



**TOSHIHIKO IZUTSU'S SEMANTIC APPROACH TO QS. AN-NISĀ'
[4]: 63 ON THE ETHICS OF COMMUNICATION IN THE SOCIAL
SPACE**

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Abstract

This study explores the meaning of qaulan balīghā in QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63 using Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic method and applies it to digital communication contexts, as existing interpretations inadequately address challenges like cyberbullying, hate speech, hoaxes, and digital polarization. Through qualitative library research involving syntagmatic, paradigmatic, diachronic, and synchronic analyses, three core meanings emerge: al-wuṣūl (reaching the heart), al-ta'tīr (psychological influence), and al-ḥikmah (wisdom in speech). Diachronically, the term evolved from a technical-rhetorical meaning in the pre-Qur'anic period to an ethical-psychological meaning in the Qur'anic period, then expanded to theological-pedagogical and humanistic-universal meanings. Paradigmatically, qaulan balīghā functions as a hypernym encompassing truth (ṣadīd), gentleness (layyin), appropriateness (ma'rūf), and nobility (karīm). Thus, qaulan balīghā represents a transformative communicative ethic integrating these four dimensions into every utterance, serving as the pinnacle of Qur'anic communication ethics applicable to da'wa, education, and digital spaces. This study's novel contribution lies in operationalizing qaulan balīghā to counter digital communication problems while bridging classical tafsīr with communication psychology and media sociology.

Keywords: *Communication Ethics, Digital Social Space, Qaulan Balīghā, QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63, Toshihiko Izutsu's Semantics*

A. Introduction

Phenomena occurring today indicate the increasing prevalence of negative behavior in various aspects of life, be it social, cultural, or media. One example is visible in the virtual world through the practice of trolling and online bullying, where social media is misused to mock, post negative comments, intimidate, or insult others without considering the emotional impact on the victims (Alfani et al., 2025). In this context, the Al-Qur'an has provided important guidance as contained in QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63, which commands the use of *qaulan balīghā* (clear, firm, and heart-touching speech). This verse teaches that every word should be delivered with full wisdom and consideration, so that it can have a positive influence, not hurt or demean others. The principle of *qaulan balīghā* becomes relevant as a guide for communication in the digital era, so that interactions on social media continue to reflect ethics, empathy, and noble human values.

Classical, medieval, to modern-contemporary scholars have interpreted QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63 with diverse yet complementary emphases. Classical scholars like al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurtubī interpreted *qaulan balīghā* as firm and influential speech, delivered in a way that penetrates the heart to evoke consciousness or fear of Allah (Al-Qurthubi, 1971; Ṭabarī, 1954). In the medieval period, commentators like al-Rāzī highlighted the psychological and rhetorical aspects of the term, stating that *balīgh* speech must be adapted to the listener's psychological state to be more effective in changing behavior (Ar-Razi, 1993). Meanwhile, modern and contemporary commentators, such as Sayyid Qutb and Muhammad al-Tāhir ibn 'Āshūr, interpreted this verse contextually, emphasizing the importance of polite, argumentative, and educative communication in facing various forms of moral deviation in society (Ibn' Ashur, 1984; Quthb, 2004). Thus, *qaulan balīghā* is understood not only as a command to speak firmly, but also as a communication ethic that guides humans to be wise in conveying the truth in every era.

However, the message contained in QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63 has not been fully embraced by contemporary Muslim society. This is because the

existing interpretations are not representative enough to meet the needs of 21st-century Muslim society, which has rapid and complex socio-religious developments. Proponents of contextual interpretation argue that the current macro context is very different from the macro context of early Islam. Therefore, it is necessary to provide new interpretations of the Qur'anic texts that were used in classical Islam to justify how good speech is used in social, cultural, and media life (Ridwan, 2016).

Research on QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63 is not something new, as previous studies have been conducted using various methods and approaches. Several previous studies on QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63 show that this verse has broad relevance in the fields of *da'wa*, communication, and Islamic education. Nida Ankhofiyya's research using the tafsir maudhu'i (thematic interpretation) method highlights the importance of using effective and heart-touching language in *da'wa*, emphasizing the concept of *qaulan balīghā* as a form of communication that is concise, clear, logical, and adapted to the interlocutor's condition (Ankhofiyya, 2014). Meanwhile, Asnalia Rokhmah's research based on Quraish Shihab's Tafsir al-Mishbah asserts that communication strategies in Islamic education must pay attention to message clarity, appropriateness of language style, and the ability to understand the psychology of students so that the message is delivered effectively (Rokhmah, 2020). Furthermore, Yeti Dwi Herti's research interprets this verse from a humanist education perspective, concluding that QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63 contains humanist-religious and humanist-liberative values that emphasize respect for human dignity in the teaching-learning process (Herti, 2019). Overall, these three studies show that the meaning of *qaulan balīghā* is not only related to linguistic accuracy but also encompasses ethical, psychological, and humanitarian dimensions in Islamic communication and education.

