second thinking but also a certain amount of familiarity with the poet’s social and cultural background and his environment. For example, the phrase *kathīr ramād al-qidr* ‘[the one whose] pot has plenty of ash’ means little unless we know that in the poet’s culture, this image is used to indicate the generosity of a person. However, this meaning is indirectly understood. Among desert Arabs when guests came, the host cooked food by burning wood, leaving ashes on the ground. Consequently, the amount of ash one had in the cooking area indicated how generous one was. If we do not know these cultural elements we miss this indirect meaning, the real intention of the speaker, in al-Jurjānī’s words, *maʿnā al-maʿnā*.

The reason why al-Jurjānī calls this the meaning of meaning is that we can reach it only through the first meaning which we defined above as *grammatical meaning*. Without understanding the first meaning correctly we cannot go to the secondary meaning or meanings, because only the first meaning actually represents the image which occurred in the speaker's psyche. It is like a bridge without which we cannot cross the river and reach the other side. In other words, meaning of meaning is a kind of interpretation of the direct meaning, if we lose that direct meaning we lose "the interpretation," meaning of meaning, as well. Therefore, "grammatical meaning" and "meaning of meaning" do not nullify one other. Rather, they coexist and become the *raison d'etre* for one another.

The significance of multiple meanings manifests itself during translation process. For example, how would we translate, *ra'aytu asadan*? Are we going to translate lexical meaning, direct meaning or indirect meaning? If we translate the words separately as 'I saw' (*ra'aytu*) and 'a lion' (*asadan*), both words have meanings but they need to be connected to express the very meaning of the sentence. This gives us the direct meaning which indicates the image of someone who saw a particular kind of animal which is called 'lion'. This is a valid translation.

However, the intention of the speaker in this sentence is not to tell us that he saw a lion. We know that the speaker uttered this sentence when he saw a man not a lion. The meaning intended by the speaker is the bravery of the man. This meaning can only be understood if we know the context in which it is uttered. Besides, if we do not know the culture we cannot understand the context either. We know that the lion in Arab culture is used as a symbol for power and courage. It does not necessarily have the same meaning in all cultures of the world. However, according to al-Jurjānī, we should still translate this sentence as "I saw a lion", not "I saw a brave man." He says in *Asrār al-Balāghah*:

If a translator translates our expression, "I saw a lion" by which we refer to a brave man in a way which has the meaning of the phrase "strong brave man," and fails to mention the name which is assigned to the lion in the language [into which he is translating], thus failing to render the expression in its own image,

then he [the translator] will not be translating [our] discourse. He is composing his own discourse.¹⁸

The above analysis shows that according to al-Jurjānī the only stable meaning in a text is the direct grammatical meaning or “grammatical meaning” as we call it. Consequently, if we translate the “meaning of meaning” without mentioning its “grammatical meaning” this is not an appropriate translation, but an interpretation which differs according to our cultural and experimental background.

D. Religious Implications of the Roots of Al-Jurjānī’s Theory of the Meaning

The concept of meaning and its relationship to the utterance originates from the debates about the inimitability and literary quality of the Qur’ān as well as from related issues about *kalām Allāh* and other attributes of God. The above theory of meanings is developed by al-Jurjānī in the context of theological debates on inimitability of the Qur’ān. In the introduction of his book *Dalā’il al-ī’jāz* al-Jurjānī asks the following rhetorical question:

What is this imposing excellence, this dazzling superiority and wondrous construction that occurred for the first time in the Qur’ān, such that it rendered all creatures, without exception, powerless, overcoming the powers and capabilities of the eloquent and articulate ones and binding notion and thought until the orators like braying he-camels went silent and the utterance of the speakers ceased to be, and until no tongue stirred and no clear speech manifested itself, and no power helped and no flint yielded a spark for any of them and the point of no sword penetrated, and until it made the valley overflow upon them with inability and seized from them the outlets of speech forever?¹⁹

The question of inimitability of the Qur’ān was one of the major theological and literary issues of al-Jurjānī’s time. The Qur’ān itself indicates its inimitability, if ambiguously: “And if you are in doubt concerning that We have sent down on our servant, then bring a *sūrah* like it, and your witnesses, apart from God, if you are truthful (Qur’ān II: 23).” In another verse the Qur’ān says: “Or

¹⁸ *Asrār* 34.

