

# A QUR'ANIC PERSPECTIVE ON POST-FLOOD LINGUISTIC EVOLUTION

## The Case of Dhu'l-Qarnayn

Ahmed TWABI

*itwabi@gmail.com*

This paper delves into the Qur'anic narrative of linguistic origins and development, with a particular focus on the period following Noah's Flood and the subsequent linguistic encounters of Dhu'l-Qarnayn. The study uniquely examines how languages may have evolved in the early post-flood period, offering a perspective that challenges traditional views. The paper critically examines the linguistic landscape during Dhu'l-Qarnayn's era, questioning the plausibility of significant linguistic diversity emerging within the relatively short timeframe following the Flood. Through a detailed analysis, the study proposes that linguistic variation among major groups was likely minimal during this period, with a predominantly unified language prevailing across regions. However, it also acknowledges the potential for earlier linguistic divergence in more geographically and socially isolated communities. The paper also explores the implications of Dhu'l-Qarnayn's encounters with various peoples, considering the possibility that his era represents a crucial transitional period in linguistic history. This transitional period, during which a unified language may have coexisted with emerging regional dialects, is of significant

importance as it laid the groundwork for the linguistic diversity observed in later historical periods. The study emphasizes the importance of considering both theological and historical perspectives when exploring the origins and evolution of language and advocates for further interdisciplinary research. This collaboration is crucial to deepen our understanding of the complex relationship between language, culture, and religion.

**KEYWORDS:** Linguistic diversity, post-flood linguistics, Dhu'l-Qarnayn, linguistic divergence, Noah's flood.

## INTRODUCTION

The evolution of languages through time and space is observed as a natural phenomenon, shaped by a multitude of factors, including migration, conquest, trade, and cultural interchange. Over millennia, these factors have contributed to significant transformations in phonology, grammar, and lexicon, culminating in the rich tapestry of linguistic diversity observed today.<sup>1</sup> Traditional linguistic theories, grounded in secular and evolutionary perspectives, often view language as a product of human adaptation and social interaction, evolving gradually from primitive forms to the complex structures we see in contemporary languages.<sup>2</sup> These theories suggest that language diversification is inevitable due to human communities' geographic and social isolation and cultural interactions.<sup>3</sup>

However, the Qur'an provides a unique and profound perspective on the origins and development of language, which fundamentally differs from secular views. According to the Qur'an, language is not merely a human invention or a product of evolutionary processes, but a divine gift bestowed upon humanity by God. This is explicitly stated in *Sūrah al-Baqarah*,<sup>4</sup> where it is mentioned,



“And He taught Adam the names – all of them. Then He showed them to the angels and said, ‘Inform Me of the names of these if you are truthful.’” Furthermore, *Sūrah ar-Raḥmān*<sup>5</sup> emphasizes the divine endowment of language: “The Most Merciful Taught the Qur’an, created man, [and] taught him eloquence.” These verses underscore the belief that God directly gave humans the ability to communicate through language, establishing a foundational difference from the gradualist views proposed by secular theories.<sup>6,7</sup>

The Qur’anic narrative of linguistic origins and development extends beyond the initial teaching to Adam. It encompasses the spread and diversification of human populations and languages post-flood, a period marked by significant demographic and linguistic shifts. This aspect is crucial in understanding the Qur’anic account of Dhu’l-Qarnayn,<sup>8</sup> which provides profound insights into historical, theological, and linguistic dimensions. Dhu’l-Qarnayn’s journeys, especially his encounter with people who could not understand his speech,<sup>9</sup> prompt a deeper exploration of linguistic implications in Qur’anic narrations.

Analyzing the linguistic dimensions of Dhu’l-Qarnayn’s encounters require considering the origins and development of languages as described in the Qur’an. It invites a reflection on how different languages and dialects emerged and diversified after the Flood, shaping the communication barriers and cultural exchanges depicted in Dhu’l-Qarnayn’s story. This narrative underscores the importance of language as a tool for governance, diplomacy, and cultural integration, highlighting the challenges posed by linguistic diversity. This paper aims to provide a holistic view of linguistic development in the Qur’an by bridging the gap between the world after Noah’s Flood and Dhu’l-Qarnayn’s linguistic encounters. Can the two be related?



## OBJECTIVES

This paper aims to explore the Qur'anic narrative on the origins and development of language, particularly in the post-Flood period, focusing on the linguistic encounters of Dhu'l-Qarnayn. By examining both the historical and theological dimensions of language evolution as presented in the Qur'an, the study aims to bridge the gap between religious perspectives and secular linguistic theories. Through a comprehensive analysis of Qur'anic accounts and modern linguistic models, the paper seeks to shed light on how language, as a divine gift, evolved and diversified in the early stages of human civilization.

One of the key objectives of this study is to revisit the Qur'anic perspective on the origins of language. The Qur'an presents language as a divine gift, with specific references to God teaching Adam the names of all things, symbolizing the initial teaching of language. This divine origin is crucial in understanding early human communication. The Qur'anic narrative of Adam and his descendants, particularly Noah, suggests that language was divinely taught and preserved throughout generations. The study intends to explore this perspective further by analyzing how the descendants of Noah might have continued to use a unified language after the Flood. The Qur'an positions this ability to communicate as integral to human development, not as something that evolved naturally through social interaction but as a direct endowment from God. Understanding the significance of this divine teaching is critical in studying early linguistic development in the Islamic framework.

