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Articulations of Phonic Discourse and Mechanisms of Persuasion in Surah al-Dukhan

A Phono-Stylistic Study of the Qur'anic Fawāṣil (Verse-Endings)

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Abstract

This research explores the manifestations of phonetic rhythm and the rhetorical mechanisms of persuasion in Sūrat al-Dukhān, utilizing a phono-stylistic analysis of Qur'anic verse-endings (fawāṣil) and their acoustic cadences. It investigates how the Qur'an deploys an organic sonic architecture designed to stimulate both auditory perception and intellect, achieving a profound emotional, cognitive, and argumentative impact upon the listener. Through an empirical examination of the surah's 59 verses, three primary structural patterns of fawāṣil are established: parallel (al-mutawāẓī), matching in both syllabic meter and rhyme letter; balanced (al-mutawāzin), agreeing in meter without rhyme identity; and marginal (al-muṭarrif), agreeing in rhyme consonant while varying in metrical pattern. The study reveals a deliberate predominance of extended nasal phonemes (/m/ and /n/), creating resonant cadential pauses that reinforce the themes of divine revelation, warning, and eschatological retribution. Ultimately, the paper demonstrates that the Qur'anic fāṣilah is far from ornamental rhyming; rather, it functions as an indispensable semantic-phonetic vehicle of divine persuasion and inimitability (i'jāz).

Keywords: *Phonic Discourse; Qur'anic Rhythm; Sūrat al-Dukhān; Fawāṣil (Verse-Endings); Persuasion Mechanisms; Phono-Stylistics; I'jāz.*

1. Introduction

The Noble Qur'an was revealed to an Arab audience possessing an acutely cultivated acoustic sensitivity. It was received with sheer astonishment, as its semantic depth and



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moral imperatives harmonized instinctively with human innate nature (*fiṭrah*), while its sonic majesty surpassed any pre-existing expressive medium. It was neither metered poetry (*shi'r*) bound by rigid quantitative prosodic canons, nor ornate rhymed prose (*saj'*) marked by artificial affectation. Consequently, any critical inquiry into Qur'anic rhythm conducted exclusively from a textual, visual, or grammatical perspective remains fundamentally incomplete. The intrinsic nature of the Qur'anic phenomenon demands auditory realization; the written text represents merely a symbolic transcription of a vibrant oral recitation that awakens the senses and engages the cognitive faculties.

The acoustic dimension of the text requires a reciter with vocal clarity, a receptive listener with aesthetic judgment, and a researcher equipped with analytical rigor. Classical Arab rhetoricians readily recognized this interdependence: al-Jāḥiẓ (1998) famously declared that 'the voice is the instrument of speech' (Vol. 1, p. 78), while Ibn Khaldūn (2004) classified hearing as the most noble of faculties and the royal gate to savoring rhetorical balance. The auditory supremacy of the Qur'an was acknowledged even by its fiercest opponents. Surah Fuṣṣilat documents the desperate countermeasure of the Meccan polytheists: 'The disbelievers advised one another: Do not listen to this Qur'an, but drown it out so that you may prevail' (Qur'an, 41:26). Historiographical sources record that prominent Meccan adversaries, such as Abū Jahl, Abū Sufyān, and al-Akhnas ibn Sharīq, would secretly gather under cover of night near the residence of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, captivated and moved to tears by his grief-stricken, melodious recitation, only to reproach one another at dawn for fear of succumbing to its overwhelming persuasive force (Ibn Hishām, 1955).

Analyzing this phonetic coherence, Muṣṭafā Ṣādiq al-Rāfi' (2000) observed: 'If you contemplate the words of the Qur'an in their arrangement, you will see that their morphological and phonological movements flow in structure and composition just as individual letters flow in producing eloquence. Each unit prepares the way for the next, and each supports the other, perfectly harmonized with the acoustic qualities of the consonants in an unbroken musical order' (p. 174). While pre-Islamic poetry captivated hearts through its quantitative meters, the Qur'an silenced the poets of Arabia because it integrated conceptual meaning, intonation, and cadential melody into a transcendent whole. In light of these premises, this paper addresses the following research questions: How are the phonic articulations structured in Sūrat al-Dukhān? What typological varieties of verse-endings (*fawāṣil*) characterize this chapter? And through what phono-stylistic mechanisms does this acoustic structure exercise its persuasive and psychological efficacy?

