

# Developing A Method of Understanding Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan Using Intertextual Reading: A Study Using the Conversion Method

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## Abstract

Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan is the second interpretation after Tarjuman al-Mustafid written in the Malay language in the 19th century AD by Sheikh Muhammad Sa'id ibn Umar. The main objective of this study is to identify the influence of the external source in the text of Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan. This study is important because it can unravel the reference works used by Sheikh Muhammad Said ibn Umar when producing Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan. This disclosure can also strengthen the work and continue to be a guide and reference for the community in understanding the contents of the Qur'an. When conducting research, the researchers applied the method of library research by using the intertextual reading methodology. This research focuses on the application of the conversion method which is one of the approaches in intertextual reading when analyzing the text of Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan. The research design used is documentation and fieldwork using the subjective approach that employs descriptive and qualitative data. The study reveals that there are six works which have influenced the essence of Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan which are Tafsir al-Jalalyn, Tafsir al-Jamal, Tafsir al-Baydawi, Tafsir al-Khazin, Tafsir al-Baghawi and Tafsir al-Qurtubi. The finding analysis also reveals that Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan is mostly influenced by Tafsir al-Jamal. Referring to the further study of this work, researchers are recommended to examine the text of the verses of the Qur'an, the use of punctuation, and the author's thoughts found in this Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan.

**Keywords:** Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan, Sheikh Muhammad Sa'id ibn Umar, Intertextual Reading, Conversion Method.

## Introduction

The writings of Islamic works and translations into the Malay language have grown tremendously since the coming of Islam to Nusantara regions (Malaysia, Thailand, Brunei, and Indonesia), which have covered various fields and branches of knowledge such as fiqh, aqidah, tafsir, hadith, and Sufism, among others. The writings and translations by previous Islamic scholars have remained as important sources of reference and are still used by contemporary scholars for academic purposes. It shows the success of previous Islamic scholars who produced writings that have not only attracted the interest of the public but also have benefited them. One of the Islamic scholars was Haji Muhammad Sa'id bin Omar Qadi Jitra al-

Qadhi who produced a book in the field of Tafsir in the Malay language entitled Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan.

Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan has been a reference in understanding Qur'anic verses not only by the public but also by contemporary scholars who have used it as teaching material. This invaluable piece of work has given a contribution to the knowledge of the public at large so much so that scholars are attracted to study and examine this work from various aspects such as history, language, the influence, and stature of the author.

Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan is also one of the books on Tafsir al-Qur'an, which is still being used as teaching material and reference today, especially at Pondok institutions, mosques, and musollas. Pondok institutions such as Pondok Tuan Guru Haji Bakar at Kedah, Malaysia and Pondok Tuan Guru Haji Salleh Musa at Kedah, Malaysia have been using the book as the teaching material for their weekly teaching. However, there have been criticisms of the content of Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan by certain sections of the public. Some of them opined that this book has its shortcomings because, in the writing of this book, the author does not mention any citation and uses many unjustified opinions in his tafsir (Zaim, 2010), so much so that the public should be careful when reading Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan (Taib, 2003).

Since Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan has been used as teaching material in the Tafsir al-Qur'an and a reference by the public at large in understanding verses of al-Qur'an, then efforts to refine this piece of work should be made. This study is one of the efforts which attempts to refine sources of reference and interconnections between the original text and other Tafsir texts using intertextual reading. This will answer the aforementioned problem statement. The objective of this study is to examine Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan to examine whether there exists the influence of other texts on the text of Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan using intertextual reading. This study focuses on the application of the conversion method on the text of Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan as an early effort towards the refinement of the text which contributes to improving the invaluable work. Since the author of Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan mentioned that he referred to works in the field of Tafsir while writing (Sa'id, 1970), this study focuses only on Tafsir works. From the perspective of methodology, this study employs library research and field study using a subjective approach to examine data descriptively and qualitatively.

### **Intertextual Reading Method**

One The intertextual reading method was originally known as dialogic which was introduced by Bakhtin in the year 1926 because there was voluminous Russian art literature that was difficult to comprehend at that time. As a consequence, this theory was introduced by Bakhtin to facilitate readers to understand the difficult literature. This theory considered that all literature that was written was based on dialogues between one text and another. In other words, this theory states that any text is influenced by other texts. This is supported by Harari (1979), who mentioned that "every text, being itself the intertext of another text, belong to the intertextual, which must not be confused with a text's origins".

