

IBN TAYMIYYAH FROM NOMINALISM TO USAGE-BASED SEMANTICS IN THE LITERALISM OF ASMA WA SIFAT

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ABSTRACT

Analyses of Ibn Taymiyyah's epistemological and linguistic stance have frequently erred by viewing the latter as merely a nominalist. This paper shows that this apportionment is mistaken and in fact conceals the finely-tuned dynamics of his thinking. Focusing on important works such as Naqd al-Mantiq, Dar' Ta'arud al-'Aql wa al-Naql and al-Radd 'alā al-Manṭiqiyyīn, the present paper argues that Ibn Taymiyyah rejects two extremist ends of this spectrum: nominalism which maintains that meaning boils down to mere references and abstract realism which posits universals as existing entities in a distinct metaphysical realm. He certainly doesn't side with the sentimentalists that locate meaning into some non-linguistic feeling but more so with what is called 'conceptualist' views, that position the meaning of something as an idea/thought and constructed through human experience, thinking etc. This paper also serves to establish that the approach of language by Ibn Taymiyyah is usage-based referential in nature. To him, meaning is not related to logical definitions created by logicians but the application of language in the lives of its speakers. Going down to the roots of meaning, it is found in accordance ('urf) with the context of use (siyāq) and connection with what words mean as a reality. In this way, semantics is not a field of speculative abstraction but rather an action in the making of meaning that is grounded in practical experience and use. This view brings Ibn Taymiyyah into close proximity with contemporary semantic theories that are inspired by corpus, cognition and referentialism. These discoveries complicate current perceptions of Ibn Taymiyyah's linguistic stance and provide a new perspective on how to approach his thought on theory of meaning. This article contends that his thought is not just a critique of Greek logic, but an alternative theory of the meaning—in both content and reference—of words in terms of patterns of application and empirical reference. His move from nominalism to the usage-based semantics paves the ground for innovative interchange between Islamic linguistic heritage and modern theory of language.

Keywords: Ibnu Taimiyyah; Empirical Conceptualism; Usage-Based Semantics; Referentialism, Universal Debata, Isti'mal.

1. INTRODUCTION

Categorizations of Ibn Taymiyyah in the recent Islamic philosophic literature are derived on conceptual grounds from Western historiographic or categorial systems" especially those embedded in a trilemma of realism, conceptualism and nominalism. Some regards him as a nominalist in so far as he denies that universals have an existence beyond the singulars. In terms of reference guides, the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy asserts that Ibn Taymiyyah's "rejection of extra-mental universals...means that he is sometimes classed as a nominalist" (Ibn Taymiyya, 2022; section 3). But this categorization is too simplistic and does not consider epistemological contextualisation and linguistic parameter in which Ibn Taymiyyah used them.

In his magnum opus, *Majmū' al-Fatāwā, Dar' Ta'arud al-'Aql wa al-Naql* and *al-Radd 'alā al-Manṭiqiyyīn* among others, Ibn Taymiyyah attacked the Aristotelian-Platonic metaphysical presuppositions that underlie the theory of universals upon which both the mutakallim and philosophers agreed. He denied the existence of universals as extramental realities, but he also rejected the extreme reductionism that denies any correspondence at all between terms (*lafẓ*), concepts (*ma'nā*), and objective reality referred to (*musammā*). In *Majmū' al-Fatāwā* 6:39, for instance, he maintains that universals (*al-kullīyyah*) "have no external objective existence; there are only existing things." But in other places he claims (MF 7:67) that classical Arabic usage always implies the actuality of the object denoted (which is to say, not simply an imaginary symbol bearing no reference at all to extra-mental reality).

Thus characterization of Ibn Taymiyyah as a "nominalist" cannot fully represent the richness of his system, especially that it is based on an epistemological theory according to which *isti'māl* (*factual usage*) anchors meaning and the referential relation between word and reality. This misconception is what the present study attempts to use as a point of departure, with aim at reassessing this classification within the context of classical Arabic semantics and philosophy.

Issues of theology, Islamic law and the critique he directed at philosophy and kalam in modern works about Ibn Taymiyyah are significant. Studies that position him in the context of classical Arabic philosophy of language and semantics are less common. Even some accounts that want to homeschool his thought with linguistics gently insist on a criticism of Aristotelian logic rather than a positive account of how meaning works, reaches and relates to reality.

In fact, a number of key works make clear that Ibn Taymiyya had an integrated theory of meaning rooted in direct referentiality. al-Radd ‘alā al-Mantiqīyyīn (MF 9:218–219), he also vehemently rejected the notion of essential definition (ḥadd) and proposed an alternative temporally based account of meaning in terms of custom, context, and factual relations between language and reality. Yet this hypothetical possibility has not been thoroughly methodologically pursued. As a result, the discussion of Ibn Taymiyyah's metaphysical stand regarding the problem of universals is not related to his linguistic commentary. It is this void that the article seeks to fill.

