Masculine and Feminine Rules in *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*: An Analytical Study

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Abstract: Shihab is a Muslim scholar who produced a complete 30 chapters of Qur'anic exegesis entitled *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*. This is the latest book of its kind published by an Indonesian Muslim scholar. Great emphasis has been given by him on the importance of understanding the Qur'an from its context, supported with strong language comprehension. He also motivated his students, especially those at the postgraduate level, to be bold in the Qur'anic exegesis and remain firm on the rules of interpretation that have served as guidance to them. In lieu of this, his *Tafsir* includes approaches related to language in the quest for accurate exegeting process. Hence, this article aims at analysing critically his masculine and feminine rules of interpretation. To identify this objective in more compactly, the document analysis method was applied by adopting his works, inclusive of various language and popular *Tafsir* books as the main source of study. The researchers have found two masculine and feminine-related rules applied by him and another one rule which has not been described in detail. However, his exegesis which uses these three rules has been recognised by great scholars and exegetes. The outcome of this study suggests that it is not possible that a grammatical error occurs in the Qur'an. Indeed, the essence of the Arabic language rules is unparallel with the structure of the Qur'an, but the arrangement rule was implemented after the Qur'an was revealed. If both cannot be made consistent with one another, then this is due to the limitation of method which is known as *shādh*.

Key words: Shihab · *Tafsir Al-Mishbah* · Exegesis · Linguistic · Masculine · Feminine

INTRODUCTION

Tafsīr (exegesis) of the Qur'an is the most important science for Muslims. All matters concerning Islamic way of life are connected to it in one sense or another, since the right application of Islam is based on our proper understanding of the guidance from Allah. Without *tafsīr* there would be no precise understanding of various passages of the Qur'an. There are a number of reasons why *tafsīr* is of great importance [1], but the basic reason is the following: Allah has sent the Qur'an as a book of guidance to mankind. The purpose of the existence of mankind is to worship Allah, i.e. to seek His pleasure by living the way of life Allah has decreed for him to adopt. He can do so within the framework of the guidance that Allah has revealed, but he can do so only if he properly understands its meanings and implications.

Arabic is the most developed Semitic language today and it is one of the major languages of the world. As a Semitic language, Arabic possesses some peculiar and unique characteristics like: (a) It is written from right to left. (b) There are three numbers - singular, dual and plural; and two genders: masculine and feminine. (c) In Arabic, words are generally formed from their roots and most of the root words are tri-consonantal. (d) In this language, nouns and adjectives possess genders. (e) The masculine nouns accept feminine numerals and vice versa. (f) In the verbal tenses the complete action is indicated by a suffix and the incomplete action is denoted by a prefix. In Arabic, for example, *katabat* means she wrote but *taktubu* means she writes. (g) The feminine suffix *ta* is used as grammatical gender in common [2]. Moreover, Arabic is spoken in large parts of the world extending from the Arabian Peninsula to the Atlantic Ocean. It has

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become an interest for millions of non-Arab Muslims, who do not speak it as a native language, to learn it at different levels, mainly because it is the language of the holy book, the Qur'an and because of the fact that all Islamic terms are in Arabic [3].

Identifying an Arabic word (symbol) with a specific meaning is not usually an easy task. In linguistics, a word in isolation usually has no specific meaning unless it is used within a specific context. However, in lexical semantics, words are defined independent from their context. The purpose of lexicons and dictionaries is to identify all the meanings that a word means, regardless of its context. However, even when having a specific context, this does not imply that a word cannot have multiple meanings even within that context. These concepts of understanding the derivation of meaning from language and lexical semantics are extremely important when analyzing any literature, including the Qur'an [4].