The basis of this dialogic theory is used to understand Dostoevsky's literature such as *The Gambler*, *The Idiot*, and *The Brother's Karamazov* which were considered as difficult to be understood by the public using theories of literature such as formalism which were dominant during that time (Dostoyevsky, 1967). The Russian formalism approach which was on the rise

during that time did not help the public to understand the approach of Dostoevsky's literature. Bakhtin's dialogism emphasized external aspects which influenced reading or how an author approached art literature and in turn would flow naturally into his literature writing. However, Bakhtin did not deny the importance of internal elements such as theme, thought, plot, characters, and other elements.

In the theory of dialogism, an author would have a dialogue with the text itself, himself, and readers. This would create dialogues between a text and another text and as a consequence, it would trigger changes, conflicts, and expansion in the literature which was being written by the author in terms of theme and problems, plot or characters, and characterization. Therefore, the relationship between external and internal structures in literature is important in this approach. According to Schmitz (2007), sentences used by someone in speech or writing interconnects among them and if there is no dependency among them, then any sentence or speech becomes gloomy and inexplicable. Schmitz (2007) mentioned;

*"Language always works within certain situations, and utterances produce their significance within this context. The linguistic material alone is not enough to determine whether a word or a sound is enthusiastic, gloomy, ironical, threatening, or deferential; rather, this depends on several factors such as intonation, volume, the interlocutor, and prior utterances in the dialogue"* (Schmitz, 2007).

This theory was later discussed by Kristeva (1980) in her Ph.D. thesis entitled *La revolution du Langage Poetique* in 1970. However, Kristeva did not name this theory as dialogic, instead, she termed it as intertextuality. Hawthorn (2000) mentioned that every text which was written was influenced by other texts and this influence was discussed in intertextual theory. Therefore, readers should not be confused with the original text which is the hipogram of a given text. Hawthorn (2000) stated that *"Kristeva defines the text as a permutation of texts, an intertext in the space of a given text..."*.

The development of this theory not only have taken place in Europe but also in the whole world. In Southeast Asia, it has been discussed as one of the modern literary theories in which one scholar in the field of literature named Sardjono (1986) has developed this theory. He has not only stood on the principles of Kristeva but has also introduced another principle termed excerpts. This principle applies when a text is incarnated in another text in an abstract form. Subsequently, there was the birth of new names in Indonesia such as Teeuw and Umar. Meanwhile, in Malaysia and Singapore, it became known after Abdul Rahman Napiah discussed it in several books, particularly in his Ph.D. thesis entitled "Tuah Jebat in Malay Drama: A Study of Intertextuality", in 1989. In this thesis, he not only discussed this theory at length but also applied it to the book entitled *Hikayat Hang Tuah*.

Upon examination of the book entitled *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* by Kristeva (1980) and *Kakawin Gajah Mada* by Sardjono (1986), 10 intertextual principles have often appeared in literature and manifestation reflected in a person's style of writing, namely transformation, modification, expansion, demitefication, haplology, excerpt, parallel, conversion, existence, and defamiliarization. Each of these principles does not have to appear separately in a certain work, which means that some of them could appear simultaneously. For example, when a particular text goes through a transformation process,

it could also pass through a modification process, expansion, or any other intertextual principles at the same time.

### **Application of Conversion Method in *Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan***

This article looks at only one angle from the aspect of applying the form of the intertextual method, namely the application of the conversion method. In *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan*, there are five debates discussed by Sheikh Muhammad Sa'id including The Contexts and Occasions of the Revelation of the Qur'an, hadiths, the stories of Isra'iliyyat, The Abrogating and Abrogated Verses in the Qur'an (Nasikh and Mansukh), and The Text about Advantages (Fadhilat). However, the discussion did not include the source of the intake. Such a thing causes the author's interpretation to be disputed by some scholars, especially on explanations that are contrary to reason and sharia. However, the results of the research that has been done found that the discussion is sourced from the works of muktabar such as *Tafsir al-Jalalyn*, *Tafsir al-Baydawi*, and *Tafsir al-Qurtubi* which is indeed certified in its interpretation value (al-Dhahabi, 2005).