2. Methods and Materials

This investigation adopts a phono-stylistic and rhetorical approach (Al-Jurjānī, 1984; Crystal, 2008), synthesizing classical Arabic rhetorical theories of Qur'anic inimitability (*i'jāz*) and verse-endings (*'ilm al-fawāṣil*) with modern phonological analysis. The methodological framework encompasses three procedural stages:

1. Comprehensive Textual Corpus & Segmentation: A complete inventory of the 59 verses comprising *Sūrat al-Dukhān* was established, cataloging the terminal lexical items (*fawāṣil*) and categorizing them across the chapter's thematic discourse units.

2. Phonological & Syllabic Scansion: Each verse-ending was dissected into its syllabic and phonetic components—distinguishing between short open syllables (CV), medium open syllables (CVV), medium closed syllables (CVC), and long closed syllables (CVVC / CVCC). Specific acoustic attributes, including nasalization (*ghunnah*), vowel prolongation (*madd*), resonance, and plosive echoing (*qalqalah*), were systematically examined.

3. Rhetorical Typological Classification: The *fawāṣil* were classified according to the classical triadic taxonomy established by Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (1988) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (2008): the parallel (*al-mutawāzī*), the marginal (*al-muṭarrif*), and the balanced (*al-mutawāzin*).

Theoretical Demarcation: *Fāṣilah* versus *Saj'*

Etymologically, the Arabic root *f-ṣ-l* (ف-ص-ل) signifies separation, division, or joints between bodily members. Within Qur'anic sciences, the technical term *fāṣilah* derives from the Qur'anic declaration: 'A Book whose verses are perfected and then fully explained (*fuṣṣilat*) from One All-Wise, All-Aware' (Qur'an, 11:1). Classical authorities insisted upon maintaining a rigorous distinction between the Qur'anic *fāṣilah* and rhymed prose (*saj'*). Al-Zarkashī (1988) recorded the consensus of authorities—including Abū 'Amr al-Dānī, al-Rummānī, and al-Bāqillānī—prohibiting the designation of Qur'anic prose as *saj'*. This rejection stems from two considerations: first, *saj'* historically evoked the cooing of birds (*saj' al-ṭayr*) and the incantations of pre-Islamic soothsayers (*saj' al-kuhhān*), which is beneath the sanctified majesty of divine speech; and second, whereas conventional *saj'* subordinates semantic coherence to phonological constraints, Qur'anic *fawāṣil* are inherently subordinate to and generative of meaning (Al-Rummānī, 1976; Al-Suyūṭī, 2008).

Abū 'Amr al-Dānī (1994) differentiated between terminal rhymes (*fawāṣil*) and verse boundaries (*ru'ūs al-āy*), demonstrating that while every verse boundary constitutes a *fāṣilah*, the converse is not universally true, as intra-verse syntactic cadences also operate as *fawāṣil*. Muḥammad al-Ḥasnāwī (2000) synthesized this concept, defining the *fāṣilah* as: 'The terminal word of a verse, fulfilling the cadential role of rhyme in poetry or assonance in prose; it is the unique phonetic configuration harmonizing verse terminals through consonantal identity or rhythmic weight in a manner that serves semantic clarity and instills psychological composure' (p. 112).

3. Results and Data Analysis

Sūrat al-Dukhān comprises 59 verses organized into six primary thematic discourse units. A comprehensive acoustic audit reveals an extraordinary distribution of cadential words, culminating in rhythmic terminal consonants dominated by nasals (/n/ and /m/) preceded by long vowels (/ī/ and /ū/). Table 1 illustrates the distribution of *fawāṣil* across the chapter.

