

Phonemic Hermeneutics of Eschatological Intonation in Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah Recitation

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the eschatological pitch movements in Misyārī Rāsyid al-‘Afāsī’s recitation of Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah and to interpret their semantic-pragmatic meanings through al-‘Ani’s pitch-level framework. Using a descriptive qualitative phonemic approach, this study examines twenty-nine eschatological verses selected from Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah based on classical exegetical boundaries. The primary data were obtained from al-‘Afāsī’s murattal audio recitation, while the semantic baseline was established through six authoritative tafsir works. Data were collected through repeated listening, note-taking, pitch-pattern classification, and digital pitch-contour visualization. The analysis applied Nasution’s five-category pitch typology and al-‘Ani’s four-level pitch notation. The findings show that falling pitch dominates the corpus, appearing in 41.4% of the verses, followed by falling-rising pitch at 31.0%, rising-falling pitch at 17.2%, rising pitch at 6.9%, and flat pitch at 3.4%. The application of al-‘Ani’s framework indicates that 37.9% of the data show semantic-pragmatic congruence, 13.8% show incongruence, and 48.3% remain undetermined due to the complexity of Qur’anic illocutionary functions. The most significant finding appears in Q. 75:40, where an interrogative construction is recited with falling pitch to encode absolute theological affirmation. This study proposes the concept of phonemic hermeneutics, namely the interpretive function of pitch in Qur’anic recitation. The findings contribute to Arabic prosody, Qur’anic phonology, and taḥsīn pedagogy by showing that intonation is not merely vocal ornamentation, but a semantic-pragmatic device that supports meaning-conscious recitation.

Keywords: *Al-Qiyāmah; eschatological intonation; Misyārī Rāsyid al-‘Afāsī; phonemic hermeneutics; Qur’anic recitation.*

INTRODUCTION

Language conveys meaning not only through lexical and grammatical structure, but also through suprasegmental features such as intonation, stress, pause, duration, and rhythm. In phonological studies, these features operate beyond individual phonemes and contribute to grammatical, pragmatic, and emotional meaning. Among these suprasegmental features, intonation plays a particularly important role because changes in pitch movement may transform the status of an utterance, for example from statement to question, from certainty to doubt, or from calmness to tension. Modern prosodic studies have shown that intonation is closely related to communicative meaning, speaker attitude, and the listener’s interpretation of speech (Prieto, 2015; Roettger & Grice, 2019).

In Arabic, the study of sound occupies a distinctive position because Arabic functions not only as a language of communication, but also as the language of revelation, worship, and Islamic scholarly transmission. The traditions of *tajwīd*, *qirā’ah*, and *‘ilm al-aṣwāt* demonstrate that articulation, sound length, pause, rhythm, and pitch in Qur’anic recitation are inseparable from the integrity of meaning. Arabic also has a complex prosodic system shaped by register variation, ranging from Classical Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic to contemporary Arabic dialects. Research on Arabic prosody shows that register variation affects intonation choice, utterance structure, and pragmatic function in Arabic communication (Hellmuth, 2022; Watson, 2002).

Qur’anic recitation provides a rich field for phonemic and prosodic analysis because reciting the Qur’an requires not only accurate articulation but also meaningful delivery. The Qur’anic command to recite with *tartīl* indicates that recitation has spiritual, pedagogical, and semantic dimensions. In the act of recitation, the *qārī* does not merely pronounce the text, but also animates the message of the verses through pitch choice, stress, rhythm, and pause. Thus, Qur’anic recitation can be understood as both a linguistic and hermeneutic event, because the

sound produced by the reciter contributes to how listeners understand the Qur'anic message (Gade, 2004; Nelson, 2001; Prieto, 2015).

The urgency of this study becomes stronger in light of the tendency of modern Qur'anic recitation to be reduced to a mechanical practice that emphasizes vocal beauty and technical accuracy while giving less attention to the relationship between pitch contour and textual meaning. Neurolinguistic research shows that prosody is processed rapidly by the brain and plays an important role in distinguishing communicative functions such as questions and statements. Tomasello et al. (2022) demonstrate that listeners process communicative functions conveyed through speech prosody within a very short time window. This confirms that intonation is not merely an aesthetic feature, but part of the cognitive and communicative mechanism of meaning (Tomasello et al., 2022).

Empirical studies on Qur'anic intonation remain relatively limited, especially studies that connect pitch patterns with interpretation, semantic-pragmatic function, and thematic characteristics of verses. Existing studies have examined phonetics, rhythm, prosody, and acoustic processing in Qur'anic recitation, but many of them still focus on sound accuracy, automatic recognition, or technical classification. Al-Hajeid et al. (2022), for instance, investigated rhythm in relation to Qur'anic subject matters, while Alqadasi et al. (2024) examined phoneme segmentation in Qur'anic recitation through speech-processing methods. However, studies that interpret intonation as an active interpretive act performed by the *qāri'* still require stronger conceptual and methodological development (Al-Hajeid et al., 2022; Alqadasi et al., 2024).

Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah is a relevant object for this study because it contains a strong eschatological discourse, including divine oaths, human denial of resurrection, cosmic destruction, human accountability, the condition of the faithful and the wicked, and the affirmation of God's absolute power over life and death. Such discourse depends heavily on rhetorical intensity and pragmatic effect, making pitch choice in recitation potentially significant in reinforcing the theological meaning of the verses. In this context, the recitation of Misyārī Rāsyid al-'Afāsī is important because his *murattal* style is clear, stable, and widely used as a model of recitation in Muslim communities, including Indonesia. The present study focuses on twenty-nine eschatological verses in Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah based on thematic boundaries derived from classical exegesis.

The state of the art reveals three main tendencies. First, general prosodic studies have established that intonation is closely connected to meaning, pragmatic function, and cognitive processing. Second, studies on Arabic prosody have shown that intonation varies according to register and speech context. Third, Qur'anic recitation studies have begun to use acoustic analysis, but they have not sufficiently developed a hermeneutic reading of the *qāri'*'s pitch choices in thematically specific verses. Therefore, there is an academic need to connect *'ilm al-aṣwāt*, suprasegmental phonology, Qur'anic exegesis, and pragmatics within a more integrated analytical framework (Hellmuth, 2022; Prieto, 2015; Roettger & Grice, 2019).

