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The Qur'anic Semantics of the Root ب ر ج: Lexical Meaning and Contextual Variation

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Abstract

This article examines all Qur'anic occurrences assigned to the root ب ر ج (b-r-j) to determine how lexical evidence relates to contextual variation. It asks which semantic features are supported across the root's cosmological, architectural, and social-ethical uses and which remain context-specific. The study employs descriptive qualitative analysis, combining the lexicographic entries in Lisān al-ʿArab and al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qurʾān with a root concordance from the Quranic Arabic Corpus. The corpus lists seven tokens in six verses: four nominal tokens of burūj, one form-V verb (tabarrajna), one form-V verbal noun (tabarruj), and one form-V active participle (mutabarrijāt). Contextual analysis considers morphology and co-text: references to the heavens and their adornment, the statement that death reaches people even in lofty towers, and passages concerning the display of the self or adornment. The lexical sources and verse contexts support conspicuousness or manifestation as the most plausible semantic link across the three domains. Elevation and built structure, however, are context-specific and should not be imposed on tabarruj. The article contributes a complete token-level map that distinguishes recurring semantic evidence from meanings supplied by particular contexts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The semantic study of Qur'anic vocabulary requires attention not only to translation equivalents but also to lexical relationships and the contexts in which words occur [1]. This is particularly relevant to the root ب ر ج (*b-r-j*), whose derivatives appear in different Qur'anic contexts, including references to the heavens, fortified structures, and *tabarruj*. These variations raise a semantic question: do the different uses share identifiable semantic features, or does each derive its meaning primarily from its specific context? This study addresses the question through lexical analysis of classical Arabic lexicons and contextual analysis (*siyāq*) of the relevant Qur'anic verses. By examining the relationship between lexical meanings and contextual uses, the study seeks to clarify how the root's semantic range contributes to understanding the meanings expressed in the Qur'anic text. In this limited sense, the analysis also relates to the Qur'anic worldview (*weltanschauung*), insofar as it examines how related linguistic forms convey meanings across cosmological, architectural, and social-ethical contexts [2].

One relevant case for this study is al-burūj (البروج), the plural form of burj derived from the root ب ر ج. In popular renderings and astronomy-oriented discussions, al-burūj in verses concerning the heavens is often associated with "constellations" or celestial formations [3]. This meaning is in accordance with the use of the word burūj in a number of verses that talk about the sky. However, if the entire use of the root ب ر ج in the Qur'an is considered, the meaning that is only oriented to the astronomical aspect is not able to explain the entire field of its meaning. The same root is used in different contexts, including to designate a tall and sturdy building structure and the behavior of tabarruj, i.e. the act of revealing jewelry or the self [4]. Thus, the variation in usage shows that the problem of al-

Burūj is not just a problem of translating a single word, but a problem of understanding the relationship of meaning between a number of forms that come from the same root.

These variations can be seen more concretely through the context of the verse. In QS 85:1, the expression wa al-samā'i dhāti al-burūj places al-Burūj in the context of the sky. A similar usage is found in QS 15:16 and QS 25:61, when burūj is associated with the structure or order found in the sky [4]. On the other hand, Qur'an 4:78 uses the form of burūj musyayyadah in the context of human life and death, which is understood as a high and sturdy fortress or building [5]. Meanwhile, Qur'an 33:33 and Qur'an 24:60 use the derivative forms of tabarruj and mutabarrijāt in the context of social behavior, especially the act of displaying jewelry or self [5]. Thus, in the same Koranic corpus, the root ج ر ب appears in at least three semantic domains: cosmology, defense architecture, and social ethics.

These differences in context raise more fundamental semantic problems. If al-Burūj can refer to a cluster or structure of the sky, burūj musyayyadah refers to a high fortress, while tabarruj is concerned with the act of manifesting, should the three be understood as completely separate meanings? Or is there a semantic relationship that allows these various uses to be traced back to the same basic meaning? This question becomes all the more important because these forms not only have similarities at the root level, but also exhibit elements of meaning related to height, protrusion, and visibility. These variations raise the following research question: How does the lexical meaning of the root ج ر ب relate to the contextual variations of its derivatives in the Qur'an? To address this question, the study examines the lexical evidence recorded in classical Arabic lexicons and analyzes how the meanings of the root's derivatives are specified by the contexts of the Qur'anic verses in which they occur. This approach makes it possible to assess whether the different uses exhibit identifiable semantic relationships, rather than assuming that they share the same meaning solely because they derive from the same root.