Based on the reading of QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63, the author has not found any research that examines it using Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic analysis approach and applies it in contemporary social space. Therefore,

this study intends to fill that gap by raising the interpretation and meaning of the Al-Qur'an by making the word *qaulan balīghā* the object of study using semantic analysis. There are at least two problem formulations: first, what is the meaning of the word *qaulan balīghā* based on Toshihiko Izutsu's Qur'anic semantic approach? Second, how can the interpretation of the word *qaulan balīghā* in the Al-Qur'an be applied in social space? The general objective of this research is expected to broaden the understanding of Islamic treasures and can serve as a guide for the wider community in building good ethics and attitudes in socializing. Specifically, this research is expected to contribute to enriching the study of Qur'anic and tafsir sciences and become an important reference for the development of Qur'anic tafsir studies.

B. Method

To obtain optimal results, this research uses a qualitative method (Moelong, 2010) with the type of library research that seeks to collect data from various literatures related to the research theme. The focus of this research is the exploration of the meaning of the word *qaulan balīghā* in QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63 by applying Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic analysis approach (Alfani et al., 2024). Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic theory basically goes through several important stages (Izutsu, 2002b). First, determining the focus word and its related keywords. Second, analyzing meaning through sentence context (syntagmatic) and its relationship with synonyms or antonyms (paradigmatic). Third, conducting a diachronic study to trace the development of meaning from the pre-Islamic period to the present, and a synchronic study to see the meaning in a specific period. Fourth, as the final stage, is formulating the Qur'anic concept of the word so that it forms the worldview of the Al-Qur'an that can be applied in life. So that this research has more tangible utility, the research results will be directed towards their application in social space.

This approach aims to position the research findings not only as theoretical concepts but as a foundation that can be applied in people's

lives. Thus, the values and messages generated from the research can be implemented in various social, cultural, and religious activities concretely. This application effort is also intended so that the research does not stop at the academic level only, but is able to provide practical impacts, answer evolving social problems, and present relevant solutions for communal life

C. Results and Discussion

1. Results

a. Biography of Toshihiko Izutsu and Ideas on the Semantics of the Qur'an

Toshihiko Izutsu was a Japanese scholar renowned as an orientalist, philosopher, and expert in Islamic studies, particularly in the field of Qur'anic semantics (Alfani et al., 2024). Born in Tokyo into a traditional Japanese family that emphasized education and intellectual discipline, Izutsu studied at Keio University, focusing initially on philosophy, philology, and foreign languages. He mastered more than thirty languages, including Arabic, Persian, Latin, Greek, Russian, and Sanskrit, a proficiency that enabled him to read classical texts in their original language. His academic career spanned multiple countries, including Japan, Canada, and Iran, where he taught at McGill University in Montreal and later became a professor at the University of Tehran. Among his most influential works are *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* and *God and Man in the Qur'an*, which introduced a semantic approach to understanding key concepts in the Qur'an (Izutsu, 2002a, 2002b). Through this approach, Izutsu not only explained the linguistic meaning of words but also explored the interconnected network of meanings that form the Qur'anic worldview, thereby establishing himself as a pivotal figure in contemporary Islamic studies by successfully combining Eastern and Western philosophical traditions with in-depth study of religious texts.

Etymologically, the term "semantics" derives from the Greek word *semantikos*, meaning to signify, interpret, or indicate, while terminologically, it refers to the science of meaning that studies the relationship between words, symbols, and the ideas or objects they

represent, as well as the shifts and changes in meaning over time (Rajul Kahfi & Ahmadi, 2021; Save, 1997). With the development of semantic studies, this field has become a tool for analyzing classical literature, and the Qur'an, as a classical text rich in linguistic aesthetics and cultural values, naturally attracts scholarly attention (Putri et al., 2023). Izutsu was not the first to employ semantics in studying the Qur'an; the works of classical Muslim scholars, especially those titled *al-Wujūh wa an-Nazāir*, demonstrate an early semantic awareness. According to Izutsu (Izutsu, 2003), semantics is the analytical study of key terms in a language with the ultimate goal of revealing the conceptual meaning or *Weltanschauung* (worldview) of the language-using community, as language is not merely a tool for thinking and communication but a way of understanding and interpreting the world.

The main concepts contained in the meanings of Qur'anic words are explained through several research steps (Izutsu, 2003). First, identifying the focus word—determining the word to be studied and the concept within it, which is surrounded by keywords. Second, revealing the basic and relational meaning through syntagmatic analysis (examining words that appear before and after the focus word) and paradigmatic analysis (comparing the word with synonyms or antonyms). Third, tracing the historical semantics of the word through diachronic analysis (tracing usage from pre-Islamic Arab society to the contemporary era) and synchronic analysis (focusing on the evolution of a word's meaning into an independent concept in the Qur'an). Fourth, revealing key concepts and their practical application, which aims to build a life based on Qur'anic principles and realize the Qur'anic vision of the universe (Alfani et al., 2026).

b. Application of Toshihiko Izutsu's Semantic Theory to QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63

Basic Meaning of the Word *Qaulan Balīghā* in QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63

This discussion will focus on the study of the word *qaulan balīghā* as the essence of QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63, which contains effective, polite, and

heart-touching communication ethics in conveying the truth. This verse emphasizes the importance of using clear, firm, and targeted language so that the message can be well received and have a positive influence on the heart and mind of the interlocutor.

