Asalibuna
مجلة اللغة العربية وتعليمها
E-ISSN: 2656-3533
P-ISSN: 2615-5885
Volume 09, Issue 02, 2025
DOI: 10.30762/asalibuna.v9i02.6997

The Use of the Word "*Kabura*" (كبر) and Its Derivatives in the Qur'an: A Morpho-Semantic Study

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Abstract:

This study examines the morpho-semantic mechanisms underlying the use of the word *kabura* (كبر) and its derivatives in the Qur'an. Variations in morphological patterns (wazn) are shown to significantly influence shifts in meaning across theological, ethical, and evaluative domains. The research employs a qualitative–descriptive, corpus-based approach using a complete retrieval technique to collect all Qur'anic instances of the root *k-b-r*. Data analysis integrates derivational morphology with Context Theory (Naẓariyyah al-Siyāq) to map evaluative polarity. The study identifies 161 occurrences distributed across 18 major derivational forms, consisting of 106 nominal (ism) forms and 55 verbal (fi'l) forms. The findings demonstrate a systematic semantic pattern: (1) nominal forms such as *al-kabīr* and *kibriyā'* consistently express a positive evaluative pole denoting divine majesty; (2) verbal forms following the *istaf'ala* pattern, such as *istakbara*, form a negative pole associated with human arrogance; and (3) several forms appear semantically neutral, with meanings determined entirely by context. These results offer pedagogical implications for Arabic language teaching, particularly in enhancing learners' awareness of how morphological variation and contextual indicators jointly shape meaning in Qur'anic discourse, enabling more accurate interpretation and reducing semantic error.

Keywords: Morpho-semantics; Root *k-b-r*; *Naẓariyyah al-Siyāq*; Evaluative Polarity; Arabic Linguistics.

Submitted : October 28th 2025
Revised : January 15th 2026
Accepted : January 30th 2026

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Open Access Journal
Availabel at: https://jurnalfaktarbiyah.iainkediri.ac.id/index.php/asalibuna

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Penggunaan Lafaz "كبر" dan Derivasinya dalam Al-Qur'an: Suatu Tinjauan Morfo-Semantis

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Abstrak:

Penelitian ini mengkaji mekanisme morfo-semantik dalam penggunaan kata *kabura* (**كبر**) dan berbagai turunannya dalam Al-Qur'an. Variasi pola morfologis (*wazn*) terbukti memengaruhi pergeseran makna pada ranah teologis, etis, dan evaluatif. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif–deskriptif berbasis korpus dengan teknik penelusuran menyeluruh terhadap seluruh ayat yang memuat akar k-b-r. Analisis data mengintegrasikan morfologi derivatif dengan Teori Konteks (*Naẓariyyah al-Siyāq*) untuk memetakan polaritas evaluatif. Hasil penelitian mengidentifikasi 161 kemunculan yang terdistribusi dalam 18 bentuk derivatif utama, terdiri atas 106 bentuk nominal (*ism*) dan 55 bentuk verbal (*fiʿl*). Temuan menunjukkan pola semantis yang sistematis: (1) bentuk nominal seperti *al-kabīr* dan *kibriyā'* membangun kutub evaluatif positif yang merepresentasikan keagungan ilahi; (2) bentuk verbal berpola *istafʿala* seperti *istakbara* membentuk kutub negatif terkait kesombongan manusia; dan (3) beberapa bentuk bersifat netral dan maknanya ditentukan sepenuhnya oleh konteks. Temuan ini memberikan implikasi pedagogis bagi pembelajaran bahasa Arab, terutama dalam meningkatkan pemahaman peserta didik mengenai hubungan antara variasi morfologis dan penanda konteks dalam pemaknaan wacana Qur'ani sehingga mengurangi risiko kesalahan interpretasi.

Kata Kunci: Morfo-semantik; Akar *k-b-r*; *Naẓariyyah al-Siyāq*; Polaritas evaluatif; Linguistik Arab;

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INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an is an Arabic text; therefore, deriving meaning from its messages requires a comprehensive understanding of Arabic across phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic levels (Rifqi et al., 2023). Words in the Qur'an may carry multiple meanings due to a variety of factors (Safitri et al., 2025). Analysis of word roots and morphological patterns constitutes an essential guide for selecting the appropriate meaning (Alim, 2025). This knowledge constitutes the foundation for all interpretive efforts, since the structure of Arabic is characterized by a complex and flexible morphological system that permits formal alternations which profoundly affect meaning. Accordingly, the examination of the dynamics of semantic change becomes crucial for an accurate understanding of Arabic texts (Sugito & Suparmi, 2025).

However, meaning cannot always be derived in a "unidirectional" manner, since word forms in Arabic may change through mechanisms of derivation, inflection, and shifts in morphological patterning, each of which carries specific semantic consequences. In other words, a term that is commonly understood as denoting divine greatness may shift in meaning to signify human arrogance when its contextual setting and derivational pattern differ. In studies of Arabic morphology, derivation and inflection are recognized as playing a crucial role in shaping both the structural configuration and the functional realization of meaning (Ritonga et al., 2025). Derivation produces new words whose lexical identities differ from those of their base forms (Zahrani & Sofyan, 2016). Such formal variation may yield divergent semantic nuances even when the forms originate from the same root, rendering purely textual reading insufficient to account for this semantic diversity (Siregar & Agustiar, 2024).