To address this question, the study first examines the root ج ر ب (*b-r-j*) through two classical Arabic lexicons: Ibn Manẓūr's *Lisān al-ʿArab* and al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī's *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qurʾān*. The analysis draws on the third edition of *Lisān al-ʿArab*, published by Dār Ṣādir in Beirut (1414 AH), and the edition of *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qurʾān* edited by Ṣafwān ʿAdnān al-Dāwūdī and published by Dār al-Qalam and al-Dār al-Shāmiyya (first edition, 1412 AH). The relevant lexical entries are examined to identify the meanings and usages recorded by each source, including descriptions associated with emergence, elevation, prominence, and visibility. These lexical features provide a preliminary basis for the contextual analysis of the root's derivatives in the Qur'an. Their relevance to the different uses of the root is subsequently assessed by examining the contexts of the corresponding Qur'anic verses [6]. Burj is also described in relation to a fortress or tall building, while its cosmological use is related to structures or places that are high and visible in the sky. Al-Raghib also provides a connection between the burj and tabarruj through the idea of the appearance of beauty [7]. These lexicographic findings became the basis for testing whether the semantic relationship remained visible when the forms were placed in different contexts.

In the next stage, the lexical meaning needs to be tested through contextual analysis (siyāq). This is important because the meaning of a word in the Qur'an cannot always be determined based solely on the dictionary definition [8]. The context of the verse can provide specification to the basic meaning of a word resulting in different uses according to its domain of speech. In the case of the root ج ر ب, the context of cosmology, defense, and social ethics provides a different semantic environment [4]. Therefore, this study does not stop at the definition of burūj as a "cluster of stars", but maps the entire use of the root derivative and connects it to the underlying lexical meaning. The combined approach between lexical semantics and contextual semantics allows the study to see whether variations in seemingly different meanings have a semantic common thread.

Based on these issues, this study aims to analyze the lexical meaning and contextual meaning of the root ج ر ب in the Qur'an, map the variations in its use in the domains of cosmology, defense architecture, and social ethics, and explain the semantic relationships among its various derivative forms. This analysis is directed at testing the hypothesis that the seemingly different meanings in al-Burūj, burj, and tabarruj have a relationship through a core meaning related to a structure or something that is prominent, high, and clearly visible. Thus, this study seeks to show that the understanding of the Qur'anic

pronunciation needs to consider not only its translation equivalent, but also its lexical meaning, the relationship between derivations, and the context of its use.

2. METHOD

This study uses a descriptive-qualitative approach with a focus on lexical semantic and contextual semantic analysis of the root word ب ر ج in the Qur'an. This approach is used to identify the basic meaning of a word through classical Arabic lexicographic sources, then test and explain variations in its meaning based on the context of its use in the verse. Thus, the research focuses not only on the translation equivalent of a word, but also on the relationship between lexical meaning, derivative forms, and accompanying semantic contexts.

2.1 Data and Data Sources

The research data is in the form of forms derived from the root ب ر ج which are used in the Qur'an and are the object of discussion in the research. These forms include the use of al-Burūj, burūj musyayyadah, as well as the derivation of tabarruj and mutabarrijāt contained in the verses of the Qur'an [3],[9]. The data are then mapped based on the verse, the form of the utterance, the context in which it is used, and its semantic domain. The mapping includes the use in QS 85:1, QS 15:16, QS 25:61, QS 4:78, QS 33:33, and QS 24:60 as analyzed in the study. The main lexicographic data sources consist of Ibn Manzur's Lisān al-ʿArab and al-Raghib al-Asfahani's Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qurʾān. Both sources are used to trace the lexical definition of the root ب ر ج, its nominal form, and the relationship of meaning between burj, burūj, and tabarruj derivations. In addition to lexicographic sources, contextual interpretation in the study also considers the sources of interpretation used in the article, including Tafsir al-Muyassar and al-Sabuni's explanation.

2.2 Lexical Analysis Stage

The first stage involves a systematic lexicographic analysis of the root ب ر ج (*b-r-j*) and the identification of all its occurrences in the Qur'an. The inventory of Qur'anic occurrences was established by consulting the Quranic Arabic Corpus and checking the identified forms against the Arabic text. The corpus records seven occurrences of the root across six verses: QS 4:78, QS 15:16, QS 24:60, QS 25:61, QS 33:33, and QS 85:1 [10]. Morphologically, these occurrences comprise four derived forms: the noun *burūj* (بُرُوج), occurring four times in QS 4:78, QS 15:16, QS 25:61, and QS 85:1; the Form V verb *tabarrajna* (تَبَرَّجْنَ), occurring once in QS 33:33; the Form V verbal noun *tabarruj* (تَبَرُّج), occurring once in the same verse; and the Form V active participle *mutabarrijāt* (مُتَبَرِّجَات), occurring once in QS 24:60 [18].

