Aspects of Interpretation of Texts Among Islamic Fundamentalist Jurisprudents

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Abstract

This paper explores those aspects of interpreting texts' meanings by Islamic Fundamentalist Jurisprudents (FJs, henceforth) who represent a special class of linguists. They are concerned with the investigation of aspects of meaning within religious texts so as to form legal interpretations and judgments. Herein the attempt is made to trace their own stream of thought in the study of linguistic clues, whether internal or external, in the treatment of texts and detecting the intended meaning therein. By so doing, a distribution of their views is made into frameworks of present day streams of linguistic thought. It has been concluded that the FJs not only looked at the semantic aspects in their interpretation of texts, but they were more concerned with the pragmatic aspects in their search for the appropriate legal judgments.

Key words: religious texts; interpretation; semantics; pragmatics; fundamentalist jurisprudents.

1. Introduction

As a stream of religious thought, Fundamentals of Jurisprudence (FJ, henceforth), is a field which basically focuses on the study of language within religious texts with the aim of preparing the rationale behind their legally-and-religiously based judgments. It is so vital a field that, upon it, all Islamic religious thinking and schools of thought depend. It is FJ that represents the total sum of methodologies for the study, understanding, and making of legal judgments (an-Nashar, 1984: 110)

A s such, a "text", being the principal material for their study and concern, never meant the same thing to FJs as it meant to usual linguists, or specifically semanticists or pragmatists, or conversation-analysts because they, viz. FJs, tackled it for one end only: the deduction of legal religious judgments. Therefore, they paid attention to all clues, whether linguistic or non-linguistic, that could be associated with the text and would have their own bearing upon it. At the same time, they have been grammarians, semanticists, and pragmaticists. Accordingly, when traditional jurists wrote laws to make people behave as to the accepted norms of religion within communities, FJs set methodologies to rational thinking, whether

religious or not, so as to make clear how a religious judgment is made and why, i.e. they tried to explain the rationale behind every action and belief (al-Jabiri, 1984: 112). From the very beginning, they realised that the meaning of a text should be approached from different angles, such as religious, linguistic (grammatical and semantic), and pragmatic angles (Mukhtar, 2011: 13).

2. FJs' Theory of Text Interpretation

At the outset, a definition of text "**Nass**" among FJs is essential. The type of material with which FJs are concerned is a highly representative of the genre of "religious text", a sort of writing any other than which may never serve their own end. It is either the Glorious Quran or the Prophetly Tradition " **Hadeeth**"; or any single lexical item, or a phrase or a clause used therein is called text "**Nass**". This is so because it is out of these, legally-religious judgments are to be deduced.(as-Sultaani, 2010 :25-27; Fadhil, 1987: 231).

In their treatment of the meanings in such texts, FJs believed that an interpretation of any text will yield valid by the collective power of things: the first is linguistic in nature, and the other is non-linguistic, specifically logical. As for the former, it is brought about by the grammatical functioning of linguistic items within a text when these are obedient to the language and its grammar rules, and when the text is perceived as a unit within an appropriately functioning context. The latter, however, is a consequence pertaining to the former, in a form of a certain relationship. These two are termed as the uttered meaning "al-Ma'na al-Mantooq" and the understood meaning "al-Ma'na al-Mafhoom" (Mukhtar, 2011: 17)**.** Moreover**,** any text is seen as functioning as speech act which may never function meaningfully without the true intention of the speaker ; when it is absent, the speech act is unhappy (see for details Mukhtar, ibid: 145).

2.1 The Uttered Meaning

In their treatment of the utterance, they at the beginning distinguished between sense of the utterance, which they termed as "dalaalatul-lafth", and its intended reference, which they termed as "ad-dalalatu-bil-lafth". The former is purely sematic, while the latter is purely pragmatic. (ibid: 96) By attending to both of these, the meaning of the utterance has been seen as either explicit "Sareeh" or of implicit "Ghayrus-Sareeh "(Mustafa 1980: 276).

An uttered meaning is defined as: "That which is referred to by the utterance in its due situation" (as-Suyooti, 1402 a.h.: 94). This constitutes the core of the meaning of the issued utterance, in so far it is associated with the literal meaning of what is being uttered and which conforms to the common rules of linguistic interpretation, "(Mustafa P.276).