The basic meaning is the original and elementary meaning possessed by a word before undergoing expansion or shift in meaning due to context, culture, or historical development. This meaning is purely lexical, usually found through etymological tracing and the use of the word outside the Al-Qur'an text, such as in the Arabic language. Understanding the basic meaning is an important initial step to uncovering key concepts in the Al-Qur'an, because from here researchers can compare the differences in meaning between general usage (everyday language) and specific usage in the revelation text. Thus, the basic meaning functions as the foundation of semantic analysis to uncover the deeper conceptual dimension of a Qur'anic term (Izutsu, 2002b).

Etymologically, the word *qaulan balīghā* consists of two elements: *qaulan* (قَوْلًا) which means speech or utterance, and *balīghā* (بَلِيغًا) which originates from the root word *balagha-yablughu-bulughan* which means to reach, to convey, or to penetrate (Ad-Damaghani, 1983; Al-Ashfahani, 1999). Thus, linguistically *qaulan balīghā* can be interpreted as an utterance that reaches its goal, namely effective, clear speech capable of penetrating the listener's heart. In the context of QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63, this term is used to describe the method of communication that the Prophet Muhammad SAW. must employ when dealing with the hypocrites not with violence or anger, but with speech that has a strong influence and can awaken their consciousness.

Terminologically, *qaulan balīghā* encompasses the meaning of targeted, argumentative communication that touches the emotional and intellectual sides of the listener. Classical commentators like al-Ṭabarī interpreted this term as speech that touches the heart and instills fear of Allah (Ṭabarī, 1954), while modern commentators like Muhammad Quraish Shihab emphasize that *qaulan balīghā* is speech composed in easily understandable language, not verbose, yet still concise and meaningful, so

that its moral and spiritual message can be well received (Shihab, 2006). Thus, the basic meaning of *qaulan balīghā* affirms the importance of using communicative, civilized, and wisdom-laden language in conveying the truth and fostering moral awareness within society.

From this explanation, it can be concluded that *qaulan balīghā* in QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63 contains a profound meaning about the importance of effective, civilized, and heart-touching communication. This term emphasizes not only the beauty of language but also the power of the message to influence the thoughts and feelings of the listener. Thus, *qaulan balīghā* becomes a guide for every individual, especially in the context of *da'wa* and social interaction, to be able to convey the truth in a wise, clear, and full of wisdom manner, so that it can bring positive change in the community environment.

c. Relational Meaning of the Word *Qaulan Balīghā* in QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63

Syntagmatic Analysis

Syntagmatic analysis is an approach aimed at determining the meaning of a word by analyzing the words that appear before and after the word under study (Izutsu, 2002b). In this way, the meaning of the word is understood not only lexically but also in relation to the sentence structure and context of its use (Khalil, 2022). In this context, syntagmatic analysis will be used to reveal how the term *qaulan balīghā* acquires a more specific meaning through its relationship with the words preceding and following it in the Qur'anic verse. Some of these words include *fa a'riḍ 'anhum* (then turn away from them) and *wa 'izhum* (and advise them).

Syntagmatically, the phrase *qaulan balīghā* gains specific meaning from its relationship with the preceding words, namely *fa a'riḍ 'anhum* (then turn away from them) and *wa 'izhum* (and advise them). The sequence of commands in this verse shows a very subtle gradation of action. First, the Prophet Muhammad SAW. is asked not to engage in arguments with the hypocrites. Second, to give advice full of wisdom. And third, to deliver a speech that is *balīgh*, strong, touching, and impactful to the heart. This relationship indicates that *qaulan balīghā* is not merely a form of verbal

communication but is the highest stage of a *da'wa* strategy combining wisdom, firmness, and emotional sensitivity.

Furthermore, the existence of the adverbial phrase *fī anfusihi* (within themselves) that follows *qaulan balīghā* strengthens the meaning that the intended speech must penetrate into the listener's soul, not just stop at the surface. Thus, syntagmatically, *qaulan balīghā* in this verse implies a form of communication that is personal, reflective, and full of spiritual awareness. It is not merely beautiful speech, but speech directed towards touching the inner self, fostering awareness, and changing behavior, in line with the function of the Al-Qur'an as guidance and a reminder for humanity.

Paradigmatic Analysis

Paradigmatic analysis is an analysis that connects a word or concept with other similar (synonym) or opposite (antonym) words or concepts in the Al-Qur'an. In the context of this research, paradigmatic analysis will be directed towards tracing vocabulary that has close meaning or opposition to the term *qaulan balīghā*, so that its semantic field can be mapped more completely and how the Al-Qur'an emphasizes the value of gentle speech through relations with other terms can be discovered.

