The collocation of Mubeen In The Holy Quran

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ABSTRACT

Collocation is the habitual co-occurrence of lexical items. The initial focus of this paper is to provide a lexical analysis of the collocation of Mubeen in the Holy Quran. The study falls into two sections. The first is devoted to providing a theoretical background of collocation, its nature and types.

The second section outlines six approaches proposed by linguists to account for the phenomenon of collocation. These six approaches are discussed in terms of the collocation of Mubeen in the Holy Quran to see how far they are relevant and efficient in the analysis of lexical relations in such a challenging text as the Holy Quran.

Introduction

Dealing with a religious text like the Holy Quran is both challenging and awesome. Similarly, to say that Allah used this word rather than that is an assumption which may amount to blasphemy and sacrilege, at least to some.

Both the nature of the text in question and the investigation tools the researchers use are very problematic. This due to the fact that the Quranic text does not lend itself easily to investigation except to those who have a solid knowledge of Arabic in general and the language of the Holy Quran in particular. Therefore, it would be so daring a task to deal stylistically or lexically with an original and authentic Arabic text using borrowed tools from English and linguistics.

Furthermore, it is quite certain that the Holy Quran is of a Divine origin revealed by Allah to the Prophet. It came as a challenge to the highly eloquent pre-Islamic Arabs; hence, the seemingly far-fetched idea of applying the *collocation theory* (if one may call it so), which is not generally adopted by Arab text-analysts, to the analysis of the language of the Holy Quran, where every word counts a great deal.

Setting all these questions, and many similar ones, aside; and capitalizing upon intuition and the scant knowledge of the Quranic language, this paper is an attempt to reveal some aspects, however microscopic, of the nature of the Quranic language through the lexical analysis of the collocation of *Mubeen*.

Section One
A Theoretical Background

It is believed that collocation is a feature of all languages. Words (henceforth lexical items) do not work in a vacuum. They string in linear sequences to form structures on the grammatical level, and collocations on the lexical level. However, the picture is a bit hazy, particularly with collocation, and it tends to get more and more murkier the more one goes through the several explanations put forward to account for the nature of collocation and why some lexical items keep the company of one collocate rather than the other. Some of these views will be discussed in due course in relation to the collocation of *Mubeen*. So, it is plausible at this point to begin with the definition of collocation.

1.1 Collocation

Approximately most of the definitions put forward by linguists agree that collocation is "the habitual co-occurrence of individual lexical items," (Crystal, 1997: 69-70). The occurrence of these lexical items is usually predictable. Mitchell (quoted in Bolinger, 1975: 102) defines it as "an abstract composite element... which can exhibit its own distribution qua copositum." It is part of the cohesive nature of language that it organizes itself on all levels of abstraction and reinforces itself against any single analysis. Why does *strong* go with *tea,* while *powerful* with *car*? Is it a matter of meaning, form or phonic harmony? Or is it a matter of convention formulated through

the different stages of language development? It is this challenge which collocation posits to linguists. Through collocation, language does show its potentiality to organize itself and manifests its arbitrariness simultaneously as well.

Halliday and Hasan (1976: 289) view collocation as a matter of historical development. For them, each occurrence of a lexical item carries with it its textual history, "a particular collocational environment that has been built up in the course of the creation of the text." This environment will then provide "the context within which the item will be incarnated on this particular occasion," (ibid.).

1.2   Collocation   and   the   Paradigmatic   and   Syntagmatic levels of Language :

In any language, lexical items tend to enter into two basic types of relations: *paradigmatic* and *syntagmatic.* On the paradigmatic level, lexical items cluster together in sets by association. For example, a lexical item such as *furniture* evokes many other items associated with it like *chair, table, sofa,* and the like. Similarly, items like *strong, powerful, vigorous, mighty* and others, are also associatively linked. But it is only on the syntagmatic level that these lexical items make their presence and distinctiveness observable. Most of them are mutually exclusive on the syntagmatic level; in other words, they do not co-occur freely in similar contexts. They vary to a greater or lesser degree with regard to the freedom with which they can be combined in syntagms with other lexical items, (Lyons, 1977: 261). A regularly cited example in this respect is Halliday's (1976: 71) *powerful car* vs. *strong tea.* According to Halliday, "the paradigmatic relation of *power* and *strong* is not constant, but depends on its linear [syntagmatic] sequence into which each enters." Therefore, such sequences as *strong car* and *powerful tea* would be rejected as *uncollocational*.