The research gap lies in the absence of systematic analysis linking pitch-pattern classification in Qur'anic recitation with the semantic-pragmatic meaning of Qur'anic verses. Previous studies on Qur'anic pitch have tended to stop at acoustic description or phonetic classification, without asking how a *qāri'*'s pitch choice may function as an interpretive act toward the text. In Qur'anic discourse, grammatical form does not always correspond directly to pragmatic function. A question may function as an affirmation, warning, rebuke, or rejection of an interlocutor's assumption. Therefore, a study is needed that not only records pitch movement, but also interprets the relationship between acoustic contour and verse meaning through exegesis and the illocutionary function of Qur'anic discourse (Al-Smadi, 2022; Borràs-Comes et al., 2019).

Previous studies have demonstrated that the phonetic and prosodic dimensions of Qur'anic recitation can be investigated not merely as aesthetic features but as linguistically significant phenomena. Arifuddin (2018), for example, employed acoustic-phonetic analysis to examine the prosodic characteristics of *qirā'ah sab'ah* in Sūrat al-Fātiḥah, demonstrating the usefulness of acoustic parameters in distinguishing patterns of Qur'anic oral realization. Similarly, Ali (2020) investigated the intonational patterns of different speech-act types in Sūrat al-Ghāshiyah through an autosegmental-metrical approach, indicating that Qur'anic interrogatives and other utterance types exhibit identifiable intonational configurations. More recently, Meliyani, Al Farisi, and Maulani (2024) examined acoustic stress on the particle *mā* /ma:/ in Qur'anic recitation and related differences in stress realization to its grammatical functions. Their findings emphasize the importance of prosody for the appropriate realization and interpretation of Qur'anic utterances, while also showing that acoustic phonetic investigation of the relationship between grammatical structure and recitational realization remains relatively underexplored.

Nevertheless, these studies have generally concentrated on acoustic characteristics, stress, pronunciation, particular speech-act categories, or formal prosodic structures rather than systematically conceptualizing pitch choice itself as an act of interpretation. The novelty of the present study therefore lies in the development of the concept of phonemic hermeneutics, namely the view that pitch choice in Qur'anic recitation can function as an active exegetical act that encodes textual interpretation through acoustic contour. This concept rests on the assumption that the *qāri'* does not merely vocalize the text, but interprets its message through falling, rising, stable, or prosodically incongruent pitch patterns in relation to surface grammatical form. Using Nasution's five-category pitch typology and al-'Ani's pitch-level system, this study examines how pitch patterns in Misyārī Rāsyid al-'Afāsī's recitation of Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah operate as semantic-pragmatic devices. The initial manuscript indicates that falling pitch dominates the corpus and that certain prosodic incongruities reinforce theological meaning, especially in interrogative constructions recited as absolute affirmations.

Based on this background, this study aims to describe and classify the pitch patterns used by Misyārī Rāsyid al-'Afāsī in twenty-nine eschatological verses of Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah and to interpret their semantic-pragmatic meanings through al-'Ani's pitch-level framework. This study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of *'ilm al-aṣwāt*, Arabic prosody, and the hermeneutics of Qur'anic recitation. Practically, it also provides a basis for developing *taḥsīn* curricula that do not only emphasize *makhraj* accuracy and *tajwīd* rules, but also cultivate exegetically grounded prosodic sensitivity so that Qur'anic recitation does not remain merely a technical skill, but becomes a meaning-conscious act of reading (Arifuddin, 2018; Ali, 2020; Meliyani et al., 2024; McKinnon, 2016; Supriyadi et al., 2019).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative phonemic analysis to examine pitch movement in Qur'anic recitation. The design was selected because the study does not aim to manipulate variables or test a predetermined hypothesis, but to observe, classify, and interpret intonation patterns as they appear in an authentic recitation performance. A qualitative design is appropriate for exploratory research in Qur'anic sound studies because the analysis requires close attention to linguistic form, acoustic movement, semantic context, and interpretive meaning rather than statistical generalization alone (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The primary data consisted of the murattal audio recording of Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah recited by Misyārī Rāsyid al-'Afāsī, obtained from an online MP3 source. The study focused on twenty-nine eschatological verses identified as the core eschatological passages of the surah, namely Q. 75:1–2, 3–4, 5–6, 7–10, 11–15, 22–25, and 31–40. The selection of these verses was based on

thematic boundaries derived from classical exegesis, particularly al-Biqā'ī's structural reading of the surah. This means that the corpus was not selected arbitrarily, but was determined according to the thematic unity of eschatological discourse in the surah.

Misyārī Rāsyid al-'Afāsī was selected as the reciter for three reasons. First, he is widely recognized as a prominent contemporary *qāri'* whose recitation style is strongly associated with clarity and meaning-conscious delivery. Second, his recordings are widely circulated and frequently used as references in Muslim communities, including in Indonesia. Third, his *murattal* style is relatively stable and less ornamental than *mujawwad* recitation, making it more suitable for identifying pitch movement, contour direction, and prosodic regularity. This selection supports the study's focus on the relationship between acoustic contour and semantic-pragmatic meaning in Qur'anic recitation (Nelson, 2001; Mujab, 2011).

The secondary data consisted of six authoritative tafsir works used to establish the semantic baseline of each verse: *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, *Tafsīr al-Wajīz*, *Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān*, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāḥ*, and *Tadabbur al-Qur'ān*. These tafsir sources were consulted to avoid relying on a single exegetical interpretation when determining the semantic and pragmatic function of each verse. Through this intertextual validation, the study could compare the reciter's pitch choices with the dominant exegetical meaning of the verse, especially in cases where grammatical form and pragmatic function did not fully coincide.

