# Language, Identity and Power in the Quranic Story of Moses: A Sociolinguistic Survey

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**ABSTRACT:** *Language is not only a communication tool but also a means of identification and uncloaking the hidden power-relation. A study of the Quranic version of the story of Moses reveals instances of multi-faceted identities and statuses and how they are employed to enact and legitimize power and dominance. Grammatical concepts and lexicalization convey the spatio-temporal relevance in constructing language of conflict and enacting authority. Statistical analytical tools like charts and histogram were employed to account for the features and sequence of expressions in the chapters in focus. It was discovered that the use of language can exhibit identity and power.*

## 1.0    Introduction

The linguistic creation and relevance of some lexical items like "creator", "creature", "lord" "resurrection", "hell", "heaven", etc. are indicators of power and authority and presupposes inequality of status manifest through dominance and servitude.Through language use, we learn who we are and the way other people perceive us. It is a means through which an identity is projected and an authority exercised (Adler, B.R., Rosenfield,, & Towne., 1995).Of all the means of communication, language, perhaps, is the most effective.

Communication is perceived by Jaworski and Coupland (2001) as a "ritualized process which avails the communicators the opportunity to construct as well as project the versions of their individual identity to the audience. Therefore, communicative process is incomplete without due consideration of the audience. After all, communication adjudged to be appropriate in a setting might turn to be a colossal blunder in another.

Questions like these shall therefore guide the focus of this research: How does a language function as an identity – marker and, most importantly, carve out a uniquely supreme identity for and ascribe absolute power to God? How does a language which is influenced by an individual perception and a religious ideology mark identity and power in utterances? How do language patternscorrelate with different social situations? We are convinced that using a sociolinguistic approach, the role of language in conceptualizing the identity and extolling the power of God, on one part, and that of Pharaoh and Moses, on the other, will be clearer and better appreciated than the so-called unquestionable religious approach.

## 2 .0    Theoretical Framework

### 2.1    A Review of Relevant Sociolinguistic Concepts

A sociolinguistic study of language use uncovers the way a social identity of an individual or a particular people is signaled.(Holmes, 2001). It probes into various functions of language in accordance with social institutions in the society. Hymes'(1974) assertion that spoken language is primary prompts him to evolve ethnography of communication model of sociolinguistics to study interdependence of language and society. He believes linguistic tools are sufficiently capable of studying the society and various societal activities.

*Social semiotics,*as Hodge and Kress (1994) prefer to call sociolinguistics, studies conventional codes and behaviors of an individual or a body. The termembodies styles and ideologies and what they symbolize in society. According to Hodge and Kress, styles and ideologies are composed of words and other linguistic forms used to depict social class and power struggle.

Fishman (1972) is of the opinion that language is undisputedly a social act, and that society exerts a considerable influence on language attitudes and choice.Like Fishman, Hudson (1999) and Stockwell (2002) also assert that sociolinguistics looks into how various social contexts or settings determine a particular form of language. From the foregoing, one can deduce that two major interacting factors have a reciprocal influence on each other, namely; language and society. Thus, the sociolinguistic variables are classified into social and linguistic variables.

*Social variables* encompass age, gender, status, role of discourse participants as well as the setting. Age consideration includes both physical and mental maturity of the speakers. Gender factor also determines a number of things in society. For instance, greater percentage of physical and mentalallocation of tasks is given to male than female though the proportion varies from culture to culture. In Nigeria, as an example, many people believe that top secrets and sensitive issues are not supposed to be discussed with female. This traditional belief is captured in a Yoruba proverb which says that "female have no secrets".

Setting or context is another social variable that affects language choice and variation. Setting dictates the formality or informality scale of language use (Holmes, 2001). Either of these styles is facilitated by the role-relation. In other words, it is the scale of social distance which defines the level of intimacy or distance that exists within communicators. Similarly, the status of interactants is significant; a group's or an individual's low or high status affects the level and manner of communication. Crystal and Davy (1969) opine that the role and status of language user impose certain restraints on what and how s/he speaks and consequently determining the particular set of linguistic forms which a speaker is at liberty to use. All these social variables, in turn, exert considerable effects on linguistic variables.

*The linguistic variables* have to do with language choice and variation. Social variables like setting, status, profession and age influence language choice thereby serving as means of identification. Linguistic variation, on the other hand, is concerned with formal properties of language such as morphological, syntactic, lexical and phonological systems. Both social and linguistic variables are inextricably tied to how language is used by speakers in different settings for different purposes. The interdependence of the language and society underscore the enormous effects they have on the inhabitants of a particular society.