Conversion is one of the methods listed in the intertextual approach used to identify the source and the original text used before the author contradicts some of the text. This method occurs when the author of the work changes the description or meaning of a text from the original work referred to and then he makes the text his text. This is because the author has been influenced by the reading material that has been read, in addition to the experience that has been passed and then transformed into the text by making some improvements. It is described as a method that will be applied when the author does not agree with a statement in the text that has been read and then he makes improvements through his text. A thesis produced is influenced by previous studies, as are articles, newspapers, books, and even novels that are inevitably influenced by existing writings. However, not all the text that has been produced is agreed upon by all readers, and therefore the conversion method will occur when the reader makes corrections to the text. An example of the application of this method can be seen through the writings of Sheikh Muhammad Sa'id in *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan*, namely; "So the king of the Jews ordered someone to kill him in the name of Istiyanus" (Sa'id, 1970).

While the text from *Tafsir al-Jamal* which is the original work that was transformed:

وأمر ملك اليهود رجلا منهم يقال له ططيانوس

When examined, *Tafsir al-Jamal* which is the original work referred to names the man as Tityanus, but it is different from what is stated in *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan*. Sheikh Muhammad Sa'id named the man Istiyanus and that is why the method of conversion is applied.

Table 1

*The List of Works which Influence the Contents of the Tafsir Nur Al-Ihsan Using Conversion Method*

No.	Works	Contexts Occasions Revelation of the Qur'an	and Hadith of the	Stories of al-Israiliyyat	Total	Percentage
1	Tafsir Jalalyn	2	2	-	4	24
2	Tafsir al-Jamal	1		7	8	47
3	Tafsir Baydawi		-	1	1	6
4	Tafsir Khazin	1	-	1	2	12
5	Tafsir Baghawi		-	1	1	6
6	Tafsir Qurtubi		1	-	1	6
<b>Total</b>		4	3	10	17	100

Table 1 explains the data which were analyzed based on the method of conversion. This study finds that the Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan was influenced by Tafsir al-Jalalyn 4 times (24%), Tafsir al-Jamal 8 times (47%), Tafsir al-Baydawi 1 times (6%), Tafsir al-Khazin 2 times (12%), Tafsir al-Baghawi 1 times (6%) and Tafsir al-Qurtubi 1 times (6%). Therefore, the text which has the most influence on Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan using the conversion method is Tafsir al-Jamal.

### Conclusion

Based on this study, it could be concluded that the intertextual approach has its method. This method combines processing, construction, and digestion of the two aspects which are internal and external aspects of the construction of a piece of work. The internal aspect is observed when the authors set the style of interpretation (*tafsir*) according to their aspirations, while the external aspect is when there exist external works which affect the written text. *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* is a *tafsir* which was written by Sa'id (1970). This work has received widespread acceptance not only in Malaysia but also in Egypt and Thailand on par with other contemporary *tafsir*. What is interesting about this work is its brief presentation style even understandable by the laymen and is also loaded with various knowledge. His easy style meets the needs of all levels of society and is suitable for use by modern civil society such as Malaysia.

Sa'id (1970) referred to 6 venerated works which are *Tafsir al-Jalalyn*, *Tafsir al-Jamal*, *Tafsir al-Baydawi*, *Tafsir al-Khazin*, *Tafsir al-Baghawi* and *Tafsir al-Qurtubi* in debating 4 contexts and occasions of the revelation of the *Qur'an*, 3 *Hadith* of the Prophet, and 10 stories of *al-Isra'iliyyat*, which are very interesting for the people to learn and live by. Through this study, the sources of references for all referred texts and the information which was omitted from the original text are identified. Therefore, this study provides evidence that Sa'id (1970) neither uses unsupported facts nor uses his own opinion in producing the literature entitled *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan*.

In conclusion, this study provides evidence that the main reference of *Tafsir Nur al-Ihsan* is *Tafsir al-Jamal* based on the percentage of frequency that Sa'id (1970) referred to it more than any other works. While the *Tafsir al-Jalalyn*, *Tafsir al-Baydawi*, *Tafsir al-Khazin*, *Tafsir al-Baghawi*, and *Tafsir al-Qurtubi* were the side works that were used by the author as references.

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