Data were collected using the listening-and-note-taking technique. The process was conducted in three stages. First, each of the twenty-nine target verses was listened to repeatedly and intensively to identify the direction of pitch movement in each prosodic unit. Second, each observation was recorded using Nasution's five-category pitch typology: falling, rising, falling-rising, rising-falling, and flat pitch. Third, each verse was also coded using al-'Ani's four-level pitch notation, namely /1/ for low pitch, /2/ for mid pitch, /3/ for high pitch, and /4/ for very high pitch. This dual coding allowed the study to describe both the general contour type and the internal pitch-level movement of each verse.

To strengthen the reliability of auditory classification, the audio data were triangulated using digital pitch-contour visualization. The recitation audio was processed through CapCut to produce visual pitch graphs, which were then compared with the researcher's auditory transcription. This procedure was used to reduce the risk of purely subjective listening judgments. However, the study acknowledges that Praat remains the standard software in acoustic phonetic research because it provides more precise measurements of fundamental frequency. Therefore, CapCut was used only as a supporting visualization tool for contour direction, while future studies are recommended to use Praat for more rigorous quantitative acoustic analysis (Grønnum, 2009; Usman et al., 2022).

Data analysis followed the interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the forty verses of Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah were narrowed to twenty-nine eschatological verses, and each verse was segmented into prosodic units. In the data display stage, the pitch patterns were organized in tables according to Nasution's typology and al-'Ani's pitch-level sequence. In the conclusion-drawing stage, the distribution of pitch patterns was interpreted in relation to the semantic-pragmatic function of each verse, using the six tafsir works as interpretive references. This process enabled the study to identify both dominant pitch patterns and cases of prosodic incongruity that support the construction of phonemic hermeneutics.

The validity of the study was maintained through three forms of triangulation. First, source triangulation was conducted by comparing auditory observations with digital pitch visualization. Second, theoretical triangulation was applied by using both Nasution's pitch typology and al-'Ani's pitch-level framework to analyze the same data. Third, intertextual validation was carried out by comparing the semantic interpretation of each verse across six tafsir sources. These procedures were intended to reduce interpretive bias and ensure that the findings were grounded in acoustic observation, linguistic theory, and Qur'anic exegesis.

Methodologically, this study has limitations. The use of CapCut provides sufficient visualization for pitch direction, but it does not offer the level of acoustic precision available in

Praat. In addition, the study focuses on one reciter and one surah, so the findings should be understood as an intensive case analysis rather than a general description of all Qur'anic recitation styles. Future research should expand the corpus by comparing multiple reciters, applying Praat-based acoustic measurement, and examining other thematic passages in the Qur'an to test whether the concept of phonemic hermeneutics can be generalized across different recitational styles and Qur'anic genres.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Acoustic Distribution and Description of Pitch Patterns in Eschatological Verses

The acoustic analysis of the twenty-nine eschatological verses in Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah shows a clear distributional hierarchy among the five pitch patterns identified through Nasution's typology. The corpus consists of verses that contain divine oaths, human denial of resurrection, cosmic upheaval, human accountability, eschatological reward and punishment, and the final affirmation of God's power over life and death. The analysis indicates that falling pitch dominates the recitation, followed by falling-rising pitch, rising-falling pitch, rising pitch, and flat pitch. This distribution suggests that Misyārī Rāsyid al-'Afāsī's recitation of Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah is strongly shaped by the theological finality and assertive character of eschatological discourse.

Table 1. Distribution of Pitch Patterns in the Eschatological Verses of Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah

Pitch Pattern	Verse Numbers (Q. 75)	Total	Percentage
Falling pitch (<i>Nāzilah</i>)	1, 2, 5, 12, 14, 15, 23, 25, 35, 36, 37, 40	12	41.4%
Falling-rising pitch (<i>Nāzilah-Ṣā'idah</i>)	6, 7, 11, 13, 24, 31, 32, 33, 39	9	31.0%
Rising-falling pitch (<i>Ṣā'idah-Nāzilah</i>)	3, 4, 9, 10, 38	5	17.2%
Rising pitch (<i>Ṣā'idah</i>)	8, 34	2	6.9%
Flat pitch (<i>Mustawiyyah</i>)	22	1	3.4%
Total	—	29	100%

Based on Table 1, falling pitch (*al-nāzilah*) appears in twelve verses, representing 41.4% of the corpus. This dominance is significant because falling intonation is widely associated with finality, completion, certainty, and assertion in prosodic studies. In the context of Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah, falling pitch functions as an acoustic marker of theological certainty. It is especially evident in Q. 75:1–2, where the divine oaths are recited with a descending contour that moves from a higher pitch level toward a lower resolution. This downward movement supports the semantic force of the verses as absolute divine affirmation rather than ordinary declarative speech. Similar falling contours also appear in verses that affirm human accountability, the inevitability of return to God, and the certainty of resurrection (Roettger & Grice, 2019; Tomasello et al., 2022).

The falling pitch pattern generally moves from level /3/ or /2/ toward /1/ in al-'Ani's pitch notation. In Q. 75:1, *Lā uqsimu bi-yawm al-qiyāmah*, and Q. 75:2, *Wa-lā uqsimu bi-al-naḥsi al-lawwāmah*, the contour /3-2-1/ creates a solemn descending arc. This prosodic movement

reinforces the weight of the divine oath. The recitation does not leave the utterance open or suspended; rather, it closes the meaning with a tone of certainty. This is consistent with the theological interpretation that the oath in these verses intensifies the certainty of the Resurrection Day and the moral accountability of the human soul.

Falling pitch also appears in Q. 75:12, *Ilā Rabbika yawma'idhin al-mustaqar*, which affirms that the final return on that Day is to the Lord. The same pattern is found in Q. 75:14–15, which state that the human being will become a witness against himself, even if he offers excuses. In these verses, the falling contour does not dramatize uncertainty; it presents the meaning as settled, unavoidable, and theologically final. Therefore, the falling pattern can be interpreted as the prosodic equivalent of eschatological certainty.