### 2.1.1    The Concepts of Language, Identity and Power

The definition of language, as observed by Holmes (2001), presents 'unsuspected' difficulties simply because it is a social and communicative tool people always take for granted. Language–be it spoken or written – is used to negotiate, manipulate and direct people's perception. As empirical as performing an action tends to be, it is sometimes misconstrued if it is not complemented with utterances.

Perception entails identification and interpretation of sensory information into a coherent and unified view ofthings. It is formed not only by what we see but more importantly by the knowledge emanating from what is sighted. Perception affects the use of language. If language is a means of externalizing our feelings and reasoning, it then confirms Thomas'(1990) assertion that there is an indivisible link between our concept of something and the language we use to represent it.

Through language, we perceive others and others perceive us. We also define our social identity. Thornborrow (1990) quoted in Thomas and Wareign (1999) emphasizes the significance of language in the construction of individual and social identities. Identity is defined as who we are, how we perceive ourselves and others, where we were born or lived and what our socio-economic status is, among others. As Thornborrow (1990) observes:

> *Your social identity is not something you can always determine on your own; it is also bound up with how others perceive you. In fact...your perception of yourself as an individual can only be in relation to others, and your status within a*

*social group. The status can be constructed through language use (p. 143).*

Names and naming practice are a remarkable means of constructing identity. Some Yoruba proverbs even say that it is the name of a child that tells who the child is and that home background is always considered before christening a child. This implies that the name an individual bears is indicative of how such person is perceived. Apart from being an identity indicator, addressing a person with the first name or surname signifies intimacy (informality) or distance (formality) between the communicators.

However, circumstances do arise when proper nouns are not made use of. In that case, pronominal is employed instead. Pronouns like "you" and "he" are often used as identity-markers. "You" can depict social solidarity between interactants while "He" especially with capital "H" even when the pronoun is in the middle of a sentence is exclusively used to refer to God. The use of honorific "We" is also noteworthy in identifying the personality of the speaker. Ideally, the pronoun "We" is a first person plural pronoun. However, if the pronoun is used honorifically, it functions as singular. It is used by a speaker to assert, claim or establish self-esteem for him/herself.

In Foucault's (1970), it was discovered that a strong connection exists between language and power. He claims that through the use of language, not only do individuals or groups identify themselves but also, either explicitly or implicitly, state who holds sway. Appropriate choice of register facilitates this practice. A register is determined by the field or social setting, tenor or role-relation and the medium of communication. Based on this Foucault's assertion, one can then ask: What is power?

Jaworski and Coupland (1997) define power as a set of attributes or potentials possessed by an individual or a body. Power is a privileged asset, it is transient and resistible. Power conveys the right to request someone to do something. This is often demonstrated by the use of imperative sentence. The idea of power therefore presupposes unequal social status. Thomas (1984) observes that a strategic (subjective) use of language is an instrument of the dominant individual or group employed to foster certain interests. That is why utterances of the socially elevated are rated and held high. Fairclough (1989) corroborates that one important aspect of power is the possibility of imposing and maintaining

order. This means that power can create two extreme positions of domination and subordination.

### 2.1.2  Religious Ideology

Ideologies refer to particular systems of beliefs and assumptions that underlie every linguistic analysis and social event (Thomas, 1984). Ideology is contestable because of its variant usage in which theoretical as well as normative contexts are embedded. Ideology entails beliefs, norms and values. It is also sometimes taken to be a form of life. Howarth (2001) approaches ideology from two opposing perspectives. One, that ideology is often taken as a set of beliefs or attitudes that influence the actions of a particular group. Two, that ideology represents certain doctrines, ideas, norms and values of a vested interest group. Based on these views, religion is classifiable as a kind of ideology.

Religion, according to Reese (1980), is from the Latin word "religare" meaning 'to bind fast'. Conventionally, religion is described as an institution made up of adherents who are bound by a set of doctrines and who regularly adopt some means of relating the individual to what is taken to be the ultimate nature of reality (Reese, 1980:488). Parts of religious cardinal tenets are love, sympathy and kindness to fellow beings. Religions are against apathy, oppression, hatred and terrorism.

