

USLUB: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS IN THE QUR'AN

Suhaimi

Faculty of Tarbiyah and Arabic Language Studies
Ar-Raniry State Islamic University (UIN), Banda Aceh
Email: shsuhaimi456@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

One of the *uslub*s or language styles mentioned in the Quran for expressing its sacred messages is question and answer (*sual wa jawab*), where a question is followed by its answer. This style of language has certainly attracted the attention of many parties, especially the scholars of the Quran, or *mufassirin*, whose thoughts and expertise are in direct contact with the holy words, as well as Arabic linguists, especially those related to *balaghah*. Scholars' perspectives on revealing the secrets of these questions and answers differ according to their scientific backgrounds, but all of them appear to be urgent in order to strengthen our awareness of the truth of the Divine Word that Allah revealed to His Messenger Muhammad (peace be upon him). The *questions and answers (uslub)* implicitly seem like an extremely important style or learning method to be applied in communicating with other parties. Among the forms of *questions and answers (uslub)* in the Qur'an that are interesting to observe is "*uslub al-hakim*," which is literally interpreted as the style of a wise man. This article discusses some of the general characteristics of *uslub al-Quran*. It also describes specific types of Quranic questions and answers. Hence, it aims to be a *blessing* for us in this life.

Keywords: *Uslub, Al-Quran, Questions, Answers*

ABSTRAK

Salah satu *uslub* atau gaya bahasa yang ditampilkan Al-Quran dalam mengekspresikan pesan-pesan sucinya adalah tanya dan jawab (*sual wa jawab*) yakni dengan menampilkan pertanyaan sekaligus jawaban atas pertanyaan tersebut. Gaya bahasa yang demikian itu tentu saja telah mengundang perhatian banyak pihak terutama para ulama Al-Quran atau *mufassirin* yang pemikiran dan keahlian mereka bersentuhan langsung dengan kalam suci tersebut, demikian pula para ahli bahasa Arab terutama terkait *balaghah*. Pandangan ulama dalam mengungkap rahasia gaya bahasa *tanya dan jawab* ini terlihat memiliki beberapa variasi sesuai latar belakang keilmuan mereka, namun semuanya terlihat menjadi urgen bagi penguatan kesadaran kita terhadap kebenaran kalam Ilahi yang diwahyukan Allah kepada Rasul-Nya Muhammad saw. *Uslub tanya dan jawab* itu juga secara implisit tampaknya bisa dimaknai sebagai suatu gaya atau metoda pembelajaran yang sangat penting untuk diaplikasikan dalam berkomunikasi dengan para pihak. Di antara bentuk *uslub* tanya dan jawab dalam Al-Quran yang menarik dicermati adalah yang berupa "*Uslub al-hakim*". yang secara literal dimaknai sebagai gaya bahasa orang bijak. Artikel sederhana ini selain memaparkan beberapa karakteristik *uslub* Al-Quran secara umum, juga memaparkan secara lebih spesifik tentang bentuk-bentuk tanya dan jawab dalam Al-Quran dengan harapan dapat menjadi *ibrah* bagi kita dalam hidup dan kehidupan ini.

Kata Kunci: *Uslub, Al-Quran, Tanya, Jawab*

A. Introduction

Al-Quran, the holy book of the Muslims, which was revealed in Arabic, has various unique *uslub*s or language styles. It is always necessary to pay close attention in order to reveal the various secrets hidden behind this uniqueness, because every style of language displayed in the Quran is not a coincidence, but it contains good and useful purposes and wisdom for human and animal life. Questions and answers are one of its usages or language styles. The *questions and answers* and other language styles, although they have different forms, are all inseparable from the main function of the Quran itself as *hudan*, or guidance, for all mankind. In the study of Quranic sciences, this *questions-and-answers* style of language has been used as a separate rule to make it easier to understand the Quran more comprehensively. Therefore, it is not surprising that the *question and answer* in the Quran are one of the topics of discussion in various books of the Qur'anic.