The second most frequent pattern is falling-rising pitch (*al-nāzilah al-ṣā'idah*), appearing in nine verses or 31.0% of the corpus. This contour usually moves downward before rising again, creating an acoustic sense of tension, contrast, or unresolved pressure. It is especially relevant in verses that present human questioning, denial, moral deviation, or sudden eschatological realization. For example, Q. 75:6, *Yas'alu ayyāna yawm al-qiyāmah*, is recited with a falling-rising pattern that dramatizes the ironic question of the human being who asks when the Day of Resurrection will occur. The contour reflects both the downward weight of denial and the renewed tension of the question.

The falling-rising contour is also prominent in Q. 75:11, *Kallā lā wazar*, where the sharp descent highlights the negation *lā*, while the subsequent rise intensifies the dramatic announcement that there is no refuge. This pattern is semantically powerful because it does not merely communicate information; it performs rejection. The prosodic movement makes the denial of refuge audible and emotionally forceful. In this sense, falling-rising pitch contributes to the rhetorical intensity of eschatological warning.

The third pattern, rising-falling pitch (*al-ṣā'idah al-nāzilah*), appears in five verses or 17.2% of the data. This pattern is used in verses that contain rhetorical confrontation, dramatic visualization, or emphatic theological claims. Q. 75:3, *A-yaḥsabu al-insānu allā najma'a 'iḏāmah*, is a clear example. The pitch rises toward the challenged assumption and then falls to close the rhetorical force of the question. This contour allows the recitation to stage the confrontation between human doubt and divine certainty. It is therefore suitable for rhetorical questions that are not genuine requests for information, but challenges to human denial.

Rising pitch (*al-ṣā'idah*) appears only twice, in Q. 75:8 and Q. 75:34, representing 6.9% of the corpus. Its rarity makes it functionally marked. In Q. 75:8, *Wa khasafa al-qamar*, the rising contour produces a sense of acoustic suspension that corresponds to cosmic disturbance. The utterance does not settle into finality; instead, it leaves the listener in a state of tension. This is appropriate for the depiction of eschatological signs, where the collapsing order of the cosmos is not yet resolved.

Flat pitch (*al-mustawiyyah*) appears only once, in Q. 75:22, *Wujūhun yawma'idhin nāḏirah*, representing 3.4% of the corpus. This verse describes radiant faces on the Day of Resurrection. The flat pitch creates a striking contrast with the dominant dramatic contours of the surah. Its stability produces an acoustic impression of calmness, serenity, and eschatological peace. In a corpus dominated by falling, falling-rising, and rising-falling movements, the single flat contour becomes semantically meaningful because it marks a moment of spiritual stillness amid the broader drama of judgment.

Overall, the distribution of pitch patterns shows that Misyārī Rāsyid al-‘Afāsī’s recitation is not random or merely ornamental. The dominance of falling and falling-rising contours reflects the thematic structure of Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah, which is centered on certainty, warning, denial, accountability, and divine power. Falling pitch encodes finality; falling-rising pitch encodes tension; rising-falling pitch encodes confrontation; rising pitch encodes suspension; and flat pitch encodes serenity. This confirms that pitch movement in Qur’anic recitation can function as a semantic-pragmatic device that strengthens the listener’s perception of eschatological meaning.

Semantic-Pragmatic Congruence of Qur’anic Discourse through al-‘Ani’s Framework

The second finding concerns the degree of semantic-pragmatic congruence between pitch patterns and the communicative functions of the eschatological verses in Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah. Using al-‘Ani’s pitch-level framework, the analysis shows that not all pitch movements can be explained through a simple grammatical correspondence between sentence form and intonation. Some verses display clear congruence between pitch contour and communicative function, some show deliberate incongruence, while almost half of the data cannot be determined within the binary capacity of al-‘Ani’s framework. This indicates that Qur’anic discourse operates through complex semantic, pragmatic, theological, and rhetorical layers that exceed ordinary modern Arabic speech registers.

Table 2. Semantic Congruence of Pitch Patterns in the Corpus through al-‘Ani’s Framework

Framework				
Category	Subcategory		Total	Percentage
Congruent	Declarative	function	6	20.7%
	(ikhbāriyyah)			
Congruent	Interrogative	function	4	13.8%
	(istifhāmiyyah)			
Congruent	Other function		1	3.4%
Subtotal	—		11	37.9%
Congruent				
Incongruent	Falling pitch in interrogative form		2	6.9%
Incongruent	Rising pitch in declarative form		2	6.9%
Subtotal	—		4	13.8%
Incongruent				
Undetermined	Beyond the framework's classification capacity		14	48.3%
Total	—		29	100%

Based on Table 2, 11 verses or 37.9% of the corpus show congruence between pitch pattern and communicative function. Six of these cases are declarative verses marked by falling pitch, which is pragmatically appropriate because falling intonation generally signals finality, certainty, and assertion. Four cases are interrogative or confrontational verses marked by rising or rising-falling pitch, which corresponds to the rhetorical force of questioning or challenging. One case falls into another congruent category. This congruent group confirms that al-‘Ani’s framework

remains useful for identifying basic relationships between pitch contour and grammatical-pragmatic function in Qur'anic recitation.

A clear example of congruence appears in Q. 75:1–2, where the divine oaths are recited with a falling pitch contour. Although the expression *lā uqsimu* has generated exegetical discussion, its pragmatic force in the verse is not negation but solemn affirmation. The falling contour therefore supports the theological function of the verse as a declaration of certainty. In this case, pitch movement strengthens the meaning already established by classical exegesis: the Resurrection Day and the reproaching soul are presented as undeniable realities. The pitch does not merely decorate the verse; it reinforces its assertive and theological force.

Congruence is also visible in rhetorical and confrontational verses such as Q. 75:3, *A-yahṣabu al-insānu allā najma'a 'izāmah*, which is recited with a rising-falling pattern. Grammatically, the verse takes the form of a question, but pragmatically it challenges human denial of resurrection. The rise in pitch highlights the contested assumption, while the subsequent fall resolves the challenge into divine certainty. This pattern is semantically appropriate because Qur'anic rhetorical questions often do not function as information-seeking questions, but as rebukes, affirmations, or theological confrontations (Al-Smadi, 2022).