Tabel 1. Synonyms and Antonyms of the Word *Qaulan Balīghā*

Synonyms	Antonyms
<i>Qaulan Ma'rūfā</i> (قَوْلًا مَعْرُوفًا) In QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 263 means good, polite, and appropriate speech.	<i>Qaulan Zurā</i> (قَوْلُ الزُّورِ) In QS. Al-Furqān [25]: 72 means false and invalid speech.
<i>Qaulan Ma'rūfā</i> (قَوْلًا مَعْرُوفًا) In QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 263 means good, polite, and appropriate speech.	<i>Qaulan Lamzan</i> (قَوْلٍ لَّمْزٍ) In QS. Al-Qalam [68]: 11 means speech that slanders and demeans.
<i>Qaulan Layyinā</i> (قَوْلًا لَيِّنًا) In QS. Tāhā [20]: 44 means soft and calming speech.	
<i>Qaulan Sadidā</i> (قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا)	

In QS. Al-Ahzāb [33]: 70 means true
and correct speech.

A paradigmatic analysis of the concept of *qaulan balīghā* in the Qur'an necessitates more than a mechanical mapping of synonyms and antonyms; it requires a deep reading of the semantic network that connects various communication-related terms into an integrated system of meaning. The term *balīghā* is derived from the Arabic root *b-l-gh*, which conveys the sense of reaching, attaining, or communicating effectively until the target is penetrated. In the context of Qur'anic communication, *qaulan balīghā* does not merely mean eloquent or rhetorically beautiful speech. Rather, it denotes speech that is precisely targeted, does not miss the heart, and leaves a profound imprint on the listener's soul. This is precisely why the classical aphorism states, "*Wa inna al-kalāma la-bālighun idhā šāda fa-lam yukhṭi al-qalba*" indeed, speech truly attains its goal when it hits the heart and does not miss it.

When one examines the positive terms often associated with *qaulan balīghā*, such as *qaulan ma'rūfā*, *qaulan layyinā*, *qaulan sadīdā*, and *qaulan karīmā*, one does not find perfect synonyms that can be used interchangeably. Instead, each of these terms represents a distinct ethical and communicative dimension, and collectively, they constitute what makes a given utterance *balīgh*. *Qaulan ma'rūfā*, for instance, emphasizes the dimension of conformity between speech and the values recognized as good by both society and religion it is speech that is appropriate, polite, and not violative of established norms. *Qaulan layyinā* adds the psychological dimension of gentleness, namely speech that is soothing, not harsh, and capable of opening hearts that were previously closed. Meanwhile, *qaulan sadīdā* brings the dimension of truth and factual accuracy, that is, speech that is straight, not deviant, and congruent with objective reality. Finally, *qaulan karīmā* mentioned in QS. Al-Isra' (17:23) completes the framework with the dimension of nobility and respect toward the interlocutor. Consequently, *qaulan balīghā* occupies a higher, more comprehensive position that subsumes all these dimensions: it is speech that is true (*sadīd*),

gentle (*layyin*), appropriate (*ma'rūf*), and noble (*karīm*), such that it does not merely reach the ear but penetrates the deepest recesses of the heart.

In contrast, the antonyms of *qaulan balīghā*, such as *qaulan zurā* and *qaulan lamzan*, are not merely lexical opposites but rather represent failures of communication that are ethically and psychologically destructive. *Qaulan zurā*, meaning false and invalid speech, constitutes the inverse of the *sadīd* (truth) dimension; it undermines the speaker's credibility and causes the listener's heart to reject any message being conveyed, because falsehood has severed the bond of trust. *Qaulan lamzan*, namely speech that slanders, mocks, and belittles others, is the inverse of the *ma'rūf* and *karīm* dimensions; it wounds the feelings of the listener or the person being discussed, engenders enmity, and closes the door of the heart. Even an utterance that is factually true (*sadīd*), if delivered in a slandering (*lamzan*) or harsh (*jāriy*) tone, can never become *balīgh* because it fails to touch the heart with gentleness and nobility. In other words, these antonyms function as barriers (*mawānī*) that must be removed in order for communication to achieve its maximum effectiveness.

The hierarchical relation within the Qur'anic semantic network positions *qaulan balīghā* as the pinnacle of all communicative ethics. While *qaulan sadīdā* demands only propositional truth, and *qaulan layyinā* demands only gentleness without a necessary condition of truth, *qaulan balīghā* demands the simultaneous fulfillment of all dimensions: truth, gentleness, appropriateness, and nobility. It functions as a hypernym that encompasses the other positive qualities while simultaneously serving as the antithesis of all forms of false, harsh, and destructive communication. This is precisely why the Qur'an describes itself as *qaulan balīghā* par excellence because God's speech not only contains absolute truth (*sadīd*), is delivered with a soul-soothing gentleness (*layyin*), aligns with human fitrah (*ma'rūf*), and is imbued with divine nobility (*karīm*), but also invariably reaches the hearts of those who are open and transforms their very souls.