The inclusion criterion is morphological: every Qur'anic word token identified as a derivative of the root ب ر ج is included, regardless of its contextual meaning or semantic domain. No occurrence is excluded merely because it refers to human behavior rather than celestial or architectural phenomena. The analysis excludes words that may be semantically related to the identified concepts but are not morphologically derived from this root, as well as occurrences outside the Qur'anic corpus. Accordingly, all seven occurrences are examined through their lexical properties and verse contexts rather than selecting only those that support a particular interpretation. The lexical analysis draws on Ibn Manẓūr's *Lisān al-ʿArab* and al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī's *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qurʾān*. The relevant entries are examined to identify the meanings and usages associated with the root and its derivatives, including prominence, elevation, visibility, and architectural structures. These lexical findings provide a preliminary basis for analyzing the contextual meanings of the identified forms. The resulting interpretations are subsequently evaluated against the contexts of the relevant Qur'anic verses rather than assuming that all derivatives necessarily retain an identical meaning.

2.3 Contextual Analysis Stage (Siyāq)

The second stage examines the contextual meaning of each occurrence of the root ب ر ج by considering its morphological form, surrounding words and phrases, grammatical construction, and the broader context of the verse. These elements are analyzed alongside the lexical definitions and relevant exegetical sources to determine how context specifies the meaning of each form [7].

The analysis groups the occurrences into three semantic domains. In the cosmological domain (QS 15:16, 25:61, and 85:1), the association of *burūj* with the heavens and other celestial elements supports its interpretation as celestial formations or stations. In the architectural domain (QS 4:78), the expression *burūj mushayyadah* and its context concerning the inevitability of death indicate fortified or imposing structures. In the social-ethical domain (QS 33:33 and 24:60), the forms *tabarrajna* and *mutabarrijāt* are interpreted in relation to displaying beauty or adornment, based on their surrounding expressions and discourse contexts. The findings are then compared to identify shared semantic features and contextual differences, without assuming that derivatives of the same root necessarily have identical meanings.

2.4 Meaning Relationship Analysis

The third stage compares *al-burūj* with *an-nujūm* and *al-kawākib*, two Qur'anic terms associated with celestial bodies. These terms were selected to clarify whether *al-burūj* refers to individual celestial objects or a broader celestial structure. The comparison examines three dimensions: (1) the referent of each term, (2) its linguistic context and associated expressions, and (3) its function within the verse. For example, *an-nujūm* in QS 6:97 is associated with guidance during travel, while *al-kawākib* in QS 37:6 appears in the context of adorning the lower heaven. By contrast, *al-burūj* in QS 15:16, QS 25:61, and QS 85:1 occurs in descriptions of the heavens. These distinctions are established through the contextual analysis of the relevant verses and the supporting literature [11],[12]. The comparison helps clarify the respective semantic roles of the three terms without assuming that their meanings are mutually exclusive in every Qur'anic context.

2.5 Synthesis of Analysis Results

The final stage is carried out by linking the results of lexical, contextual, and relational analysis to obtain a pattern of meaning that can explain all variations in the use of the root ب ر ج. The synthesis is directed at the search for elements of meaning that remain present even though the domain of use is different [13],[14]. Based on the analysis in the source article, the element is formulated as the idea of a structure or something prominent, tall, and clearly visible, which is then applied to three levels of use: cosmological structure, architectural structure, and self-appearance in a social context [15]. The results of the synthesis are then used as a basis for explaining the theological implications regarding the power, order, protection, and limitations of human power as discussed in the results and discussion sections.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Lexical Meaning ب ر ج in Classical Arabic Lexicon

Lexical analysis begins with the two classical Arabic lexicons used in this study, namely Ibn Manzur's Lisān al-ʿArab and al-Raghib al-Asfahani's Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qurʾān. In Lisān al-ʿArab, the verbal meaning of the root ب ر ج relates to ẓahara (appearing or becoming visible), irtafaʿa (raising or becoming high), and the state in which something can be seen by others. The definition denotes two repetitive semantic elements, namely height or protrusion and visibility. In nominal form, al-burj is first described in an architectural sense as al-ḥiṣn, i.e. a fortress, or as a tall building, before the lexicon records the astronomical use of burūj al-falak for the division of the sky into twelve parts.