The incongruent category consists of four verses or 13.8% of the corpus. Two cases involve falling pitch in interrogative forms, and two cases involve rising pitch in declarative forms. These cases are particularly important because they show that apparent mismatch between grammatical form and pitch contour does not necessarily indicate error. Instead, it may reveal a deeper interpretive decision made by the reciter. In Qur'anic discourse, grammatical form frequently carries layered pragmatic functions, and pitch may be selected to express the underlying theological meaning rather than the surface syntactic structure.

The most significant example of incongruence appears in Q. 75:40, *A-laysa dhālika bi-qādirin 'alā an yuḥyiya al-mawtā?* Grammatically, the verse is an interrogative construction introduced by *a-laysa*. Based on ordinary intonational expectation, it could be predicted to receive a rising or rising-falling contour. However, Misyārī Rāsyid al-'Aḥsāī recites it with a falling contour. This falling pitch transforms the grammatical question into an acoustic affirmation: the Creator is certainly able to give life to the dead. In this case, the pitch choice aligns not with surface interrogative form, but with the exegetical meaning of the verse as an affirmation of divine omnipotence.

Another important pattern appears in verses where declarative forms receive rising contours. Such cases indicate escalation, warning, or intensified threat rather than ordinary statement. For example, Q. 75:34, *Thumma awlā laka fa-awlā*, is grammatically declarative, yet the rising contour intensifies the warning and creates a sense of accumulating threat. The pitch rises not because the verse is uncertain, but because the warning is intensified pragmatically. This demonstrates that pitch in Qur'anic recitation can encode emotional and rhetorical force beyond grammatical category.

The largest category is the undetermined group, consisting of 14 verses or 48.3% of the corpus. This does not mean that the analysis failed; rather, it reveals the limitation of applying a modern Arabic pitch-function framework to Classical Qur'anic discourse. Many eschatological verses simultaneously function as declaration, warning, rebuke, promise, threat, theological reminder, and performative evocation of the unseen. Because al-'Ani's framework was designed

for more stable grammatical-pragmatic functions, it cannot fully classify verses whose illocutionary force is layered and polyvalent.

This high percentage of undetermined cases suggests that Qur'anic intonation requires an expanded semantic-pragmatic framework. Categories such as *qasam* or divine oath, *wa 'id* or threat, *wa 'd* or promise, eschatological proclamation, rhetorical affirmation, cosmic alarm, and moral indictment may be more suitable for analyzing Qur'anic recitation than a simple declarative-interrogative distinction. In this sense, the data do not weaken the study; they demonstrate the need for a more Qur'an-sensitive prosodic theory.

Overall, the semantic-pragmatic congruence analysis shows that al-'Ani's framework is useful but not sufficient. It successfully identifies congruent pitch-function relationships in 37.9% of the corpus and highlights meaningful incongruence in 13.8%. However, the 48.3% undetermined data reveal the complexity of Qur'anic discourse and the need for a broader interpretive model. This finding becomes the foundation for the next argument of this study: pitch in Qur'anic recitation can function as **phonemic hermeneutics**, namely an interpretive act through acoustic contour.

Phonemic Hermeneutics: Theoretical Boundaries and Islamic Intellectual Roots

The third finding concerns the emergence of **phonemic hermeneutics**, namely the idea that pitch choice in Qur'anic recitation can function as an active interpretive act. In this framework, the *qāri'* does not merely pronounce the Qur'anic text according to phonetic correctness, but also encodes meaning through pitch movement, tonal contrast, and prosodic incongruity. The clearest evidence appears in verses where grammatical form and pitch contour do not fully correspond. Rather than indicating recitational error, such incongruity may reveal a deeper exegetical decision in which the reciter gives priority to the theological meaning of the verse over its surface grammatical form (Mitchell, 2006; Rota et al., 2007).

The most significant case appears in Q. 75:40, *A-laysa dhālika bi-qādirin 'alā an yuḥyiya al-mawtā?* Grammatically, this verse is an interrogative construction introduced by *a-laysa*, which would ordinarily be expected to receive a rising or rising-falling contour. However, Misyārī Rāsyid al-'Afāsī recites it with a falling pitch pattern, moving from a higher pitch level toward a final low resolution. This prosodic choice transforms the grammatical question into an acoustic affirmation. The verse no longer sounds like a request for confirmation, but as a declaration that God is certainly able to give life to the dead. In this case, pitch becomes a vehicle of theological assertion (Al-Smadi, 2022; Tomasello et al., 2022).

This finding is consistent with the exegetical meaning of the verse. Classical and modern tafsir works interpret Q. 75:40 not as a genuine question, but as a rhetorical affirmation of divine omnipotence. The interrogative form functions pragmatically as an affirmation whose answer is already known and undeniable. Therefore, the falling contour used by al-'Afāsī does not contradict the theological message of the verse; rather, it reveals it more directly. The pitch contour removes the grammatical disguise of interrogation and presents the underlying meaning as final certainty. This is the core of phonemic hermeneutics: interpretation is performed not through verbal commentary, but through acoustic contour (Al-Ṭabarī, 1995; Quṭb, 1992; Shihab, 2002).

A similar phenomenon appears in Q. 75:34, *Thumma awlā laka fa-awlā*, which is grammatically declarative but recited with a rising contour. In ordinary intonational expectation, declarative utterances are often associated with falling pitch. Yet in this verse, the rising contour

intensifies the force of threat and escalation. The pitch rises not because the meaning is uncertain, but because the warning becomes more urgent and pressing. This shows that prosodic incongruity can function rhetorically: it allows the reciter to amplify the illocutionary force of the verse beyond its grammatical category. Thus, incongruent pitch may serve as a mechanism for intensifying warning, threat, rebuke, or theological emphasis (Borràs-Comes et al., 2019; Roettger & Grice, 2019).