For communication in education, da'wah (Islamic outreach), and everyday life, achieving *qaulan balīghā* requires more than mere rhetorical mastery or beautiful diction. A person who wishes their speech to be effective, impactful, and capable of moving hearts toward goodness must

conduct an ethical examination of every utterance: Is my speech factually true? Am I delivering it with gentleness and a soothing effect? Is it appropriate and good according to societal values? Am I honoring my interlocutor? Without this holistic awareness, even the most eloquent speech will fall upon the ears without ever reaching the heart, or worse, will wound and close the listener's heart. Thus, *qaulan balīghā* from the Qur'anic perspective is not merely a stylistic category but rather a transformative communicative ethic that demands the integration of truth, gentleness, appropriateness, and nobility into every word that is spoken.

d. Synchronic and Diachronic Meaning of the Word *Qaulan Balīghā* in QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63

Pre-Quranic

The linguistic system of the pre-Qur'anic period can be understood by analyzing the vocabulary of the Bedouin tribes, which reflects the worldview of the ancient Arabs, the vocabulary of caravans (traders), as well as terms that were part of the religious lexicon of Jews and Christians living in the Arabian Peninsula (Zulhamdani, 2017). For the ancient Arabs, poetry was the greatest cultural product. Their poems often told stories of love and war, group solidarity, and condemned their enemies (Tanasyah & Krisdiantoro, 2023).

Interestingly, before the revelation of the Qur'an, the term *balīgh* (بليغ) was already known in the treasury of classical Arabic and was often used in pre-Islamic poetry (*ash-shi'r al-jāhili*) (Nurbayan, 2019). Although the complete phrase *qaulan balīghā* was not found explicitly, the word *balīgh* was already used to describe speech that was eloquent, strong, and effective in touching the listener's heart (Faldiansyah, 2023). This indicates a value highly upheld by Jāhiliyyah poets and orators.

To strengthen the linguistic evidence from the pre-Qur'anic period, the following citations of pre-Islamic Arabic texts demonstrate the use of the word *balīgh* and its derivatives. For example, Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā links *balīgh* speech to eloquence and credibility, warning that ineffective speech undermines moral integrity (Sulmā, 1944). 'Alqamah ibn 'Abadah compares *balīgh* utterance to a bird's startling warning cry, emphasizing its power to jolt the listener awake ('Abadah, 1996). A Jāhiliyyah aphorism defines *balīgh* speech as that which precisely hits the heart without missing

its target. Together, these three sources confirm that *balīgh* signified not mere rhetorical beauty but speech that penetrates the soul and moves the heart (Al-Maydānī, 1955).

A verse by the Jāhiliyyah poet 'Alqamah ibn 'Abadah:

وَقَوْلٍ بَلِيغٍ تَلْقِيهِ إِلَى فَتًى ... كَأَنَّ عَلَيْهِ صَيْحَةَ الطَّيْرِ تُنذِرُ

Translation:

And a balīgh utterance that you deliver to a young man ... as if upon it is the sound of a bird warning.

The verse by 'Alqamah ibn 'Abadah portrays *balīgh* speech as powerfully penetrating, likened to the startling cry of a bird issuing a warning. This simile demonstrates that effective communication is not always gentle; it can be jarring in order to awaken the listener from heedlessness. Just as a bird's sudden cry alerts others to imminent danger, a *balīgh* utterance seizes attention instantly and leaves no room for indifference. Thus, in the Jāhiliyyah perspective, *balāghah* encompasses the capacity to jolt the heart through intensity and urgency, not merely linguistic beauty.

A verse by Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā:

إِذَا مَا قَالَ الْقَائِلُ غَيْرَ بَالِغٍ .. فَقَوْلُكَ مَعْرُوفٌ وَفِعْلُكَ مُنْكَرٌ

Translation:

When a speaker says something that is not bāligh (does not reach the target) ... then your word is known but your deed is denounced.

When a speaker's words fail to be *bāligh* meaning they do not precisely reach and penetrate the listener's heart the consequence is a crisis of credibility, as expressed in the phrase "*fa-qawluka ma'rūfun wa fi'luka munkar*" (your word is known but your deed is denounced). Thus, ineffective speech, no matter how outwardly acceptable, exposes a disconnect between word and deed, ultimately undermining the speaker's moral integrity and trustworthiness. An expression attributed to a Jāhiliyyah poet, as previously mentioned:

وَإِنَّ الْكَلَامَ لَبَالِغٌ إِذَا صَادَ فَلَمْ يُخْطِ الْقَلْبَ

Translation:

Indeed, a word becomes balīgh (effective) when it resonates and does not miss the heart.

Indeed, the expression means that speech is truly effective (*balīgh*) only when it precisely hits the heart without missing its target, emphasizing that impactful communication must penetrate the listener's innermost feelings, not merely reach the ears or intellect. Such expressions reflect that for pre-Qur'anic society, *balīgh* meant not only eloquent but also speech that penetrates the soul and arouses the listener's emotions. In the context of their culture, which highly valued eloquence and rhetoric, a poet or orator was called *balīgh* when he was able to move hearts, ignite the spirit of war, or foster respect through the power of his language.