This article intends to analyze Ibn Taymiyyah's categorizations in the debate concerning universals by applying the methodology of classical Arabic semantic and linguistic analysis articulated within his works. To be specific, the following three questions are targeted by this paper:

1. How does Ibn Taymiyyah understand the relationship between lafẓ, ma‘nā, and musammā?
2. Can his position be accurately equated with nominalism in the Western philosophical sense?
3. How can the theory of use (isti‘māl) and its focus on referentiality explain his views on meaning and universals?

In responding to these queries, our aim is that this article will hopefully offer a clearer interpretative paradigm of Ibn Taymiyyah's semantic theory. The thesis of the article is that in his rejection of nature, Ibn Taymiyyah cannot be understood as a nominalist in the classical sense—by which is meant, an account according to which abstract entities do not exist and meaning is fundamentally arbitrary. Instead he should be classified as a conceptualist, who sees universals as beings in the mind and not living outside of human thought. According to him, he states in Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā 6:40 that universals exist “*fī al-dhihn*” (in reason) and only particulars are found empirically.

In addition, his theory of language shows that he is (a usage-based) referentialist: meaning depends on actual use and to some extent refers to entities. In MF 7:111 he claims that a word cannot be the object of legitimate understanding unless there is connected with it the reality to which it refers, a view fairly equivalent to today's usage-based semantics. So the nominalist label conceals his more subtle epistemology.

In theory, the article provides a fresh hermeneutic resource for linking Ibn Taymiyyah's theology to contemporary theories of meaning and philosophy of language. By treating semantic analysis as a point of entry, this paper shows that system of thought of Ibn Taymiyyah is not simply negative rejection, but in fact a positive theory of language, meaning and reality. This is something that can contribute to the study of pre-modern Islamic epistemology as well as instigate a conversation between classical language theory and modern cognitive linguistics.

The theoretical contribution of this article is its text-oriented semantic analysis: It investigates metaphysical and epistemological ideas on the basis of Ibn Taymiyyah's technical terminology, argumentation structures, and semantics from primary corpus. As such, this is not an attempt to subscribe inappropriate imported categories but a more contextualised and philologically sensitive analysis. It can be also be use as a model in other works of the figures of Islamic intellectual tradition.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Ibn Taymiyyah's Position in Islamic Semantic Historiography

In other words, in the historiography of Islamic thought and theology, semantics is seldom found to be treated separately as an analytical category. It is typically a secondary issue in discussions of tafsir (exegesis), Arabic rhetoric (balāghah) or theological discourse about the attributes of God. Ibn Taymiyyah's place in the Islamic semantic tradition for these reasons is often misconceived erroneously, and his opposition to Aristotelian logic and the method of essential definition read as reductionism. Textual analysis of Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā, Dar’ Ta‘arūḍ al-‘Aql wa al-Naql and al-Radd ‘alā al-Mantiqīyyīn demonstrates that, however dismissive it may earlier be of the significance of meaning for religious knowledge, Ibn Taymiyyah's theory-building in this regards is less epistemological barb than one might think.

Thus, in al-Radd ‘alā al-Mantiqīyyīn Ibn Taymiyyah, for example, challenges the possibility of apprehending essential meaning (ḥaqīqah dhātiyyah) through rational definition. And in MF 9:236–237 he argues against the view that sortal definitions have an epistemic priority over ordinary language practices. This refusal is not just against the method of logic, it is a claim that meaning is made out of linguistic habits (al-‘urf), situations and human empirical experience.

The semantic dimension of Ibn Taymiyyah's thought is lost on post-Enlightenment historiography—saturated as it is with Western philosophical classifications. Although scholars such as Jon Hoover, Yahya Michot and Carl Sharif El-Tobgui have provided detailed explications of his theology and logical criticisms the semantic reading is still not explicit. El-Tobgui, for example, subtly engages several linguistics when he does epistemology with Ibn Taymiyyah (such as *tasmiya* [naming] or the role of language in Islamic judgment). But he doesn't offer a systematic treatment of how Ibn Taymiyyah conceived meaning structure, reference, and sources of linguistic authority.

By contrast, ancient books on rhetoric and exegesis do offer a context that is in fact highly relevant. Figures, such as the al-Jurjānī of Dalā'il al-I'jāz pointed to the correlation between meaning and linguistic structure while exegetes like Ibn 'Aṭīyyah or al-Ṭabarī used *isti'māl* claims to infer what particular Qur'anic words mean from how Arabic is practiced. However, Ibn Taymiyyah generalized this principle from the specific study of texts to a more general epistemological basis. About MF 7:68 He argued for the correct meaning *mā dallat ʿalayhi al-lafẓ* and it cannot be deduced from examination that this was theoretical (*muhmal*) working-out, he says “*bi-istimāl al-‘Arab*”—in other words, the language community decides what any given expression means; its up to them or to us to determine meaning.

Thus, among the history of Islamic semanticians, Ibn Taymiyyah is in a unique position: he did not perpetuate *balāghah* nor was he an adherent to classical *kalam*, instead bringing together linguistic theory and epistemology into a semantic framework based upon empiricism and referential effects. This position is frequently disregarded in reading him today, and results in mis-characterizations like reducing him to pure nominalism.