Another essential objective is to investigate post-Flood linguistic evolution. This section of the study will explore the possibility of a unified linguistic framework among the early descendants of Noah, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the Flood. By examining Noah's descendants' demographic and geographic spread, the study aims to assess the plausibility of minimal lin-



guistic diversity in the early stages. The narrative of the Flood in the Qur'an suggests that all languages might have derived from Noah's lineage, meaning that, in the post-flood world, human language would have been unified at first. The paper explores how this unified language might have spread and diversified as Noah's descendants migrated across different regions. This research will look at the timeline within which linguistic divergence began to occur, considering factors such as geographic isolation, population growth, and social structures, which could have contributed to the gradual differentiation of language.

The analysis will also delve into the story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn, a figure mentioned in the Qur'an who traveled to distant lands and encountered various peoples with different languages. This exploration will focus on the linguistic challenges Dhu'l-Qarnayn faced during his travels, as described in the Qur'an. One notable instance is Dhu'l-Qarnayn's encounter with a people who could hardly understand his speech, highlighting a possible early instance of significant linguistic divergence. By analyzing this and other encounters, the study will propose a timeline for the onset of linguistic diversity in Dhu'l-Qarnayn's era.

Finally, this paper proposes a framework for further research that integrates multiple disciplines. The study emphasizes the importance of a multidisciplinary approach, combining insights from theology, linguistics, and history to understand language's evolution better. The study suggests a more comprehensive understanding of linguistic diversity and its historical context can be achieved by bringing together these diverse fields. This multidisciplinary approach also encourages further exploration into the relationship between language, culture, and religion, as depicted in religious texts.

In essence, this study seeks to contribute to ongoing scholarly dialogue by offering new insights into the historical and theological understanding of linguistic diversity and evolution from an Islamic perspective. While modern linguistic theories often



emphasize the natural development of language through social interaction, the Qur'anic perspective introduces a divine dimension, suggesting that language is not merely a human invention but a gift from God. By comparing these two perspectives, the study aims to foster a more nuanced discussion of how language has developed over time and how divine teaching may have shaped early human communication.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach used in this paper focuses on a qualitative analysis of both theological and linguistic texts, with a particular emphasis on understanding post-Flood linguistic evolution through the lens of Qur'anic accounts. Specifically, the study centers on the Qur'anic narrative of Dhu'l-Qarnayn, a figure in Islamic tradition whose narrative serves as a critical case study, investigating how language development may have unfolded in the early stages of human history following the Flood of Noah. The analysis considers existing linguistic theories, comparing secular perspectives on language divergence and evolution with those rooted in Islamic theological teachings. Through this comparative approach, the study seeks to highlight both areas of convergence and divergence between these two paradigms.

Much of the research is dedicated to a theological analysis of the Qur'anic verses that touch upon the origins of language, with particular attention paid to the figures of Adam, Noah, and Dhu'l-Qarnayn. These figures, particularly Adam, the first human and prophet, are central to Islamic understandings of early human history. As a prophet who survived the divine Flood, Noah represents a pivotal moment in the Qur'anic narrative, in which humanity must rebuild and repopulate the earth. Dhu'l-Qarnayn, though a more enigmatic figure, is often associated with the spread of knowledge and culture, including the diffusion of lan-



guage. The study draws from classical Islamic sources, including *tafsīr* (exegesis) literature, which provides detailed interpretations of the Qur'an, to explore the possible implications of these narratives for understanding early human language.

In conjunction with this theological analysis, the paper also incorporates a historical and linguistic framework grounded in secular linguistic theories. These theories, particularly those related to language divergence and evolution, offer a scientific lens to understand how languages may have developed and diversified following the Flood. One of the key aspects of this approach is the use of comparative linguistic timelines to estimate the timeframes required for significant linguistic changes to occur. For instance, the divergence of the Romance languages from Latin serves as a historical benchmark for understanding how quickly languages can evolve and branch off from a common source. By applying this framework to ancient civilizations, the paper explores how linguistic divergence might have occurred in the early post-Flood period, considering the social, cultural, and geographical factors that would have influenced language development.

The study contextualizes this linguistic evolution by introducing population growth and spatial expansion models based on historical and theological sources. These models are handy for understanding how the descendants of Noah, following the flood, may have spread out across the earth and how this expansion might have contributed to the development of linguistic diversity. The population growth model is grounded in historical accounts of human migration and expansion while considering theological narratives of how Noah's descendants repopulated the earth. By estimating the population growth rate and the geographical spread of these early communities, the study assesses how spatial separation and isolation would have facilitated linguistic divergence. The theory of exponential population growth, coupled with the isolation of certain groups over time, provides a plausible explanation for how different languages and dialects could have



emerged as Dhu'l-Qarnayn traveled and encountered various communities during his legendary journeys.

Through this multi-faceted methodological approach, the paper seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of linguistic diversity in the post-Flood period, drawing from divine intervention as depicted in the Qur'an and natural linguistic processes observed in secular linguistic studies. The Qur'an suggests that linguistic diversity is not merely a result of historical or social processes but also a sign of divine will and creation. This theological perspective is balanced with a scientific analysis of how human migration, population growth, and geographical isolation can lead to the natural divergence of languages over time. By comparing these two perspectives, the study explores how language, religion, and human migration interact to shape the development and evolution of languages across history.

Exploring Dhu'l-Qarnayn's narrative is essential to this study, as his travels and interactions with diverse communities are often interpreted as evidence of early linguistic variation. In some interpretations, Dhu'l-Qarnayn's journey to the ends of the earth can be seen as symbolic of the spread of culture and language and the challenges posed by linguistic and cultural differences. By analyzing the Qur'anic depiction of his travels and encounters, the paper delves into the broader question of how early human civilizations managed linguistic diversity, whether through efforts at translation, the creation of common languages, or simply through the coexistence of multiple languages within the same geographical region.