Lyons (op. cit.: p. 262) holds Porzig's view that it is impossible to describe the "collocationally restricted lexemes [lexical items] without taking into account the set of lexemes with which they are syntagmatically... connected." Thus, it turns out to be that the lexical item acquires its meaning from the environment in which it appears. This environment determines the "instant meaning or text meaning of the item which is unique to each specific instance," (Halliday and

Hasan, op. cit.: p. 289). This is very much true of *Mubeen* whose real meaning is specified only with reference to the very lexical item with which it comes to collocate as will be shown below.

1.3   Collocational Restrictions :

The term '*collocational restrictions*' is reminiscent of *selectional restrictions* which specify the conditions governing the permitted combinations of lexical items within a given grammatical context (Crystal, op. cit.: p. 342). Collocational restrictions, however, are not concerned with grammar; rather, they work on the lexical level. They attempt to give an answer as to why, for instance, *the pig passed away* is uncollocational (though it is grammatical).

For Palmer (1976: 97), there are three types of collocational restrictions, which may be given the following labels:
1. **Semantic restrictions:** lexical items which are unlikely to collocate because their juxtaposition would produce illogical forms like *damp writing, brief mountain,* though forms like these are fairly acknowledged in poetry.
2. **Probabilistic restrictions:** here, lexical items are not likely to co-occur because of range. For example, *a buxom chicken* is unlexical. The collocational range of *buxom* can never include animals unless it is meant to produce a certain humorous effect.
3. **Formal restrictions:** these restrictions are not related to meaning nor to range. *Green,* for example, collocates with *jealousy* (as opposed to *red jealousy* or *brown* or *black* even though there is no "referential basis for the link," (Crystal, op. cit.: p. 70).

One may add a further type of restrictions, namely *historical restrictions*; or restrictions that have developed over a long period of time, or ones that have appeared on certain occasions and tended to be coded, preserved and institutionalized through time, so that lexical items are historically collocating with each other as in *white elephant, Parkinson disease, Hobson's choice* and the like. Nevertheless, most of these collocations are fossilized, and it is fairly plausible to classify them as idioms rather than collocations simply because they are not susceptible to commutation and rearrangement processes as collocations most often are.

1.4   Collocational Range and Overlap

For each lexical item there is a set of limited number of collocates. Thus, collocational range is the "potential of items to collocate," (Crystal, op. cit.). An item like *economical* has a list of collocates constituting its collocational range such as *affairs, sanctions, policy* and so on.

Collocational overlap, on the other hand, is "the tendency of items to share part of their collocational range," (Enkvist & Thompson, 1969: 73). Again, this can be exemplified by the lexical item *political* which overlaps with the item *economic* in almost all of its collocates.

The collocational range of an item is established by statistical methods. In the Holy Quran, for example, **19** word types (different lexical items) out of **97** lexical items constitute the collocational range of *Mubeen.*

1.5   Collocational Types

Many types of collocations have been identified by linguists depending on the nature of the collocations at hand. Hill (2002:2-3) makes a typological distinction between four types of collocation. His categorization is based upon the criteria of familiarity (Firth's *usual vs. unusual collocations*) and range. Hill sees that it is instrumental in thinking of collocation to be on a cline ranging from *unique, fixed, strong* to *flexible* or *weak* collocations.

1.5.1 Unique Collocations

The term *unique* may appear a bit question begging. However, it refers to those items that have the tendency to co-occur in restricted contexts. Among the examples Hill cites representing this category of collocation are *leg room, foot the bill,* where *foot* is used as a verb meaning *to pay (the bill).* However, one cannot imagine *footing the invoice* or *footing the coffee,* Hill adds.

1.5.2 Strong Collocations

These collocations can be defined as those items which have comparatively limited range of collocates. They constitute a large number of collocations, although they are not unique. One can speak of *trenchant criticism,* or *rancid butter,* but this does not necessarily mean that other things cannot be so.

1.5.3 Weak Collocations

Those lexical items which "co-occur with greater than random frequency" are weak collocations (Hill, Ibid.). They include items such as color terms, evaluative and descriptive adjectives like *good, bad, nice, long, high...etc*. Many things can be *good, long, short* and so on.