Accordingly, the integration of formal aspects (morphological) and meaning (semantic) constitutes the primary foundation for explaining how formal variation in Arabic gives rise to significant semantic differentiation (Firjatullah, 2025). Hadia Youssef Sharaf (2025) emphasize that morphological variation in classical Arabic texts plays a key role in enriching semantic understanding. Moreover, derivational processes contribute to the construction of broader semantic fields, thereby expanding the range and organization of meanings associated with a given root (Raswan et al., 2022)

This study focuses on the root *k-b-r* (كبر), particularly the lexeme kabura and its derivational forms as they occur in the Qur'an. The root raises a central problem of semantic polarity: it generates positive meanings such as greatness, majesty, and moral superiority when referring to divine attributes, yet also yields negative meanings such as arrogance and haughtiness when describing human behaviour. This pattern accords with the observation that many lexemes share the same etymological origin while exhibiting markedly different meanings and connotations (Altohami & Khafaga, 2023). The contrast, therefore, cannot be treated as a mere matter of translation choice, but reflects a deeper linguistic problem involving variation in derivational patterns, grammatical class, and contextual deployment (Fakhri, 2025).

To account for this semantic diversity in a systematic manner, it is essential to understand how Qur'anic roots construct a spectrum of meanings through context. Balil Abd al-Karim (Al-Karim, 2017) emphasizes that Qur'anic roots often function within a spectrum of meanings, and the key to interpretation lies in recognizing the

semantic frame activated in context. Moreover, from a morphopragmatic perspective, pragmatically speaking, this derivational variation entails different implications in the context in which it is used (Khalaf et al., 2023). Therefore, careful mapping is required to ensure that interpretation and translation do not conflate "greatness" as a divine attribute with "arrogance" as an expression of human ego. Such precision is crucial in Qur'anic studies to maintain consistency with the communicative intent of the verse and to prevent meaning from being distorted by subjective, intuitive reasoning.

This study adopts a morpho-semantic approach, namely an approach that integrates the analysis of word form (morphology) and meaning (semantics) within a single, interrelated analytical framework. Within this perspective, morphological patterns (*wazn*) realized through derivational processes do not merely alter the formal shape of a word but also influence the functional distinctions of meaning that are produced (Fakhri, 2025). In morphological studies, formal changes that yield a new lexical identity are referred to as derivation (Luthfan & Hadi, 2019). According to Idham et al. (2022), a comprehensive understanding of a word form is determined not only by its basic meaning, but also by its distribution and the contexts of its occurrence within discourse.

Accordingly, this study traces how formal alternations correlate with semantic shifts across each occurrence of derivations of the root *k-b-r*. However, formal change alone is insufficient to determine final meaning. Meaning assignment remains constrained by context through *siyāq* analysis. M. Quraish Shihab, as cited in Ahmad (Ahmad, 2017) notes that *siyāq* serves as an indicator for determining the meaning intended by the speaker or by the configuration of words. Thus, morphological analysis and contextual analysis proceed in tandem to identify the active meaning manifested in each derivational form.

In linguistic studies, the theory of *siyāq* (context) is essential because context determines the active meaning in language use and guides readers toward an accurate interpretation. Abdurrahman (2018), citing Umar, argues that in contextual theory, meaning lies in its actual use in language, that is, the procedures or modes of use and the role a word performs within a particular situation. Bahri (2016) notes that Wittgenstein's view likewise emphasizes that meaning does not stand independently, but depends on the context of its use, which may be linguistic, emotional, situational/conditional, or socio-cultural.

Accordingly, a linguistic approach to Arabic, particularly through the study of semantics (*dalālah*) and linguistic context (*siyāq al-lughawī*), constitutes an essential instrument for uncovering the meanings of Qur'anic verses in a more comprehensive and accurate manner (Suriyanti et al., 2026). Within this framework, *siyāq* is employed to distinguish consistently whether a given derivation of the root *k-b-r* activates meanings of "greatness/majesty" or, instead, "arrogance/ haughtiness," thereby preventing semantic conflation in the processes of Qur'anic interpretation and translation. According to Razavi et al., (2021), context represents the most reliable instrument for understanding the Qur'an, and neglecting it may result in interpretations that are inaccurate or incomplete. Thus, the analytical function of *siyāq* becomes pivotal in maintaining semantic coherence across all verses containing derivations of this root.