Moreover, the main motive behind the codification of the Arabic language by lexicographers and grammarians according to Wild [5] was to defend the pure Arabic language against linguistic corruption and to teach non Arab-speakers correct Arabic. Standardising, codifying, developing orthographic and orthoepic symbols were based on the absolute necessity to preserve the correct form and pronunciation of the Qur'an. The Qur'an, but with it also Classical Arabic as a whole, had to be protected against the influences of Arabic dialects and against the influences of languages of subjected peoples in the new Arab-Islamic empire, for example, Persian, Aramaic, Coptic or Greek. Soon urban forms of spoken Arabic were felt to be more open to 'corruption' than the language of Bedouin tribes. The rift between the language of the city-dwellers and Arab nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes was to make a lasting imprint on the history of Arabic dialects. To this day these are often subdivided into urban, rural and tribal dialects. For large parts of the Near and Middle East, Classical Arabic became a religious and cultural *lingua franca*. It became the scholarly medium of Muslims all over the world. Arabic deep influenced other languages spoken and written by Muslims. In the case of Persian, Ottoman Turkish, Pashto, Urdu and Hausa even the Arabic writing system was adopted. The Islamic vocabulary which has penetrated most language spoken by Muslims to some degree is Arabic. It starts with religious formulas used in the ritual prayer and does not end with Muslim proper names. The model of Classical Arabic was so powerful mainly because it was inspired by the Qur'an. In morphology and syntax the rules had been laid down once and forever by Arab grammarians. Strict linguistic norms assured linguistic unity over time and space, but on the other hand they blocked development and flexibility. This led in the course of centuries to a diglossia which is until today one of the most important features of the linguistic space of Arabic.

The Qur'an is the central religious text of Islam and, for Muslims, the book of divine guidance and direction. Its significance stems from the idea that it is the Word of Allah, revealed to the prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and therefore considered inimitable, as Allah states in the *sura al-Isrā'* (The Night Journey), verse 88 [6].

In short, this article represents a humble attempt to explore and analyse Shihab's linguistic interpretation focusing on the *al-tadhkīr wa al-ta'nīth* (or the masculine and feminine rule) to strengthen his argument in the scope of Qur'anic exegesis. The elaborations begin with a brief introduction of this persona, who is an eminent exegete in Indonesia, followed by definitions of the terms that will be used. Therefore, the data collection is the most common method to obtain data or facts related to the subject of research. The first source is *Tafsir Al-Mishbah* written by Shihab himself. Other sources include books, journals, written papers and other suitable materials. All of these materials will be discussed in this article so our study method is library research.

Shihab: A Great Indonesian Exegete: M. Quraish Shihab was born in Rappang, South Sulawesi on 16th February 1944. His early education was obtained from his father, Abdulrahman Shihab. His love towards the Qur'an blossomed from the age of six [7]. As a son of a famous exegete, he was often brought by his mother to attend religious classes given by his father. His mother also sparked his interest, as her constant encouragements and guidance resulted in his decision to further his studies in the same field. Hence, the parental involvement through discussion, custody and communication had a positive relationship with Shihab's academic achievement. The study found that Shihab's parents exerted a significant influence on his academic achievement [8], as manifested in Shihab's academic achievements and advanced studies [9].

Other than his parents' early involvements at home, Shihab also studied at Pondok Pesantren Darul Hadith al-Faqihiyyah, Malang. Soon after, in 1958 the state of Sulawesi awarded him a scholarship to study at al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt and he was accepted to move up to secondary two '*thanawiyyah*'. His academic journey

later took him to the Department of Theology, University of al-Azhar majoring in *al-Tafsīr* and *al-□adīth*, where he completed his bachelor degree in 1967 [10].

Like other scholarship recipients, Shihab lived in austere and moderate life in Egypt. This lifestyle facilitated his socialisation with other students. Although he was little involved in the activities of student organizations, he was nevertheless active in interacting with students from other countries. This exposed him to a broad range of cultures and presented him opportunities to practice and develop his Arabic language capabilities. However, despite his limited involvement in student activities, Shihab appeared to have successfully compiled a database of sorts of those students from Sulawesi, Indonesia. He would collect information concerning their personal details, educational background and employment. This practice was subsequently practiced by later generations of Indonesian students [11].

Two years later in 1969, Shihab managed to obtain a master degree in the same field with a dissertation entitled *al-I'jāz al-Tashr̄ī li al-Qurān al-Karīm* 'An Inimitability of Legislative towards the Holy Qur'an'. The thesis analysed the social realities of society's that failed to differentiate between miracle '*mu'jizah*' and peculiarity. In 1980, Shihab furthered his Ph.D. in al-Azhar. He completed his study in two years and obtained *mumtāz ma'a martabah al-sharaf al-ulā* grade 'an exemplary scholar with outstanding performance' with his Thesis entitled *Kitāb Nazm al-Durar fī Tanāsub al-Ayāt wa al-Suwar li Ibrāhīm ibn 'Umar al-Biqā'ī (809-885H): Ta□qīq wa Dirāsah (al-An'ām, al-A f̄āf, al-Anfāl)*. His outstanding results qualified him as the first South East Asian student to obtain a Ph.D. in Qur'anic sciences from al-Azhar University [12]. His research comprised of 1336 pages, written in three volumes which measured the validity of *Tafsīr al-Biqā'ī* through a comparative analysis with other exegetes. His thesis was supervised by 'Abd al-Basā' Ibrāhīm Bulbul [13]. Hence, the process of intellectual growth experienced by Shihab for 13 years at the University of al-Azhar shaped his thought. In addition, Shihab is also known as a religious figure and educator with his own publication house, Lentera Hati Publisher.