2.2. Nominalism, Conceptualism, and Realism in the History of the Philosophy of Language

(Universalism and Vagueness in Language, Philosophy, and Words 905 The problem of universals—realism versus nominalism versus conceptualism—is central to the history of Western philosophy of language. An approach known as realism (introduced by Plato, based on the doctrine of Platonic forms) claims that universals have actual existence apart from our own minds and are the basis of all concepts. Aristotle altered this to associate universals with the particulars (in *rebus*), although still as mean intending metaphysical entities grasped by reason.

Nominalism denies anything really exists in universals other than individual things, or that can be inhered by predicables. In scholasticism, William of Ockham taught that universals do not have an existence except as pendants to real individuals but are invented by the human mind, although only individuals exist. The nominalism of Ockham is such that it marginalizes the intentiones and emphasizes the role of language as a means for naming.

Conceptualism sits between these two extremes. It concedes that universals are not subsistent, but a hypothetically stable mental picture which facilitates the constant classification, supposition and linguistic activity of a human mind. Several Muslim philosophers including Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and al-Ghazālī, also elaborated on versions of this concept in order to explain universal sense as a *dhihniyyah* construct.

This is where Ibn Taymiyyah's stance becomes intriguing. He is out of sympathy with the metaphysical realistic philosophers, on the one hand, and with extreme nominalism, on the other. In his criticism of Aristotelian definitions he implicitly denies the substantialization of meaning, but his stressing of *tasawwur dhihnī* (mental representation) and *isti'māl* as the foundation of meaning shows that he does believe in the permanence of concepts within substance. In MF 6:40 he affirms (336) the universality of “*innamā takūnu fī al-dhihn*” but at the same time (MF 7:112) stresses that *lafaz* must be with reference to a “*musammā ma'lūm fī al-wāqi'.*” That is why the position of Ibn Taymiyyah lies more properly in connotational concepts than in nominalism.

2.3. Contemporary Research on Usage-Based Semantics

The conception of usage-based semantics in recent linguistics, emerged as a critical reaction to structural and representational theories according to which meaning exists as an immobile substance outside the realm of linguistic practices. This was first articulated philosophically by figures like Wittgenstein and his thesis (as I have argued), “meaning is use”. There are advanced developments in cognitive linguistics, too, from George Lakoff and Ronald Langacker and Adele Goldberg who argue that meaning is a relationship among cognitive representations, experience-constructed context representation (unless you're Benedict Anderson), linguistic habits or grammar.

It is only recently that some comparative studies between these theories and Classical Arabic heritage have started. Dr Toshihiko Izutsu interprets the Qūran depended on semantic field analysis and seeks to rely on word distribution. Yet, research that explicitly connects usage-based semantics to pre-modern linguistic theories is fairly scarce. This is where the relevance of Ibn Taymiyyah comes in.

Ibn Taymiyyah's principles—as laid down in his *al-Radd and Majmū' al-Fatāwā*—bear a marked resemblance to those of usage-based semantics. He dismisses essential definitions as unrelated to linguistic praxis (MF 9: 245), insists that meaning is true only if it accords with *isti'māl al-'Arab* (MF 7:68), and emphasizes the relationship between phrasing and empirical existence. These principles also resonate, of course, with the belief that meaning is a function of social practice and not ontological bases or fixed logical types.

This resonance has not been investigated well in recent literature. It was hinted at by some philologists, however no study has to date presented Ibn Taymiyyah as a historical case for the application of a usage-based semantic approach. Accordingly, the discussion in this article will show that Ibn Taymiyyah's theory not only has relevance for contemporary debates about universals but also an important contribution to modern linguistic theory.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Conceptualism in the Epistemology of Language

Conceptualism in the theory of linguistic knowledge claims that universal ideas do not exist objectively in reality independent from the mind, and yet cannot be reduced to just individual names without propositional content. This view stood in between metaphysical realism which endorses the existence of an external reality to universals and the radical nominalism that asserts general mental representation is impossible. In the conceptualist view, it is the human mind that invents these concepts, and therefore existence must precede essence — an opposing viewpoint to that of essentialism. These forms of *ghaib* are mental (*dhihniyyah*), however firm enough to serve the function of language, deduction and reasoning.

In classical peripatetic philosophy of language, somewhat analogous themes occur in those lengthy discussions of *ma'qūlāt*, *tasawwur* and *mafhūm* undertaken by al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. It represented to them, that the universal combination takes place in the mind, by means of general ideas abstracted from individuals. But their debates were still working within the framework of Aristotelian metaphysics that had separated essence from accident. Ibn Taymiyyah accepted the idea of mental representation, but decoupled that from Greek essentialist metaphysics. In *Majmū' al-Fatāwā* 6:40 he says that ‘universality “*innamā takūnu fī al-dhihn*”’, meaning by it that universality is mental rather than independently existing outside the intellect.