Quran scholars have formulated various materials that are the subject of study in the disciplines of the Quran itself. M. Quraish Shihab, an expert on the Quran and commentary, believes that the material for studying the Quran can be divided into four components: (1) an introduction to the Quran; (2) interpretation rules; (3) interpretation methods; and (4) commentaries and commentators.¹ Furthermore, he also explains some components of interpretation rules, such as *isim* and *fi'il* rules, *ta'rif* and *tankir* rules, the *questions and answers* method, the repetition method, command and prohibition rules, the name-mentioning method in stories, etc.²

Thus, it is clear that questions and answers are among the materials that receive special attention in order to be thoroughly scrutinized and comprehended so that one's understanding of the Quran becomes perfect.

B. Uslub of the Quran and its characteristics

Uslub generally means the way or style of speech adopted by a speaker (*mutakallim*) in composing sentences or utterances and in choosing words or pronunciations. As a result, the Quran's *uslub*, as Sheikh Muhammad al-'Azim al-Zarqani put it, is the way the Quran constructs its sentences and chooses its pronunciations.³

Al-Quran al-Karim, as stated by Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafi'i, has its own *uslub* because it was not made by humans. If it is created by humans, its *uslub* is similar to that of the Arabs. As a result, there is no conflict between the Quran *uslub* in terms of method, structure, and meaning.⁴ Allah mentions it in surat Al-Nisa verse 82:

¹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan Al-Quran* (Bandung: Mizan, 1992).

² Shihab.

³ Al-Zarqani, *Manahi Al-'Irfan Fi Ulum Al-Quran*, Juz 2 (Cairo: Dar al-Hadis, 2001), p. 253.

⁴ Mustafa Shadiq al-Rafi'i, *I'jaz Al-Quran Wa Al-Balaghah Al-Nabawiyyah* (Cairo: Dar al-Taqwa, 2014), p. 281.

With a slightly different editorial, but the same substance that Syauqi Dhaif also expressed the views of previous scholars on this matter, such as his excerpt from the book *I'jaz al-Quran* by Abu Bakar al-Baqillani, which explains that *uslub* Al-Quran has its own privileges that are different and exceed the words of Arabic language experts. See: Syauqi Dhaif, *Al-Balaghah Tahawwur Wa Tarikh*, Dar al-Fikri, 1965, p. 109.

أفلا يتدبرون القرآن ولو كان من عند غير الله لوجدوا فيه اختلاف كثيرا.

Then do they not reflect on the Qur'an? They would have found it contradictory if it had come from someone other than Allah.

According to Al-Zarqani, there are seven characteristics of Quranic uslub. First: the regularity of its pronunciations; second: conformity with common people (general) and special people (certain); third: compatibility with reason and feelings; fourth: the beauty of the language; fifth: the beauty in making sentence variations; sixth: the ability to collect between mujmal and bayan; and seventh: the appropriateness of pronunciation and meaning.⁵ They will be briefly explained in more detail, as follows:

1. The regularity of the pronunciations

Al-Quran is expressed in very orderly and neat pronunciation, so that when all words are pronounced, the listener will feel the harmony of the sound of the letters more than other pronunciations and sentences. From the time of its revelation until the end of time, the beauty of the sound of Qur'anic recitations has been heard. Al-Rafi'i states that it has been felt by the Balaghah experts among the Arabs because they see a different type of speech in their character, so it is impossible for them to oppose it.⁶

2. Conformity with common people (general) and special people (certain).

When the Quran is read by ordinary people (the general public) or read to them, they will feel its beauty. Similarly, if it is read by certain people, such as intellectuals and scholars, then they will also feel the same thing. It's different from human speech, which sometimes can only be liked by certain circles and not by ordinary people because they don't understand it.

This also does not mean that everything revealed in the Quran can be understood by pious and ignorant people with the same understanding. However, their understanding must be different, because if the Al-Quran were all clear and revealed so that in knowing its content there is no difference between the pious and the ignorant, then there will be no advantages between those humans,⁷ and this is of course impossible to happen because the reality of society shows that there are differences, so there are teachers and students, there are pious and ignorant people, and so on.