Upon completing his studies in 1982, Shihab returned to Indonesia and began teaching again in IAIN Alauddin, Ujung Pandang. After two years in 1984, he was transferred from IAIN Ujung Pandang to the Department of Theology IAIN, Jakarta. He became active teaching in the field of interpretation and Qur'anic knowledge until 1998. Other than his responsibility as a lecturer, he also held a post as the Rector of IAIN, Jakarta for two terms

(1992-1996 and 1997-1998), as well as the Minister of Religion in early 1998 until finally being appointed as a Foreign Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia for the Republic of Egypt together with the Republic of Djibouti in Cairo [14].

Al-Darrāz [15] has stated that a scholarly work could not escape seven points, namely: a totally new article, completing the incomplete, explaining the vague and difficult, summarizing the long, updating the mixed, purifying the wrong and collecting the scattered. According to Mazlan and Abur [16] Shihab did all these things well and even links the limitations which often happen when someone wants to clarify the terms of Islamic scholarship in Arabic into Indonesian language quite successfully. Therefore, there is no doubt that this Indonesian scholar is named a credible and respectable expert in Qur'anic exegesis.

The Notion of Masculine and Feminine: Linguistic Basis: There are two genders in Arabic, masculine and feminine. Masculine refers to many categories of entities such as *rajulun* (a man); animal, *dīkun* (a cock) or things like *qalamun* (a pen) [17]. Feminine is directed to these signs: 1. *al-Tā' al-marbûtah* in the last word, such as *qāimah*. 2. *al-Alif al-maq?ûra*, such as *hublā*, 3. *al-Alif al-mamdûdah* with *hamzah* after it, such as *zarqā'*. 4. *al-Ta' al-sākinah* at the end of the verb (*al-fi'l*), such as *qāmat*. 5. Feminine words with *ta'* placed after a pronoun (*al-?amīr*) referring to words such as *alnāru wa'ādahallah*. Hence, *al-nār* is feminine due to the fact that *hā* as a pronoun when pronounced *wa'adahā* that refers to *al-nār* [17].

According to Jones [18] the simplest working rule is to treat words as masculine unless it has a reason for treating them as feminine. As shall be seen later, words may be feminine because of the form, meaning category or convention. From the outset it will encounter a small number of words that are feminine through meaning, such as *ummun* (mother), or through convention, such as *ardun* (earth). However, the first important group of feminine words that it has to deal with are those that take the ending *-atun*. There are a few masculine words with this ending, but the only common one is *khalīfah*. In the Qur'an this word has the strict sense of 'succesor' or 'viceroy'. In later times this was generalized to 'caliph'.

Hence, in terms of gender, the two varieties distinguish between two genders: masculine and feminine. For human beings and most animals, the distinction is based on sex or biological gender. For the rest of the common nouns, gender is largely determined by

convention and sometimes by form. Typically, feminine nouns are marked with, if they are singular and with -*at* if plural. However, some feminine nouns lack the feminine markers and by contrast, some masculine nouns may have them [19]. In fact not all languages recognize gender in the same way. Some languages do not recognize any gender, other languages have more than one. Gender in English for example is considered by some grammarians as an unimportant grammatical area since nouns and determiners cannot be inflected for the masculine and feminine distinction [20]. Yet, semantically it is important since English speakers actually make gender distinction (masculine, feminine and neutral) when they speak. According to Halah [21], it is obvious that the grammatical gender in Arabic is a very important category. Arabic also differs from other languages such us English, as English has a three-gendersystem (masculine, feminine and neuter). Gender distinction in Arabic does not apply to nouns only; adjectives, verbs and pronouns are also gender-inflected.