Linguistic epistemology In terms of metaphilosophy Ibn Taymiyyah can be classified as a conceptualist but usage-oriented traditionalist. In other words, universal mental content items are not alone. They emerge after repeated and internalized linguistic experience. When Ibn Taymiyyah rejects the logicians' essential definitions (MF 9:236–239), he is not rejecting abstraction, but their preference for metaphysical categories that have no basis in lived experience of language. In that sense he is more like an empirical conceptualist — concepts arise from patterns of language use in Arabic society, not from abstracted *a priori* thinking which would force the world to be shaped by rational definitions.

Ibn Taymiyyah's conceptualism is also very much connected with his theory of *tasmiya* (naming). In MF 7:112, for example, he suggests that calling is mere nonsense if one can't assign a basis in reality. This statement shows that, however not any longer existentially universals are psychological entities, but they still here provide an indirect access to the world from within language. Concepts are not independent but rather contingent upon linguistic usage and empirical knowledge. That is why his epistemology of language can be described as anti-pure-nominalism and as acknowledging mental structures in the meaning process. Universals are not “out there,” but they are also not non-existent—they are patterns of the mind that structure experience and language.

3.2. Usage-Based Semantics dan Referentialism

Usage-based semantics is a theory of meaning in which the meaning of expression forms is not based on relationships between entities, but emerges from actual patterns of language use in social interactions. It is a reading that is grounded in Wittgenstein's account of Language games, and has been developed into what we could call cognitive linguistics with Langacker, Lakoff and Goldberg as key representatives. Basically, meaning supposedly derives from conditioning, social usage, context and empirically

established patterns of reasoning.

These are very similar to the principles of thought laid out by Ibn Taymiyyah. At MF 7:68 he insists that the true meaning is "mā dallat 'alayhi al-lafẓ bi isti'māl al-'Arab" (whatever the Arabic has sanctioned). He doesn't look for sense in metaphysical systems or in logical analysis, but rather that which is the linguistic usage of the Arab community. Consequently, his semantics is interpretable as an early usage-based approach to semantics within the classical Arabic tradition.

Frequency and patterning One central aspect of the usage-based approach is capturing frequency. Ibn Taymiyyah himself does not employ such language, but his claim about pre-Islamic Arabic assumes the principle that repetitive patterns yield consistent meanings. When he disapproves the Arabic figures of speech which are not known (MF 7:127), he indeed reminds us that usage regulates the frontiers of sense. Referentialism fleshes out this with the claim that meaning is not just usage but must further refer to experience. In the philosophy of language referentialism is the normative position that meaning in language is to be accounted for through how words correspond to things in the world. This principle was made explicit also by Ibn Taymiyyah. In MF 7:111 he says that it is impossible to understand anything truly if it is not connected to "musammā ma 'lūm fī al-wāqī' ." This principle is the premise behind his claim that "language is not a universal nomenclature, but an organon of designation."

In uniting usage and referentiality, Ibn Taymiyyah provides an original synthesis that is highly unusual in the pre-modern semantic tradition: meaning derives from linguistic practices of community, yet those practices constitute communities' recognition of empirical reality. This model offers the conceptual basis for understanding his works on divine properties, law or logic.

3.3. Analytical Model for Reading Ibn Taymiyyah's Texts

The theoretical model employed in this study is based on two comprehensive strategies: usage-based semantic analysis and referential analysis. Both are formed by the close reading of critical primary texts that deploy the concepts of contemporary linguistic theory to consistently account for Ibn Taymiyyah's argumentative practice without anachronistically imposing extraneous historical categories.

They adapt usage-based semantic analysis to the identification of regular patterns in terms on which Ibn Taymiyyah draws. I did so by an analysis of those key terms or concepts which constantly recur in his theories, for example; ḥaqīqah, majāz, tasmiya, musammā, lafẓ and ma'nā. It concentrated on his integration of these concepts into the habits of use in Arabic and how he maintained they were applied to usurpations which were not unknown as meanings in isti'māl al-'Arab.

Second, referential analysis is employed to elucidate how Ibn Taymiyyah posits the correlation between words and the world. By reviewing his considerations in MF 6 and 7 as far as the divine attributes are concerned on the problem of universals, this model reveals that Pattison's logic of meaning ends always with the question what words refer to finally. It is the fusion of the two models that allows here for an integrative and philologically sensitive reading of Ibn Taymiyyah's text, which does not succumb to either anachronism or a reductive metaphysics.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Linguistic Hermeneutics Model

This study is based on the linguist-hermeneutic model of exegesis and classical linguistic practice. Linguistic hermeneutics takes for granted that grasping a thinker's ideas is mediated by the structure of language in which he writes: its idioms, conventions of sense and pragmatic force. The research can, in this way, escape two particular extremes: that of reading a text only in the light of a modern conceptual anachronism that would not take into account classical Arabic's morphosyntactic and semantic system; and also from carrying out pure philological analyses by ignoring the theoretical meaning aspect of Ibn Taymiyyah's arguments.