2.1.1. The Explicit Utterance

An explicit utterance is that which is made to mean, either by independence of or by dependence upon other elements, in conformation with the rules of literal interpretation within a language. Consider the following:

(1)   Fi al-ghanam   as-saaimah   zakaa [GT] In the sheep   freely-browsing alms-payemnt [LT]"As to freely-browsing sheep, alms-payment is obligatory"

Here in (1), the explicit interpretation of the utterance is that "You should pay alms for your freely-browsing sheep". Such an interpretation, which yields by dependence on the nature of linguistic elements, will be a base for the resulting meaning in (2) below:

(2)   Al-ghamaul- ma?loofah   la zakaata   feeha [GT] The sheep made-fed   no alms-payment   in them [LT] As to hand-fed sheep, no alms-payment is obligatory

This interpretation in (2) is directly arrived at form the surface literal meaning of (1) above. That is, (1) totally predicts (2) with no least mental effort. Here, (2) comes as some sort of an entailment of the utterance in (1); such is termed as understood by total sameness "Mafhoom bil-Mutabaqah" (Mukhtar, ibid: 96).

Or, an interpretation might be arrived at by containment "Mafhoom bil-Tadhmeen"; that is, the meaning of proposition is contained as a part of the meaning of another (ibid: 97). Consider the following:

(3) There is not a human in the house.

(4) There is not a man in the house.

Here, the negative proposition in (3) may be taken to mean that in (4), because the meaning "human" contains that of "a man". But, the meaning of (4) may never be taken to mean that of (3). This is because (3) may mean that there is a woman in the house. So, the expression in (3) is general, and includes that in (4). Such a meaning is understood by containment, or in sematic technical terminology, hyponymy (ibid).

2.1.2. The Implicit Utterance

Basically, an implicit utterance is any meaningful consequence that might be arrived at by being logically bearing on the association with the explicit original one (ibid:98).

FJs consider as an implicit utterance those interpretations which are generally subsumed under tenets of both implicature and inference. They term these two as intended "Maqsood" and non-intended "Gayru-Maqsood" respectively.

2.1.2.1 The Intended Meaning: Implicature

To say what is implicature, consider the following:

(5)   La salaatah   ila   bi-fatihatil-kitab [GL] No   prayer   save with   the opening-chapter of the book [LT]No **correct** prayer yields without the opening chapter.

(6)   Was'al   al-qaryah [GT] And   ask   the village [LT]   And ask **the people of** the village.

(7)   Hurimmat   alaikum   umahatukum [GT] Forbidden unto you   your mothers [LT] **Marriage to** your mothers is forbidden to you.

These three instances involve the three aspects of interpretation which have been subsumed under implicature "**Iqtidhaa**" by FJs. They reason thus. In (3), at the surface level, one may know that a prayer can be performed without the involvement of reciting the opening chapter in it. This is right. But then, is it legally correct? FJs say, correctness is a necessary consequence of the proposition, but this meaning of correctness is indirectly stated in the explicit utterance, but it is implied. The same rationale is followed in the interpretation of (4). No mentioning of "**the people**" is there, but by the exploitation of little common sense of logical reasoning, it could be understood that one would never ask the houses or roads or water streams in a village, but those who live there will be asked. In (5), logical and legally-religious reasoning will never deny one the right of seeing, visiting, or taking care of their own mothers, but it is only **the marriage-relation** that always should never be thought of with mothers, nothing else. These three instances represent the three subtypes of implicature as discussed by FJs. (ibid: 101-3). They saw in conclusion that implicature should not be utterance-based, but interpretation-based. It is an additionally conveyed meaning so as to be interpretative in so far as it conforms to those general laws of logical thinking, or with the ways the world goes. It is a matter of schematic thinking or a matter of background knowledge, as is going to be made clear in the following section.

Along with implicature, FJs have another subcategory for the intended meaning; it is termed as gesture "I'emaa". This is either associated with a linguistic textual clue that shows the relationship, being temporal, spatial, cause-and-effect, etc., between the propositions within sentences. Or, it is related with a non-textual clue pertaining to the psychological status, for instance, of one participant in an event (see for details ibid: 109-111; as-Sultaani, 2010: 37-48).

The difference between the two is that, implicatures, as it has been stated above, are text-meaning based, but gestures are context-based. And most importantly, the basic difference is related to their truth-value: it is upon implicature that the truth-value of the text depends, but gestures have no such effect upon the text (Mukhtar, ibid: 112).