3. Compatibility with reason and feelings

The Quran uslub speaks with both reason and heart at the same time. It also collects truth and beauty simultaneously. This is illustrated in al-Fushshilah verse 39, where it is explained about the signs of Allah SWT's greatness and power: the earth is dry and barren, but when it rains, it becomes fertile. Similarly, it is also explained that God, the one who revives things, can certainly also revive the dead.

Similarly, in Surah Qaf verses 6–11, Allah describes the sky, which was created full of beauty, as well as the earth with its solid mountains and all kinds of plants that are beautiful to the eye, trees that grow, including tall date trees, and all of that is sustenance for

⁵ Al-Zarqani.

⁶ Mustafa Shadiq al-Rafi'i.

⁷ Ibnu Quthaibah, *Ta'wil Musykil Al-Qur'an* (Mesir: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2014), p. 58.

all servants. In this regard, Al-Zarqani claims that the uslub is one that both satisfies the mind and pleases the feelings at the same time.⁸

4. The beauty of the language

The beauty of the Quran's uslub can be seen in the interrelationships between its parts, such as words, sentences, verses, and letters, so that it is like a perfect body, where each part is interrelated with one another.

5. The beauty of making sentence variations

This means that the Quranic uslub can convey a single meaning in a variety of ways and pronunciations. This can be seen, among other things, in expressions about demands to do work by expressing clear (sharia) command words such as orders to fulfill mandates. There is also a way of preaching that the act is obligatory upon the Muslim, such as being obliged to fast. Another way is to report about the deed through *questions and answers*, as mentioned in Al-Baqarah verse 220: *They question you concerning orphans. Say: "Improving their lot is best, and there are many other options."*

It could also be the opposite pattern, namely bringing in a single word with various meanings, and this is found a lot in the Quran. Even Imam Ibn Qutaibah has written a separate chapter on this matter; as an example, he mentions the word "*qadha*" can mean: *hatama* (in al-Zumar: 42); *amara* (in al-Isra` : 23); and *shana`a* (in Fushshilat: 12).⁹

6. The ability to collect between Mujmal and Bayan

One of the characteristics of Quran uslub is collecting mujmal and mubayyin, even though these two are paradoxes, and these two things do not occur in human speech. This happens because there are words expressed with a clear meaning and do not require explanation, but there are also words expressed where the meaning is still hidden, so an explanation is needed. A lot of information about this is usually expressed in various books written by Quran scholars.¹⁰

7. Appropriateness of pronunciation and meaning

Every sentence in the Qur'an contains a word whose meaning corresponds to the meaning of the word itself. It means that each word is purposefully chosen to have a meaning without being exaggerated. In this regard, Al-Zarqani states that in each sentence in the Qur'an, there is a deliberate and measured explanation for the need of the human soul for divine guidance, so that there is no intervention from anyone in it.¹¹ It is mentioned in Surah Hud, verse 1:

كتاب أحكمت آياته ثم فصلت من لدن حكيم خبير

This is a book whose verses are perfected and then presented in detail by [one who is] wise and acquainted.

⁸ Al-Zarqani.

⁹ Ibnu Quthaibah.

¹⁰ As an example, for example, it can be seen in Al-Itqan Fi Ulum al-Quran by Imam Jalaluddin al-Suyuthi, where he wrote in chapter 46 in juz 3 page 21 with the theme "Fi Mujmalih wa Mubayyanahu.

¹¹ Al-Zarqani.

C. Questions and Answers in the Quran

In principle, in communicating between a speaker (*mutakallim*) and his speaking partner (*mukhatab*), dialogue often occurs using a *question and answer* style, so that the conversation between the two parties goes well. If someone asks, another person answers. Apart from that, it also happens that someone asks a question, and then he answers it himself. Such a question-and-answer pattern often occurs or is carried out by an orator in a speech with the aim of arousing the attention of his audience.