What makes a collocation unique, strong or weak is the potential range of items with which the nodal item tends to co-occur. Halliday (1970: 63) introduces the term *lexical power* to refer to "the measure of the restrictions on high probability collocations." In a sense, "the fewer the item with which a given item is likely to collocate ... the more powerful it is said to be," (Ibid.). *Mubeen* is not a unique collocation, nor is it weak. It has a limited set of collocates that resist substitution or change due to the nature of the Holy Quranic discourse which admits no transformation or change. This linguistic evidence makes *Mubeen* a markedly strong collocate with the other items it co-occurs with.

1.5.4 Medium-strength Collocations

This type of collocation makes up the greater portion of what people speak and write. Examples of this include:

> *Hold a conversation*
> *Make a mistake*
> *Perform an operation*
> *Drive a car*
> *Ride a bicycle*
> *...etc.*

To this cline, suggested by Hill, one may further add another kind of collocation, i.e. restricted collocations. This type is characterized by being restricted to one or two items to the degree that they can be considered idiomatic. However, they differ from idioms in that their meanings are quite predictable and their order can relatively be changed. Under this type onomatopoeic words and collective nouns can be categorized:

> *The gibber of apes*   *apes gibber*
> *The quack of ducks*   *ducks quack*

The hooting of owls   *owls hoot*
A brood of chicken
A colony of ants
A pride of lions
...etc.

Aisenstadt (1979: 54) introduces two further types of collocation: *frozen* vs. *free collocations.* Frozen collocations are fixed; they correspond to Hill's *strong collocations*, and consist of two or more items which are unidiomatic in meaning and are "restricted in commutability not only by semantics, but also by usage." *Rancid butter* and *addled eggs* are illustrative of this type.

Free or usual collocations, on the other hand, are "the combination of two or more items with free commutability within the semantic or grammatical framework of language," (Ibid.). Again, this kind of collocation matches with Hill's *weak collocations.*

All these instances are taken to be collocations from a semantic point of view. However, collocations can also be viewed in terms of their structure, or the sequence in which they align. Following Hill (op. cit.: p.4), Heaton (1975), McMordie and Seidle (1979), *et al.,* collocations can be reduced down to five patterns:

Pattern   *Example*

1. adjective + Noun   ***heavy traffic***
2. Adverb + Adjective   ***extremely vicious***
3. Adjective + Preposition   ***replete with***
4. Noun + Noun   ***a stone's throw***
5. Verb + Noun   ***set an exam***

Mubeen, like other adjectives in Arabic, always modifies a noun. Again, in Arabic the unmarked form is that adjectives follow the noun they modify. Thus, the pattern of *Mubeen* would be:

Pattern	Noun + Mubeen
Arabic example	NaTheerum Mubeen
Word-for-word translation	Warner clear
English	Clear warner

This table shows that *Mubeen* is the nodal item and is therefore constant. What varies is the noun with which *Mubeen* collocates, and this what makes of *Mubeen* a particularly peculiar phenomenon in Holy Quran since, normally, it is the adjective that varies relative to the noun which remains fixed throughout. In such a case, where nouns are fixed, it will be quite easy to account for the collocation in terms of the distinctive features or selection restrictions, which the varying adjectives display about the noun they collocate with.

Therefore, the selection restrictions and the other approaches put forward in the section to follow falter to answer the question as to why *Mubeen* and no other synonymous or semi-synonymous adjective is used.

SECTION TWO
APPROACHES TO THE COLLOCATION OF *MUBEEN*

As was indicated above, *Mubeen* is the nodal item; it is the fixed element in the collocational constructions. What makes *Mubeen* hard to account for is its collocability with nouns having totally contrasting or opposing meanings and features. Let us see then how the collocation of *Mubeen* fares in the approaches already cited by Leherer (1974: 173-183).

2.1   The Lexical Approach

According to this approach, taken up by Firth and his followers, co-occurrence restrictions (or selectional restrictions) are a "function of particular lexical items." Firth (in Leherer, op. cit.: p. 173) argues that "one level of or aspect of the meaning of a word is determined by

its collocational environment (i.e. on the syntagmatic axis, or level of language)." So, the multiple meanings of *Mubeen,* according to Firth's view, are only conferred upon it by its collocates. Nevertheless, this approach does not state the type of relationship obtaining between the members of the collocational set. Further, it gives no explanation as to why *Mubeen* and no other item frequently occurs in collocation.