¹⁹ *Dalā’il* 18-19.

do they say, 'He has forged it'? Say, 'Then bring you ten *sūrahs* the like of it forged,' and call upon whom you are able, apart from God, if you speak truly (Qur'ān XI: 13)."

The inimitability of the Qur'ān is a controversial issue because the Qur'ānic challenge about it is ambiguous. The expression "like it" in both verses does not specify any particular qualities of the Qur'ān that are unmatched. In spite of this fact, Muslims took the issue of inimitability as a firm religious tenet and scholars in every field made tremendous effort to support this belief. Larkin describes the situation as follows:

Since the notion of the inimitability of the Book referred to its linguistic form as well as its content, the *i'jāz* was a rhetorical question as much as it was theological, and in the logocentric atmosphere of medieval Islamic scholarship, the question of the inimitability of the Qur'ān was necessarily the subject of research among scholars within the disciplines of grammar, rhetoric and theology alike.²⁰

Unlike his predecessors, al-Jurjānī attempts in *al-Dalā'il* to answer this question by developing a comprehensive theory. Although al-Jurjānī's main purpose in his book was to explain and prove the inimitability of the Qur'ān, it is evident that his aim was broader. His naming of the book as *Dalā'il al-i'jāz* without mentioning the Qur'ān reflects that intention. He aimed to bring forth a new general theory which depended on the idea of *nazm* that requires taking a text in a complete unity in order to judge the literary value of it and, emphasizes the inseparability of the form and content in the text. For him the literary quality of a text can be measured according to its stylistic form (*nazm*). In a text there is an inevitable and intrinsic connection between a mental prototype of a discourse and the stylistic form that it takes. As for the Qur'ān, it is inimitable as a text because its form embodied linguistically in its unique *nazm*. For al-Jurjānī, the inimitability of Qur'ān means that the ideas or content of the Revelation are presented in a verbal form that is stylistically beyond the creative powers of human beings.²¹

²⁰ Margaret Larkin, "The Inimitability of the Qur'ān: Two Perspectives," *Religion and Literature* 20/1 (1988) 32.

²¹ Larkin, "The Inimitability of the Qur'ān" 42.

My purpose here is not to analyze the inimitability of the Qur'ān but to show how the issue gave rise to some important linguistic and literary debates. Therefore, I will not indulge in the debates about this issue here. Hence, I will show briefly the roots and implications of al-Jurjānī's theory of meanings in the discussions about inimitability of the Qur'ān (*i'jāz al-Qur'ān*). When al-Jurjānī developed his theory in the eleventh century, the tracks of two earlier debates in addition to the debates on inimitability of the Qur'ān were still going on:

1. The discussions about the attributes of God (*ṣifāt Allāh*): This debate revolved around specific Quranic verses relating to divine attributes (*ṣifāt Allāh*) and acts (*af'āl Allāh*). The following verses are two of them: "*al-rah-mān 'alā al-'arsh istawā*: God is seated on the throne (Qur'ān XX: 5)," and "... *yad Allāh fawqa aydihim*: God's hand is above their hands (al-Qur'ān XLVIII: 10)." Some scholars rejected a literal translation in this case because of its anthropomorphic suggestions which are not appropriate for God's uniqueness. These scholars argued that we need to go beyond this surface meaning and interpret it as "God's power and total control" even if this steps away from its literal meaning. In other words, those words have more than one meaning. This argument resulted in the recognition of literal (*haqīqī*) and metaphoric (*majāzī*) usages of language. Eventually it was also applied in the study of poetry (first by al-Jahiz), and led to intense investigations about the characteristics of language.²² I think this idea is one of the major foundations of al-Jurjānī's thinking in the differentiation of meaning and meaning of meaning.
2. The discussion of 'createdness and uncreatedness' of the Qur'ān (*khalq al-Qur'ān*). The second debate focused on the nature of the Qur'ān and its relationship with God in terms of its createdness or uncreatedness (or its eternity). There were mainly two different opinions on this issue: one group argued that the Qur'ān is "created (*makhlūq*)" because there should not be anything eternal except God Himself. This opinion was generally held by

²² Kamal Abu Deeb, "Abbasid Belles-Letters" in *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature* II, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 361-3.

the Mutazilites. The other group held that the Qur'ān, the Word of God (*kalām Allāh*), cannot be created because it is one of the eternal attributions of God.