The Holy Qur'an also employs a question-and-answer format in various forms. In principle, an answer must be in accordance with the question, and such a thing is of course something that normally happens when the question is clearly directed. But sometimes the answer is not in line with the questions. In other words, the questions and the answers are not suitable. This form of answer is often called *uslub al-hakim* by al-Sakaki.¹²

Aside from that, there are questions with answers that are more general than the question itself due to the need for that, and other forms where the answer is less or less than desired from the question due to the demands of the situation and conditions.¹³

So we can trace these question and answer variations from the various verses of the Qur'an in a few surats:

1. The question and answer in which the answers are given are in accordance with the questions. It can be seen in Surat Yusuf, verse 90:

أإنك لأنت يوسف قال أنا يوسف.

"Are you, in fact, Yusuf?" *He said, "I am Yusuf."*

In the same line, Allah asked spirits:

أأست بربكم : قالوا بلى شهدنا.

"Am I not your Lord?" *They replied, "Yes, you are! We testify."*

2. A question and answer in which the answer given is not what was asked
This can be seen in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 189:

يسألونك عن الأهلة قل هي مواقيت للناس والحج.

People question you concerning the phases of the moon. Say: They are signs to determine time for the sake of people and for the pilgrimage.

If we take a quick look at the questions and answers in the verse, we will get something that seems incomplete because the question is related to a crescent moon and then

¹² See: Badruddin Muhammad ibn Abdillah al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi `Ulum al-Quran*, Dar al-Hadis, Mesir, 2006, hal. 945. Badruddin Muhammad ibn Abdillah al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi `Ulum al-Quran*, Dar al-Hadis, Egypt, 2006, p. 945. Al-Uslub al-Hakim is known in Balaghah science as one of beauty in terms of meaning (al-muhaisnah al-ma'nawiyah). This uslub by Balaghah scholars is sometimes in the form of answering a question that was not asked, and can be in the form of leading the mutakallim's utterance to someone he does not want to, with the reason to remind him that it is proper for the questioner to ask this question or the meaning conveyed (in that answer). (See: Ahmad al-Hasyimi, *Jawahir al-Balaghah*, p. 388).

¹³ Jalaluddin Abdur Rahman al-Suyuthi, *Al-Itqan Fi Ulum Al-Quran* (Mesir: al-Maktabah at-Taufiqiyyah), p. 227.

Suhaimi

Uslub: Questions and Answers in the Qur'an

it is answered about time. However, if we are willing to ponder more deeply, then we will know and realize that this answer is really wise, because the content and purpose of that answer should be questioned, since it is the easiest for us to know and the most useful. As for the question about the crescent moon itself, the answer cannot be explained so simply because it requires scientific evidence that is not always easy for everyone to understand. This is proven by the fact that, not only at the time of the verse's revelation, but even today, not all people understand the true nature of the crescent, except astronomers. Therefore, it is not surprising that there are still disagreements over the issue of determining the beginning of the month each year. It seems inseparable from the complexity of explaining various things related to the crescent moon, such as how to measure it per second or per hour, when it can be counted as a new moon, how it is related to the sun, how far it is from the sun, etc.

Therefore, the answer stated by Allah in the verse is very wise, so it does not require a lot of energy to understand it. Even though it's a short answer, it's full of meaning. Whereas a broader and more detailed answer will be provided by the development of science and technology, No matter how detailed the answer is, it will definitely be in accordance with what is conveyed in the Quran that the new moon has something to do with time in general and specifically for worship, such as fasting, holidays, etc.

Another example can be seen in Al-Baqarah verse 215:

يسألونك ماذا ينفقون قل ما أنفقتم من خير فلولوالدين والأقربين واليتامى والمساكين وابن السبيل.

They ask you how they should donate. Say, "Whatever donations you give are for parents, relatives, orphans, the poor, and needy travelers."