Like other gender languages, questions about the emergence of gender in Arabic have led to two conflicting theories, namely the sex-based theory and the grammar-based theory. The sex-based theory attributes the existence of linguistic gender to speakers who classify everything in nature into masculine and feminine based on natural gender. The name associated with this theory in Arabic and in Semitic languages in general is that of Wright [22], who clearly states that "the vivid imagination for the Semite conceived all objects, even those that are apparently lifeless, as endowed with life and personality. Hence for him there are but two genders, as there exist in nature but two sexes". This theory has been criticized for being speculative in nature and not many contemporary linguists seem to subscribe to it today. The grammar-based theory about Arabic gender, on the other hand, argues for the independence of gender from social and psychological factors, giving primacy instead to linguistic factors. Speiser [23] influenced by advances in the study of Indo-European gender, have sought explanation of the development of Arabic and Semitic gender in purely linguistic changes. Most of these diachronic studies found evidence for the feminine suffix -*at*. Ibrahim [24] sums up this view as follows "Grammatical gender is merely a means for classifying nouns according to their suffixes without in the beginning any allusion to sex; the sex reference of gender was always posterior to the emergence of grammatical gender. On the other hand, the ancient Arab grammarians did not provide any theories about the origin of Arabic gender and their accounts on the topic in general were strictly descriptive [25].

Masculine and Feminine in *Tafsir Al-mishbah*: the Rules and Analysis: All the divine Scriptures are revealed in the language of their first addressees. The Qur'an was decreed in Arabic, the language of its first target population. Arabic language, as used in the Arab world today, is not similar to the Arabic in that era. That is why learning modern Arabic may not necessarily lead to the understanding of the Qur'an. The reason is very simple. Modern Arabic is not the language of the revelation. Both modern, as well as Qur'anic Arabic, are different in styles and modes of expressions. It seems quite logical to suggest that true understanding of the divine messages in the Last Scripture is possible only by mastering the Qur'anic Arabic. Scholars in exegeting the Qur'an differ from one another as well. It may be due to their disregard of the traits and characteristic features of the classical styles of the Qur'an. Styles of the Qur'anic speeches are actually those of Arabs of the revelation period. An understanding of those styles as applied in the divine Book may serve as a key to the citadel of Qur'anic wisdom. The choice of words to convey a particular message, the formation of sentences and sequence of statements with a view sketching a clear picture of the matter concerned are all unique in the Qur'an and all carry one sole purpose- for the words to be highly effective and deliver the intended messages the best way possible. There are certain linguistic rules behind these phenomena, whereby if not understood one may not be expected to do justice with one's deliberation over the words revealed. If one applies one's own linguistic rules to read these divine statements, one may feel disgruntled for failing to grasp their meaning and think that the Qur'an is nothing but a mere script of incoherent speeeches and disjointed words and they will tend to declare that the Qur'an is not a revelation from the Almighty. Knowledge of the method of speech applied in the Quran may help resolve this problem [26].

When a comparison is made on the efficiency of all languages of the world [27], it is possible to assert that Arabic is the most efficient, especially with regard to its writing of statutes. A simple and clear example is the word 'they' in the English Language. When we say 'they' we could be talking about either a group of men or a group of women or a mixture of men and women or two males or two females. This problem does not exist in Arabic. There

is a word for the group of men '*hum*' and there is a word for the group of women '*hunna*', There is even a word for the two '*humā*', There is a word for the two males '*hadhāni*' and there is a word for the two females '*hatāni*'. Another important possibility for choosing Arabic as the language of the Qur'an is the fact that the pronouns 'he' and 'she' do not necessarily imply gender. Thus, when the Qur'an refers to Allah as 'He' this does not at all imply that Allah is a 'male'. He is neither male nor female. He is above gender. The Arabic language refers to 'the door' as masculine, 'the window' as feminine, 'the book' as masculine, 'the house' as masculine, even though we know that these things are neither male nor female as well.

According to Mazlan and Abur [28] Shihab was concerned about the importance of language in exegeting the Qur'an. He states that in order to understand the Qur'anic content, in-depth knowledge of the Arabic language used in the Holy book is pivotal. It can help one understand the meaning of each word in a verse, where one shall first review the meaning in the word and then set the most appropriate meaning after analyzing all aspects relating to the verse. This approach is used consistently in each verse he analyzed. He was very attentive to the vocabulary meaning or the Qur'anic expressions with reference to the opinions of the language experts. In addition, he always questioned how the vocabulary is used in the Qur'an.