As an introductory illustration, the root *k-b-r* in the Qur'an is employed to convey divine meaning, for example in Q. al-Raʿd (13):9, where God is described as *al-Kabīr* (ٱلْكَبِيرُ). This nominal form signifies greatness, majesty, and essential

superiority that are exclusively attributable to God. Conversely, the same root also appears with negative meaning, as in Q. al-Baqarah (2):34 through the form *istakbara* (ٱسْتَكْبَرَ), which depicts arrogance and the act of self-exaltation in defiance of truth. These two examples demonstrate the presence of evaluative polarity within a single root, thereby necessitating *siyāq* analysis to determine consistently which meaning is activated in each occurrence of *k-b-r* derivations. This view is reinforced by *Ibn al-Qayyim*, as cited by Rizkilah and Bashori (2025), who emphasizes that *siyāq* functions to "determine the meaning of words that are potentially multivalent (*muḥtamal*)" and to "avoid meanings that are not intended." In other words, without a contextual framework, readers may erroneously interpret a form that should carry a positive theological value as a negative ethical meaning, or vice versa.

Although Qur'anic semantic studies have addressed several derivational lexemes, most previous research has tended to analyze words in isolation without systematically tracing the complete derivational network of a given root. The study by Khoiriyatunnisa, Asfar, and Syahrani *"Analisis Semantik Makna Kata /Nashara/ dan Derivasinya dalam Al-Qur'an,"* maps 158 occurrences of the root n-ṣ-r and identifies ten derivational patterns; however, its analysis remains focused on the description of formal structures and basic meanings, without formulating an evaluative pattern. Meanwhile, the study by Norazizah, Dasuki, and Supriadi (Norazizah et al., 2021), *"Makna Istikbār dalam Al-Qur'an: Perspektif Semantik Toshihiko Izutsu,"* examines only a single term through Izutsu's semantic framework, yet its scope does not extend to the entire network of derivations from the root k-b-r. Accordingly, a research gap persists for a study that integrates all derivations of the root k-b-r in a comprehensive manner, encompassing both morphological dimensions and evaluative relations across forms.

Nevertheless, because their object of analysis is restricted to one term, the approach remains partial with respect to the broader derivational family of the root *k-b-r* (كبر) and does not position *istikbār* (اِسْتِكْبَار) within a continuum alongside related forms such as *kabīr* (كَبِير), *akbar* (أَكْبَر), *kibr* (كِبْر), and *kibar* (كِبَر). The fundamental limitation of such partial approaches lies in their inability to explain the systemic mechanism by which a single root can generate opposed evaluative polarities, functioning as a praiseworthy attribute when ascribed to God, as in *al-kibriyā'* (ٱلْكِبْرِيَاء), while simultaneously constituting a blameworthy disposition when attributed to human beings, as in *istikbār* (اِسْتِكْبَار), on the basis of the interaction between morphological patterning and theological context.

As a result, a comprehensive model capable of explaining how variations in morphological patterns (*wazn*) consistently shift meaning from the positive pole to the negative pole within the root *k-b-r* (كبر), on the basis of contextual usage in Qur'anic verses, has not yet been systematically developed. If this gap remains unaddressed, the interpretation of *k-b-r* derivations risks continuing to be treated merely as a matter of "translation choice" or intuitive judgment. This concern resonates with Izutsu's (2002) critique that Qur'anic lexical meanings isolated from their semantic fields tend to obscure the *weltanschauung* embedded within the text, thereby blurring the distinction between "greatness/majesty" as a divine attribute and "arrogance/haughtiness" as a human disposition. Accordingly, the present study seeks to fill this gap by constructing a morpho-semantic model that integrates

a comprehensive mapping of all derivations of the root *k-b-r* with *siyāq* analysis, in order to elucidate the patterns of evaluative polarity operating within Qur'anic discourse in a methodologically rigorous manner.

In general, this study aims to explicate the variation in meanings of the derivations of the root *k-b-r* (كبر) in the Qur'an through a morpho-semantic approach grounded in siyāq analysis. Specifically, it seeks to: (1) inventory all occurrences of k-b-r derivations in the Qur'an; (2) classify these occurrences according to morphological pattern (*wazn*) and grammatical class; and (3) analyse their contextual meanings in light of the linguistic and thematic *siyāq* of the verses in order to determine the evaluative polarity activated in each occurrence. Accordingly, this study does not merely highlight word forms from a statistical or distributional perspective but directly relates them to their semantic functions within the Qur'anic context.

Theoretically, this study offers a contribution to the field of Qur'anic semantics by proposing a form–context mapping model that can be employed as an analytic procedure to explain variation in root-based semantics in a more systematic manner, rather than merely describing meanings on a term-by-term basis. More specifically, it adopts an evaluative-semantics and contextual-polarity perspective, in which the meanings of derivations are analysed in terms of their position along a positive–neutral–negative spectrum within Qur'anic discourse. Accordingly, the study provides an important methodological contribution to Qur'anic linguistic scholarship, particularly in clarifying how the Arabic language system constructs nuances of meaning through the integrated interaction of form, pattern, and context.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive–analytical design grounded in a Qur'anic corpus. This approach was selected because the analysis of lexical meaning in a sacred text requires an integrated understanding of morphological form, minimal syntactic function, and contextual deployment within the verse. Numerical information, such as the frequency of occurrences of derivations of the root *k-b-r*, is used solely as distributional evidence, rather than as a basis for statistical testing or numerical generalization.