The question in the verse mentions wealth that must be spent, but the answer is about information about where the wealth is spent. Thus, it seems at first glance that the answer is different or not in accordance with the question; this of course makes us think more clearly and more comprehensively, "Why is there such an answer?"

As previously mentioned, diverting the answer from the question is aimed at making us aware that the content should be questioned. It should be redacted: to whom should the treasure be imparted? Because the answer to this question should be given more attention, it's not what to spend. Because if the question is "What do we have?" of course the answer is very simple: the things we have. But that is certainly not enough, because we spend our assets without knowing and realizing where we have to spend that wealth so that Allah is pleased with us. It could be that many other people's rights in our assets are not properly distributed, so Allah reminds us that wealth is a mandate from Allah that has been entrusted to us and must be distributed (spent) to other parties to whom He has also entrusted it so that the treasure will be a blessing and useful for the world and the hereafter.

In surah Al-Isra, Allah says:

ويسألونك عن الروح قل الروح من أمر ربي وما أوتيتم من العلم إلا قليلا

They ask you about "the spirit." Say, "The spirit descends by the command of my Lord, but you have been given only a little knowledge."

There are many opinions from Quran experts regarding questions and answers contained in this verse, including the views of the author *Al-Idhah* as exemplified by Imam

al-Zarkasyi in the book *Al-Burhan* that: "The Jews ask only for the purpose of weakening; when the spirit is said to associate with the human spirit, the Quran, Jesus, Jibril, and other angels, then the Jews deliberately ask it, but whatever answer is given to them, they still Hence, the answer is that, in general, in order to resist their deception.¹⁴

Another opinion says that the question is whether the spirit is a creature or not. The answer is that the spirit is God's business, and that is the correct answer.¹⁵ On the other hand, it is said that if the question is intended to demand knowledge, then most of it is accompanied by the pronunciation of "an," as mentioned in verse 85 of Surat al-Isra.¹⁶

3. Question and answer where the answer is more general than what is asked

This form is found in verses 23–24 of Surat Al-Syu'ara about Fir'aun question to the prophet Musa:

وما رب العالمين . قال رب السماوات والأرض وما بينهما.

And who exactly is the "Lord and Cherisher of Worlds"? Musa said, "The Lord and Cherisher of the heavens and the earth, and all that is between,"

In Arabic, it is explained that questions using the question word "ma," which means "what" or "whether," are intended to ask about the mahiyah (essence) of something or its type. Therefore, the question in the verse actually also wants to illustrate Fir'aun stupidity in asking, so the question is actually wrong because what he is asking cannot be seen from its essence and does not have a gender, so it is answered with a more general answer.

4. The answers are less than what is asked.

This type of answer can be found in Surat Yunus, verse 15:

وإذا تتلى عليهم آياتنا بينات قال الذين لا يرجون لقاءنا ائت بقرآن غير هذا أو يدله قل ما يكون لي أن أبدله من تلقى نفسي

And when Our verses are recited to them as clear evidence, those who do not expect the meeting with Us say, "Bring us a Qur'an other than this or change it." Say, "O Muhammad," "It is not for me to change it of my own accord."

Sent down by Allah or to change the existing Quran, so the answer is only related to the change, saying: "It is not for me to change it of my own accord." When it comes to the demand to bring in something else, it means that creating a new one is left unanswered, because creating a new one is even more inappropriate. Thus, it can be understood that an answer that is less than what was asked for is very logical, considering that the demand to change something that is easier and possible for humans to do is inappropriate, let alone to make another Quran that humans cannot create. Hence, it is certainly more important not to be responded to.

5. Questions and answers, where there are more answers than questions.

This type of answer can be found in Surat Al-An'am verses 63–64:

¹⁴ Badruddin Muhammad Abdullah al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi Ulum Al-Quran* (Cairo: Dar al-Hadis, 2006), p. 947.

¹⁵ Badruddin Muhammad Abdullah al-Zarkasyi.