This paper aims to comprehensively understand the factors contributing to linguistic evolution in the post-Flood period. By synthesizing theological exegesis with secular linguistic theories, the study seeks to offer a balanced view of how divine and natural processes may have shaped the development of languages. Furthermore, the paper highlights the importance of considering religious and historical perspectives when studying the evolution





of language, as each provides valuable insights into the complex interplay between language, culture, and human migration. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the study sheds light on the linguistic history of early human civilizations and offers a broader reflection on the relationship between language, religion, and human identity.

## QUR'ANIC LINGUISTIC ORIGINS

Secular theories of linguistic origin, grounded in evolutionary biology, anthropology, and cognitive science, offer various explanations for how language may have emerged in early humans. However, these theories often differ in interpretations and lack a unified explanation. For instance, some earlier nature-based theories, such as the Bow-wow theory, suggest that language developed as a reaction to natural stimuli, social coordination, or the mimicry of natural sounds.<sup>10</sup> These theories propose that humans initially began to communicate by imitating the sounds of their environment—like animal calls or natural phenomena. However, this perspective has significant limitations. One essential criticism is that natural sounds are vastly limited in comparison to the richness and diversity of human linguistic sounds. Additionally, there is no straightforward relationship between a word and its sound across different languages. Even onomatopoeic words, meant to imitate natural sounds, vary significantly from one language to another, indicating that linguistic sounds are not universally tied to their referents.<sup>11</sup>

Another primary secular theory is rooted in biolinguistics, which posits that language emerged due to a genetic mutation in early humans, granting them the innate ability to speak.<sup>12</sup> This theory aligns with the idea that a biological change at some point in human evolution enabled complex linguistic abilities to develop. While this theory attempts to offer a scientific explanation, it



faces significant challenges, particularly in explaining the origin of the mutation and the precise nature of the cognitive processes it purportedly enabled. Moreover, these theories often decouple cognition and speech, treating the emergence of language as a purely physical or biological process without fully addressing the intricate cognitive functions that underlie language use. The complexity of these functions suggests that language acquisition and use are deeply intertwined with human cognition, indicating that the ability to learn and use language is an inherent feature of human nature rather than a purely external development.

In contrast, the Qur'anic perspective on linguistic origins offers a fundamentally different narrative that attributes language's origin directly to divine intervention. According to the Qur'an, language is a gift from God, bestowed upon humanity to enable communication and understanding. This view is expressed in several verses. For example, *Sūrah al-Baqarah*<sup>13</sup> states, "And He taught Adam the names – all of them. Then He showed them to the angels and said, 'Inform Me of the names of these if you are truthful.'" This verse highlights the belief that language was not an evolutionary development but a divine teaching, where God directly imparted linguistic knowledge to Adam. Similarly, in *Sūrah al-Rahmān*,<sup>14</sup> the Qur'an underscores this divine endowment: "The Most Merciful Taught the Qur'an, created man, [and] taught him eloquence." These verses emphasize that language, in the Islamic worldview, is an intrinsic part of human creation, inseparable from the cognitive abilities that were also divinely granted.

The Qur'anic narrative also addresses the diversification of languages, acknowledging that the multiplicity of languages and peoples is part of God's design. *Sūrah al-Rūm*<sup>15</sup> states: "And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and colors. Indeed, in that are signs for those of knowledge." This verse suggests that the diversity of languages, like human appearances, is a deliberate aspect of



God's creation. Unlike secular theories, which often struggle to explain the mechanisms behind linguistic diversification, the Qur'anic perspective frames it as a purposeful and divine act. However, it does not explicitly detail the processes by which languages diverged.

Moreover, the Qur'an emphasizes the role of prophets in communicating God's message to humanity in the language of their people, further highlighting the importance of linguistic diversity in facilitating divine communication. In *Sūrah Ibrāhīm*,<sup>16</sup> it is stated: "And We did not send any messenger except [speaking] in the language of his people to state clearly for them." This indicates that each prophet was sent with a message in the native language of their people, ensuring that the divine message was accessible and understandable to all. This focus on linguistic accessibility is further exemplified in the case of Prophet Muḥammad, who is described as a messenger for all humanity.<sup>17</sup> However, unlike earlier prophets, whose messages were specific to their communities, the Qur'an, as revealed to Muḥammad, transcends linguistic barriers intended for a universal audience.

The Qur'anic account of linguistic origins also suggests that the original language taught to Adam was preserved through his descendants until Noah. According to Islamic tradition, as narrated in the corpus of *ḥadīth*, there were ten generations between Adam and Noah, during which time the original language would have been transmitted with minimal variation. However, this linguistic continuity was disrupted by the Great Flood, which the Qur'an describes as a pivotal event that left Noah's family as the sole survivors and progenitors of post-flood humanity. This implies that whatever linguistic diversity existed before the Flood was effectively reset, with all subsequent languages tracing their origins back to Noah's dialect of Adam's language.