His consistency in talking about the Qur'anic vocabulary in *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, to find out the true meaning of one verse has led him to produce different interpretations from other authentic exegetes. Even though the interpretation is different, there are times when his interpretation of the Qur'anic verses is more convincing, compared to other exegetes, as it is being supported by other *qarīnah*s (indicators)*, as exemplified by his interpretation of *Sura al-Mu'minûn* (The Believers) verse 31 [29].

The rules of interpretation in Arabic language is a combination of two words namely qawāᶜid 'rules' and *al-tafsīr* 'exegesis'. *Qawāᶜid* in the language viewpoint according to al-Kafawī [30] defined it as pillars for everything above it, whereas the rule terminology according to al-Sabt [31] defined it as a general stipulation by which provisions associated with the details were known.

The definition of *al-tafsīr* from the aspect of language according to al-Jurjānī [32] is explaining something and making it clearer and more distinct, or uncovers something hidden. However, in terms of terminology, al-Zarkashī [33] defined it as a set of knowledge employed to have the best understanding of the Qur'an which was revealed to Rasulullah (pbuh), clarifying its meaning, extracting rulings of Islamic law and wisdoms contained in it with the aid of linguistics, Arabic grammar, Principles of Jurisprudence, reasons of the revelation and the abrogation and abrogated.

Based on these definitions, it can be concluded that what is meant by the rule of interpretation is a set of ruling which is universal in nature, used by exegetes as a guideline to reach to the study of the meanings of the Qur'an and knowing the procedures to get its wisdoms.

In lieu of Shihab exegesis, one of his approaches is analysing the Qur'an according to the masculine and feminine rules. The researchers have found two rules applied by him in *Tafsir Al-Mishbah* as mentioned below:

Rule: Changing feminine noun into masculine noun by referring to the interpreted meanings as masculine.

This rule is mentioned by al-Suyû□ī [34] and applied by Shihab [35] when interpreting *sura al-Aᶜrāf* (The Heights) verse 56 as follows:

- *"Do no mischief on the earth, after it hath been set in order, but call on Him with fear and longing (in your hearts): for the Mercy of God is (always) near to those who do good."*

Shihab [35] states this verse is a favorite topic of discussion amongst Muslim scholars due to its application of *qarīb* (near) word which, according to the Arabic language has to be feminine that is *qarībah*. This is due to its feminine proximity and not *qarīb* (masculine form). Those with limited knowledge will claim that the Qur'an is erroneous. They believe that it contradicts the language rule whereby "Adverbs must be related to the noun. Hence, if the adverb is feminine, the characteristic should follow suit."

Based on this, Shihab [35] rejected the confusion in the grammatical sructure of the Qur'an. He clarifies this and says that indeed the essence of the Arabic language rule is stated as such, but, they have forgotten that the arrangement of the linguistic rule was implemented after the Qur'an was revealed. When a noble po*et al*-Farazdaq was criticised by someone due to his grammatically eloquent words which rejects the value that is unparellel with the grammatical structure of Arabic, al-Farazdaq stated: "I practise the original language, hence, when I

speak, it is you who are supposed to arrange the structure of my spoken words." Hence, the rule analysis is supposed to cater for all issues inclusive of phrases with specific connotations. If one is unable to comprehend, the speaker is not to be blamed, instead, it is a result of limited formulated techniques. This absence is acknowledged by scholars when they introduced *shādh* (exception) to withstand what is not included in the language technique. These exclude incorrect or confusing matters, but rather, those of which that are unable to be accomodated by the rules practiced. Therefore, according to Saharudin [36], all rules which accomodate all issues have evidently managed to uplift the Arabic language standard as implied by the teachings of Islam itself. These processes of rearrangement and transformation have brought massive impacts on the development of the Arabic language.

In relation to this, Shihab's arguments above have clarified on the truth that adverbs must match with the characteristics of the nouns; if feminine, the adverb ought to be likewise. The suffixes *-tā'* and *tā' marbûtah* indicate the feminine-form of the word (either noun or verb) [37]. However, exceptions need to be made since the meanings will depend on the speaker himself. Shihab identified this as *shādh*; a rule triggered by the existing technique unable to cater for all related issues, for example, *Sura al-Aᶜrāf* verse 56 stated earlier.