2.1.2.2. The Non-Intended Meaning: Inference

As for the non-intended, FJs saw it as inclusive of inference (which they termed literally in Arabic as "Ishaarah" or reference). This is defined in dictionaries as "an implicit non-uttered signal signifying

what is uttered along with all its prerequisites" (see for instance al-Fayroozabadi, s.v. *sh w r*). But to FJs, it seems to be a concept which goes beyond the limits of what is non-uttered to be inclusive of what is uttered as well. They defined it as "a meaning of an utterance which is essentially never intended in due context, but is associated with the intended-purpose of the original utterance by force of a necessary link". As a clarification, when a certain action is being related, the listener is normally to think of the actor of that action even if there is no mentioning of it. Here, the relation between the action and its producer is thought of as a sort of logical necessary association   (as-Sultani, 2010: 19). As an instance, consider (6):

(8)   Inna   Allah   ya'murukum   an tu'adoo al-amaanati   ila ahliha [GT] Truly Allah order you all to return   trusts   to their people [LT] Allah does order you all to return back trusts   to their owners

Here in (6), the utterance declares the obligation made by Allah towards all people to give back the trusts that they have had to their owners. This is the meaning which is directly stated in the text, but is this all? What is indirectly meant is that the trusted people should not only give back the trusts to their owners, but also they have to keep them safe and protected. This meaning is a necessary outcome of the named situation, i.e. giving back trusts to their owners necessarily follows keeping them (i.e. trusts) safe and protected for the owners, which is a prerequisite for the original proposition.

2.2. The Understood Meaning

As to this category of meaning, FJs define it as a form of an implied relation pertaining to logical reasoning (al-Ansari, 2007: 48;   al-Aamidi, 1402 a.h.: Vol.III:66)   as thus: "That meaning which is understood of an utterance in a situation, when it is not that for which the utterance was originally made to mean" (as-Sultani, 2010: 64). This involves all those meanings which might be viewed as natural or logical outcomes of the original utterance. It is hearer-specific and it is connotative in nature. Generally, this category of meaning subsumes two sub-categories, where the demarcation line is a matter associated with the conformation with the affirmative or negative force of the original proposition. Thus, if the new concluded meaning agrees with this force, whether being affirmative or negative, it is called understood by agreement "Mafhoomun bil-Muafaqah"(ibid: 68). But, when it does not agree, it is called understood by disagreement "Mafhoomun bil-Mukhalafah". The mechanism for the arrival of such an understanding may be worked out via considering the following instances (Mustafa, 1980: 276)

(9)   Wa la   taqul   lahuma   uffin [GT] And not say   to them-both   uf [LT] And never address them both with any sign of anger or dissatisfaction.

Here in (9), it should be understood that when the least sign of anger or dissatisfaction is not allowed to be addressed to the parents, what about what is more than it? It is also forbidden. This includes all sorts of insults and harms, physical and non-physical. Such a meaning falls under the term of understood by agreement. As for the second meaning, view the following:

(10)   Al-Haju ashhurun ma'loomat[GT] Pilgrimage   months known [LT] Pilgrimage is within known months

The interpretation here is that pilgrimage is to be made within specific known months, and this entails that doing pilgrimage within other than these already specified months is legally unacceptable. This is an instance of interpretation which explains what is understood by disagreement (as-Sultaani, 2010: 137)

3. FJs' Terminology for Texts' Meanings

A word of assessment of the terminology adopted by FJs is of a place here. As a beginning, it has been shown that FJs, in their search for the logical bases of their legal and religious judgments out of texts, have looked at different levels of linguistic analysis simultaneously. This resulted in a very rich approach to the treatment of "meaning" within a text. It could be said that the approach is made of both semantic and pragmatic aspects. As to pragmatics (the field which may never be traced back farther that a half-century in its existence in linguistics) made to them one of two equally important aspects in the study of text meaning. This is something that they should be extensively praised for! But, unfortunately, their treatment of this lively aspect was not that clear, since the demarcation line between what is semantic and what is pragmatic went through a continuum: each penetrated into the other.