## POST-FLOOD LINGUISTICS

The Qur'an recounts the story of Prophet Noah and the catastrophic flood, emphasizing Noah's family's survival as humanity's progenitors after the deluge. In *Sūrah Hūd*,<sup>18</sup> Noah's ark is described as the vehicle through which he and his followers were saved while the floodwaters submerged the disbelievers. Importantly, as recorded in the Qur'an,<sup>19</sup> Noah's prayer says, "My Lord, do not leave upon the earth from among the disbelievers an inhabitant." This statement emphasizes that the Flood was global, eliminating all human life apart from those aboard the ark. Furthermore, in *Sūrah al-Ṣāffāt*,<sup>20</sup> the Qur'an affirms that "We made his descendants those remaining [on the earth]," underscoring that Noah's family alone survived to repopulate the planet. Thus, regardless of how many languages and dialects existed before the Flood, Noah's language and that of his progeny became the dominant and only surviving tongue in the post-Flood world. This narrative raises an intriguing question: How long would this singular post-Flood language take to diverge into multiple languages? Additionally, how extensive was the settlement of Noah's descendants, and how far could they have spread before linguistic variations became pronounced?

Given the Qur'anic assertion that only Noah's descendants repopulated the earth, we can assume there was a significant period after the Flood when only one language prevailed across humanity. The Qur'an also mentions that Noah lived to an age of 950 years before the Flood,<sup>21</sup> implying that he continued to live for some time afterward. The exceptional longevity of Noah and his immediate descendants suggests that linguistic divergence may have occurred more slowly than it would in a society with shorter life spans. Lifespans of several centuries would allow for prolonged continuity of linguistic and cultural norms across multiple generations. It is possible that Noah's language persisted with



only minor variations for a few thousand years as his descendants dispersed across the earth.

Linguistic theories indicate that a language takes several hundred years to diverge significantly. For example, the Romance languages, including Spanish, French, and Italian, began to emerge from Latin around the 6th century CE, with further divergence occurring over the later centuries.<sup>22</sup> Various factors, such as the collapse of the Roman Empire and the migration of different groups across Europe, contributed to this linguistic fragmentation.<sup>23</sup> By examining these historical examples, we can estimate the rate of linguistic change. During the period when the Romance languages evolved, the average lifespan of a Roman was around fifty years. Given this, roughly 10 to 12 generations would have passed (over 600 years) to result in the development of distinct languages. This timeframe provides a valuable comparison for understanding the potential speed of linguistic divergence in the post-flood world of Noah's descendants.

However, the case of Noah presents unique considerations. Firstly, the geographical spread of Noah's descendants plays a critical role in understanding how quickly linguistic variation could occur. According to Qur'an 11:44, the ark came to rest on Mount Judi, a location many Islamic scholars identify as being in modern-day southeastern Turkey.<sup>24</sup> This location is central to multiple continents, meaning Noah's descendants could easily have spread into Europe, Asia, and Africa. The question, then, is how long it would have taken for these early human communities to expand across such vast territories and how geographic isolation would have influenced language development.

A rough estimate of population growth and spatial expansion can be made using population growth formulas. The formula for exponential population growth is given by where  $P_0$  is the initial population,  $r$  is the growth rate, and  $t$  is time. Using the assumption that Noah and his immediate family were the sole survivors of the Flood, we could consider an initial population of around ten people



(Noah, his children, their spouses, and other possible believers). The population would have expanded significantly, taking a plausible growth rate of 0.5%, reflecting a small, isolated community focused on repopulating the earth and a timeframe of 2,000 years after the Flood (roughly three generations later, considering their long lifespan). Applying the formula, the population would reach above 220,000 people after this period. The estimated population crosses the low millions in two to three more generations. While this number is substantial, it is still relatively small considering the vast geographic areas that Noah's descendants could occupy. Thus, even with geographical expansion, the population would have remained small enough to maintain frequent communication, which would help preserve linguistic unity for an extended period.

In addition to population growth, the extended lifespans described in the Qur'an and other religious texts play a significant role in preserving linguistic continuity. A model of decreasing lifespans following Noah, proposed by John Sanford,<sup>25</sup> suggests that the ages of subsequent generations gradually decreased over time. According to Sanford's exponential decline curve, Noah's children would have lived to around 626 years, their children to 458 years, and their grandchildren to 310 years. While biblical narratives may differ from the Qur'an in most prophetic narrations, this model can roughly estimate that the time between Noah and his great-grandchildren would have spanned approximately 1,500 years. During this period, the language spoken by Noah's descendants would likely have remained largely intact, with only minor variations emerging due to regional differences and geographic separation.

Even with the gradual spatial expansion of Noah's descendants across different regions, a unitary language could have persisted for a considerable time. Geographic separation would eventually lead to linguistic variations, but these changes would initially manifest as dialectal differences rather than entirely distinct languages. Significant linguistic divergence would require prolonged



isolation and a lack of communication between different groups. This may not have occurred until the population had grown more extensive and spread across distant areas. Furthermore, given the relatively small population sizes in the early generations, frequent interaction between distinct groups would have helped maintain linguistic unity.

This model of linguistic evolution provides a plausible explanation for the early stages of human language development following the Flood, as recounted in the Qur'an. Considering population growth, geographic expansion, and extended lifespans, we can understand how a single language might have persisted across large regions for several thousand years. The eventual emergence of linguistic diversity would have occurred gradually as Noah's descendants settled further afield and became more isolated. This framework also sheds light on the story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn in the Qur'an, whose legendary travels and encounters with various peoples can be seen as a reflection of the linguistic diversity that emerged over time. The Qur'anic narrative of post-Flood linguistic unity and subsequent divergence offers an essential perspective on the broader theme of language evolution and human migration.

