

Mehdi Cengiz, *Dilde Kesinlik Sorunu: Anlatabilmenin İmkânı*, Ketebe Yayınları: İstanbul, 2021. 308 sayfa. ISBN 978-625-7303-80-4.

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Various disciplines in the Islamic intellectual tradition, including the linguistic sciences, philosophy, theology (*kalām*), logic, and legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), have examined *lafẓ* (utterance), *maʿnā* (meaning), and the relationship between them. Within the utterance–meaning relationship, the cognitive process by which meaning is apprehended once an utterance is designated or posited to it is termed *dalāla* (signification). In the science of rhetoric (*ʿilm al-balāgha*), the subject of *dalāla* is addressed in introductory discussions, which investigate semantic possibilities like literal and figurative usage (*ḥaqīqa* and *majāz*), as well as attribution (*isnād*) and its various states. In the discipline of logic, *dalāla* is treated as preliminary knowledge pertaining to the formal structure of propositions, whereas in legal theory it is discussed in detail within discussions of utterances, particularly in relation to the literal–figurative distinction and the degree of certainty conveyed by verbal evidence.

The certainty of linguistic *dalāla* (signification) is of crucial for attaining the definitive meanings of the sharʿī sources upon which the derivation of rulings in *fiqh* depends. Likewise, the Sharʿī sources to which other Islamic sciences refer also employ linguistic *dalāla* as a means of expression. In this context, the claim that linguistic *dalāla* is non-definitive (*zannī*) has emerged within *kalām* as an argument advanced by those who maintain that reason (*ʿaql*) ought to be given precedence over transmitted textual authority (*naql*) in cases of conflict between the two. Doctrinal divergences arising from attributing to God certain qualities specific to created beings—such as “the hand of God” (*yad Allāh*)—may be cited as

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instances in which reason is preferred over transmission. Indeed, the Sunni schools have held that such expressions derived from the revealed texts cannot be assigned their literal (*ẓāhir*) meaning; rather, these descriptive (*khābarī*) attributes must be subjected to interpretation (*tāwīl*) on the basis of reason.

Meaning has three modes of existence: in the mind, in language, and beyond language. Intra-linguistic data alone is not always sufficient to attain a definitive grasp of meaning as it exists in the mind. In such cases, the necessity of extra-linguistic data casts doubt upon the meaning conveyed by words. Consequently, linguistic signification cannot yield certainty and is rendered probabilistic (*zannī*). The view that linguistic signification does not convey definitiveness was first systematically articulated by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210). According to al-Rāzī and his followers, when the meaning of a word becomes questionable on account of linguistic or extra-linguistic impediments, its signification is thereby reduced to a probabilistic status, and no definitive rulings can be established upon probabilistic premises.

The theory of the *zannī* character of *lafẓī* evidence, examined in detail within the sciences of *kalām* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, has been attributed by Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and his followers to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. Others, however, contend that al-Rāzī's words have been misinterpreted and that this idea cannot rightly be ascribed to him. Seeking to clarify this controversy and to determine with precision al-Rāzī's view regarding the probabilistic nature of linguistic signification, Mehdi Cengiz authored *The Problem of Certainty in Language: The Possibility of Expression*, a work derived from his doctoral dissertation, *The Problem of Certainty in Language in the Context of the Signification of Words in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*. This study examines the elements that, from al-Rāzī's perspective, obstruct certainty and give rise to probabilism. Its central contribution is to advance the discussion of al-Rāzī's conception of linguistic signification as probabilistic, a view that he developed on the basis of issues in *kalām* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and to present it as a linguistic theory.

The reason for situating the idea of probabilistic linguistic signification within al-Rāzī's framework is that none prior to him had elaborated this notion as a systematic theory with defined principles. Indeed, al-Rāzī employed the notion of probabilistic signification in addressing various problems in *kalām* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and he applied it in his exegesis of the Qur'ān as well. Moreover, it was through al-Rāzī that the thesis of the probabilistic character of linguistic signification became widely recognized and associated with his name.

