

A Critical Discussion on Linguistic Assignment, Denotation, and Apparent Meaning in *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*

This research paper consists of two steps. Firstly, it introduces a new perspective on the problem of the relationship between expression and meaning, thereby contributing to linguistic discussions in *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Secondly, it discusses some drawbacks of the principle of authoritativeness of apparent meaning.

The process of assigning (*al-waḍ'*) vocal expressions (*alfāz*) to meanings and the topic of denotation (*dalāla*) has been one of the oldest subjects discussed by scholars in the field of *uṣūl al-fiqh* since its inception. In this context, assigning and imposing refer to a particular correlation between an expression and its corresponding meaning. It involves the speaker and the audience inherently associating the intended meaning upon encountering the expression. Therefore, assignation is the sole factor through which a text or utterance signifies a specific meaning. Also, according to Islamic logicians, denotation is a state wherein recognising something elicits recognising something else. Scholars in *uṣūl al-fiqh* agree on assignation as a distinct link between expression and meaning, offering varied explanations of its workings. Al-Ṣaymarī sees assignation as natural, while Mohaghegh Isfahani deems the relation arbitrary. Mohaghegh Nāinī refutes both, asserting God posits the connection, revealing languages to humankind. Al-Khoei, influenced by Nahavandi, highlights dependency on the positer's intention. This study introduces a new perspective on the relationship between expression and meaning.

The relationship between meaning and expression in a given source text can have three modalities: textually explicit, implicit synoptic, and apparent. The principle asserting the primacy of apparent meaning as authoritative evidence underpins most principles in *uṣūl al-fiqh*. However, this principle necessitates scrutiny, as it has specific limitations. This essay addresses these issues by examining the following questions: Firstly, it analyses whether the audience of the source text confines to the immediate addressees from the first generation when the text was initially uttered or it extends to contemporary individuals in subsequent generations. Secondly, it contemplates whether, if the addressees of source texts encompass contemporary people, the criterion for the authoritative apparent meaning should be what could be comprehended at the time of utterance or what could be understood in the context of contemporary circumstances. Finally, despite Islamic theologians maintaining that the Quran's text is God's speech, this essay raises the following questions: does the same hold true for the texts of hadiths? Do hadith texts correspond to the speeches of the Imams? Or can they be considered paraphrased quotes? If so, applying the linguistic principles from *uṣūl al-fiqh*, especially the principle of apparent meaning, to hadiths could be methodologically controversial.



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