*The Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* (1953) explains that primitive religion arose out of fear, superstition and rationality. It explains that polytheism and not monotheism was the earlier religion of man. But in all monotheistic religions like Christianity, Islam and Judaism, the primary concern and focus has been the concept of God. Anthony in *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (1979) defines God as:

> *The single omnipotent and omniscient creator*
> *and creator of everything else that exists" (p.*
> *283).*

Reese (1980) reckoning with the Aristotelian concept of God defines God as:

> *Unmoved mover and final cause to which all is*
> *related, while remaining self-sufficiency and*
> *perfection unrelated to everything (p.193).*

In many chapters of the Qur'an, God communicates, with man,jinn and animals for various reasons which include enjoining, forbidding, explaining or describing things, among others. Such divine communication is referred to as a revelation. Revelation is granted to man in three forms. *Quran* says:

> *It is not for any mortal that Allah should speak*
> *to him except by inspiring or from behind a veil*
> *or by sending a messenger revealing by His*
> *permission what He pleases" (42:51).*

Those chosen for revelation and propagation of God's message are called prophets. Prophets Moses and Aaron were among these prophets. They were sent to the powerful Egyptian ruler, Pharaoh. Several passages, in chapters 6, 7, 17, 18, 19, 20, 28 of the Qur'an, reveal that there is a direct conversation between God and Moses. Even in Islamic tradition, Moses bears a special honorific title of KALIMU-LLAH, Meaning "One who speaks with God". A summary of Moses' life, his mission and his divine signs as given by the *Encyclopedia of Islam (*1993) is presented below. (Note that "Musa" and "Harun" are used here):

> *Musa received from the burning bush in the holy*
> *valley of Tawa, a message,a voice which orders*
> *him to take off his shoes, the message to*
> *pharaoh the signs of his mission, the rod, the*
> *snake and the hand that becomes white. His*
> *speech is difficult to understand. Harun*
> *accompanies    him as Wazir. Pharaoh*
> *reproaches Musa with ingratitude, saying he*
> *had been brought by them. Pharaoh assembles*
> *his magicians but their rods are devoured by*
> *Musa's. The magicians profess their belief in*
> *God and are    mutilated in punishment*
> *(pp. 638 – 639).*

Utterances in the Qur'an are not necessarily direct expressions of those speakers whose stories were narrated therein. The style of *Qur'an* is lucid, and the use of language is fantastic. How then does the language of the Holy Qur'an, specifically as it relates to the story of Moses, serve as a projection of the identity and power of the individuals involved:

God, Moses and Pharaoh? It is our conviction that applying sociolinguistic principles, one can show and explain how identity and power of an individual or a group are constructed and perceived in the society.

## 3.0. Textual Analysis

In the realm of religion, man is considered a being whose fundamental mission on earth is to worship God. Man is subservient to God, his creator whom he, the creature, should always worship. Basically, then, the question of equality does not arise between the creator and the creature. Excerpts from two chapters make our primary data. The first is Chapter 20 titled "Taha" comprising a total number of 135 verses out of which verses 9 to 97 are devoted to the narration of the story of Moses. The second is Chapter 28 titled Al-Qasas (The Narration)consisting of 88 verses. The story of Moses is contained in verses 1 to 48 of the Chapter.

To begin with, the use of language suggests the identity as well as the power in possession of each of the three major participants: God, Moses and Pharaoh. It is also clear how language is constructed to depict and correlate with the social conflicts and tension at different stages of the story.

Language is used in these two narrations to conceptualize a reality or an assertion. In other words, it mirrors the perception of the speaker. For instance, Moses and Pharaoh had different perceptions concerning who should actually be God. While Moses acknowledged God as the only Supreme Being, Pharaoh did not share the same view with him because his own perception differed. Instead, he proclaimed himself to be the supreme God not only of the universe but also of Moses, especially. He said, "I am thy lord, the most high". (Chp. 79 v. 24).

To start with the identities of the concerned individuals- Moses, Pharaoh and God – differ in accordance with the setting. That is why for convenience, Moses' story shall be divided into three phases in order to identify not only their correlative identities but also to explain the communicative patterns distributed therein spatio-temporally. The first phase considers Moses as an infant; the second phase, as an adolescent (pre-prophethood stage); and the third phase as an adult (prophetic

era).This paper shall examine those distinctive social and linguistic variables which empirically make the text as a sociolinguistically analyzable masterpiece.

## 3.1      Social Variables

The identified social variables in the text are namely: age, gender, status and setting. These variables function as both identity and power markers. We shall first examine how they signal the identity of Moses, Pharaoh and God.