This hermeneutic method is two-layered: it interprets the text simultaneously as an effect of certain linguistic circumstances, and as a specific expression of epistemological ideas that can be studied independently. Given the double layering and syngoleness, what this paper aims for is reconstructing rather than quoting Ibn Taymiyyah's thought of language. The hermeneutic model of language also enables an interpretation of the tension between linguistic practices and normative claims, which results in a more integrated reading.

4.2. Source Data Primer: Ibn Taymiyyah Linguistic Corpus

The main data that this investigation relies upon were derived from four underlying books of Ibn Taymiyyah where contents related to meaning, language, reasoning and criticism are directly held in their structure:

1. Naqḍ al-Mantiq,* a brief work with an early criticism of Aristotelian logic and an analysis of the inadequacy of essences in defining terms.
2. Dar' Ta'arūḍ al-'Aql wa al-Naql mention on the ideal of kalam, the revelation of Qur'anic language and the link between linguistic sense and theological truth.
3. al-Radd 'alā al-Mantiqiyyīn, the most significant of them, since it has a systematic account of concepts, g 399 naming (tasmiya), universals and rejection of genus-differentia analysis to meaning.
4. Majmū' al-Fatāwā, particularly vols. 6, 7, 9 and 12 where he has elaborated on isti'māl al-'Arab or the use of language; mauqūf verses of the Qur'an regarding qadīm wa huduth; integrate position of referentiality with respect to Divine attributes expressed in The Book etc.

4.3. Analysis Techniques: Semantic Reading, Usage Analysis, and Referential Mapping

In this work, three principal analytical methodologies are utilized. The first round of interpretation is "semantic," or meaning-oriented interpretation, seeking for patterns in what the text means, both in terms of key words and argumentation. This method considers how Ibn Taymiyyah demarcates ḥaqīqah, majāz, ma'nā, and musammā and how he defines the senses within these concepts.

Second, usage (isti'māl) is adopted to prove how Ibn Taymiyyah relies upon linguistic conventions of speech in order for meaning from the term be validated. This methodology examines his assertions of classical Arabic usage, detects semantic anomalies and evaluates readings that do not comply with "known Arabic". We perform this analysis by comparing the examples he offers with the general principles he establishes about authority of usage.

Third, we apply referential mapping to see how he accounts for the relation between lafaz and empirical reality. This method scrutinizes his accounts on musammā, the semantics of meaning and its relation to object or attribute it signifies, and empirical acquaintance in terms of meaning requisitioning. Putting these three methods together, the study can generate a reading that integrates the linguistic with the epistemological dimensions of Ibn Taymiyyah's thought.

4.4. Reliability and Interpretative Validity

Inter-corpus triangulation was used to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, which involved comparing results from al-Radd 'alā al-Mantiqiyyīn with analogous explications in Majmū' al-Fatāwā and Dar' Ta'arūḍ. In this way the interpretations were also not based on isolated quotations, but attempted to draw inferences about locations by making judgements across several works. Interpretive validity was attained through adherence to standard classical Arabic usage and isti'māl the norms that Ibn Taymiyyah himself invoked. What is more, the study averted the pitfalls of anachronism by refusing to impose contemporary categories per se on its material, but only as analytical tools that were confirmed from the primary sources.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Ibn Taymiyyah's Rejection of Nominalism

Their most significant result in this respect is the discovery that Ibn Taymiyya did not advocate either a pure nominalism or an essentialist realism theory regarding meaning. Despite some of the early readings by orientalist—like H. Laoust and certain contemporary readers—who attempts to classify him as such, a close scrutiny of his textual references shows that 'nominalism' does not suit Ibn Taymiyya's epistemological and semantic standpoints. In Naq al-Mantiq, he states that meaning cannot, in any way, be reduced to nothing more than alfāz muḍa'ah (brute words) since language does not function as a series of empty names or meaningless signs⁷ which are detached from the empirical world or mental processes (Naq al-Mantiq, 33–36).

Aristotelian nominalism—particularly the form advanced in the scholastic tradition—maintains that universals lack a mode of existence distinct from (though not independent of) their assignments to general concepts. Ibn Taymiyyah censured this view, as he believed that language could not be made intelligible without a priori mental forms to sort out the connection between words and reality. In his

critique of logicians who maintained that al-kullīyyāt are nothing more than imaginable forms formed by definition, he rejected such a reduction, because it rendered signification overly dependent on terminological conventions rather than on the real-world relations entertained by an intellection. As for mankind, “lā yudrik al-ma‘ānī bi-al-alfāz faqat, bal bi-mā tuḥīlu ilayhi min al-ashyā’ al-khārijīyyah (humans do not receive meanings just by means of words alone, rather than that which are grasped due to excessive things) (MF 7:67).