The primary corpus of this study is the Qur'an in its entirety, treated as a complete textual corpus. From this full corpus, a dedicated subcorpus was constructed consisting of all verses containing derivations of the root *k-b-r*. Identification was carried out through comprehensive retrieval using lexeme indexes and digital search tools to ensure that no morphological forms were omitted. No sampling technique was applied, as the complete retrieval approach ensures that all relevant tokens are analyzed holistically in accordance with the requirements of morpho-semantic investigation.

The unit of analysis in this study is each token of a derivation of the root *k-b-r* as it occurs in a verse. The analysis was conducted through four principal analytic categories: (1) morphological pattern (*wazn*), (2) grammatical class, (3) the linguistic and thematic context of the verse (*siyāq*), and (4) the evaluative polarity produced through the interaction of the preceding components. Accordingly, this study does not employ the notion of "variables" in a statistical sense, but rather utilizes a structured and replicable set of analytic categories.

The researcher served as the primary instrument, responsible for identifying forms, assigning codes, and interpreting the meanings of each token. The coding process proceeded through several stages: recording all tokens, determining *wazn* and grammatical class, examining syntactic structure (subject–predicate–object), and reading the verse context to determine the active meaning. Consistency was maintained through a set of classification rules established at the outset and applied uniformly across the dataset.

Polarity determination was guided by stable linguistic indicators within the corpus. Positive meaning was recorded when the analysed form functioned as a divine attribute, had "Allah" as its grammatical subject, or occurred within an affirmative siyāq emphasizing power and majesty. Conversely, negative meaning was assigned when the form appeared as an agentive verb with a human subject, particularly within narratives of revelation, rejection or moral defiance. Siyāq analysis was conducted hierarchically by attending to co-textual relations, rhetorical markers, and verse themes, so that interpretation was not based on intuition but on verifiable linguistic patterns. To enhance interpretive validity, the semantic interpretation of each token was systematically cross-checked against authoritative tafsīr works and specialised studies in Qur'anic semantics, ensuring that the proposed polarity assignments remained consistent with established exegetical understandings while retaining analytical rigor.

RESULTS

Corpus exploration through a complete retrieval procedure yielded 161 occurrences of the root *k-b-r* (كبر) in the Qur'an. These tokens give rise to 67 distinct surface forms, representing orthographic and *iʿrāb*-based variations generated through affixation and syntactic structure. Following the processes of coding and consolidation, all forms were classified into 18 principal derivational categories, which constitute the analytical basis for the morphological and semantic examination undertaken in this study. The following table presents the frequency distribution of the verbal forms.

Table 1. Distribution of Verbal Forms of the Root *k-b-r* (55 tokens)

Verbal Pattern	Principal Form	Frequency	Description
Form I	*kabura* (كَبُرَ)	8	Basic verb meaning "to become great"
Form II	*kabbir* (كَبِّرْ)	4	Intensive imperative
Form IV	*akbar* (أَكْبَرَ)	1	Causative verb
Form V	*yatakabbaru* (يَتَكَبَّرُ)	2	Arrogant behavior
Form X	*istakbara* (ٱسْتَكْبَرَ)	40	Arrogant rejection

This distribution reveals the clear predominance of Form X (*istakbara*), with 40 occurrences, whereas Form IV (*akbara*) represents the least frequent verbal pattern, appearing only once. Overall, the verbal group depicts a spectrum of actions

ranging from the process of becoming great, commands of glorification, to intentional acts of arrogance.

Out of the total 161 tokens, 106 tokens fall within the nominal–adjectival category. This group includes *ism tafḍīl*, common nouns, abstract nouns, feminine superlative forms, as well as *ism fāʿil* derived from Form V and Form X. The following table presents the complete distribution of these categories:

Table 2. Distribution of Nominal and Adjectival Forms of the Root *k-b-r* (106 tokens)

Nominal Pattern	Principal Form	Frequency	Description
Ism tafḍīl	*akbar* (أَكْبَر)	24	Superlative "greater / greatest"
Adjective / Noun	*kabīr* (كَبِير)	40	Attribute meaning "great / exalted"
Feminine nominal	*kubrā* (كُبْرَىٰ)	7	Feminine superlative
Common noun	*kibar* (كِبَر)	6	Greatness; old age
Abstract noun	*kibr* (كِبْر)	2	Arrogance
Abstract noun	*kibriyāʾ* (كِبْرِيَاء)	2	Majesty
Plural noun	*kubarāʾ* (كُبَرَاء)	1	Leaders; eminent figures
Intensive adjective	*kubbār* (كُبَّار)	1	Intensive form
Ism fāʿil (Form V)	*mutakabbir* (مُتَكَبِّر)	7	One who behaves arrogantly
Ism fāʿil (Form X)	*mustakbir* (مُسْتَكْبِر)	6	One who displays arrogance
Maṣdar (Form II)	*takbīr* (تَكْبِير)	1	Glorification
Maṣdar (Form X)	*istikbār* (ٱسْتِكْبَار)	2	Arrogance

The nominal–adjectival group is consistently more dominant than the verbal group. The forms *kabīr* (40 occurrences) and *akbar* (24 occurrences) occupy the highest positions within this category, whereas forms such as *kubbār*, *kubarāʾ*, and *takbīr* occur only once.