## DHUL-QARNAYN ENCOUNTERS

The Qur'anic narrative of Dhu'l-Qarnayn's travels, as presented in *Sūrah al-Kahf*, offers compelling insights into the linguistic landscape of early human history. His extensive journeys to the East and West, as described in these verses, highlight the diversity of people and cultures he encountered. While he appears to communicate effortlessly with most of the communities he meets, there is a notable exception in his encounter with a group "who could hardly understand his speech."<sup>26</sup> This scenario invites several vital questions about the state of linguistic diversity during Dhu'l-Qarnayn's time. One such question is whether it was plausible for a





man to travel such vast distances, encountering minimal linguistic barriers, suggesting that linguistic diversity in that era may not have been as pronounced as it would later become.

The Qur'an introduces Dhu'l-Qarnayn as a historical figure in *Sūrah al-Kahf*,<sup>27</sup> stating thus, "They ask you about Dhu'l-Qarnayn. Say: I will recite to you something of his story." This positions Dhu'l-Qarnayn as a man who lived at a specific time, endowed by God with the means to achieve great things. The next verse adds, "We established him in the land and gave him the means to all things,"<sup>28</sup> implying that Dhu'l-Qarnayn was not only a ruler but also a person of considerable influence, able to traverse vast regions. This also implies he would have spoken that area's dominant language or dialect, enabling his communication with other significant groups. His travels took him to the far reaches of the known world, both to the east and the west, as indicated by Qur'anic descriptions such as "he reached the setting of the sun"<sup>29</sup> and "until, when he reached the rising of the sun."<sup>30</sup> These phrases highlight the extent of his travels, suggesting that he explored the furthest lands that were accessible to him, encountering various peoples with different beliefs and social conditions.<sup>31</sup>

"Until he reached the setting point of the sun, which appeared to him to be setting in a spring of muddy (or hot) water";<sup>32</sup> while this would not necessarily mean an exact point where the sun sets, but rather he travelled westwards so much that no landmass remained, only water. It can be rightly argued that it is unlikely that this "spring of muddy water" is the ocean (Atlantic or Pacific) since the word "spring" here would not be appropriate. However, in other verses in the Qur'an, the word "west" is used multiple times to mean the extreme ends of the world, for instance, "To Allah belongs the east and the west. Wherever you turn, there is the Face of Allah."<sup>33</sup> It would be a gross underrating of God's dominion if the same word were used in Dhu'l-Qarnayn's case to depict a location of no extremity in travel from the east to the west, e.g., the Caspian Sea, as some would suggest.





Similarly, in Qur'an 18:90, "until he reached the rising point of the sun" symbolizes the extreme east. This description of his journeys further indicates that his origin was central to the East and the West since the extremity of "East" carries no weight if one is already further east, e.g., Japan, and vice versa. Therefore, if his travels were in the Eurasian landmass, his origin must have been between Asia Minor and the Middle East. In any case, the symbolism in the Qur'an about his travels shows how far he must have traveled. Regardless of this vastness in travel, Qur'an 18:93 states that "until he reached a pass between two mountains. He found in front of them a people who could hardly understand his language." This is significant because the information divulged in this verse is not present in the verses from his previous travels. His travels to the extreme west and east did not outline this linguistic challenge. This means that the scope of this whole region had no trouble understanding him. Furthermore, this linguistic challenge also poses a way to describe how remote this community in the mountains was. Therefore, it can be elucidated that this community was remote and isolated, perhaps due to this geological impediment.

Although the Qur'an mentions him meeting this linguistic challenge,<sup>34</sup> the subsequent verse (18:94), where the people address Dhu'l-Qarnayn directly, raises questions about how communication was achieved. The suggestion of a translator by other authors,<sup>35</sup> seems unlikely, as he would have consistently needed one throughout his travels, and its mention in this particular verse would be pointless. Even other exegetes have suggested that Dhu'l-Qarnayn was bestowed the divine ability to understand the community. This being correct still would not negate the existence of said linguistic challenge. On the other hand, the most plausible explanation lies in the nuanced meaning of the Arabic verb "*yakādu*" (almost). It suggests the linguistic divergence was incomplete, and mutual comprehension was still possible, albeit difficult. This can be supported by another verse of the Qur'an,<sup>36</sup>



which uses the same word, “...The people overpowered me and were about (almost) to kill me...” which in this case means almost but never happened. This means that in Dhu’l-Qarnayn’s case, the linguistic barrier was “almost” and not entirely. An extreme example would be between two dialects of Arabic<sup>37</sup> whose lingual roots are the same and have started to diverge.

Furthermore, other exegetes suggested that Dhu’l-Qarnayn was a prophet himself<sup>38</sup> due to the nature of the way God addresses him directly.<sup>39</sup> If this is the case, it has already been divulged by the Qur’an (14:4) that “And We did not send any messenger except [speaking] in the language of his people to state clearly for them.” Therefore, Dhul-Qarnayn should generally have no linguistic challenges with communities under his purview. The mention of this community, who could barely understand him, alludes to language divergence in isolated areas of the known world.

This work, thus, proposes that Dhu’l-Qarnayn lived several generations after the flood described in the story of Noah, adding further context to the linguistic environment of his time. Precisely, his era being placed between five to seven generations after Noah and many generations before Abraham is a plausible theory since Abraham’s time demonstrates an already present tribal, hence, linguistic diversity.<sup>40</sup> According to Qur’anic tradition, Noah’s descendants repopulated the earth after the flood, and as they spread out from Asia Minor, they would have initially shared a common language. However, as these populations dispersed across the Eurasian landmass, linguistic divergence would have occurred gradually, with isolated communities developing distinct languages earlier than those in more densely populated and interconnected regions. Dhu’l-Qarnayn’s ability to travel from the East to the West with minimal linguistic challenges suggests that this divergence was still in its early stages, with only the most geographically isolated communities exhibiting significant differences in language.