2.2   The Semantic Approach

This approach is exemplified by the works of McCawly and other generative semanticists like Paul Postal and George Lackoff. It states that the "co-occurrence restrictions are the result of the lexical items and that collocations are reflections of this fact,"(ibid., p. 176). These co-occurrence restrictions are to be stated in terms of what semantic features may occur together. Lexical items such as *the vase broke* may be accounted for by saying that the verb *break* requires an object with the feature   [+fragile], so that sequences such as *the book broke* are to be rejected as unlexical simply because *book* does not have this feature, namely [+ fragile].

But how far is this true of *Mubeen* ? *Mubeen* requires a noun with the feature   [+concrete] or at least [+ visible], while it can be recognized that most of the nouns with which *Mubeen* goes are lacking in this feature. For example, *trial, account, adversary,* and many others, obviously lack the feature [+ visible].

This complexity of the selectional or co-occurrence restrictions has led Weinreich (1966) to propose what he calls *transfer-features approach.*

2.3   Transfer-Features Approach

Weinreich proposed this approach as a substitute for the inadequacy inherent in the selection restrictions or the semantic approach. The difference between these approaches can be brought about in the following example:
Susan broke the bird.
It has just been mentioned above that the verb *break* requires an object (or subject in the ergative) with the feature [+ fragile]. This fact makes the sentence above ungrammatical or unlexical construction. However, Weinreich sees that the feature [fragile] would be transferred to *bird.* Then one of the semantic implications of the sentence is that the *bird* talked about is fragile (as, for example, this bird is made of glass or ceramics).

Weinreich's proposal is context-dependent and is restricted to the extensional meaning of lexical items apart from their intensional meaning. Hence, it works within a limited set of nouns, yet it can work more powerfully in works of literature where human characteristics are transferred to objects as in synecdoche and metaphor.

As is shown in 2.2 above, *Mubeen* collocates equally with nouns having and lacking in the feature [+ concrete] or [+ visible]. For instance, in Arabic *adversary* may be used to refer to *people, animals, the elements, the Devil,* and even to the self of *man* himself. It is certain that the feature [+ concrete] or [+ visible] cannot be assigned to *self,* nor can it be to *adversary, trial, authority, error,* etc. Hence, the transfer features approach is as inefficient as the lexical and semantic approaches to answer the question raised so far. This, then, calls for the possibility of seeking a more valid explanation.

2.4   The Lexico-Semantic Approach

The inadequacy of the previous approaches motivated Leherer (op. cit.: p.183) to put forward an approach which is a configuration of the lexical and semantic approaches. This can be referred to as "the Lexico-semantic approach." It is, nevertheless, as inadequate as its predecessors simply because it presumes that, following the lexical approach, one can account for collocability of lexical items with no need for providing any explanation as far as their selectional restrictions are concerned. On the other hand, other collocations are to be determined by stating their selectional restrictions as in the semantic approach.

In the case of *Mubeen,* however; which are of the features or selectional restrictions of its collocates to be kept maintained and which are to be left out? If all the items are to be specified in terms of their selection restrictions, the problem will still persist since neither the semantic approach nor its lexical counterpart can answer the question of *Mubeen's* frequent use. This question may find a partial answer in the positions taken up hereunder.[1]
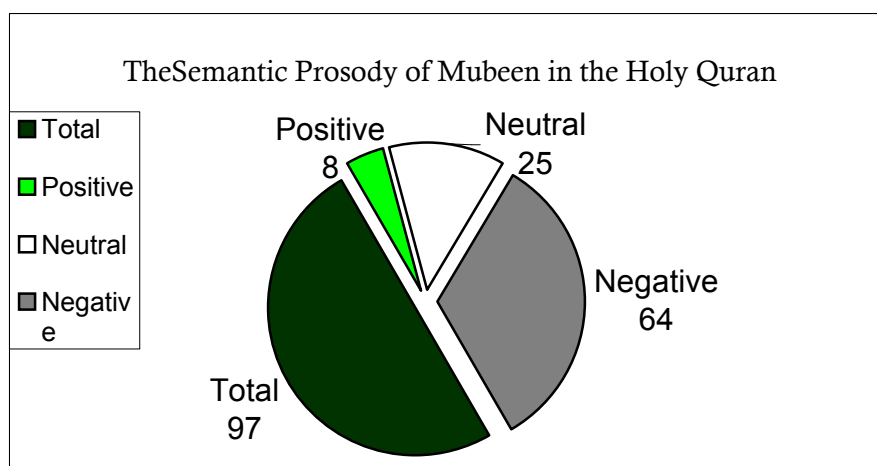
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[1] These positions are not approaches in the strict sense of the term. They are merely a consideration of some aspects of collocation and are loosely referred to her as approaches

2.5   The Semantic-prosody Approach

Put rather crudely, the semantic prosody means the *good* or *bad* connotations a combination of lexical items gives the speaker and/ or reader (Rundell, 2002: 1). An aspect of the collocation of *Mubeen* is that it is *semantically prosodic* with lexical items of negative evaluation. In a sense, most of *Mubeen's* collocates carry negative connotations.