The eighteen principal derivations exhibit a consistent distribution across semantic domains and evaluative tendencies (*evaluative polarity*). A summary of the semantic patterns based on these principal derivations is presented below.

Table 3. Derivations of the Root *k-b-r* According to Morphological Patterns and Evaluative Polarity

No	Derivation	Pattern / Category	Dominant Evaluative Pole	Typical Semantic Field	Typical Qur'anic Discourse Function
1	(*kabura*) كَبُرَ	Verb Form I	Neutral → negative (context-dependent)	Hardship, heaviness, difficulty	Describing psychological / spiritual burden or gravity of an act or situation
2	كَبِّرْ / تُكَبِّرُوا / لِتُكَبِّرُوا / فَكَبِّرْ (.etc *kabbir*)	Verb Form II	Positive (divine greatness)	Glorification, ritual exaltation	Commanding believers to magnify Allah (takbīr) in devotional and liturgical contexts
3	(*akbar*) أَكْبَرَ	Verb Form IV	Neutral	Causing something to appear great	Describing human perception or reaction ('to regard as great')
4	يَتَكَبَّرُ (*yatakabbar*) (*u*	Verb Form V	Negative (human arrogance)	Self-exaltation, internal pride	Portraying ongoing arrogant behaviour of humans toward revelation
5	ٱسْتَكْبَرَ (*istakbara*)	Verb Form X	Negative (human arrogance)	Active refusal, haughty resistance	Narrating deliberate rejection of divine signs and prophetic calls
6	(*akbar*) أَكْبَرَ	Ism tafḍīl	Dual: positive (divine) / negative (gravity of sin)	Comparative / superlative greatness	Marking ultimate greatness of Allah or the greater seriousness of certain deeds or punishments
7	(*kabīr*) كَبِير	Adjective / noun	Dual: positive (divine / eschatological) / neutral	Greatness, magnitude, reward, punishment	Qualifying divine attributes, eschatological events, or the magnitude of reward/punishment
8	كَبِيرَة / كَبَائِر (*kabīrah* / *kabāʾir*)	Noun (sg./pl.)	Negative	Major sins	Categorizing grave transgressions with heavy moral-spiritual consequences

9	(*kubrā*) كُبْرَىٰ	Feminine superlative	Positive (divine signs / eschaton)	The greatest sign, the great calamity	Intensifying the status of miracles or eschatological events
10	كُبَرَاء (*kubarāʾ*)	Noun (plural)	Negative	Social elites, leading sinners	Labeling arrogant leaders who misguide others
11	(*kubbār*) كُبَّار	Intensive adjective	Negative	Extremely grave plotting / corruption	Emphatically condemning intense, persistent opposition to truth
12	(*kibr*) كِبْر	Abstract noun	Negative	Arrogance, inner pride	Naming the internal disposition that blocks guidance
13	(*kibar*) كِبَر	Noun	Neutral	Old age, advanced life stage	Referring to physical / biographical 'greatness' (age)
14	كِبْرِيَاء (*kibriyāʾ*)	Abstract noun	Positive (divine majesty)	Sovereignty, majesty, exclusive greatness	Affirming Allah's unique grandeur and exclusive right to absolute greatness
15	(*takbīr*) تَكْبِير	Masdar Form II	Positive	Act of glorification	Naming the ritual and theological act of exalting Allah
16	ٱسْتِكْبَار (*istikbār*)	Masdar Form X	Negative	Arrogance as process / attitude	Conceptualizing arrogance as a continuous stance against guidance
17	مُتَكَبِّر (*mutakabbir*)	Ism fāʿil V	Negative	Arrogant person	Labeling individuals characterized by persistent arrogance
18	مُسْتَكْبِر (*mustakbir*)	Ism fāʿil X	Negative	One who practices arrogance	Identifying agents who actively adopt arrogant resistance

The frequency data and the classification of these forms reveal a regular pattern of usage that can be observed consistently across the entire corpus.

DISCUSSION

The complete retrieval procedure applied to 161 tokens of the root *k-b-r* (كبر) yielded 67 surface forms, which were subsequently consolidated into 18 principal derivations. The coding results reveal a marked asymmetry between the verbal and nominal domains. The verbal group comprises 55 tokens, the majority of which occur in Form X *istakbara* (ٱسْتَكْبَرَ), with 40 attestations—substantially exceeding the frequencies of Form I *kabura* (كَبُرَ), Form II *kabbir* (كَبِّرْ), Form IV *akbar* (أَكْبَرَ), and Form V *yatakabbaru* (يَتَكَبَّرُ).