Quranic Period

The Qur'anic period is the core stage that examines the meaning of keywords as used directly in the Qur'an at the time the revelation was revealed. The focus is on studying the context of the verses containing the word, the interrelationship of vocabulary within the Qur'anic semantic field, as well as the shifts or affirmations of meaning compared to pre-Qur'anic usage (Izutsu, 2002b).

In the Qur'anic period, QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63 was revealed in the context of the life of the Prophet Muhammad SAW in Madinah, when a group of hypocrites emerged who showed faith outwardly but concealed disbelief in their hearts (Al-Nisaburi, 2009). According to a narration from Ibn 'Abbas, this verse is related to a group of hypocrites who rejected the decision of the Messenger of Allah in a legal matter and preferred to seek judgment from *tāghūt* (tyrannical rulers). In that situation, Allah commanded the Prophet not to retaliate against their deceit with violence, but to continue advising them wisely through *qaulan balīghā* (speech that touches the heart and awakens consciousness) (Thalhah, 1992).

Linguistic data from the Qur'anic period, the word *balīghā* in QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63 appears in the following construction:

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُ اللَّهُ مَا فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ فَأَعْرِضْ عَنْهُمْ وَعِظْهُمْ وَقُلْ لَهُمْ فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ قَوْلًا بَلِيغًا

Translation:

So turn away from them, and admonish them, and speak to them a balīgh word (effective speech) concerning their very selves.

In the context of revelation, this term exemplifies a prophetic communication style that prioritizes gentleness and wisdom, without losing moral firmness. The Prophet was commanded to turn away from the

hypocrites not in the sense of neglecting them, but to avoid unproductive debates while still providing advice containing lessons. Socially and religiously, this verse affirms the principles of da'wa communication ethics. It displays a balance between a firm stance against hypocrisy and gentleness in calling to the truth. This communication style reflects the character of the Islamic message that prioritizes spiritual persuasion and moral touch, not verbal violence. Therefore, in the Qur'anic period, QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63 became a practical guide for the Prophet in dealing with groups who pretended to believe, while also affirming the prophetic communication model rooted in wisdom and compassion.

In the Qur'anic period, *qaulan balighā* was tied to the specific context of confronting hypocrites through a psychological and ethical approach. In the post-Qur'anic period, this meaning expanded to become a general principle of Islamic communication across various fields (da'wa, education, leadership), and was enriched with theoretical elaborations from exegetes and scholars.

Post-Quranic

The post-Qur'anic period is the stage of studying the meaning of Qur'anic keywords after revelation ceased, when the vocabulary was interpreted, developed, and used in subsequent Islamic discourses, such as hadith, tafsir, literary works, and scholars' thoughts. In this phase, the meaning of words often undergoes expansion, narrowing, or conceptual enrichment according to the development of Islamic theology, law, philosophy, and Sufism. Post-Qur'anic analysis helps to see how the understanding of the ummah towards a Qur'anic term continues to evolve along with historical and cultural dynamics, while also revealing the interaction between the original meaning of the Qur'an and the construction of meaning formed by later generations (Fahimah, 2020).

In the post-Qur'anic period, the interpretation of this verse developed following the dynamics of classical and modern Islamic thought. Classical commentators like Al-Ṭabarī, Al-Rāzī, and Al-Qurtubī provided deeper elaboration on the meaning of *qaulan balighā*. Al-Tabari interpreted this term as speech that is "firm in meaning yet gentle in delivery, namely advice that awakens consciousness without shaming" (Ṭabarī, 1954).

Meanwhile, Al-Rāzī highlighted its psychological dimension: *balīgh* words are speech that adapts to a person's psychological condition, so it can penetrate the heart of its listener (Ar-Razi, 1993). As for Al-Qurtubī, he emphasized its ethical aspect: this verse becomes the basis for leaders and scholars to reprimand the mistakes of the ummah in a manner full of wisdom, not with blame or insult (Al-Qurtubi & Al-Ansari, 2006).

In the modern and contemporary era, the meaning of *qaulan balīghā* is increasingly understood as a principle of ethical and empathetic communication. Sayyid Quṭb in *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān* viewed this verse as a form of Islamic psychological approach, *da'wa* that does not pressure but awakens moral consciousness (Quthb, 2004). Muhammad Quraish Shihab also asserted that *qaulan balīghā* contains a universal message about the importance of speaking with wisdom, having words that suit the situation, and placing the truth without offending the interlocutor's feelings (Shihab, 2002).

In the post-Qur'anic social context, this verse became the basis for the formation of Islamic communication ethics in various fields – *da'wa*, education, to leadership. The principle of *qaulan balīghā* teaches that the effectiveness of religious messages is not measured by the loudness of speech, but by the extent to which the words are able to awaken consciousness and self-transformation. Therefore, this verse also becomes the foundation for a humanistic approach in *amar ma'rūf nahi munkar*, namely calling to goodness with soothing speech, not with confrontation.

e. Semantic Field of the Word *Qaulan Balīghā* in QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63

The semantic field is a set of words that are interrelated in meaning and provide a conceptual network that reflects the worldview of the Al-Qur'an. Every keyword does not stand alone but is closely related to other words through synonymous, antonymous, or thematic connections, so that the meaning of one word influences the understanding of others (Izutsu, 2002a).

