

## Reexamining the Semantic Evolution of "A'jami" in Verse 103 of Surah An-Nahl: An Analysis of the Interaction between Theological Discourses and Quranic Exegesis

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### Abstract

This study employs the method of historical-critical analysis to examine the semantic evolution of the term a'jamī in verse 103 of Sūrat al-Nahl. The semantic transformation of a'jamī can be traced across four distinct historical stages. In the first stage(1st–4th centuries AH), exegetes interpreted the term strictly within the historical context of the verse's revelation, understanding it as referring to speaking a language other than Arabic. During the second stage(5th–6th centuries AH), the term's meaning expanded, establishing an initial connection with the concept of the Qur'an's inimitability (i'jāz). The third stage(7th century AH) a'jamī was explicitly reinterpreted within the framework of the linguistic inimitability of the Qur'an, acquiring a new and influential signification. By the fourth stage(8th–15th centuries AH), the linkage between a'jamī and the theory of the Qur'an's inimitability became

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firmly established, with the later i'jāz-centric reading supplanting the earlier interpretation. A noteworthy observation is the significant temporal gap between the theological-literary theorizations of scholars and their subsequent reflection in Qur'anic exegeses. An analysis of socio-cultural contexts reveals that three major intellectual currents contributed to this semantic evolution: polemics with Ahl al-Kitāb, the Shu'ūbiyya movement, and theological debates between the Mu'tazila and Ash'arī schools.

**Keywords:** A'jami; semantic evolution; cultural-social context; inimitability of the Quran; Mu'tazilites; Ash'arites.

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