By contrast, 106 tokens fall within the nominal–adjectival category. The most dominant forms are *kabīr* (كَبِير), with 40 occurrences, and *akbar* (أَكْبَر), with 24 occurrences. The remaining forms, while less frequent, are semantically significant, including *kubrā* (كُبْرَىٰ), *kibar* (كِبَر), *kibr* (كِبْر), *kibriyāʾ* (كِبْرِيَاء), *kubarāʾ* (كُبَرَاء), *kubbār* (كُبَّار), *takbīr* (تَكْبِير), *istikbār* (ٱسْتِكْبَار), *mutakabbir* (مُتَكَبِّر), and *mustakbir* (مُسْتَكْبِر). This distribution provides an initial indication that the divine domain is more frequently articulated through stable nominal forms, whereas the human domain tends to be expressed through verbs and action-oriented forms.

Within the framework of evaluative semantics, this contrast is not merely a matter of formal variation but is directly linked to evaluative polarity. Forms such as *al-Kabīr* (ٱلْكَبِيرُ), *al-Kibriyāʾ* (ٱلْكِبْرِيَاءُ), and *kubrā* (كُبْرَىٰ) tend to construct a positive pole insofar as they are associated with absolute greatness. Conversely, *istakbara* (ٱسْتَكْبَرَ), *istikbār* (ٱسْتِكْبَار), *mutakabbir* (مُتَكَبِّر), and *mustakbir* (مُسْتَكْبِر) form a negative pole, as they are linked to self-exaltation and the rejection of truth. Situated between these two poles is a neutral zone, represented primarily by *kabura* (كَبُرَ) and *kibar* (كِبَر), when the root *k-b-r* denotes meanings such as "heavy," "great," or "old." In this zone, the ultimate evaluative value is determined by *siyāq* (السِّيَاق), namely, the contextual framework of the verse.

Divine Majesty and the Positive Pole of *k-b-r*

The nominal group displays a strict and consistent pattern in articulating divine majesty. The form *al-Kabīr* (ٱلْكَبِيرُ) functions as a theological attribute that affirms the greatness and exaltedness of God and is frequently paired with other attributes such as *al-ʿAlī* (ٱلْعَلِيُّ). This co-occurrence reinforces a sublime semantic field in which greatness is construed as an absolute divine attribute rather than a quality measurable in relative terms, thereby fixing *al-Kabīr* as a marker of divine authority and supreme majesty.

The abstract noun *kibriyāʾ* (كِبْرِيَاء) is likewise employed exclusively within the divine domain to denote majesty and authority that are not legitimately ascribable to created beings. This exclusivity of usage indicates that, at the positive pole, *k-b-r* does not merely signify "greatness" in terms of intensity, but also conveys theological legitimacy: majesty is constituted as a domain properly attributable only

to God. Consequently, this form functions as a conceptual boundary between divine attributes and creaturely claims.

In addition, the superlative forms *kubrā* (كُبْرَىٰ) and *akbar* (أَكْبَر) occur in contexts such as "the greatest sign" or "the greatest event," particularly within discourses on divine signs and the eschaton. In such usages, the sense of "greatest" does not always operate as an ordinary comparison, but rather as an affirmation of ultimate intensity. The framework of contextual polarity helps to account for this phenomenon: in many verses, *akbar* does not function as a formal comparative, but as a marker of emphasized greatness aligned with theological and eschatological horizons of discourse. This is because *akbar* (أَكْبَر) is an adjectival form constructed according to the *wazan* (أَفْعَلُ) for the masculine (*mudhakkar*) and the *wazan* (فُعْلَى) for the feminine (*mu'annath*), which indicates that two entities share a particular attribute, yet one surpasses the other in that attribute (Nafi' et al., 2024)

In ritual usage, such as *takbīr* (تَكْبِير), akbar signifies the apex of glorification rather than a relative comparison. Accordingly, these nominal forms collectively construct the positive pole of the *k-b-r* network and serve as a normative reference point for other derivations, insofar as they consistently position *k-b-r* as a semantic field of "majesty" when associated with God, His signs, and culminating events within eschatological discourse.

Human Arrogance and the Negative Pole of *k-b-r*

The negative pole of the root *k-b-r* is constituted through verbal derivations in the *istafʿala* (اِسْتَفْعَلَ) pattern. In Arabic morphology, this pattern inherently marks intentional and reflexive action, namely a conscious effort by the subject to acquire or claim a particular attribute. This is evident in common Form X examples such as *istaʿlama* (اِسْتَعْلَمَ, "to seek to know"), *istaghfara* (اِسْتَغْفَرَ, "to seek forgiveness"), and *istahzaʾa* (اِسْتَهْزَأَ, "to mock"). All of these forms indicate that Form X does not describe a passive state, but rather an active process directed by the subject toward oneself or toward others. Accordingly, when this pattern is applied to the root *k-b-r*, the resulting meaning is not "to become great," but to claim greatness for oneself.