## INFERRED MECHANISMS OF LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

Linguistic diversity is possibly triggered by many factors, some still unexplored. Some of these factors also contribute to language isolation. For example, geographical isolation through physical barriers such as mountains, rivers, and seas can lead to isolated communities developing distinct languages or dialects over time.<sup>41</sup> This idea is implicitly supported in the Qur'an, where verse 18:93 hints at the isolated tribe's geography, dwelling beside two mountains, suggesting a physical barrier that could have contributed to their linguistic distinctiveness.

Beyond geography, social and cultural dynamics also play a crucial role in linguistic diversification. The size and structure of a community, its social norms, and the frequency of interaction with other groups can all influence language change and diversification. For instance, more petite, tightly-knit communities may preserve unique linguistic features. In contrast, more significant, more diverse communities may experience faster rates of language change due to increased contact and interaction.<sup>42</sup> In communities with high social stratification, distinct social classes may develop linguistic variations, further contributing to internal linguistic diversity.<sup>43</sup> In Dhu'l-Qarnayn's case, verse 18:94 alludes to their small numbers. Building the barrier or wall themselves would have been possible if they had enough. Further, their tribe could fight off the aggressing Gog and Magog tribes.

Additionally, migration and subsequent isolation play a significant role in linguistic divergence. When groups of people migrate and settle in different regions, the lack of sustained contact between the original group and the offshoots can develop distinct languages or dialects. This is especially pertinent in the post-Flood era. Noah's descendants would have spread out across different regions, gradually developing linguistic variations due to their separation and adaptation to new environments.<sup>44</sup> The



Qur'an's narrative of human dispersion after the flood can be seen as a reflection of this process, where isolated communities like the one encountered by Dhu'l-Qarnayn developed distinct languages or dialects over time.

The influence of religious and cultural practices on language is another crucial factor. In societies where religion plays a central role, the language used in religious texts and rituals often becomes a standard or prestige dialect, influencing the evolution of the spoken language. The Qur'an has profoundly impacted the Arabic language, standardizing it and preserving its structure over centuries.<sup>45</sup> In the context of Dhu'l-Qarnayn, the presence of a dominant religious or cultural influence could have contributed to the linguistic unity observed in most of the regions he traveled through, with isolated communities possibly developing variations due to their lack of exposure to the same cultural influences.

Finally, the concept of linguistic convergence, where different languages or dialects in close contact influence each other and become more similar over time, can also be considered. This process can occur in regions where trade, intermarriage, and political alliances bring diverse groups into regular contact.<sup>46</sup> However, in isolated communities, such as the one mentioned in verse 18:93, the lack of such interactions would likely have led to linguistic divergence rather than convergence, further explaining the distinctiveness of their language.

## THEORETICAL LIMITATIONS

First and foremost, limitations exist in the thought process of the theory outlined above. One significant limitation is the possibility that Dhu'l-Qarnayn was proficient in multiple languages, which would have enabled him to communicate effectively across different regions without encountering significant linguistic barriers. This would challenge the idea that his era was characterized by



minimal linguistic diversity and undermine the proposed timeline for linguistic divergence post-Flood. Another assertion would be that he used interpreters throughout his travels. Both cases require a closer analysis for a better understanding of their plausibility.

In the first case, where Dhu'l-Qarnayn knows many languages, there are two options for his ability to know them. Since Dhu'l-Qarnayn was given a way over all things,<sup>47</sup> it is Qur'anically plausible that his ability to know these languages is divinely inspired. In the second option, his ability to speak multiple languages is an individual effort put into learning these languages. Logically, if divinely inspired, there should be no communication challenge since the inspiration will endow him with the correct dialect or ability for the most effective communication. Such a communication challenge shows that if he could communicate in multiple languages, it certainly is not due to divine inspiration.

On the other hand, if personal effort was required to learn these languages, particularly this tribe's language, then the presence of a communication challenge still indicates that he learned a slightly different dialect from them that they could not understand, i.e., the verse alludes that the inability to understand was on them not him.<sup>48</sup> This means that he spoke sufficiently, but they could not understand him. This case would still agree with the theory above that this tribe's isolation made them unable to understand the more common dialects spoken in the region. In the second case, where he used interpreters, the same communication challenge led to the same outcome: they still did not understand Dhu'l-Qarnayn's interpreters very well due to linguistic deviation.

Secondly, another limitation could be posited that the Qur'an often uses symbolic language and metaphors. While this enriches its spiritual and moral teachings, it can introduce ambiguity when interpreting historical events and timelines. The precise time-frame of Dhu'l-Qarnayn's era and the extent of linguistic diversity during that period might be subject to multiple interpretations. Similarly, the Qur'an does not provide explicit details about the



mechanisms of language divergence or the specific characteristics of the languages encountered by Dhu'l-Qarnayn. This leaves room for various interpretations and hypotheses, potentially limiting the ability to draw definitive conclusions about the linguistic landscape of that era.