The concept of phonemic hermeneutics also helps explain why 48.3% of the corpus could not be fully classified within al-‘Ani’s framework. This high percentage does not indicate analytical failure, but rather reveals the theoretical limitation of applying a modern Arabic pitch-function system to Classical Qur’anic discourse. Qur’anic verses often carry multiple pragmatic functions simultaneously: declaration, warning, oath, rebuke, promise, threat, and eschatological proclamation. A single verse may not fit neatly into a binary distinction between declarative and interrogative functions. This confirms that Qur’anic prosody requires an expanded semantic-pragmatic framework that is sensitive to the layered illocutionary structure of revelation (Hellmuth, 2022; Al-Smadi, 2022).

From a theoretical perspective, this finding shows both the usefulness and limitation of Nasution’s and al-‘Ani’s frameworks. Nasution’s five-category pitch typology is useful for classifying the direction of pitch movement, because all five patterns appear in the corpus: falling, rising, falling-rising, rising-falling, and flat pitch. However, al-‘Ani’s framework is more limited when used to interpret Qur’anic discourse because it was designed for more general Arabic grammatical-pragmatic functions. Therefore, the present study suggests that Qur’anic recitation requires additional categories such as divine oath, rhetorical affirmation, cosmic alarm, moral indictment, eschatological threat, and spiritual serenity (Hellmuth, 2022; Nasution, 2012).

The roots of phonemic hermeneutics are not foreign to Islamic intellectual tradition. The science of *tajwīd* has long recognized that Qur’anic recitation is not only a matter of correct sound production, but also meaningful delivery. Classical *tajwīd* distinguishes between *ḥaqq al-ḥurūf*, the phonetic rights of letters, and *mustaḥaqq al-ḥurūf*, the contextual and expressive rights that emerge in recitation. This distinction implies that the meaning of the Qur’an is not carried only by written words, but also by the way those words are sounded. In this sense, phonemic hermeneutics gives a modern linguistic formulation to an insight that has long existed in Islamic recitational tradition (Graham, 1993; Nelson, 2001).

This finding also strengthens the view that the Qur’an is fundamentally an oral and acoustic revelation. The word *Qur’an* itself is related to recitation, and the historical transmission of the Qur’an has always involved sound, memory, rhythm, and vocal performance. Therefore, studying pitch in Qur’anic recitation is not a peripheral concern, but part of understanding the Qur’an as a living oral text. When a *qāri’* chooses a falling contour for a rhetorical question or a rising contour for a threat, the recitation becomes an interpretive performance that communicates meaning through sound. This places *tilawah* at the intersection of phonology, pragmatics, exegesis, and spirituality (Gade, 2004; Graham, 1993; Nelson, 2001).

Table 3. Phonemic Hermeneutics in Qur’anic Recitation

Aspect	Finding	Interpretation
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Core concept	Pitch choice can function as an interpretive act.	The <i>qāri'</i> interprets meaning through acoustic contour, not only through pronunciation.
Main evidence	Q. 75:40 is grammatically interrogative but recited with falling pitch.	The pitch encodes theological affirmation rather than ordinary questioning.
Prosodic incongruity	Some grammatical forms receive unexpected pitch patterns.	Incongruity may indicate rhetorical emphasis, threat, certainty, or affirmation.
Limit of al-'Ani's framework	48.3% of the corpus cannot be classified within the framework.	Qur'anic discourse exceeds simple declarative-interrogative categories.
Islamic roots	Tajwīd recognizes both phonetic correctness and meaningful delivery.	Phonemic hermeneutics reformulates an existing Islamic recitational insight in modern linguistic terms.
Theoretical implication	Qur'anic prosody requires expanded semantic-pragmatic categories.	Future analysis should include categories such as oath, threat, rhetorical affirmation, and eschatological proclamation.

Based on Table 3, phonemic hermeneutics explains how Qur'anic recitation can function as active interpretation through pitch movement. The case of Q. 75:40 shows that a falling contour can transform a grammatical question into an acoustic affirmation of divine power. This finding confirms that pitch patterns in tilawah are not merely aesthetic ornaments, but semantic-pragmatic devices that participate in meaning-making. Therefore, the study of Qur'anic intonation should be developed not only as acoustic phonetics, but also as a hermeneutic discipline grounded in linguistics, tafsir, and Islamic recitational tradition.

Pedagogical Implications for Qur'anic Recitation and Taḥsīn Curriculum

The fourth finding concerns the pedagogical implications of pitch-pattern analysis for Qur'anic recitation and *taḥsīn* curriculum development. The findings show that intonation in Qur'anic recitation should not be treated merely as an aesthetic ornament or vocal embellishment, but as a meaningful prosodic device that can support semantic understanding, theological awareness, and spiritual engagement. In the case of Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah, the pitch choices of Misyārī Rāsyid al-'Afāsī demonstrate that recitation can encode certainty, warning, tension, serenity, and divine affirmation through acoustic contour. Therefore, teaching Qur'anic recitation should move beyond technical accuracy in *makhārij al-ḥurūf* and tajwīd rules toward a more integrated model that includes prosodic sensitivity and exegetical awareness.

The first implication is the need to introduce **basic pitch notation** in *taḥsīn* learning. The use of al-'Ani's pitch-level system, such as /1/ for low pitch, /2/ for mid pitch, /3/ for high pitch, and /4/ for very high pitch, can help students and teachers discuss intonation more precisely. At present, many learners imitate the melody of a *qāri'* without understanding why a certain pitch movement is used in a particular verse. By introducing simple notation, teachers can explain that

falling pitch may indicate certainty, falling-rising pitch may express tension, rising-falling pitch may mark confrontation, rising pitch may create suspense, and flat pitch may communicate calmness. This makes intonation teachable, observable, and connected to meaning.

The second implication is the use of **annotated recitation models** in Qur'anic recitation instruction. Recordings of Misyārī Rāsyid al-'Afāsī can be used not only as models for imitation, but also as materials for guided analysis. For example, Q. 75:1–2 can be introduced as a model of falling pitch that encodes divine oath and theological certainty. Q. 75:11 can be used to show how falling-rising pitch strengthens the rejection expressed in *kallā lā wazar*. Q. 75:22 can be presented as an example of flat pitch that conveys eschatological serenity. Meanwhile, Q. 75:40 can be used as a central example of phonemic hermeneutics, because the grammatically interrogative verse is recited with falling pitch to express absolute affirmation of divine power.