The Semantic Field of *qaulan balīghā* in this verse revolves around the meanings.

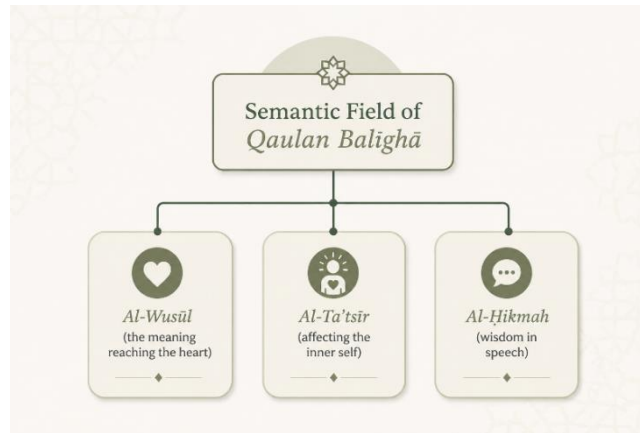


Figure 1. Semantic Field of *qaulan balighah* In QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63

In QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63, *qaulan balighah* is used to describe the communication strategy of the Prophet Muhammad SAW towards the hypocrites. Allah commands him not to become entangled in open debate or punishment, but rather to advise them with speech capable of touching their inner selves. Consequently, the semantic field of *baligh* is not limited to rhetorical eloquence but also encompasses the spiritual and psychological power of precisely targeted speech.

To ensure the validity of the findings regarding the semantic field above, the analytical steps that produce the three main meanings (*al-wuṣūl*, *al-ta'tsīr*, and *al-ḥikmah*) from the semantic field of *qaulan balighah* in QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63 must be explained in detail. This process follows the semantic field analysis method developed by Toshihiko Izutsu (2002a), which includes: identification of keywords within the verse, analysis of paradigmatic relations with other words in the same verse, analysis of the situational context (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), and synthesis of meanings based on these findings. The verse QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63 reads: "*Fa a'riḍ 'anhum wa 'iḏhum wa qul lahum fī anfusihim qaulan balighah*" (So turn away from them, and admonish them, and speak to them a *baligh* word concerning their very selves). From this verse, the keywords identified include *qaulan balighah* (speech that reaches its target), *'iḏhum* (admonition or warning), *fī anfusihim* (concerning their souls or selves), and *a'riḍ 'anhum* (turn away from them).

Next, an analysis of paradigmatic relations among the keywords within the same verse was conducted to discover meaningful connections. The word *'izhum* (admonition) has a functional synonymic relation with *qaulan balīghā*, indicating that *balīgh* speech aims to awaken consciousness. The phrase *fī anfusihim* (concerning their souls) functions as a target specification, signifying that *qaulan balīghā* must touch the inner aspect of the listener. Meanwhile, the phrase *a'rid 'anhum* (turn away from them) has a contextual antithetical relation, indicating that *qaulan balīghā* should not be delivered with violence or confrontation. From this analysis, two initial indications emerge. First, *qaulan balīghā* has the function of *al-wuṣūl* (conveying meaning to the heart) because it is targeted at *anfus* (souls). Second, *qaulan balīghā* possesses the dimension of *al-ta'thīr* (psychological influence) because it replaces physical punishment with moral touch.

The third step is the analysis of the situational context (*asbāb al-nuzūl*). According to a narration from Ibn 'Abbas, this verse was revealed when a group of hypocrites rejected the decision of the Messenger of Allah and preferred to seek judgment from *tāghūt* (tyrannical rulers). In this situation marked by tension and deceit, Allah forbade the Prophet from responding with violence or punishment. Instead, the Prophet was commanded to turn away diplomatically while still offering advice through *qaulan balīghā*. The analysis of this context yields a third indication, namely that *qaulan balīghā* requires *al-ḥikmah* (wisdom) because it is delivered in a vulnerable social condition where a confrontational approach would be counterproductive and would only worsen the situation.

Based on the integration of findings from the paradigmatic relation analysis and the situational context analysis, the three main meanings of the semantic field of *qaulan balīghā* are systematically formulated. The first meaning is *al-wuṣūl*, namely the ability of speech to convey meaning until it penetrates the heart. This meaning is derived from the phrase *fī anfusihim* which targets the listener's soul, and is reinforced by the pre-Qur'anic definition of *balīgh* in a Jāhiliyyah aphorism: "*idhā ṣāda fa-lam yukhṭi al-qalba*" (when it hits and does not miss the heart). The second meaning is *al-ta'thīr*, namely the ability of speech to influence the listener's consciousness and behavior. This meaning is derived from the contrast between *qaulan balīghā*

and *a'rid* 'anhum (avoiding violence) as well as from the function of *'izhum* as admonition aimed at awakening moral consciousness. The third meaning is *al-hikmah*, namely wisdom in choosing appropriate words, timing, and manner according to the listener's condition. This meaning is derived from the *asbāb al-nuzūl* context, which demonstrates that confronting hypocrisy requires a diplomatic and wise approach, not open confrontation.