Section	Verses & Count	Thematic Content	Terminal Words (Fawāṣil)
Unit 1	Verses 1–8 (8 verses)	Divine Revelation & Mercy	al-mubīn, mundhirīn, ḥakīm, mursalīn, al-ʿalīm, mūqinīn, al-awwalīn
Unit 2	Verses 9–16 (8 verses)	Meccan Skepticism & Impending Doom	yalʿabūn, mubīn, alīm, muʿminūn, mubīn, majnūn, ʿāʾidūn, muntaqimūn
Unit 3	Verses 17–33 (17 verses)	Pharaoh's Defiance & Historical Destruction	karīm, amīn, mubīn, tarjumūn, faʿtazilūn, mujrimūn, muttabiʿūn, mughraqūn, ʿuyūn, karīm, fākihīn, ākharīn, munzarīn, al-muhīn, al-musrifīn, al-ʿālamīn, mubīn
Unit 4	Verses 34–42 (9 verses)	Denial of Resurrection & Eschatological Truth	liyaqūlūn, bimunsharīn, ṣādiqīn, mujrimīn, lāʾibīn, lā yaʿlamūn, ajmaʿīn, yunṣarūn, ar-raḥīm
Units 5 & 6	Verses 43–59 (17 verses)	Torment of Zaqqūm vs. Bliss of the Righteous; Divine Prophetic Consolation	az-zaqqūm, al-athīm, al-buṭūn, al-ḥamīm, al-jaḥīm, al-ḥamīm, al-karīm, tamtarūn, amīn, ʿuyūn, mutaḳābilīn, ʾīn, āminīn, al-jaḥīm, al-ʿazīm, yatadhakkarūn, murtaqibūn

Table 1. Inventory and Thematic Distribution of Fawāṣil across Sūrat al-Dukhān.

Typological Patterns of Fawāṣil in the Surah

Detailed rhetorical analysis establishes three principal structural classes of fawāṣil governing Sūrat al-Dukhān:

1. The Parallel Pattern (al-Mutawāzī): Characterized by absolute concurrence in both morphological meter and terminal rhyme consonant (Al-Zarkashī, 1988; Al-Suyūṭī, 2008). This represents the pinnacle of phonetic harmony. A striking manifestation occurs in the infernal punishment scene: 'Like the boiling of scalding water. Seize him and drag him into the depths of Hellfire! Then pour over his head the torment of boiling water' (Qur'an, 44:46–48). Here, the terminal words al-jaḥīm (الْجَحِيم) and al-ḥamīm (الْحَمِيم) exhibit complete parallelism: both adhere to the morphological paradigm faʿīl (فَعِيل) and terminate on the identical consonant /m/ preceded by a prolonged high front vowel /i/.

This creates a tight, rhythmic cadence that underscores the inescapable severity of divine retribution.

2. The Marginal Pattern (al-Muṭarrif): Occurs when verse-endings share the final rhyme consonant but diverge in morphological meter (Al-Zarkashī, 1988). This pattern represents the dominant cadential structure of Sūrat al-Dukhān, anchored overwhelmingly upon the nasal phonemes /n/ and /m/. For instance, consider verses 34–35: 'Indeed, these people say: There is nothing beyond our first death, and we will not be resurrected (bi-munsharīn)' (Qur'an, 44:34–35). The fawāṣil yaqūlūn (يَقُولُونَ) and bi-munsharīn (يُمْنَشَرِينَ) share the rhyming letter /n/, while differing in weight (yaḥ'ulūn vs. bi-muḥ'alīn).

Phonological scansion reveals an underlying syllabic correspondence (al-tashābuh al-maqṭa'ī):

- ya-qū-lūn: [ya] (CV - short open) / [qū] (CVV - medium open) / [lūn] (CVVC - long closed).
- bi-mun-sha-rīn: [bi] (CV) / [mun] (CVC - medium closed) / [sha] (CV) / [rīn] (CVVC - long closed).