Finally, Ash'arites (people who usually apply the Mutazilites' method to vindicate the conservative views) offered a solution dividing *kalām Allāh* into *kalām nafsī* (inner speech) and *kalām lafzī* (outer speech). According to this view, *kalām nafsī*, the inner speech of God, is eternal and uncreated and exists as an attribute in the divine Essence. What we experience as a text, the Qur'ān, or *kalām lafzī*, is the outward linguistic expression of that inner speech.²³

Conclusion

We can see through al-Jurjānī's two distinguished works of *Asrār al-Balāghah* and *Dalā'il al-İjāz*, and the theory of *naẓm* an effort to develop a theory which puts forward an analysis of the psychological impact of the poetic image regardless of its context being religious or non-religious. In this context he created a theory of meaning quite ahead of his time.²⁴

For al-Jurjānī, it is possible to find three types of meaning in a literary text: lexical, grammatical and contextual. This means we can interpret a text by looking at its words, its structure and its context (beyond structure). But only the second type can be an appropriate means to establish a stable base for interpretation and evaluation. The first and last types can vary according to reader's social, cultural and linguistic background. Therefore, only the grammatical meaning can be universal and valid in every language. Thus, the grammatical structure of the expression represents the structure of the mental image of the speaker. This type of meaning is what we understand from the sentence directly.

²³ Larkin, "The Inimitability of the Qur'ān" 32.

²⁴ In this study, I depend on al-Jurjānī's two major works, *Asrār al-Balāghah* and *Dalā'il al-İjāz*. Along with al-Jurjānī's own books, I have also examined Kamal Abu Deeb's work, *Al-Jurjānī's Theory of Poetic Imagery* (England: Aris&Phillips Ltd., 1979). I used Abu Deeb's work especially when I quote from al-Jurjānī to provide a refined translation of original texts of al-Jurjānī. Abu Deeb's study is the most comprehensive analysis of al-Jurjānī's literary theory that exists. However, Abu Deeb is somewhat overly concerned with establishing parallels between al-Jurjānī's ideas and certain contemporary lines of thought in modern linguistics and literary criticism.

There could be some other possible meanings, but we can only reach those indirect meanings through this immediate meaning, and only after understanding it correctly.

I think al-Jurjānī's emphasis on this grammatical meaning made a significant contribution in changing the dualistic view to literary text as words and meaning or form and content which dominated the thinking of most theologians and literary critics of his time.

This idea of differentiation of *kalām Allāh* manifests itself in al-Jurjānī's analysis of poetic imagery. It is also one of the foundations of his theory of multiple meanings which links the structure of image with the structure of a sentence. In doing this he meant to refute the dominant dualistic approach that examined the Qur'ān's language separating it as meaning and words. He created a unique literary theory, the theory of construction (*naẓm*) based on his linguistic theory of meaning, which measures the literary value of a work, applicable not only to the Qur'ān but also to all kinds of literary texts.

There are three fundamental views of language-underlying al-Jurjānī's concept of meaning: Language is a system of relations; language is a convention; linguistic signs are arbitrary. Accordingly, a word does not possess any inherent relationship to its referent. Therefore, a word can not reveal its referent more adequately than another word can reveal its own referent. Furthermore, a word does not mean fully until it enters into an active relationship with other words, forming a particular syntactic pattern. In isolation, a word is neither more nor less poetic than any other word in the language. In other words, a word derives its beauty and expressive power entirely from its role within its immediate context and within the context of the literary composition.

Furthermore, if we consider that the structure of the sentence is a manifestation of the structure of the image, we may conclude that a meaning can be expressed only by one expression. If we want to express the same meaning again we have only one choice which is to repeat the same expression. Otherwise we are not repeating the same meaning but are making an interpretation according to our own understanding based on our own experiences and imaginations. On

the other hand, even if we repeat the same expression it does not express the same meaning all the time. The meaning of an expression changes according to reader's conditions.

I believe the exposition of al-Jurjāmī's ideas about language and literature contributes greatly to the contemporary debates in linguistics, particularly in semantics, and in literary criticism regarding text and meaning or form and content.