Mubeen recurs (97) times in the Holy Quran. Out of these (97) occurrences there are (64) occurrences where *Mubeen* collocates with connotatively negative items like *adversary, magic, error, snake, warner,* etc. Moreover, the total number of word-types in these (64) word-tokens is (15), (cf. the chart below).

The other lexical items constituting the (97) collocates of *Mubeen* include only

The Semantic Prosody of Mubeen in the Holy Quran

- Total
- Positive
- Neutral
- Negative

Positive 8

Neutral 25

Negative 64

Total 97

eight word-tokens (forming only four word-types) and have positive evaluation. These are *prophet, Quran, light,* and *victory.* The rest (25)

word-tokens, including only six word-types, are of neutral evaluation; *thing, book, authority* (or *evidence*), *highway[2], Arabic* and *comet.*

2.6   The Metaphorical extension Approach

This approach is taken up by structural semanticists to account for the observation that most lexical items, "though [...] still preserve their original meaning, will come to be applied to a wider range of things and in a wider situation," (Lyons, 1977: 262-263).

Accordingly, these lexical items which undergo metaphorical extensions (while retaining their central or original meaning) tend to enter into a range of collocations compatible with the number of nuances or shades of meaning they acquire. Conversely, items which do not extend their central meaning will be confined to a highly restricted set of collocations.

In the same vein, Lyons (Ibid.) proposes the term *encapsulation* to refer to the "creation of a single more specific lexeme to the work, as it were, of a single syntagm." For instance, the lexical item *kick* encapsulates the meaning *to strike with foot.* But how this is true of *Mubeen* is not certain. The various meanings of *Mubeen* in Arabic seem to derive from the Holy Quran. It, *Mubeen,* can be said to have encapsulated the meaning of *clear and convincing, open and plain to see, making things clear,* and many others (see the list below).

Hence, according to this approach, *Mubeen* has undergone a considerable metaphorical extension through the accumulation of a variety of meanings conferred upon it by the very context in which it appears, and this makes it potentially amenable to co-occur with different collocations in the Holy Quran. But Lyon's definition of *encapsulation* presupposes that the lexical item itself works as a *single syntagm*; and that this item has its own encapsulated meaning irrespective of whether or not it is forming a collocation. Moreover, it is not certain whether *Mubeen's* extended meanings are an offshoot of

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[2] In some *tafãseer (exegeses), highway* is rendered as *Imam* (both are homophones in classical Arabic). Thus, the number of the positively evaluated collocates would be seven rather than six, whereas the number of collocates with neutral evaluation would be five.

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                              ┌─── an avowed (enemy)
                              ├─── manifest (error)
                              │
                              ├──── perspicuous (book)
                              │
                              ├──── evident (magic)
                              │
                              ├──── plain for all to see
                              │
                              ├──── clear (warner...etc.)
                              │
                              ├──── makes things clear
                              │
                              ├──── bright to see
                              │
  Mubeen ──────────────────── open (highway) and plain to see
                              │
                              ├──── (Arabic) pure and clear
                              │
                              ├──── a signal (victory)
                              │
                              ├──── mere (wizard)
                              │
                              ├──── obvious (lie)
                              │
                              ├──── (something) clear and convincing
                              │
                              ├──── (a messenger) making things clear
                              │
                              ├──── obviously
                              │
                              ├──── (erring) manifestly
                              │
                              ├──── clearly
                              │
                              ├──── visible smoke
                              │
                              ├──── sheer (loss)
                              │
                              └──── avowedly (ingrate)
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accumulation through the development of language that made it eligible to occur in different contexts, or that these context are the reason for *Mubeen's* kaleidoscopic semantic feature as is shown in the many facets of meaning it has, as illustrated below[1]:

As this list shows, *Mubeen* incorporates not only various lexical items and meanings, but also functions of other grammatical

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[1] The translated version of the Holy Quran adopted here is produced by the Islamic and Guidance Presidency of King Fahad Printing Complex.

categories like adverbs and verbs within modifying (reduced) relative clauses. All this gives *Mubeen* the versatility and flexibility to occur in different linguistic contexts. Moreover, this makes it a lexically powerful item which includes and excludes at the same time all its variants and synonyms.