According to such a view, since nominalism refuses entities or formations of meaning outside language, Ibn Taymiyyah reveals himself as an anti-nominalist. He dismissed the notion that words were self-contained referents or, according to our concept today, did not need to in relation to anything outside themselves. His rigorous criticism of Aristotelian logic shows his allegiance to the nonseparability of meaning and referent. Thus, when he was addressing the ontological definition of humaneness word: ḥayawān nātiq) for that language connectionality, his sarcastic response about it was to say that this purported and proposed “definition does not take a root in any of the used Arabics nor is registered in any speech community’s communicative practices.” (Radd ‘alā al-Mantiqīyyīn, 88–90). This criticism shows how he is not committed to conceptual nominalism, that is meaning can be built up upon arbitrary definitions that have no basis in usage.

One of his clearest statements in this regard is that words have no sense except where they stand in a causal-empirical relation to the facts. Ibn Taymiyyah disagrees with the idea that meaning is “purely nominal” (muṭlaq al-waḍ‘). The first naming for him is inseparable from perception, experience and social praxis which construct certain mental images of ideas. He finds, consequently, the belief that words are arbitrary tags which can be affixed to any object cuts across the epistemological unity of language. Strongly railing against logicians who imagine that al-asmā’ can be freely conferred, he declares morū, al-lughah min ajlihāh wa‘al-ibdā bīhi laysa bi-mashrū’, “Habit and language for the rest of their being (and at creation) are not within our [philosophers’s] purview” (MF 6:201).

The conclusion that we can draw is therefore that Ib’n Taymiyyah cannot be labeled as a nominalist in the sense of Latin scholasticism, and neither in terms of modern thought. He is refusing to accept the nadir of meaning as wholly conventional, arbitrary. Simultaneously, he also denied Platonic realism. This undermines the categorical distinction that sells zamān as a surface without depths and makes it aurally invisible then silent over against writing, carving out a domain of analytical opportunity for treating Ibn Taymiyyah as an intellect who drew aspects of mental and worldly existence into his theory of meaning.

5.2. Ibn Taymiyyah's Conceptualism: Meaning as a Mental Concept

The second is that Ibn Taymiyyah's position, as best one can grasp it, was conceptualist—i.e., the view that universals and meanings have a mental existence neither realist (externalist) nor nominalism. In Dar’ Ta‘āruḍ al-‘Aql wa al-Naql, he specifies that the signification of a word is housed in what he calls the *ṣūrah dhihniyyah* (mental configuration) which one has formed on the basis of one’s experience and with which one coordinates communicative activity (Dar’ Ta‘āruḍ, 1:78–79).

Ibn Taymiyyah's argument for conceptualism Which takes the following as a map of two principal epistemic pillars:

1. Meaning is locked up in the mental constructs bound by senses and experience.

He repudiated the metaphysical side of meaning—as it were Avicennian realism—and he indeed considered meaning to be a kind of mental generalization which is produced by habitual experiences with individual objects. When the word “insān” is employed, it signifies a concept in the mind of human beings based on their experiences and does not refer to an essence. This is stressed in MF 5:300 where he describes universal knowledge as “amr dhihnī lā wujūd lahu fi’l-khārij illā bi-muṭābaqatihi li-afrādih” (it is a mental reality, not existing externally except through its correspondence to the details).

2. Concepts of the mind play a cognitive and communicative role.

Ibn Taymiyyah does not see mental concepts as reified objects, but as tools of the mind used to classify and communicate. This is a way of giving mental items an epistemic role even if they do not exist independently. He says that man comes already equipped with a factor of understanding, the cognitive concepts whereby he can grasp *an-nār* (fire), his awareness of which has been derived through empirical experience with it; he constructs meaning around this (MF 6:210).

His anti-essentialist definition is a reinforcement of this conceptualism. He denies that logical definition can give valid meaning. Definitions, he argues, are descriptions of currently held concepts, not the definers of meaning (Naqd al-Mantiq, 48–53).

Moreover, Ibn Taymiyyah's conceptualism has a methodological aspect: he rejects splitting

language from mental performance. You can't get meaning from word order without also knowing how the mind is engaging in associating experiences to categories. This is perhaps why in debates with the logicians, he would insist over and over again that no definition of Aristotle's was ever imported from the Arabic language, nor developed out of Arab experiences. He referred to philosophical definitions as "*ma lā ya 'rifuhu al-'arabiyyah wa lā yasta'miluhu ahl al-lughah*" (what is unknown in Arabic and does not serve its speakers) (Majmu Fatawa, 7:273).

It is these findings that confirm the fact that meaning, in Ibn Taymiyyah's conception was an entirely mental and conceptual being not a mere convention. Mental images are not imaginations, but cognitive constructs which can be tested for by way of comparison with experience. Accordingly, Ibn Taymiyyah's insights now align him with the conceptualist tradition of the history of the philosophy of language as represented by thinkers like John Locke - but within Islamic epistemology.

5.3. Usage-Based Semantics: Root Meanings in 'Urf and Siyāq

By this subsection we stress a major observation: Ibn Taymiyyah is one of the few classical Islamic thinkers who established a well-organized theory of usage based semantics. For him, meaning is not considerable except along with the 'urf (customary speech), the habits of speakers, context (*siyāq*) and history of usage of a word in society.