The third implication is the integration of **tafsir-based prosodic training** into the *taḥsīn* curriculum. Students should not only be trained to pronounce letters correctly, but also to understand the semantic and rhetorical function of the verse before reciting it. This means that recitation learning needs to include short exegetical explanations, especially for verses containing divine oaths, rhetorical questions, threats, promises, and eschatological scenes. When learners understand the meaning and function of the verse, they are more likely to produce pitch patterns that correspond to its theological and pragmatic force. In this sense, *taḥsīn* becomes not only phonetic training, but also meaning-conscious recitation.

The fourth implication concerns the prevention of **mechanical recitation**. Modern Qur'anic learning often emphasizes fluency, memorization, and beauty of voice, but may neglect the relationship between sound and meaning. The findings of this study show that such separation weakens the spiritual and communicative function of tilawah. If learners recite beautifully but without awareness of meaning, the Qur'anic message may not be fully communicated. Therefore, the integration of prosody and tafsir can help restore tilawah as a reflective and spiritual act. This approach is aligned with the Qur'anic principle of *tartīl*, which implies careful, meaningful, and orderly recitation.

The fifth implication is the need for teacher training in **prosodic awareness**. Many Qur'anic teachers are highly competent in tajwīd and vocal correction, but not all are trained to explain pitch movement in relation to meaning. A pedagogical model based on phonemic hermeneutics can support teachers in developing a more analytical approach to recitation. Teachers can be trained to identify pitch contours, compare them with verse meaning, and guide students to recite with semantic awareness. This does not mean replacing traditional tajwīd instruction, but enriching it with prosodic and hermeneutic dimensions.

Table 4. Pedagogical Implications for Qur'anic Recitation and Taḥsīn Curriculum

Pedagogical Aspect	Finding	Instructional Implication
Pitch notation	Pitch levels and contours can be classified using al-'Ani's system and Nasution's typology.	<i>Taḥsīn</i> curricula can introduce simple prosodic notation to help students understand pitch movement.

Annotated recitation	Specific verses in Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah show meaningful pitch patterns.	Teachers can use annotated recordings of Misyārī Rāsyid al-‘Afāsī as learning materials.
Tafsir-based prosody	Pitch patterns are connected to theological and semantic-pragmatic meaning.	Recitation lessons should include short tafsir explanations before vocal practice.
Meaning-conscious tilawah	Intonation functions as a semantic and spiritual device, not only vocal ornamentation.	Students should be trained to recite with awareness of meaning, not merely technical fluency.
Teacher training	Teachers need tools to explain pitch and meaning systematically.	Qur’anic recitation teacher training should include prosodic awareness and phonemic hermeneutics.
Curriculum development	Current <i>taḥsīn</i> learning often emphasizes makhraj, tajwīd, and melody separately.	A more integrative curriculum should connect makhraj, tajwīd, prosody, tafsir, and spiritual reflection.

Based on Table 4, the pedagogical value of this study lies in its potential to reconstruct *taḥsīn* learning into a more meaning-oriented model. Qur’anic recitation should not only teach how to pronounce letters correctly, but also how to deliver meaning through sound. The concept of phonemic hermeneutics provides a bridge between phonology, tajwīd, tafsir, and pedagogy. Through this approach, learners can understand why a verse is recited with falling, rising, flat, or incongruent pitch patterns. Therefore, the study contributes to the development of a *taḥsīn* curriculum that is technically accurate, semantically informed, and spiritually meaningful.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that pitch movement in Qur’anic recitation is not merely an acoustic or aesthetic phenomenon, but a meaningful prosodic device that participates in the construction of semantic, pragmatic, and theological meaning. The dominance of falling pitch in the twenty-nine eschatological verses of Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah demonstrates that Misyārī Rāsyid al-‘Afāsī’s recitation is strongly oriented toward certainty, finality, and divine authority. This is consistent with prosodic theory, which explains that falling intonation commonly signals completion, assertion, and communicative closure (Prieto, 2015; Roettger & Grice, 2019). In the context of Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah, this acoustic finality corresponds to the surah’s major themes: resurrection, accountability, divine judgment, and the impossibility of escaping God’s power.

The first major implication of the findings is that eschatological discourse in the Qur’an has a distinctive prosodic character. The fact that falling pitch and falling-rising pitch together dominate 72.4% of the corpus suggests that the recitation of Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah is shaped by a tension between theological certainty and eschatological warning. Falling pitch encodes finality and certainty, while falling-rising pitch produces tension, contrast, and unresolved pressure. This distribution is not random; it reflects the rhetorical architecture of the surah, which moves between divine oath, human denial, cosmic disturbance, moral exposure, and final affirmation of divine omnipotence. In this sense, prosody becomes part of the surah’s communicative force, not simply an external ornament added to the text.

The second finding shows that al-‘Ani’s pitch-level framework is useful but insufficient for explaining the full complexity of Qur’anic discourse. The framework successfully identifies semantic-pragmatic congruence in 37.9% of the corpus and highlights meaningful incongruence in 13.8%. However, the 48.3% undetermined data reveal that Qur’anic discourse cannot always be reduced to simple declarative or interrogative categories. Qur’anic verses often perform several illocutionary functions at once: divine oath, warning, rebuke, threat, promise, proclamation, and theological affirmation. This supports previous studies showing that Qur’anic rhetorical questions and Arabic prosody require sensitivity to pragmatic complexity and register-specific interpretation (Al-Smadi, 2022; Hellmuth, 2022).

The most important theoretical contribution of this study is the formulation of **phonemic hermeneutics**. This concept explains how a *qāri’* may interpret the Qur’anic text through pitch movement. The case of Q. 75:40 is especially significant. Although the verse is grammatically interrogative, al-‘Afāsī recites it with a falling pitch contour, thereby transforming the surface question into an acoustic affirmation of God’s absolute power to resurrect the dead. This finding demonstrates that prosodic incongruity is not necessarily a recitational deviation; it may function as an interpretive strategy. In other words, the *qāri’* does not merely vocalize the written text, but also performs meaning through sound.