2. Discussion

This verse was revealed in the social context of Madinah society, which was facing a group of hypocrites (people who outwardly claimed faith but concealed intentions to oppose the Messenger of Allah) (Al-Suyuti, 2002). In the social space of that time, the existence of the hypocrites created tension and suspicion within the Muslim community. They often acted as obstacles in the socio-political consolidation process of the Muslims, either through slander, provocation, or the spread of misleading information. Therefore, this verse is not only theological but also has strong social relevance in building communication ethics and social strategy for the Muslim ummah (Harun, 2015).

The contextualization of this verse shows that Islam encourages a persuasive approach in handling social conflict (Alfani & Mukhsin, 2024). The command to utter *qaulan balighā* contains dimensions of communication that are wise, effective, and heart-touching, not confrontational or full of anger. In the context of modern society, this principle can be applied to situations where society faces polarization, disinformation, or ideological differences in views. Instead of responding with verbal violence or repressive actions, Islam teaches the importance of insightful, empathetic, and wisdom-based dialogue. Thus, *qaulan balighā* becomes a model of social communication that builds cohesion and strengthens solidarity amidst differences.

Furthermore, this verse affirms that in social space, not all conflicts must be resolved with open confrontation. The Prophet Muhammad was instructed to stay away from hypocrites, not as a sign of weakness, but as a social strategy to avoid escalating conflicts that would disrupt social order

(Thohir, 2023). This approach teaches that maintaining social stability is more important than emphasizing division. Within the framework of today's pluralistic society, this message is relevant for shaping social ethics that prioritize a balance between firmness of principle and gentleness of communication.

The three dimensions of *qaulan balīghā* find strong theoretical support in contemporary communication psychology and media sociology. *Al-wuṣūl* corresponds to the psychological concept of *empathic accuracy* – the ability to accurately perceive the emotional states of others (Jaksic & Schlegel, 2020). *Al-ta'thīr* aligns with *persuasion theory* and the *elaboration likelihood model* (ELM), which distinguishes between central and peripheral routes to persuasion, where heart-touching speech often operates through the peripheral route by evoking emotional responses that lead to lasting attitude change. *Al-hikmah* resonates with *emotional intelligence* frameworks, particularly the ability to regulate one's own emotions and respond appropriately to the emotional states of others (Double, 2026).

From a media sociology perspective, the application of *qaulan balīghā* to digital spaces challenges the dominant paradigm of content moderation, which tends to rely on punitive removal and account suspension. While such measures are necessary for extreme cases, they do not address the underlying social and psychological drivers of toxic communication. A *qaulan balīghā*-informed approach would complement punitive measures with restorative, dialogic, and educational interventions that seek to transform the hearts and minds of users rather than merely silencing them. This aligns with emerging frameworks in *digital civility* and *online conflict resolution* that emphasize empathy, dialogue, and community-based norm enforcement (Rosmita et al., 2026).

D. Conclusion

The application of Toshihiko Izutsu's semantic analysis to QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63 has systematically revealed that *qaulan balīghā* is not merely a rhetorical category denoting eloquent speech, but rather a comprehensive communicative ethic that integrates three core dimensions: *al-wuṣūl*

(reaching the heart), *al-ta'thīr* (psychological influence), and *al-ḥikmah* (wisdom in speech). The diachronic analysis demonstrates a significant semantic evolution from the pre-Qur'anic period, where *balīgh* signified technical-rhetorical effectiveness, to the Qur'anic period, where it acquired ethical-psychological dimensions in confronting hypocrisy, and finally to the post-Qur'anic period, where it expanded into humanistic-universal frameworks. The paradigmatic analysis further positions *qaulan balīghā* as the pinnacle of Qur'anic communication ethics, functioning as a hypernym that subsumes truth (*sadīd*), gentleness (*layyin*), appropriateness (*ma'rūf*), and nobility (*karīm*), while standing in opposition to destructive speech such as falsehood (*zurā*) and slander (*lamzan*).

The primary contribution of this research lies in its novel application of Izutsu's semantic method to QS. An-Nisā' [4]: 63 and its provision of concrete, operational strategies for implementing *qaulan balīghā* in digital spaces, including countering cyberbullying through *al-wuṣūl*, addressing hate speech and hoaxes through *al-ta'thīr*, and managing digital polarization through *al-ḥikmah*. By integrating Qur'anic ethics with communication psychology and media sociology, this study bridges the gap between classical tafsir traditions and contemporary digital communication challenges, offering both theoretical insights and practical tools for Muslim communities, educators, and social media users. Thus, *qaulan balīghā* is not a historical construct but a living ethical framework capable of addressing the most pressing communication problems of the digital age.

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