Shihab [35] pursued for answers by extracting views from religious scholars. He said: "Why must *qarīb* word be not feminine?" The answers obtained from experts are abundant. Some would argue that the meaning of *ra?mah* (blessing) is *thawāb* (reward). Hence, the word becomes masculine; the same goes for *qarīb*. Some imply that *qarīb* when similar in meaning in its *nasab* (origin) belongs to the same form but if similar meaning does not fall into this context, it becomes masculine. These processes occur when their similarity is great, whereby it is related to its closest meaning in position of *qarīb al-makān*. This is due to the resemblance in the esssence of place or location.

The answers obtained by Shihab on *qarīb al-makān* clearly shows that feminine nouns can be masculine if the meaning refers to the masculine. His rule is also applied by many scholars such as al-Zajjāj [38] who states that words uttered which are near (*qarīb*) due to *ra?mah* and *ghufrān* (pardons) hare the same meaning. In addition, every *ta'nīth* (feminine form) needs in-depth understanding. ᶜAbduh [39] believes that each uttered *ra□mah* ought to be understood as *mu'annath majāzī* (feminine metaphor) and not as *haqiqi* (real feminine).

al-Matᶜānī [40] said, usually, the Arabs differentiate between *qarīb* and *baᶜīd* (far) with its *nasab*, which meaning is related to time and space. When it refers to *nasab*, it will be in feminine form. However, when the meaning is in reference to time and space, they can be either masculine or feminine.

Al-□abarī [41] on the other hand, has mentioned that the word *qarīb* serves the same way as *khabar* (predicate) for *ra□mah*. It is applied in the masculine form since its meanings refer to place and not origin. This is because the Arabs transform *khabar* in *ism* (noun) as *□āl* (circumstantial expression). Hence it is singularised, irrespective of the number of *ism*. A similar process is when its *ism* is in either masculine or feminine form, whereas its *khabar* may also be masculine.

Al-Qur□ubī [42], on the other hand, has given seven opinions related to the issues mentioned earlier. Firstly, al-Zajjāj and al-Nu□ās accepted *alra□mah* and *alra□īm* as sharing the same meaning, which are *alᶜafw wa alghufrān* (forgiveness and pardons). Secondly, al-Nadhr ibn Shumail justification on *al-ra□mah* in the form of *ma□dar* (infinitive) is included necessarily using the masculine utterance and the argument is shown in *Sura al-Baqarah* (The Cow) verse 275. This view is similar to the first one, whereby the word *mawᶜizah* in *Sura al-Baqarah* contains the meaning of *al-waᶜz* (advice). Thirdly, al-Jawhari has mentioned the meaning of *al-ra□mah* which is *ali□sān* (goodness), positioning feminine as *majāzī* (metaphor). Hence, it cannot be pronounced as masculine. The next one is when al-Akhfazh states the meaning of *al-ra□mah* as (rain) and the pronunciation can be masculine as it is argued that words appearing feminine can also be masculine. Next, Abû ᶜUbaidah has elaborated on the word *qarīb* which is known as masculine due to its *almakān* (position). ᶜAlī ibn Sulaimān denies the fifth view since he feels that *qarīb* is described as *alman□ûb* (accusative) in the Qur'an when in actual fact it is not the case. Hence, the actual meaning in this subject is *nasab*. Therefore, it is seen appropriate for the meaning which refers to the bounty of Allah. This is followed later by al-Farrā' who states that if *qarīb* contains meaning pertaining to distance, then it qualifies as either masculine or feminine. Should the meaning be *nasab*, it will fall under the feminine category. Many religious scholars are unanimous in their agreement pertaining to this matter. Besides, the meaning of *nasab* which can either be in both categories is evident in *Sura al-A□zāb* (The Combined Forces) verse 63.

Based on the information shared by Shihab earlier, it can be summarised that his interpretation on *sura al-Aᶜrāf* verse 56 is based on the rule formulated by Muslim scholars.

Rule: The Arabic language does not apply any feminine symbol to the doer who will definitely be a female.

The rule above is also stated by al-Sabt [31] regarding any adverb specifically for women inclusive of action/verb with the additional *tā'* but is not added if the doer does not belong to this category. Shihab [35] himself applies this rule while commenting on *sura al-□ajj* (The Pilgrimage) verse 2 as stated below:

- *"On the day when ye behold it, every nursing mother will forget her nursing and every pregnant one will be delivered of her burden and thou (Muhammad) wilt see mankind as drunken, yet they will not be drunken, but the Doom of Allah will be strong (upon them)."*

While elaborating on word to *mur□iᶜah* Shihab [35] has stated that the Arabic language does not apply any feminine symbol since the doers are definitely women. With that in mind, an emphasis is not necessarily given to *□āi□ah* for women who are experiencing menses since the experience does not apply to men. This is similar to *mur□iᶜah* whereby men do not breastfeed their babies. Hence, it is sufficient with just the word of *□āi□* or *mur□iᶜ* only. However, should there be a feminine symbol in its pronunciation such as *mur□iᶜah* it is implying the act of breastfeeding a baby. As a result, *mur□iᶜah* in that sentence refers to a woman who is breastfeeding her baby.