The following chart gives the mostly adhered to conception of meaning by FJs. There are other conceptions of meaning adopted by other FJs of other schools of thought. The difference lies mostly in naming these categories of meaning. However, what concerns us here is the distribution of these categories into the framework of modern linguistic thought.
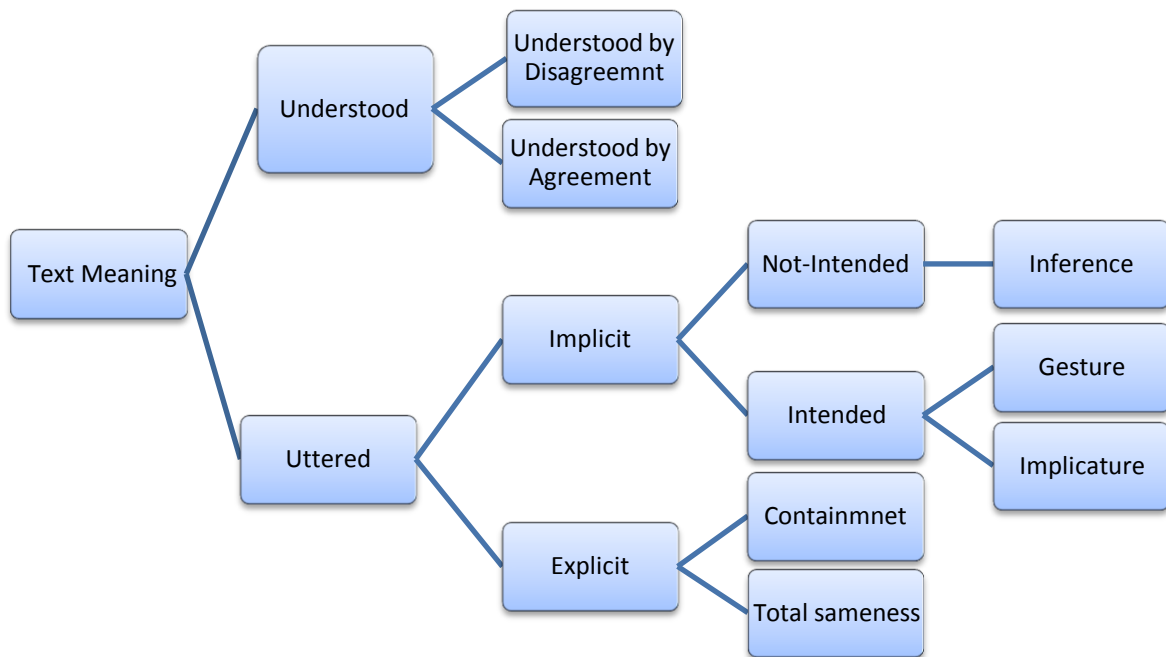
Fig. 1: Meaning as viewed by FJs (Adopted and Modified from Mukhtar, 2011: 95)

As such, a sub-genre of **logic** covers both of the categories subsumed under the category of **Understood**. A present day plane **semantics** covers: the **Uttered**→ the **Explici**t→ **Containment** + **Total Sameness**. And, **pragmatics** will investigate into all other categories subsumed under the **Implicit**.

This in fact agrees even with the categorisation of meaning as is approached by logicians who depend upon the nature of the relation between the signifier and the signified in their view of meaning. So, the meaning is one of three: mentalist, naturalist, or denotative (Mustafa 1980, 29; al-Jurjani, n.d.: 20 ; as-Sultani, 2010:16). Worth mentioning still is that the distribution of denotation into three more sub-categories may further be the logical optimization for such a distribution. As such, denotative meanings are divided into total sameness "**Mutabaqah**", containment "**Tadhmeen**", and logical association "**Talazumun ?qli**".

4. Conclusion

FJs represent a special class of religious text analysts. In their panoramic look at a text, which is of a very special genre, they created an eclectic methodology of investigation into it. They logically have approached it so as to:

- Create a connection between the scattered elements of truth within it.

- Create a connection between it and the world outside.
- Draw the background against which a legal judgment is taken as valid.
- Comprehend all those elements, linguistic, semantic, pragmatic, logical, and many others, which would have their own effect upon the meaning of the text.

Encompassed within all this is their belief of the power of the text-producer' intention. It is this which makes a text meaningful and functional; any text void of this element is judged as no text. Their originality of efforts in the explanation of texts have had no precedence until the appearance of modern schools of philosophical linguistic thought which only recently associated the meaning of the uttered with the meaning of the non-uttered. However, the lack of luck and absence of more organisation and systematisation of their approaches took them off the stage, along with their theorising heritage, of modern schools of linguistic thought.

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جوانب تفسير النصوص لدى علماء الفقه الأصوليين المسلمين

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المستخلص

يستكشف هذا البحث تلك الجوانب المتعلقة بتفسير معان النصوص لدى علماء الفقه الأصوليبن المسلمين الذين يمثلون طبقةً خاصة من علماء اللغة. إذ إنهم مهتمون بتقصي جوانب معاني النصوص الدينية كيما يتوصلوا لتفسيرات و أحكام شرعية. و تكمن المحاولة هنا في تتبع منهجهم العقلي في دراسة العلامات اللغوية،سواءً كانت خارجةً عن النص أو داخلةً فيه، في معالجتهم للنصوص و التحري عن المعنى المقصود فيها. و بهذا، سيجري توزيع آرائهم في أُطرِ مناهج التفكير اللغوي في الوقت الراهن. و ظهر أن العلماء الأصوليين لم ينظروا في الجوانب الدلالية البحتة في تفسيرهم للنصوص و حسب، بل تجاوزوا هذا الحد بالنظر في الجوانب التداولية للنصوص من أجل التوصل إلى الأحكام الشرعية المناسبة.
كلمات مفتاحية: نصوص دينية؛ تفسير؛ علم الدلالة؛ علم التداول؛ علماء الفقه الأصوليون.