This concept is strongly connected to the oral nature of the Qur’an. The Qur’an is not only a written scripture, but also a recited revelation whose authority has historically been transmitted through sound, memory, rhythm, and vocal performance. Studies on Qur’anic recitation emphasize that listening to the Qur’an involves affective, pedagogical, and spiritual dimensions (Gade, 2004; Nelson, 2001). Therefore, examining intonation in *tilawah* is not peripheral to Qur’anic studies. It opens a path for understanding how meaning is embodied in vocal performance. Phonemic hermeneutics provides a bridge between *‘ilm al-aṣwāt*, *tajwīd*, pragmatics, and *tafsir*.

The findings also reveal that pitch choices can strengthen the emotional and spiritual reception of Qur’anic meaning. For example, the flat pitch in Q. 75:22 creates a rare moment of acoustic serenity in a surah otherwise dominated by dramatic tonal movement. This pitch stability corresponds to the verse’s description of radiant faces on the Day of Resurrection. Meanwhile, rising pitch in verses such as Q. 75:8 produces suspense and cosmic alarm. These examples show that different pitch patterns contribute differently to the listener’s perception: falling pitch conveys certainty, falling-rising pitch conveys tension, rising-falling pitch conveys confrontation, rising pitch conveys suspense, and flat pitch conveys calmness.

Pedagogically, these findings challenge the tendency to teach Qur’anic recitation as a purely technical skill. Traditional *taḥsīn* instruction often focuses on *makhraj*, *tajwīd* rules, fluency, and melodic beauty. These components remain essential, but they are not sufficient if recitation is expected to communicate meaning. The study shows that pitch movement can encode theological and pragmatic force. Therefore, *taḥsīn* curricula should integrate prosodic awareness and *tafsir*-based interpretation. Learners need to understand not only how to pronounce the Qur’an correctly, but also how to deliver its meaning through appropriate tonal movement (McKinnon, 2016; Supriyadi et al., 2019).

Practically, the use of annotated recitation models can strengthen Qur’anic pedagogy. Teachers can use selected verses from *Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah* to demonstrate how pitch corresponds to meaning. Q. 75:1–2 can be used to teach falling pitch as the sound of divine certainty. Q. 75:11

can illustrate falling-rising pitch as the sound of negation and eschatological tension. Q. 75:22 can demonstrate flat pitch as the sound of serenity. Q. 75:40 can become a central example of phonemic hermeneutics, showing how a grammatical question may be recited as theological affirmation. This approach can help students move from mechanical imitation toward meaning-conscious recitation.

Nevertheless, the study also has methodological limitations. The use of CapCut provides visual support for pitch-contour direction, but it does not offer the acoustic precision of Praat. In addition, the analysis focuses only on one reciter and one surah, so the findings should be understood as an intensive case study rather than a universal theory of Qur'anic intonation. Future studies should compare multiple *qurrā'*, apply Praat-based acoustic measurements, and examine different Qur'anic genres, such as legal verses, narratives, supplications, and verses of praise. Such studies may test whether phonemic hermeneutics operates consistently across reciters, styles, and thematic corpora.

Overall, this discussion confirms that Qur'anic intonation should be studied as a meaningful intersection of sound, text, interpretation, and spirituality. The recitation of Misyārī Rāsyid al-'Afāsī in Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah demonstrates that pitch movement can reinforce theological certainty, dramatize eschatological warning, intensify rhetorical confrontation, and communicate spiritual serenity. Therefore, the study of Qur'anic prosody should not remain limited to acoustic description. It should be developed as an interdisciplinary field combining phonology, pragmatics, tafsir, tajwīd, pedagogy, and hermeneutics

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that pitch movement in Misyārī Rāsyid al-'Afāsī's recitation of the twenty-nine eschatological verses of Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah functions as a meaningful semantic-pragmatic device, not merely as vocal ornamentation. The acoustic distribution shows that falling pitch is the dominant pattern, appearing in 41.4% of the corpus, followed by falling-rising pitch at 31.0%. This dominance reflects the theological character of Sūrat Al-Qiyāmah, which emphasizes certainty, resurrection, divine judgment, human accountability, and the finality of God's power.

The application of al-'Ani's pitch-level framework demonstrates that 37.9% of the data show semantic-pragmatic congruence, while 13.8% show incongruence and 48.3% remain undetermined. These findings indicate that Qur'anic discourse cannot always be explained through a simple correspondence between grammatical form and pitch contour. Many eschatological verses contain layered illocutionary functions, such as oath, warning, rebuke, threat, affirmation, and theological proclamation. Therefore, Qur'anic intonation requires a broader analytical framework that is sensitive to the complexity of classical Qur'anic Arabic.

The main theoretical contribution of this study is the formulation of **phonemic hermeneutics**, which refers to the interpretive function of pitch in Qur'anic recitation. The clearest example is Q. 75:40, which is grammatically interrogative but recited with falling pitch to encode an absolute theological affirmation of God's power to resurrect the dead. This confirms that a *qāri'* may interpret the Qur'anic text not only through correct articulation, but also through acoustic contour, tonal direction, and prosodic emphasis.

Pedagogically, this study recommends the integration of prosodic awareness into *tahsīn* and Qur'anic recitation curricula. Instruction should not only focus on *makhārij al-ḥurūf*, tajwīd rules, fluency, and melodic beauty, but also on how pitch patterns communicate meaning. Teachers can use annotated recitation models, simple pitch notation, and tafsir-based prosodic

explanation to help learners recite the Qur'an with both technical accuracy and semantic awareness.

This study is limited by its use of CapCut as a supporting visualization tool and by its focus on one reciter and one surah. Future research should use Praat-based acoustic analysis, compare multiple *qurrā'*, and examine other Qur'anic genres, such as legal verses, narratives, supplications, and verses of praise. Such studies may further test and refine the concept of phonemic hermeneutics as an interdisciplinary framework connecting *'ilm al-aṣwāt*, tajwīd, tafsir, pragmatics, and Qur'anic pedagogy.

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