Based on the elaborations above, it can be understood that the Arabic language does not apply feminine symbol to the doer other than women themselves. Hence, a word such as *□āi□ah* referring to women experiencing their menses is equivalent to the word *□āi□*. The same goes for *□āmilah* for pregnancy or the fact that it can just be *□āmil* since men do not go through these two episodes in life. However, if there exists any feminine symbol in any of the stated words in the Qur'an which points to the female doer, the meaning refers to what is acted upon. The additional *tā'* in *mur□iᶜ* does not only function as a feminine symbol but rather portraying the doer responsible for the action of breastfeeding her child; not by chance to do so. With

that, the statement used in the verse earlier is not but *dhāt □aml* inferring to "the one with the baby in the womb" [43].

The researchers have also found the word *mur□iᶜ* in Arabic which implies a natural feminine. There is no need for the use of *ta'* of feminization. Generally speaking, it cannot be used for a masculine noun, but this lexeme sometimes needs to have *tā'* showing feminization. This serves a pragmatic function as in the case of the noble verse. al-Zamakhsharī [44] and al-Marāghī [45] point out that there is a slight difference between *mur□iᶜ* and *mur□iᶜah*, where the word *mur□iᶜah* means that she is in the state of suckling now, but *mur□iᶜ* does not mean that she is suckling or feeding her baby now. It is her habit. Therefore, these translations are not appropriate. They suffer the loss of pragmatic gender. A translator may compensate for the loss by using the timeframe 'now' as a time marker to convey the intended meaning and to shed light on the pragmatic function. Moreover, he should delve into the philological nuances of such pragmatic phenomena [46].

Hence, it can be concluded from Shihab's interpretation on *Sura al-□ajj* verse 2 that he had applied the rule of masculine and feminine pioneered by the great Muslim scholars and exegetes. Moreover, other than the two rules which have been elaborated clearly, the researchers have identified a rule that is applied by Shihab but is not clearly mentioned in his interpretations. The rule is as the following:

Rule: Should there be a separator in *mu'annath majāzī* (feminine metaphor), it is better to delete its *tā' ta'nīth* especially if the separator becomes longer. However, to establish its *tā' ta'nīth* is also a good move.

This rule is practiced by deleting the *tā' ta'nīth* to the verb in the form of *mu'annath majāzī* (feminine excludes the masculine form and it does not include feminine symbols) which is better with the existence of a separator. Once the separator becomes longer, it is better to delete the *tā' ta'nīth* even though leaving it in its initial stage is good as well [33]. On the same note, al-Suyû□ī [34] clarifies that Muslim scholars have asked for it to be deleted since Allah has instructed for it to be deleted when merging. It is evident in *Sura Hûd* [Hood] verses 67 and 94. In verse 67, the Qur'an implies a masculine word which is *waakhadha alladhīna □alamû al□ay□ah*, whereas inverse 94 is feminine word, *waakhadhat alladhīna □alamû al□ay□ah*.

Shihab [35] upon interpreting *Sura Hûd* verse 97 has only adapted views from al-Biqāʿī without clearly announcing his preference to agree or otherwise. According to al-Biqaʿi *akhadhat* is in the form of feminine word verb whereas in *sura Hûd* verse 67 he applies *akhadha* or which is the masculine form. This is a sign for the strong hollering over the Shuʿaib tribe which was weaker than the women of the Thamud tribe because logically, women's voices are weaker than men's.

Accordingly, the researchers also conclude that scholars agree that *al-□ai□ah* (screaming) can be matched with the masculine or feminine form, either directly connected with the verb (*Hûd*, 67) or without separation between the two (*Hûd*, 94). Therefore, Ibn Hishām [47] asserts that the most correct is *al-□ai□ah* which is strengthened by *al-musnid* (concatenation) indicating its feminine metaphor; whereas *al-musnid* is in the verb or phrase form and the feminine word is clearly mentioned. For example, *□alaʿa alshams* (the sun was rising) or *a□āliʿun alshams* (it's the sun rising□). Therefore, we cannot say *hadha alshams* (this is a sun) or *huwa alshams*.

