

Research Paper

Examining the Origin of Izutsu's Linguistic Theories in Understanding the Discourse of the Quran

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Extended abstract

1. Introduction

The necessity of semantic studies in Quranic scholarship stems from the urgent need to modernize and deepen our understanding of the Qur'an. This trend traces back to Toshihiko Izutsu, a Japanese linguist and Islamic scholar, who pioneered a distinctive approach known as "lexical-structural semantics" in Quranic studies. Izutsu views semantics not merely as word analysis but as a method for uncovering the worldview (Weltanschauung) of a people through their key linguistic terms. He acknowledges the lack of a unified theoretical framework in semantics due to its diverse and often conflicting

schools of thought. Consequently, he proposes his own integrative model, explicitly stating that his methodology is not an original invention but a synthesis of ideas drawn from prominent linguists and philosophers. This study aims to identify and analyze the theoretical linguistic roots that shaped Izutsu's semantic approach to understanding the Qur'anic discourse.

2. Research method

This research employs a descriptive-analytical method. It systematically investigates the intellectual influences Izutsu himself acknowledges, focusing on scholars whose theories directly informed his semantic framework. The study examines the ideas of Leo Weisgerber, Edward Sapir,

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Benjamin Lee Whorf, Ferdinand de Saussure, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Noam Chomsky. By analyzing their core concepts and comparing them with Izutsu's methodology, the paper clarifies how these diverse theories were selectively adapted and integrated into his unique approach to Quranic semantics

3. Results

Toshihiko Izutsu's contribution to Quranic studies lies in his innovative integration of modern linguistic theories into a cohesive semantic methodology. His approach is not a mere repetition of Sapir-Whorf, Weisgerber, Saussure, or Wittgenstein, but a deliberate and critical synthesis tailored to the Qur'anic text. He combines the ethnolinguistic emphasis on worldview, Saussurean structural relations, and Wittgensteinian contextual use to argue that the Qur'an must be understood through its own internal semantic

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system, in its original language. While his strong stance on untranslatability may be seen as extreme, his method has undeniably opened new avenues for conceptual and lexical analysis of the Qur'an. This study confirms that Izutsu's theoretical foundation is pluralistic yet purposeful, enabling a holistic and systematic exploration of the Qur'an's moral and theological universe. His work remains a landmark in bridging contemporary linguistics with classical Islamic hermeneutics.

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Conflict of interest

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