The Functional Lexico-Grammar of Semantic Prosody in the Quran

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Semantic prosody is defined as the spreading of connotational colouring (Partington 1998, 2004); it refers to lexical items that collocate with semantic classes of words that are positive [+]; negative [-]; or neutral [ ]. This tendency of words to occur in a certain semantic environment echoes the Firthian slogan (1957), "You shall know a word by the company it keeps".

The present study tests the hypothesis that semantic prosody contributes to the lexico-grammatical level of functional linguistics via "lexical cohesion" or collocation (Halliday 2004, p.576). It explores this hypothesis from a corpus-based perspective, with specific focus on the semantic prosody of nature terms and their collocates in the Quran. It examines how a word's surroundings can affect the dimensions of meaning emerging where a collocation involving nature occurs (e.g. in verses of the Quran). Since there has been little work done on collocation and semantic prosody in the Quran, this study contributes to shedding light on the collocational behaviour of nature terms, such as *earth; day; night; sun; moon; sky; mountain;* etc.

We used the Python-based Natural Language Toolkit (Bird et al 2009) and corpus-linguistic techniques to explore the semantic prosody and attitudinal meanings of nature via a list of natural-phenomena terms using Yusuf Ali's acclaimed English translation available from the Tanzil project[1]. We applied the Log Likelihood metric for collocation extraction, and ascertained statistically significant collocational patterning based on the n-best list rule of the highest ranking candidates (Evert 2005). Finally, we analysed the verified collocations for insight into the semantic and pragmatic representations of nature in the Quran.

Our findings show that the same term can have a positive, negative, or neutral connotation depending on the connotational colouring of its collocates. They also mirror Halliday's view of lexis and grammar as "complementary perspectives"; each of the terms reveals both a semantic and a pragmatic function not independently but within its context. Moreover, we found that the majority of positive semantic prosodies pertaining to nature terms in the Quran are semantically related to landscapes and the cosmos, and the negative ones to the semantic field of weather. On the pragmatic level, our findings produced a taxonomy, based on connotational colouring, for classification of pragmatic functions associated with nature in the Quran. These include: glorifying God [+]; Punishment [-]; Day of Judgment calamities [-]; Islamic teachings [ ], etc. In sum, the semantic prosody of nature in the Quran conveys the continuity between grammar and lexis; that is, the vital correlation between words and their contexts and the representation of meaning. In future studies, the semantic prosody of nature in the Quran can be further explored in depth to relate it to the elicited pragmatic functions, and the same methodology can be applied to the original Arabic text or other translations of the Quran for comparative studies.

Keywords: *collocation, semantic prosody, attitudinal meanings, corpus linguistics, collocation extraction*, *lexico-grammar*

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[1]http://tanzil.net/ is a web resource consisting of the original verses in Arabic as well as 42 manual translations of the whole book

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