### 3.1.1      Age and Gender

The identity of Moses in the early part of his life is that of a helpless infant but who was destined to live and fulfill a great mission. He crossed all the hurdles on his path. The birth and nursing of Moses coincided with the reign of a tyrannical Egyptian ruler who ordered the killing of all male Israelite children in that period. History reveals that Pharaoh's action was informed by sorcerers' forecast that an Israelite male child would be born and would cause Pharaoh's destruction and down fall. Moses as an adolescent was courageous as expected of his male gender; though not all males are necessarily courageous. First, he tried to help an Israelite against an Egyptian who later died. Second, as a married man, he fended for his family and was prepared to face a possible danger all alone when he sighted a burning bush. Moses said:

> *Tarry ye, I perceive a fire and I hope to bring*
> *you from there some information, or a burning*
> *firebrand that ye may warn yourselves (Chp. 28*
> *v. 29).*

As an adult, he was commissioned to convey a divine message. It was a risky mission of rescuing the Israelites from the persecution of the arrogant Egyptian ruler, Pharaoh. Here, Age was also an important determinant of prophethood as indicated in the quotation below.

> *When he reached **full age** and he was firmly*
> *established (in life), we bestowed on him wisdom*
> *and knowledge: for thus do we reward those*
> *who do good (Chp.28 v 14).*

Meanwhile, the word "Assudau" translated as "full age" shall be discussed under lexicalization. Religious adherents believe that God is

ageless, gender-neutral and immortal. On the other hand, the story is silent on the age-signal of Pharaoh. However, he was assumed to be an adult because he was said to be a married man. The text shows he was courageous though tyrannical. The diagram on the next page succinctly captures others' perception of Moses' multi-faceted identities.
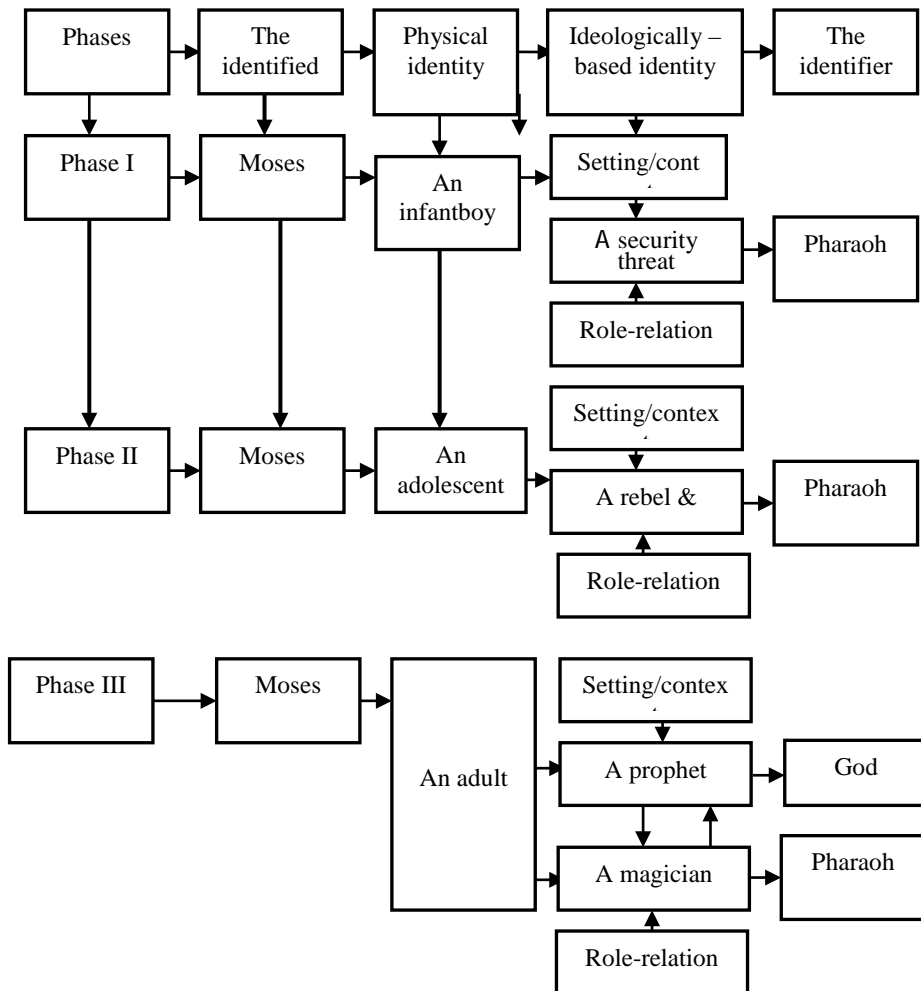


*Fig. 1: A diagram showing Moses' perceived identities at various stages.*

The above diagram is a synopsis of Moses' perceived identities at various stages based on circumstance and individuals involved.