When the root *k-b-r* is combined with the *istafʿala* pattern, it yields the Form X verb *istakbara* (اِسْتَكْبَرَ). Linguistically, *istakbara* encodes an action in which the subject consciously elevates or exalts oneself (Kamila, 2025). This form, together with its *maṣdar istikbār* (اِسْتِكْبَار), and the participial forms *mutakabbir* (مُتَكَبِّر) and *mustakbir* (مُسْتَكْبِر), is consistently employed in the Qur'an to depict actors who oppose truth, such as Iblīs, Pharaoh, the Meccan polytheists, and communities of earlier prophets. The predominance of these agentive and intentional forms indicates that, within the human domain, the root *k-b-r* tends to generate meanings of arrogance as active and deliberate behavior.

Theologically, this semantic structure interacts with the concept of *al-kibriyāʾ* (ٱلْكِبْرِيَاءُ), namely absolute greatness that belongs exclusively to God. Within Qur'anic epistemology, human beings possess no legitimate claim to occupy a position of greatness. Consequently, the act of claiming greatness for oneself constitutes *baghy*

(بَغْي), that is, a transgression beyond the existential limits of created beings. It is at this point that the causal mechanism of negative valuation becomes evident. *Istakbara* is transgressive not merely because of the modern gloss "arrogance," but because it is the direct outcome of the Form X morphological structure interacting with a firm theological framework that establishes the exclusivity of divine greatness.

Accordingly, the shift to the *istafʿala* pattern does not constitute a mere semantic change from the meaning "great" to "to act arrogantly," but rather functions as a linguistic marker of a form of theological transgression. In the context of the root *k-b-r*, this pattern morphologically encodes an action in which the subject consciously claims for oneself the attribute of *al-kibriyāʾ*, which is theologically established as the exclusive prerogative of God. Thus, the negative polarity inherent in *istakbara* does not arise solely from lexicographical definition or conventional usage, but instead emerges as a consequence of the interaction between its morphological structure and the Qur'anic theological framework.

A comparison between Form I *kabura* (كَبُرَ) and Form X *istakbara* (اِسْتَكْبَرَ) further clarifies this distinction. *Kabura* is used to describe a state of becoming great, heavy, or difficult without any inherent moral loading. By contrast, *istakbara* depicts a conscious and deliberate act of illegitimately exalting oneself. A contextual polarity analysis of all tokens demonstrates that *istakbara* consistently appears in contexts of revelation rejection, injustice, and spiritual arrogance. Accordingly, the negative pole of the root *k-b-r* does not depend on fragmentary verse interpretation, but rather constitutes a systemic pattern emerging from the combination of morphological form, agentive orientation, and theological discourse structure.

Other derivations, such as *kibr* (كِبْر), denoting an internal disposition of arrogance, and *kabāʾir* (كَبَائِرُ), referring to major sins, further expand this negative semantic network. *Kibr* marks an inner state, *istakbara* denotes agentive action, *mutakabbir* and *mustakbir* identify the actors, while *kabāʾir* represent the moral consequences manifested as major transgressions. Thus, the root *k-b-r* forms a complete conceptual sequence, moving from disposition (*kibr*), to action (*istakbara*), to agent (*mutakabbir* / *mustakbir*), and finally to moral consequence (*kabāʾir*). This entire system demonstrates that the negative pole is not merely a lexical inventory, but a stable and integrated morpho-semantic structure within Qur'anic discourse.

Neutral Meaning and the Evaluative Threshold Zone

In addition to the two extreme semantic poles, the root *k-b-r* also exhibits neutral usage, primarily realized through Form I *kabura* (كَبُرَ) and the noun *kibar* (كِبَر). At the level of basic lexical meaning, both forms denote "great," "heavy," or "old" without any inherent moral loading. In a number of verses, *kabura* (كَبُرَ) is employed to describe the gravity of prophetic commands or the magnitude of responsibility borne by a messenger, whereas *kibar* (كِبَر) is used to indicate a stage of advanced age. In such usages, the root *k-b-r* functions descriptively and does not encode either positive or negative evaluation.

Evaluative value emerges when these neutral forms are situated within *siyāq* (السِّيَاق), namely the linguistic, syntactic, and thematic context of the verse. When the context emphasizes the weight of a trust or mandate, the meaning may shift toward a positive valuation as a spiritual trial that reinforces the status of a prophet or the faithful. Conversely, when the context highlights the magnitude of deviation or disobedience, the same terms may shift toward an intensification of negative value. This mechanism demonstrates that, within the neutral zone, context operates as the determinant of polarity direction rather than as a provider of alternative meanings.

This threshold zone is significant because it reveals the semantic flexibility of the root *k-b-r* and demonstrates that evaluative polarity is not a fixed category, but a continuum that moves between two extreme boundaries. Corpus data indicate that physical and temporal meanings generally remain within a neutral value range, whereas theological and ethical meanings tend to be drawn toward one pole or the other in accordance with discursive configuration. Accordingly, the neutral zone functions as the gravitational center of the system, where the interaction between basic form, syntactic structure, and verse theme determines the trajectory of meaning toward either the positive pole of divine majesty or the negative pole of human arrogance.