For instance, one example of the symbolic language and metaphors in the Qur'an that could lead to multiple interpretations is the description of Dhu'l-Qarnayn's travels to "the setting of the sun" and "the rising of the sun."<sup>49</sup> These phrases could be interpreted literally, suggesting that Dhu'l-Qarnayn traveled to the farthest reaches of the known world, or metaphorically, representing the extent of his influence and authority. This ambiguity makes it difficult to determine the exact geographical locations and the linguistic diversity he would have encountered. Additionally, the Qur'an does not detail the specific languages spoken by the communities he met, nor does it describe the processes by which these languages may have diverged from a common ancestor. As a result, although this work proposes that Dhu'l-Qarnayn's era was a transitional period in linguistic history, it must acknowledge that these conclusions are speculative, based on interpretations of symbolic language rather than explicit historical records. This limitation highlights the challenges of using the Qur'anic narrative as a historical source for precisely reconstructing the linguistic landscape of the post-Flood world.

## PROSPECTS

Future studies could delve deeper into the intersection of linguistic divergence and migration patterns in the early post-Flood period, drawing from various fields such as historical geography, population ecology, and sociolinguistics to map the spread of human populations and their corresponding languages. Such interdisciplinary research could offer new insights into the mechanisms



that drove linguistic evolution in this crucial period of human history, particularly in the context of the Qur'anic narrative. By examining how the descendants of Noah might have migrated across different regions, interacting with various cultures and environments, we can begin to construct a more detailed picture of how language families evolved and spread. This, in turn, could shed light on how linguistic diversity arose, particularly in areas that may have been geographically isolated.

Historical geography is especially relevant in this context, as it involves studying past physical and human geography. By reconstructing the likely migration routes of Noah's descendants, we can better understand how environmental factors such as mountains, rivers, and deserts may have influenced the spread of populations and, consequently, the development of different languages. In the post-flood era, as described in religious and historical accounts, humans would have needed to adapt to new environments, affecting their social structures, trade, and communication practices. For example, migration into mountainous regions or across deserts might have led to the isolation of certain groups, fostering the development of unique dialects or languages over time. Thus, studying migration patterns is integral to understanding linguistic divergence during this period.

Furthermore, population ecology can provide critical insights into how demographic factors influence language development. The rate at which populations grew and dispersed would have directly impacted the speed and extent of linguistic change. Smaller, isolated populations tend to develop distinct linguistic features more rapidly, while larger, more interconnected populations may maintain linguistic cohesion for extended periods. By modeling population growth and dispersal in the early post-Flood world, scholars could better understand how and why specific languages diverged while others remained relatively stable. Such models could incorporate variables such as geographic barriers,





resource availability, and social structures, which are all likely to have shaped the linguistic landscape of the time.

Sociolinguistics, which explores the relationship between language and society, is another field that could contribute valuable insights into the study of early post-Flood linguistic divergence. Language is a means of communication and reflects social hierarchies, cultural norms, and identity. As Noah's descendants formed new communities and established social structures, their languages would have evolved in response to these factors. For instance, different social classes, professions, or religious groups may have developed distinct linguistic practices, contributing to the overall diversity of languages in the post-Flood world. Sociolinguistic studies of contemporary linguistic communities could provide helpful analogies for understanding how similar processes may have operated in the past, particularly in regions where multiple languages or dialects coexisted.

In addition to these secular fields of study, future research could benefit from a more detailed examination of the Qur'anic accounts of linguistic diversity, particularly those concerning prophets like Abraham and Noah. The Qur'an offers a unique perspective on the origins and development of language, attributing the gift of language directly to divine intervention. By studying these narratives in dialogue with contemporary linguistic models such as language contact theory and creolization, scholars could gain new insights into how early linguistic communities may have interacted and influenced one another.

Language contact theory, which examines how languages influence each other when speakers of different languages interact, is particularly relevant to studying linguistic evolution in the post-Flood period. As Noah's descendants migrated and established new communities, they would have encountered other groups with different languages or dialects, leading to linguistic borrowing, code-switching, and forming pidgins or creoles. Creolization refers to the process by which a new, stable language develops





from mixing different languages, often due to prolonged contact between speakers of different linguistic backgrounds. Researchers could better understand how linguistic diversity emerged in the early post-Flood world by comparing the Qur'anic narrative with historical language contact and creolization examples.

Another important avenue for future research is the potential for collaboration between scholars of Qur'anic studies, linguistics, and archaeology. By bringing together experts from these different fields, we can better understand the historical and linguistic developments described in the Qur'an. For instance, archaeological evidence of ancient migrations, trade routes, and settlements could provide an essential context for understanding the linguistic evolution during this period. Archaeologists can shed light on how different communities interacted and communicated by studying artifacts such as inscriptions, pottery, and tools. This, in turn, can help linguists and Qur'anic scholars better understand the historical context in which the linguistic developments described in the Qur'an occurred.

The framework for future research would also benefit significantly from comparative studies of other religious texts that discuss the origins of language. Many religious traditions, including Judaism and Christianity, contain narratives that describe the early development of language, often in ways that parallel the Qur'anic account. For example, the biblical story of the Tower of Babel presents a similar narrative of linguistic diversification, in which God confounds the languages of humanity as a punishment for their hubris. By comparing these religious texts, scholars can explore the similarities and differences in how different faith traditions understand the origins and evolution of language. This comparative analysis could facilitate interfaith dialogue, fostering a deeper understanding of language's role in human culture and spirituality.

The proposed interdisciplinary approach would help clarify the processes of linguistic diversification and convergence, enabling a



richer understanding of how language, religion, and culture have shaped human history. By integrating insights from historical geography, population ecology, sociolinguistics, Qur'anic studies, and archaeology, scholars can better understand the factors that drove linguistic change in the early post-Flood period. This approach would deepen our understanding of the historical and linguistic context in which the Qur'anic narrative takes place and contribute to broader discussions about the origins and evolution of language in human society.