2.7 The Harmony of Mubeen in the Holy Quran

The phonological harmony which *Mubeen* strikes in the make up of the Quranic verses is also a factor in its use. What enhances the the collocational power of *Mubeen* is that it rhymes with the Quranic verse-ending in the contexts in which it occurs. In all its occurrences, *Mubeen* punctuates the verse and is therefore quite predictable. Further, it contributes to the rhythmic structure of verses in no less degree than rhyme. That is one of the reasons the pre-Islamic Arabs mistook the Holy Quran for poetry.

Moreover, rhyme (and other schemes) is not used only as a stylistic nicety; rather, it is also deployed to produce meaning since "equivalence in sound [...] inevitably involves semantic equivalence," (Jacobson, 1958: 48). It is also noted that every phonological repetition in the Holy Quran is meaningful. In a sense, "what is repeated in the Holy Quran has a marked semantic function in every single occurrence," (Al-Sa'ad, 1995: 29). However, this meaning may or may not be accessible to the lay Muslim reader/listener.

Conclusion:

The preceding lexical study has attempted to provide an account of collocation in general and that of *Mubeen* in particular. It has been shown throughout the study how *Mubeen* is hard to deal with and account for. This makes *Mubeen* a peculiar phenomenon in the Holy Quran and a testimony of its Divine origin.

What also testifies to the idiosyncrasy of the Quranic discourse is that the available approaches surveyed so far fall short to give a convincing account of the peculiar lexical power of *Mubeen* in terms of its collocability and collocational range. These approaches raise more questions than they are efficient to answer. So the issue is still open for further research and investigation, and human linguistic endeavours; though pooled, would never embrace the Divine nature of language in the Holy Quran.

INDIX
THE DISTRIBUTION OF *MUBEEN* IN THE HOLY QURAN

Collocation	Recurrence	Place in the Holy Quran
Open wrong	3	(4: 20, 50, 112)*
A clear authority	12	(4: 91, 144, 153/ 11: 96/ 14:10/ 23:45/ 27:21/ 37:156/ 40: 23/ 44: 91/ 51: 38/ 52: 38)
An avowed enemy	10	(2: 168, 208/ 4: 101/ 17: 53/ 6: 142/ 7:22/ 12:5/ 28;15/ 36:60/ 43: 62)
Sheer loss	1	(4; 119)
A clear light	3	(4; 174/ 5:15/ 24:12)
Manifest error	18	(2: 164/ 6:74/ 7: 60/ 12: 5,8,30/ 19:38/ 26:97/ 28: 85/ 31: 11/ 34:24/ 36:24,47/ 39: 22/ 43:40/ 46: 32/ 61: 2/ 67: 16)
Perspicuous book	7	(5:15/ 6:59/ 10:61/ 11:6/ 27:1,75/ 3:34)
Evident magic	9	(5:110/ 6:7/ 10:76/ 11:7/ 27:13/ 34:43/ 37:15/ 46:7/ 61:6)
Clear warner	11	(7:184/ 11:25/ 22:49/ 26:115/ 29:50/ 38:70/ 46:9/ 51:50,51/ 67:9/ 71:2)
A Quran that makes things clear	2	(15:1/ 36:69)
A fiery comet, bright to see	1	(15: 18)
An open highway, plain to see	2	(15: 79/ 36: 12)
An open opponent	2	(27:4/ 36: 77)
Arabic, pure and clear	2	(16: 103/ 26: 196)
Something, clear and convincing	1	(26: 30)
A serpent, plain for all to see	2	(7:107/ 26:32)
One erring manifestly	1	(28: 18)
One that do right, and one that do obviously wrong to themselves	1	(37: 113)
Avowedly ingrate	1	(43: 15)
Clear account in dispute	1	(43:18)
A messenger making things clear	2	(43: 29/ 44: 13)
Manifest trial	1	(44: 33)
A signal victory	1	(48: 1)
A mere wizard	1	(10: 2)
An obvious lie	1	(24: 12)
Plainly visible smoke	1	(44: 10)
	Total: 97	*(Surah number: Verse number)

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