Synthesis of the Morpho-Semantic Polarity Model of the Root *k-b-r*

The frequency distribution within the corpus does not merely function as a numerical report, but rather facilitates the identification of recurrent semantic patterns. The dominance of the Form X verb *istakbara* (اِسْتَكْبَرَ), with 40 tokens in the human domain, stands in contrast to the dominance of nominal–adjectival forms such as *kabīr* (كَبِير), likewise with 40 tokens, in the divine domain. This pattern indicates that the polarity of the root *k-b-r* operates as a system, in which the positive pole is more frequently constructed through stable nominal forms, whereas the negative pole is more frequently articulated through agentive and intentional verbal forms.

This mechanism may be explained through a horizontal spectrum model extending from the positive pole to the negative pole, with a neutral zone situated at the center. At the left end of the spectrum are nominal forms such as *al-Kabīr* (ٱلْكَبِيرُ), *kibriyāʾ* (ٱلْكِبْرِيَاءُ), *akbar* (أَكْبَر), and *kubrā* (كُبْرَىٰ). These forms tend to be non-agentive and consistently occur in theological contexts or in affirmations of divine signs, thereby constructing a relatively stable positive pole.

At the center of the spectrum are neutral forms such as *kabura* (كَبُرَ) and *kibar* (كِبَر). At the basic lexical level, both simply denote "great," "heavy," or "old" without inherent moral valuation. New evaluative value emerges only when these forms are situated within *siyāq* (السِّيَاق). When the context emphasizes the weight of a trust as a spiritual trial, meaning may shift toward the positive pole. Conversely, when the context foregrounds the magnitude of sin or the gravity of rejection, meaning may shift toward the negative pole. Thus, within the neutral zone, *siyāq* functions to determine the direction of polarity rather than merely to provide synonymous meaning.

At the right end of the spectrum are intentional verbal forms such as *istakbara* (اِسْتَكْبَرَ) and *yatakabbaru* (يَتَكَبَّرُ). Morphologically, the Form X *istafʿala* (اِسْتَفْعَلَ) pattern marks a conscious action by the subject to acquire or claim a particular attribute. Accordingly, *istakbara* does not signify merely "becoming great," but rather "claiming greatness for oneself." When this morphological structure encounters the theological principle that *al-kibriyāʾ* (ٱلْكِبْرِيَاءُ) constitutes absolute greatness belonging exclusively to God, any human claim to greatness becomes an act of transgression (*baghy*, بَغْي) and consistently yields negative evaluative value.

Through this model, the three groups of derivations are no longer read as separate lists. Nominal forms construct the positive pole, intentional verbal forms construct the negative pole, and neutral forms function as a flexible pivot that may shift toward either pole through *siyāq*. Accordingly, the polarity of the root *k-b-r* may be understood as an integrated morpho-semantic mechanism rather than as a mere variation of translation across verses.

Interaction of Morphology, Word Class, *Siyāq*, and Evaluative Value

The interaction among morphological patterning, grammatical category, syntactic relations, and thematic context operates simultaneously in determining the meanings of the derivations of the root *k-b-r*. Nominal forms such as *al-Kabīr* (ٱلْكَبِيرُ) and *kibriyāʾ* (كِبْرِيَاءُ) acquire positive value because they consistently occur in theological contexts. By contrast, verbal forms such as *istakbara* (اِسْتَكْبَرَ) combine a morphological structure that marks deliberate action with narrative contexts of revelation rejection, thereby producing a stable negative valuation. Neutral forms such as *kabura* (كَبُرَ) and *kibar* (كِبَر) shift toward one pole or the other only when interpreted through their syntactic relations and the thematic orientation of the verse. Accordingly, final meaning cannot be determined by the lexicon alone; rather, an integrated account of morphology, word class, and *siyāq* is required to apprehend the evaluative polarity of the root *k-b-r*.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the root k-b-r (كبر) in the Qur'an operates as a unified semantic system shaped by the interaction of morphological pattern, grammatical class, agentive orientation, and siyāq. The meanings generated by its derivational forms cannot be understood through isolated lexical readings, but require an integrated morpho-semantic approach.

The analysis of 161 occurrences indicates a clear evaluative polarity. Nominal and adjectival forms such as al-Kabīr, kibriyāʾ, akbar, and kubrā consistently construct the positive pole of divine majesty. In contrast, intentional verbal forms, particularly those based on the Form X pattern such as istakbara, represent the negative pole associated with deliberate human arrogance. Forms like kabura and kibar occupy a neutral position whose evaluative direction depends entirely on contextual usage.

Overall, the polarity of meanings related to k-b-r reflects an organized semantic mechanism in which morphology and context work together to shape interpretation. This model contributes methodologically to Qur'anic linguistics by

offering a consistent basis for distinguishing divine greatness from human arrogance, thereby reducing interpretive error. It also provides pedagogical value by strengthening learners' understanding of how form and context jointly determine meaning in classical Arabic texts.

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