First, he insisted on a return to the original meaning of every term (*al-isti'māl al-awwal*) in the collective sense agreed upon by speakers. In *Majmū' al-Fatāwā* 6:200 he stated, "*al-lughah innamā tu'raf bi-isti'māl ahl-hā lā bi-ta'allum umana' il-manṭiqiyyīn*" (language is known only by the usage of its speakers, not through the learning of those who study logic). And so, he placed 'urf as the basis of meaning.

He also denied that meaning should be sought in theoretical analysis removed from context. He derided logicians who would search for the "true" meaning of a phrase without regard to its use in communication. For Ibn Taymiyyah, each word is qualified in context and by its construction. In *Dar' Ta'arud* 3:307 he argues, *al-siyāq yadullu 'alā ma 'ānī lā tudrik bil-alfāz mufradah* (meaning is inferred by inference, and what can not be understood from the word in isolation).

Third he said that change in meaning is, or follows from, change in use. To this phenomenon he gave the name *taḥawwul al-alfāz* (shifting of words). When a word changes in use, it ceases to have its old sense. Ibn Taymiyyah illustrates the words *al-ṣalāh*, *al-īmān* and *al-kufr* (whose meanings changed with the process of sharia) (MF 7:301–305). This discovery confirms his theory of historical semantics.

Fourth, still another crucial discovery is that Ibn Taymiyyah associates meaning with human practices and the intention of the speaker. He claims that meaning is not only matter of convention and objectivity, but is also a function of what the speaker desires. On the other hand, in *Radd' 'alā al-Manṭiqiyyīn* 112–113 he argues that a word can mean different things according to the speaker's intention as well as the syntactic and pragmatic context.

Fifth, that semantics knowledge is impossible to comprehend regardless of understanding how the Arabic language and life take place. He emphasized that the interpretation of the Qur'an and hadith, as well as reason itself, cannot be independent of 'linguistic structures,' which he believed were entirely circumscribed by social life in Arabic-speaking society at time of revelation. It is thus a hermeneutical duty to restore the sense to Arabic 'urf.

Therefore, the results of this study are providing empirical evidence that Ibn Taymiyyah's account of meaning is usage-based: it is through use, not through abstract definitions or logical constructs, that language becomes comprehensible. It is a position that resembles Wittgensteinian ordinary language philosophy but derives from the paradigm of classical Islamic epistemology.

5.4. Referentialism: The Relationship between Meaning and Reality in Ibn Taymiyyah's Framework

The last section finds that Ibn Taymiyyah worked out a kind of empirical referentialism, a view which insists that meaning is always grounded in extramental reality. There is an external reality that words point to, they do not merely exist in the mind as some sort of conceptual abstraction. The refusal of reference renders language non-epistemic.

In *Dar' Ta'arud* 1:76 says what is meant by knowledge cannot be removed from (the object in reality) it refers to. But this coincides with his attack against logicians who draw up metaphysical definitions on the basis of no empirical facts. He claims that meaning isn't true unless there is an outside world for it to point at. The referentialism of Ibn Taymiyyah includes three principles:

1. Words assume external reference
Even the universals such as *insān* are based on real individuals and not metaphysical entities. This, I feel, shows a healthy respect for reality.
2. Truth is when knowledge corresponds to the mind and matter.
He opposed the notion that mental conceptions were true apart from correspondence. Ideas need to be proven through reference to outside reality.
3. Not all references are tangible, but they must still exist in reality
With respect to the divine attributes he rejected *tashbih*, but held that words signify real attributes, though such as could apply to his dignity only and not to creatures.

Accordingly, the conclusions of this study are that Ibn Taymiyyah formulated a coherent type of referentialism: meanings arise from mental concepts moulded by experience, refined by means of language and tie in with referral to reality.

6. SYNTHESIS AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1. Ibn Taymiyyah's Position in the Global Map of Meaning Theory

The review of the previous chapter's findings place Ibn Taymiyyah as a figure largely outside the standard classicist rubrics of philosophy of language historiography. He tends to be labeled — especially so in early Orientalist scholarship — as a nominalist, by virtue of his attitude towards Avicennian essentialism and realism. But a close reading of *Naqd al-Mantiq* and *Dar' Ta'arud al-'Aql wa al-Naql* reveals that he was no nominalist; nor could he have ever supposed meaning to be nothing other than an act of naming (*alfāz muḍa'ah*). Instead, he claimed that meaning is located in mental images (*ṣuwar dhahniyyah*), constructed out of empirical content, and validated through the application of language and external referents (MF 7:67; *Dar' Ta'arud* 1:76–78).

In the theoretical map of meaning across cultures, Ibn Taymiyyah aligns with empirical conceptualism, which holds that meaning is an experiential mental representation sustained by practice. At the same time he also has a robust referentialism: meaning must be about external reality if it is to be epistemically meaningful. This is not a combination that one finds in the scholastic or Avicennian logic, but it leans instead towards the strand which will eventually appear in the modern philosophical tradition of language, with its stress on the connection between sense experience, mental images and linguistic usages.