¹⁶ Manna` Qaththan, *Mabahis Fi `Ulum Al-Quran* (Mesir: Dar al-Rasyid), p. 207.

Suhaimi

Uslub: Questions and Answers in the Qur'an

قل من ينجيكم من ظلمات البر والبحر تدعونه تضرعا وخفية لئن أنجانا من هذه لنكونن من الشاكرين . قل الله ينجيكم منها ومن كل كرب ثم أنتم تشركون

Say, "Who rescues you from the darknesses of the land and sea when you call upon Him, imploring aloud and privately, "If He should save us from this crisis, we will surely be among the thankful?" Say, "It is Allah who saves you from it and from every distress; then you still associate others with Him."

The question in the verse above is related to disasters on land and at sea, but we see that the answers go beyond that, covering all disasters, whether on land, at sea, in the air, etc. Thus, of all the disasters that may befall anyone and anywhere, only Allah can save people from them. This is the main message that must be understood from the answer conveyed in that verse.

Furthermore, this type of response can be found in Surah Thaha verses 17 and 18:

وما تلك بيمينك يا موسى . قال هي عصاي أتوكؤا عليها وأهش بها غنمي ولي فيها مآرب أخرى .
And what is that in your right hand, O Musa?" He said, "It is my staff; I lean upon it, and I bring down leaves for my sheep, and I have other uses for it."

The answer in that verse seems to be much more than what was asked, not only answering what is at hand but also explaining the needs of the object in question. This kind of membership has a specific purpose or benefit. According to Imam Suyuthi, the benefit of answering more than what was asked is the pleasure of having a dialogue with Allah SWT.¹⁷

D. Conclusion.

Observing the *uslub questions and answers* from the various verses of the Quran as described above, it can be concluded that they have two models. First, the question and answer, where the answers given are in accordance with what was asked. Second, the answers do not match exactly with the questions. Sometimes, turning away from the question because the answers are more important, such answers can also be used to correct questions that are considered to be of lower quality. The answers in the latest model are also more general, or they are beyond the questions, and there are also answers that are less than what was asked. All of the question-and-answer models in the Quran certainly contain lessons and wisdom as well as benefits for us, especially in dialogue with the parties. Thus, these may be our reflections on how to be wiser in dealing with the interlocutor.

When a person asks a question and then receives an answer, the person who asked the question is frequently offended and even hurt. This is because the answers given are not wise, whereas we are taught to follow the example of the Quran in dialogue. Our inability to understand the meaning of the Quran can sometimes cause problems in communication that make *ukhuwah*, or brotherhood, tenuous.

We believe that the Quran as a revelation from Allah emits light of the truth, which if we meditate on it at any time, we definitely will receive guidance from Allah SWT. Therefore, our lives are always protected from things that can damage our dignity in front of anyone. *A'lam bi al-Shawab, Wallahu A'lam.*

¹⁷ Jalaluddin Abdur Rahman al-Suyuthi.

Reference

- Al-Zarqani, *Manahi Al-`Irfan Fi Ulum Al-Quran*, Juz 2 (Cairo: Dar al-Hadis, 2001)
- Badruddin Muhammad Abdullah al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhan Fi Ulum Al-Quran* (Cairo: Dar al-Hadis, 2006)
- Ibnu Quthaibah, *Ta`wil Musykil Al-Qur`an* (Mesir: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2014)
- Jalaluddin Abdur Rahman al-Suyuthi, *Al-Itqan Fi Ulum Al-Quran* (Mesir: al-Maktabah at-Taufiqiyyah)
- Manna` Qaththan, *Mabahis Fi `Ulum Al-Quran* (Mesir: Dar al-Rasyid)
- Mustafa Shadiq al-Rafi`i, *I`jaz Al-Quran Wa Al-Balaghah Al-Nabawiyyah* (Cairo: Dar al-Taqwa, 2014)
- Shihab, M. Quraish, *Membumikan Al-Quran* (Bandung: Mizan, 1992)