The Qurʾān's Mufradāt fī Gharīb reinforces this lexical pattern by defining al-burūj in relation to al-quṣūr, i.e. a palace or majestic building. Its cosmological application is explained through burūj al-samāʾ, which is understood as manāzil or station related to celestial bodies. Al-Raghib also explicitly links this architectural meaning to tabarruj, which is the act of displaying beauty and, in other explanations, the act of exiting the burj or space of refuge. If the two lexical descriptions are combined, the core meanings identified in this study are not identical to one particular contextual translation, such as "star" or "fortress". Instead, the repetitive elements point to something tall, prominent, structured, and clearly visible. This synthesis becomes the lexical basis for testing whether the same semantic elements are still recognizable when the roots are used in different contexts of the Qur'an.

3.2 Contextual Distribution ب ر ج in the Qur'an

The semantic methodology of the Qur'an demands that the lexical meaning (dictionary meaning) be tested against contextual meaning (siyāq). A word may have a broad basic meaning, but the Qur'an will give it a specific and nuanced meaning depending on the context of the verse. To detect this contextual meaning, all verses containing roots (جرب) (have been collected and classified into three different semantic domains.

Table 1. Contextual Analysis of the Root ب ر ج and Its Derivatives in the Qur'an

Pronunciation	Verse	Domain Semantics	Contextual Meaning	Relevance to the Meaning of Roots
الْبُرُوجِ	al-burūji (noun)	QS 85:1	Cosmology / Divine oath	Celestial formations or constellations, mentioned in the oath concerning the heavens.
بُرُوجًا	burūjan (noun)	QS 15:16	Cosmology / Celestial adornment	Celestial formations or stations associated with the heavens and their adornment for observers.
بُرُوجًا	burūjan (noun)	QS 25:61	Cosmology / Celestial description	Celestial formations mentioned alongside the sun and the illuminating moon.
بُرُوجٍ	burūjin (noun)	QS 4:78	Architecture / Mortality	Fortified or imposing structures in the expression fī burūjin mushayyadah, within a statement about the inevitability of death.
تَبَرَّجْنَ	tabarrajna (Form V verb)	QS 33:33	Social ethics / Conduct	The act of displaying oneself ostentatiously, prohibited in the context of the verse.
تَبَرُّجَ	tabarruja (Form V verbal noun)	QS 33:33	Social ethics / Conduct	Ostentatious display, qualified by the expression tabarruj al-jāhiliyyati al-ūlā.

3.3 Al-Burūj in the Context of Cosmology

In Qur'an 85:1, Qur'an 15:16, and Qur'an 25:61, burūj appears in relation to the sky and is thus interpreted in the domain of cosmology. The term is described as a high celestial structure, a cluster of stars, or a station related to the arrangement and circulation of celestial bodies. The sources of interpretation used in the study describe burūj as a place or high structure seen in the sky and associate it with the regularity of cosmic phenomena.

The relationship to lexical meaning becomes increasingly apparent in QS 15:16, when the creation of the burūj is followed by the statement that the heavens have been decorated for those who look at them. The context reinforces the semantic element of visibility. In this domain, al-Burūj is not understood solely as an individual star (najm), but as a more expansive and orderly celestial structure that can be observed as part of the cosmic order. Such contextual meanings thus clarify the general lexical notion of prominent and visible structures in the domain of cosmology.

3.4 Burūj Musyayyadah in the Context of Defense Architecture

In QS 4:78, the expression *burūj mushayyadah* refers to lofty, well-constructed or fortified structures. This interpretation is supported by the architectural sense of *burūj* recorded in classical Arabic lexicons and the contextual meaning of *mushayyadah*, which describes structures built or raised firmly. The surrounding verse states that death will reach people wherever they may be, even in elevated fortifications. Thus, the architectural meaning is consistent with the verse's emphasis on the limits of physical protection against the inevitability of death. This contextual meaning corresponds directly to the architectural meaning recorded in the classical Arabic lexicon. The semantic power of the phrase becomes clearer when read together with the statement that death will get people wherever they are. A structure can be tall, sturdy, and appear safe, but its physical strength does not provide absolute protection from death. The results of the analysis show a contrast between man-built structures and the limitations of human power: the height and sturdiness of the fortress do not make it an absolute source of security

3.5 Tabarruj in the Context of Social Ethics

In Qur'an 33:33 and Qur'an 24:60, the same root appears in the form of derivative tabarrajna and mutabarrijātin. In both contexts, these forms refer to the act of showing or making jewelry and beauty visible. Al-Raghib associates tabarruj with iẓhār al-maḥāsin, i.e. the manifestation of beauty, while other explanations associate it with the act of leaving the space of refuge so that one becomes visible to others. This use extends the semantic pattern from physical structure to human behavior. The same element is not that the human body becomes a literal structure, but rather that a person is made prominent and visible through the act of appearing. In Qur'an 33:33, the contrast between staying at home and the prohibition of tabarruj further strengthens the semantic relationship between the space of refuge and visibility in public spaces. Thus, the results of the analysis show the social-ethical actualization of the broader semantic elements, namely appearance and prominence.