So Ibn Taymiyyah's position is a hybrid, but not inconsistent: he is an empirical conceptualist and usage-based referentialist as well as critic of both nominalism and metaphysical realism. This is where he remains in relation to the current discussion on meaning theory.

6.2. Convergence with Cognitive Semantics and Usage-Based Linguistics

Results of the present study show that the thought of Ibn Taymiyyah is impressively consistent with fundamental concepts in cognitive semiotics and usage-based linguistics, two leading paradigms in current linguistic studies. On the one hand, cognitive semantics claims that meaning is a product of the mind which emerges from the interplay of sensory perception and conceptual organisation. Ibn Taymiyyah also maintains that the 'meaning' of a word is the mental form which emanates from empirical experience (*(ṣūrah mā yu'laq bi-al-dhihn min al-ashyā)*, (Majmu Fatawa 6:210). It gets closer to the embodiment approach of cognitive semantics.

Second, the use-based premise of linguistics developed by Langacker-Bybee-Croft holds that meaning can only be known from patterns of actual usage in a speech community. "Arabic is only known (*lughah tu'raf*) according to how it is used by its people" (*al-lughah tu'raf bi-isti'māl ahl-hā*, MF 6:200).⁵ Ibn Taymiyyah asserts that the meaning of Arabic cannot be understood except through the 'urf, *siyāq*, and actual usage practices of speakers. His criticism of Aristotelian logical definitions anticipates similar criticisms in our own time against formalism and language divorced from use.

Third, in UBL, changes of meaning are taken as the outcomes of changing patterns of use. Indeed, Ibn Taymiyyah elaborated the theory (based on *taḥawwul alfāz*) that many Islamic and classical arabic terms underwent a shift of signification according to sociocultural practices. This convergence illustrates the point of contact between traditional Islamic semantic thought and contemporary linguistic models.

6.3. Relevance for Classical Arabic Theory and Tafsir Studies

Theoretical considerations of this amalgam are important for the analysis of classical Arabic, exegesis and Islamic hermeneutics. The first is that Ibn Taymiyyah's methodology shows that the meaning should not be abstracted from contemporary usage in Arabic at the time of revelation. As he insists that the Qur'ānic word meaning is related to early Arabic 'urf and not to abstract philology, this approach demands from Islamicists a blend of linguistic, usage and contextual analyses. This also accentuates the tradition of linguistic exegesis (tafsīr lughawī) with a more forceful philosophical polemic in defence of al-tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr.

Secondly, Ibn Taymiyyah's theory of referentialism offers an original epistemological foundation for the question of believing theologically loaded words (like the attributes of God). He insists that the words have a referent, but not in the way of God's majesty, thus shunning tashbīh (anthropomorphism) while also avoiding complete negation. This pries open some moderate hermeneutical space grounded in the reality of language, rather than speculative metaphysics.

Third, his use-based and mentalistic theory of concepts can provide a fertile ground for revisiting the device of meaning in Arabic grammar (see above), particularly from the perspective of semantic growth, polysemy, and majazi motivations.

7. CONCLUSION

This study indicates that Ibn Taymiyyah's categorization as a nominalist is a historical simplification that does not hold, in fact -conducive to the epistemological and linguistic system of his thought. From his Naqd al-Mantiq, al-Radd 'alā al-Mantiqiyyīn, Dar' Ta'arūḍ al-'Aql wa al-Naql, to the Majmū' al-Fatāwā, we ascertain that he construes meaning as an idea in mind which result from empirical acquaintance yet is retained via usage conventions of a speech community. This very way of viewing matters situates Ibn Taymiyyah among the empiricist conceptualists, not nominalists. Meanwhile, he formulated a usage-based semantics model based on urf, siyāq and linguistic practice as the condition of meaning-legitimation. At the same time, he was a strong-referentialist: for meaning to be genuine, it must refer to something in the world other than its own constituents, including when discussing God's attributes. Hence, in his case we will find that conceptual reflection and practices of use combine with referring in a way specific to him.

This is an important work for the study of classical Arabic linguistics and Islamic theology. First, it alters historiographical understanding by placing Ibn Taymiyyah in a semantic horizon much closer to modern theory than is normally suggested. Second, it offers a philosophical basis for hermeneutics as linguistic interpretation, in particular with respect to the weight one must give to Qur'anic 'urf and context when seeking meaning. Third, the theology of Ibn Taymiyyah offers an epistemological scheme that rejects metaphysical speculation but allows there to be a grounding in the Godhead of the divine attributes through sustained referentiality. And so this monograph contributes to our depth of knowledge about the relation of language, meaning, and reality in Islamic intellectual history.

Acknowledgements Like any study based on the reading of texts and not on experimental data, our research has limitations, which are mainly due to the size of the corpus and its focus on semantic, without neglecting pragmatic dimensions. Additionally, the un-edited nature of Ibn Taymiyyah's writings mean there could have been variant readings to affect interpretation. Another study can extend this work by comparing the thought of Ibn Taymiyyah with that of his period or by looking at such semantic consequences in Qur'anic interpretations and thematic fatwas to get more clear view.

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