Prior to this work, no Turkish study had specifically examined the *zannī* character of linguistic signification in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's method. Works in the Arabic literature had approached the subject, but only from the perspectives of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *kalām*. The principal distinction of the study under consideration lies in its claim that al-Rāzī's view regarding the probabilistic nature of *lafẓī* evidences—although discussed within the disciplines of legal theory and theology—is, in essence, a linguistic theory. The work advances numerous arguments in support of this claim.

For example, in elaborating on al-Rāzī's classification of the transmission of linguistic data (*naql al-mādda al-lughawīyya*), Cengiz notes that the latter pertains to the methodology of grammar, comparing it with a similar classification made, albeit in different terms, by Kamāl al-Dīn al-Anbārī (d. 577/1181). Likewise, in discussing the transmission of linguistic data, the author expounds upon the view of 'Abbād b. Sulaymān (d. 250/864) concerning the intrinsic (*dhātī*) character of linguistic signification, and he explains why the works of *uṣūl al-fiqh* do not engage this position.

The author demonstrates through such examples that the phenomena debated in the context of theorizing the probabilistic character of linguistic signification in fact pertain to areas such as the methodology of grammar and the philosophy of language, the subject matter of the linguistic sciences rather than of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *kalām*.

In explicating the theory of the *zannī* nature of linguistic signification, the work evaluates various phenomena and concepts through references to leading grammarians such as Sibawayh (d. 180/796), al-Anbārī, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), Abū al-'Abbās al-Mubarrad (d. 286/900), and Ibrāhīm b. Mūsā al-Shāṭibī (d. 790/1388). This reliance upon authorities from the linguistic tradition itself constitutes a strong argument that the issue is, in essence, a linguistic theory. As Cengiz notes in another study, al-Suyūṭī summarized this very question by citing from al-Rāzī's *al-Maḥṣūl* in both his grammatical treatise *al-Iktirāḥ fī uṣūl al-naḥw wa-jadalihi* and his lexicographical work *al-Muḥṣir fī 'ulūm al-lughā*, thereby explicitly relating the matter to the Arabic language.

By contrast, both classical and modern studies that directly address the problem of certainty in language have examined the subject primarily within the frameworks of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *kalām*. Indeed, in those works, external factors that obstruct definitiveness in the text—such as abrogation (*naskh*), specification (*takḥṣīṣ*), and

rational objection (*mu'āraḍa 'aqliyya*)—are not distinguished from phenomena intrinsic to language, such as figurative usage (*majāz*) and polysemy (*ishtirāk*), which likewise impede certainty. The work under examination, however, makes this crucial distinction and thereby demonstrates that the issue is, at its core, a matter of linguistic theory.

The opening section of *The Problem of Certainty* introduces the problem of certainty in language, addressing the factors pertaining to transmission (*sanad*) and text (*matn*) that determine definitiveness as well as four theories concerning the certainty of linguistic signification. The theories considered in this context are: the definitiveness of language, the *zannī* nature of language, the theory of induction (*istiqrā'*), and the theory of contextual indication (*qarīna*). This section surveys various classifications of linguistic certainty theories, emphasizing that the classification including these four types has been adopted on account of its direct relevance to the present study (51).

What is particularly noteworthy, however, is that only a brief passage is devoted to the theory of contextual indication. Yet in that very passage the author cites al-Rāzī's claim that certainty can be attained through *qarīna* as a solution to the problem of the probabilistic nature of language (70). A more detailed treatment of the theory of *qarīna*, set out under a separate heading, would perhaps have been more conducive to a proper understanding of al-Rāzī's position.

The second section of the work addresses the elements that, according to al-Rāzī, impede certainty in language. This section explains how features inherent to the nature of language—such as polysemy (*ishtirāk*), figurative usage (*majāz*), and word-order variation (*taqdīm-tākhīr*)—hinder definitiveness, drawing upon the problem of the transmission of linguistic material to the present day.

External (extra-linguistic) factors are considered in the final section, yet they are not examined in as much detail as the internal linguistic elements. There are two reasons for this relative brevity. First, al-Rāzī maintains that linguistic signification does not in itself convey certainty, adducing as evidence phenomena internal to language rather than external elements that obstruct definitiveness. Consequently, the claim centers upon linguistic factors, whose number may be multiplied. External factors such as abrogation (*naskh*) and rational objection (*mu'āraḍa 'aqliyya*) are fixed extra-linguistic considerations and are of secondary significance within al-Rāzī's

theory (72). The second reason emerges from Cengiz's relocation of the problem of linguistic certainty—typically examined within the disciplines of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *kalām*—into the domain of the linguistic sciences. The predominant role assigned to intralinguistic factors thus accords with the author's principal aim in the study.