Both cadences resolve upon an identical acoustic unit: a heavy, ultra-long closed syllable (CVVC) with an extended vocalic nucleus preceding a sonorant nasal. This device prevents prosodic monotony while securing unity of cadential resonance.

3. The Balanced Pattern (al-Mutawāzin): Manifested when terminal words agree in syllabic weight and metrical pattern while terminating on distinct consonants (Al-Suyūṭī, 2008). Examples abound in the opening section: mundhirīn (مُنْذِرِينَ - Qur'an, 44:3) and mursilīn (مُرْسِلِينَ - Qur'an, 44:5), complemented by mūqinīn (مُوقِنِينَ - Qur'an, 44:7). Although these words end in distinct roots, they share identical stress distributions and syllabic quantities, generating an internal pulse that reinforces cognitive assent.

4. Discussion: Mechanisms of Persuasion

The acoustic architecture of Sūrat al-Dukhān operates not as an extraneous aesthetic veneer, but as an active rhetorical instrument of psychological and theological persuasion. Three communicative mechanisms substantiate this claim:

1. Phono-Semantic Congruence and Affective Tone Modulation: The text modulates phonetic density in precise correspondence with thematic content. In verses depicting eschatological terror and the Tree of Zaqqūm (vv. 43–49), the acoustic structure is dominated by plosive consonants, pharyngealization (tafkīm), and short, abrupt syllabic transitions that sonically replicate agitation and anguish. Conversely, in depicting the beatific serenity of the righteous in gardens, springs, silk, and secure abodes (vv. 51–55), the rhythm decelerates into gentle, extended vocalic murmurs dominated by voiced nasals and liquids. The phonetics induce visceral emotional states that anticipate and ratify the cognitive proposition.

2. Cadential Pre-emption and Cognitive Receptivity: Classical critic al-Rāfi'ī (2000) astutely observed that Qur'anic fawāṣil perform the functional role of cadential full-stops

in musical phrasing. Because the auditory cadence resolves naturally into deep sonic repose, the listener experiences psychological fulfillment before rational resistance can mount. The acoustic harmony pre-empts cognitive discord, predisposing the listener to assent to the divine warning. This explains why the Meccan elite confessed their vulnerability to the acoustic spell of Qur'anic recitation.

3. Transcendence of Monotony via Asymmetry: Unlike classical Arabic qasīdah poetry, which binds the ear to a rigid mono-rhyme, or folk saǧ', which forces sense into mechanical repetition, the Qur'anic composition in Sūrat al-Dukhān balances symmetry with variance. By alternating between parallel, balanced, and marginal fawāšil, the discourse preserves thematic agility and semantic supremacy while sustaining a hypnotic acoustic thread.

5. Conclusion

This investigation affirms that Sūrat al-Dukhān deploys a sophisticated phono-stylistic architecture wherein acoustic cadence and argumentative intent are completely synthesized. The key findings of the study are summarized as follows:

1. The verse-endings (fawāšil) in Sūrat al-Dukhān do not serve mere formalistic ornamentation; they represent organic acoustic culminations that advance the persuasive objectives of the Qur'anic message.

2. The text demonstrates structural mastery through three distinct types of fawāšil: the parallel (mutawāzī), the marginal (muṭarrif), and the balanced (mutawāzin), with a clear predominance of the marginal pattern terminating in prolonged nasals (/m/ and /n/).

3. The phonological scansion of verse cadences reveals sophisticated syllabic equivalences (al-tashābuh al-maqṭa'i), providing melodic unity across asymmetrical syntactic structures.

4. The acoustic design of Sūrat al-Dukhān constitutes a primary pillar of its rhetorical inimitability (i'jāz), effectively orchestrating sound, rhythm, and theological argument to captivate the auditory sense and convince the human intellect.

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