3.6 Semantic Relations: Al-Burūj, An-Nujūm, and Al-Kawākib

The semantic relationship between *al-burūj*, *an-nujūm*, and *al-kawākib* is examined by comparing their referents, surrounding linguistic expressions, and functions within the Qur'anic verses. These terms are selected because they occur in descriptions of celestial phenomena, although their contextual functions differ. In QS 6:97, *an-nujūm* are associated with guidance through the darkness of land and sea. In QS 37:6, *al-kawākib* are mentioned as an adornment of the lower heaven. Meanwhile, *al-burūj* occurs in descriptions of the heavens in QS 15:16, QS 25:61, and QS 85:1 [11], [12]. These contexts suggest a distinction in emphasis: *an-nujūm* are associated with guidance, *al-kawākib* with celestial adornment, and *al-burūj* with descriptions of celestial formations or stations. However, these distinctions concern their contextual use in the selected verses and do not establish that the terms are mutually exclusive in meaning. The comparison therefore clarifies their respective semantic functions without assuming that *al-burūj* necessarily denotes a single, unified system of celestial bodies.

3.7 Synthesis of Core Meaning and Theological Implications

The comparative analysis suggests that prominence or visibility is the most plausible semantic feature connecting the three domains, although it is expressed differently in each context. In the cosmological domain, *burūj* refers to celestial formations or stations associated with the heavens. In the architectural domain, *burūj mushayyadah* refers to elevated or fortified structures. In the social-ethical domain, *tabarruj* concerns the display of beauty or adornment. Thus, height and physical structure are context-specific features of cosmological and architectural uses, whereas visibility or conspicuous display provides a more abstract semantic connection to *tabarruj*. This proposed relationship does not imply that all derivatives share an identical meaning; rather, it identifies a possible semantic link supported by their lexical descriptions and contextual uses.

This distinction also informs the theological interpretation of the verses. The celestial *burūj* appears in descriptions of the heavens associated with divine power and cosmic order, whereas QS 4:78 emphasizes that even fortified human structures cannot prevent death. The contrast supports a theological reflection on the limitations of physical protection in relation to divine power. This interpretation is a contextual and theological implication of the verses, rather than a direct consequence of the shared lexical root alone [4]. The contemporary relevance of this analysis should likewise be distinguished from its lexical findings. The modern Arabic use of *burj* for a tower or tall building may be discussed as a semantic development associated with elevation and prominence, provided that this development is supported by appropriate lexicographic evidence. Similarly, connections between *tabarruj* and contemporary practices such as social media self-presentation, influencer culture, and personal branding are interpretive applications of the concept of public display. These contemporary parallels do not establish additional lexical meanings of the Qur'anic derivatives and should be understood as applications requiring their own contextual justification.

4. CONCLUSION

The principal contribution of this study is to demonstrate how lexical evidence from classical Arabic dictionaries, when examined alongside the contexts of Qur'anic verses, helps explain the

semantic relationships among the derivatives of ب ر ج. The analysis suggests that prominence or visibility provides a possible semantic link across cosmological, architectural, and social-ethical contexts, while height and physical structure remain specific to particular uses. The classical Arabic lexicon to which the source article refers emphasizes the elements of height, prominence, and visibility, while its nominal form includes buildings or fortresses before progressing to cosmological use as burūj al-samāʾ. Siyāq's analysis then shows three main actualizations: the structure of the heavens as a sign of order and divine power, the fortress of man as a tall structure incapable of avoiding death, and tabarruj as the act of manifesting one's beauty. The relationship with an-Nujūm and al-Kawākib makes it clear that al-Burūj is positioned not as an individual object, but as a broader structure or system. Theologically, this entire network directs the reader to a comparison between absolute divine power and protection and limited human structure and prominence. Since the bibliographic data in the original source is still concise, verification of the edition, year, and publication details of all references remains necessary before the manuscript is submitted to the journal.

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