The third chapter seeks to determine al-Rāzī's approach to certainty in language. The reason for dedicating a separate chapter to this task lies in the complexity of the subject and in the fact that the views al-Rāzī expresses on it across his works appear inconsistent. Drawing directly upon al-Rāzī's writings, Cengiz endeavors to reconcile and interpret these apparently conflicting statements in order to arrive at a more precise understanding of his position.

In Cengiz's argument, the presence of such divergent statements in al-Rāzī's various works—even at times within different sections of the same text—together with the critical method (*taḥqīq*) that he employs, renders the task of identifying his stance particularly challenging (290). The study's investigation and determination of al-Rāzī's views thus shows that the work is not merely descriptive but also analytical in character. Furthermore, this chapter attempts to delineate, in light of various perspectives, the range of possibilities that may impede certainty in language.

An examination of the three sections of the work reveals that they adequately encompass the subject matter. The first section offers a preliminary exposition of the theories of linguistic certainty and the very notion of certainty in language. The second examines the factors that, according to al-Rāzī, impede linguistic certainty, with particular attention to those intrinsic to language. The third identifies the divergences in al-Rāzī's positions across his works in an effort to ascertain his overall approach to the issue.

The thematic progression of the chapters from the general to the specific is consonant with Cengiz's stated aim in composing the work he sought to achieve. In order to determine al-Rāzī's position on linguistic certainty, it is necessary first to situate him among the existing theories and subsequently to delineate his own views on the matter. Moreover, the evaluation in the final section of the statements al-Rāzī made on the subject throughout his works proves apposite for the realization of the author's objective.

The principal claim advanced in the work is that the problem of the certainty of linguistic signification is, at its root, a linguistic issue, such that al-Rāzī's conception

of probabilism constitutes, in effect, a linguistic theory. From this perspective, a more detailed exposition of *qarīna* would have more effectively served the aim of the study and could have been employed to substantiate its findings. Moreover, the absence of numbering in the sections and subsections of the work represents a stylistic decision that imposes a burden upon the reader. This omission renders the tracking of topics more difficult and makes retrospective consultation both cumbersome and confusing.

The work has inaugurated a new avenue of inquiry within linguistic studies by introducing the problem of linguistic certainty into the domain of Arabic language scholarship and by seeking to demonstrate this problem's essentially linguistic character. In doing so, it has shown that the issue of the probabilistic (*zannī*) nature of linguistic signification bears only indirect relevance to the disciplines of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *kalām*, being in essence a matter of textual interpretation. Indeed, in the wake of this study, similar investigations into the problem of linguistic certainty have begun to be undertaken within the fields of legal theory, theology, and linguistics. According to the Cengiz, the treatment of this question within the framework of Islamic sciences other than Arabic has impeded both theoretical reflection and practical engagement with the subject. By contrast, when the matter is approached within the boundaries of language itself rather than from a theological or jurisprudential perspective, the new concepts and theoretical frameworks that emerge constitute a field of research from which those very disciplines may also profit.

In conclusion, the work has inaugurated a new field of inquiry for those who seek to engage more deeply with the Islamic sciences in general and with linguistic studies in particular. Moreover, the identification of which scientific disciplines are directly and indirectly concerned with a topic commonly treated within the Islamic sciences constitutes a methodological contribution, enabling issues to be approached in a scientific manner yielding sound conclusions. This is because certain problems in the Islamic sciences are located within the foundational sources of multiple disciplines; classical scholars, in accordance with the scientific understanding of their time, did not rigidly demarcate these fields. As a result, subjects directly related to language—such as the question of linguistic certainty—were examined within the traditions of *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *kalām* and treated in accordance with the principles of those disciplines. From this perspective, it becomes evident that the author, by structuring the study into sections in line with his stated aim, has succeeded in presenting the topic effectively and has attained the expected outcomes of the research.