Based on the statement of Ibn Hishām, it is understandable that the pronouncement of *al-□ai□ah* should never be combined with masculine or feminine without *al-musnid* in the verb or a phrase form and this proves that *al-□ai□ah* is a feminine methapor. Therefore, this cannot be said: *hadhā al□ay□ah* or *hadhihi al□ay□ah*. According to Ibn al-Qayyim [48] in *Sura Hûd* verse 67, *al-□ai□ah* as *al-ma□dar* (infinitive) contains the meaning *al-□iyā□* (screaming/ in masculine form), then using the masculine form is better. The meaning also can be intended as *al-wā□idah min al-ma□dar* (one screaming/ in feminine form) in *sura Hood* verse 94, so using the feminine form is better. This is despite the fact that both are fluent in Arabic grammar.

Therefore, the exegetes must have ample knowledge of classical Arabic, its grammatical construction and its figure of speech, because this is the language of the Qur'an. Any *Tafsīr* which is based solely on a translation of some of the meanings of the Qur'an will be liable to distortion. Lastly, for Muslims, the Qur'an is considered the most perfect expression of the Arabic language; a unique piece of writing that is comparable to no other and which, as the Qur'an itself states, cannot be matched with any human composition. This aspect of the Qur'an, generally referred as its 'inimitability', has been the subject of major works by Muslim linguists, exegates of the Qur'an and literary critics. The idea of the Qur'an's inimitability is supported by a number of Qur'anic verses -see the Qur'an in *Sura al-Baqarah* (The Cow) 2:23, *Yûnus* (Jonah) 10: 38 and *Hûd* (Hood) 11: 13-, which challenge the Prophet Muhammad's opponents in Mecca to produce a literary compilation similar to the Qur'an.

CONCLUSION

We have seen up to this point that Shihab is known as the greatest exegete in Indonesia. His passion towards the Qur'an and its exegesis was initiated by his parents which later developed while he was studying at Pondok Darul Hadith al-Faqihiyyah. His thirst to learn academic traditions had sent him abroad, to the University of al-Azhar, Egypt. He even obtained his Ph.D from the same university. Shihab had experienced the process of intellectual development in the said institution for almost 13 years.

He has given great emphasis on understanding the Qur'an based on language analyses to ensure that its actual meaning can both be sustained and uplifted. These essentials were recognised by Shihab in *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*. Examples related to the rule pertaining to masculine and feminine were during his exegesis in *Sura al-Aʿrāf* verse 56. His evaluation on that verse exhibited the rule employed: "Changing feminine noun into masculine noun by referring to the interpreted meanings as masculine". In *Sura al-□ajj* verse 2, he applied the rule whereby "The Arabic language does not apply any feminine symbol to the doer who will definitely be a female".

Both rules were mentioned by Shihab clearly and they were recognised by the scholars and exegates. This research however, has found one other rule which is formulated by a Muslim scholar but is yet to be analysed in detail in his *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*. For example, when commenting on *Sura Hûd* verse 94 the applied rule is "Should there be a separator in feminine metaphor, it is better to delete its *tā' ta'nīth* especially if the separator becomes longer. However, to establish its *tā' ta'nīth* is also a good move".

The numerous styles of the Qur'an have made the last edition of Allah's message not only beautiful but also effective and meaningful. Beauty, effectiveness and meaningfulness are complementary to one other. Any of these three qualities may not be found available in isolation. A speech, which is really elegant may move the hearts of the audience and motivate them to act upon the message therein. The Qur'an is so exquisite in its diction

that its reciters would appreciate and receive it without doubt. Other than that, it is not possible that a grammatical error would occur in the Qur'an. Allah says, *"And this Qur'an is in a clear Arabic language"* (*al-Na☐l*: 103). In reality it is the Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah that have preserved the Arabic language, not the opposite. However, it is possible that the reader of the Qur'an will tend to misunderstand or fall into ethe messages relayed. In this regard, it is an obligation for every Muslim to ask trustworthy scholars regarding the religious sciences in general and the Qur'an in specific, as the Qur'an is the foundation and primary source of our religion and the basis for guidance; otherwise their misguided interpretations would be deemed sinful.

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