Additionally, this framework would open new possibilities for exploring the theological implications of linguistic diversity. The Qur'an presents linguistic diversity as part of God's divine plan and studying this diversity in greater detail could lead to new insights into the spiritual significance of language. For instance, researchers could explore language's role in shaping religious identity and practice by examining how different linguistic communities have preserved and transmitted the Qur'an and other sacred texts. This, in turn, could inform broader discussions about the relationship between language, religion, and culture, offering new perspectives on language's role in shaping human experience.

The proposed framework for future research represents an exciting opportunity to explore the complex interplay between language, migration, and religion in the early post-Flood period. By drawing on insights from multiple disciplines and comparing religious narratives with contemporary linguistic theories, scholars can better understand how linguistic diversity emerged and evolved. This interdisciplinary approach will enhance our understanding of the Qur'anic narrative and contribute to broader discussions about the role of language in shaping human history and culture.



## CONCLUSION

The Quranic narrative of linguistic origins and development offers a unique perspective that contrasts sharply with secular theories of language evolution. This paper has explored the post-Flood linguistic landscape depicted in the Qur'an, mainly through Dhu'l-Qarnayn's encounters with various communities. The analysis suggests that during Dhu'l-Qarnayn's era, there was likely a predominantly unified linguistic landscape, with minimal variation among significant groups. However, the narrative also acknowledges the existence of isolated communities that may have begun to experience linguistic divergence earlier than others.

Dhu'l-Qarnayn's encounters provide valuable insights into the linguistic state of his time. They indicate that while a common language may have prevailed across vast regions, the early stages of linguistic diversity were beginning to emerge, particularly in geographically or socially isolated groups. This scenario suggests that Dhu'l-Qarnayn's era might have been a transitional period in linguistic history, where the seeds of linguistic diversity were sown, eventually leading to the wide variety of languages seen in later periods.

Further research is needed to explore the historical and linguistic evidence that can shed light on the Qur'anic narrative of language development. Interdisciplinary collaboration between theologians, linguists, and historians is essential to deepen our understanding of the complex relationship between language, culture, and religion as depicted in the Qur'an. Such research can also help bridge the gap between religious and secular perspectives on language evolution, offering a more comprehensive view of humanity's linguistic heritage.

In conclusion, while the Qur'an provides a distinctive framework for understanding the origins and diversification of language, the story of Dhu'l-Qarnayn remains a rich source of inquiry. By examining this narrative in the context of religious belief and lin-



guistic theory, scholars can gain deeper insights into the processes that have shaped linguistic diversity throughout human history. This paper thus contributes to the ongoing scholarly dialogue, encouraging further exploration of the Qur'anic perspective on linguistic evolution and its implications for understanding the development of human languages.

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## NOTES

1. Hiskens et al., "Merging and drifting apart," 2–3.
2. Pachenko and Bilous, "Various theories about the origin of language," 82–83.
3. Mufwene, "Language evolution: Contact, competition, and change."
4. Qur'an 2:31.
5. Qur'an 55:1–4.
6. Aramaki, "Sound Categorization and Conceptual Priming for Nonlinguistic and Linguistic Sounds."
7. Saleem, "The Origin of Language: An Analysis of Theories from Qur'anic Perspective," 8–10.
8. Qur'an 18:83–98.
9. Qur'an 18:93.
10. Saleem, "The Origin of Language: An Analysis of Theories from Quranic Perspective," 8–9.



11. Aramaki, "Sound Categorization and Conceptual Priming for Nonlinguistic and Linguistic Sounds."
12. Pachenko and Bilous, "Various theories about the origin of language," 84–85.
13. Qur'an 2:31.
14. Qur'an 55:3–4.
15. Qur'an 30:22.
16. Qur'an 14:4.
17. Qur'an 21:107.
18. Qur'an 11:40–48.
19. Qur'an 71:26.
20. Qur'an 37:75–77.
21. Qur'an 29:14.
22. Harris, "The Romance Languages," 1–4.
23. Darnell, "The Roman Language Policy: Its Parts, Presence, and Consequences," 9–10.
24. Shaffi, *Tafsīr Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, 636.
25. Sanford, "Genetic Entropy Recorded in the Bible?" 4–7.
26. Qur'an 18:93.
27. Qur'an 18:83.
28. Qur'an 18:84.
29. Qur'an 18:86.
30. Qur'an 18:90.
31. Shaffi, *Tafsīr Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, 647–656.
32. Qur'an 18:86.
33. Qur'an 2:115.
34. Qur'an 18:93.
35. Shaffi, *Tafsīr Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, 647–656.
36. Qur'an 7:150.
37. Trentman and Shiri, "The Mutual Intelligibility of Arabic Dialects," 4–6.
38. Shaffi, *Tafsīr Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān*, 647–656.
39. Qur'an 18:86.
40. This is so since Abraham is considered the father of subsequent nations, as referenced in Qur'an 14:35–41 and similar verses.



41. Hinskens et al., “Merging and drifting apart: Convergence and divergence of dialects across political borders,” 4–8.
42. Labov, *Principles of Linguistic Change*, vol. 3 (Cognitive and Cultural Factors).
43. Trudgill, *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society*, chapter 2.
44. Renfrew, *Approaches to social archeology*, 150–200.
45. Owens, *Linguistic History of Arabic*, chapter 2.
46. Thomason and Kaufman, *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics*.
47. Qur’an 18:84.
48. Qur’an 18:93.
49. Qur’an 18:86–90.