Perception changes with each transitional phase. The perception of God, Moses and Pharaoh is represented in the above diagram with "ideologically-based identity", which in turn, is influenced by the setting and the role-relationship between Moses and his vinterlocutors.

### 3.1.2  **Status**

Moses' status is determined by a number of social political parameters and the role relation he shared with God, on one hand, and Pharaoh, on the other. Moses, to God, has a status of a divine messenger who needed to be equipped with strong evidence, which incidentally were his hand and staff. These two evidences which God described as "our signs" (Chp. 20 v 56) subsequently became Moses' symbols of power and authority against Pharaoh's.

On the other hand, Pharaoh was identified as a king who was desperate to protect his throne against any usurper at all cost. This inordinate ambition made him become a killer (of Israeli male children), an oppressor (of Israelites) and a self-acclaimed universal ruler (God) who was ready to crush whatever could block his way or undermine his power and authority.

The status of God, first and foremost, is that of the master, the creator who creates for a purpose and he who possess masterplans of events across time and space. This characteristic of God was demonstrated through the manner in which the mission He assigned Moses and his proclamation of Pharaoh's doom came to pass in spite of all obstacles. This confirms that God is powerful. God attested to His own power: "… the promise of Allah is true"(Chp. 28 v 13).

Furthermore, the formlessness of God demonstrated His supernatural status. He appeared in the form of a burning fire. However, the importance and import of this burning fire cannot be fully appreciated without reference to its setting.

### 3.1.3  **Setting**

The physical setting of the above event is in the desert, where shrubs, grasses and trees are scanty and scattered, and where atmosphere is naturally cold. Little wonder then that the sight of a fire in such a vast plain land especially at midnight caught the attention of Moses and his family. Two major reasons could be adduced to this: One, Moses and his family were wanderers in search of a new place of settlement. Thus, the

sight of fire could signify "life", and perhaps those in charge of that fire might be of assistance. Two, it was a cold night in the desert and Moses wanted to fetch firebrands so that his family could warm themselves. So when he got to the spot he had sighted a fire, there was no fire burning on that spot. Instead, it was God who declared that:

> *But when he came to the fire, He was called O Moses! Verily, I am thy Lord! (Chp. 20 v.11 - 12).*

> *But when he came to the fire, he was called from the right Bank of the valley, from a free in hallowed ground: O Moses! Verily, I am Allah, the Lord of the Worlds…" (Chp. 28 v. 30).*

Apart from this fire incident which occurred in the wilderness of Egypt, other major events mentioned in this story took place at the palace of king Pharaoh of Egypt.

## 3.2.    **Linguistic Variable**
Under the linguistic variable, we shall review lexicalization, adjuncts, modal auxiliaries, the evolution of names and naming practices, and finally, the choice of words that characterize language of conflict.

### 3.2.1    **Lexicalization**
Etymologically, The Arabic word **Assuda** has been interpreted by commentators in various ways. Yusuf Ali (1990) puts the age bracket to be between 18 – 30years, but most commentators like Ibn Umar Zamakhshari (1982) Maududi (1988) Ibn Kathir (2002) all believe the age is between 15 – 40 years. It could be inferred here that the consensus opinion is that this age bracket represents the stage of youth. It is expected that at this period, a man is fully matured physically and psychologically to face challenges. Many prophets, except John the Baptist and Jesus, received divine calls at this age.

Similarly, Moses challenged Pharaoh to test the efficacy of his magic. Thus, the contest was fixed for daybreak – **Duha** of a festival. This word is translated as "when the sun is well up" as seen below:

> *Moses said: Your tryst is the Day of the festival*
> *and let the people be assembled when **the sun is***
> ***well up"***(chp 20 v. 59).

The festival referred to here is the Temple Festival. The Egyptians were fond of celebrating this festival with pomp and pageantry. Palace and public places decorated and public holiday declared to facilitate mass attendance. The timing of "Duha" (An Arabic word that means daybreak) represents the time when people will not be too busy. The spatio-temporal significance of this word is that the place and time chosen will definitely attract a mammoth crowd. More importantly, these two expressions **assudau** (his full age) and **duha** (when the sun is well up) are key words to identify the timing of prophet hood of Moses as well as to indicate the time of contest between him and Pharaoh respectively.

### 3.2.2   Adjuncts

Adjuncts like "verily", ''indeed", "certainly" and "sure" are used to signal certainty and authority on the part of God. Here are two examples:

1.   **Verily,** I am thy Lord! Therefore put off your shoe… (Chp. 20) v. 12)
2.   We will **certainly** strengthen thy arm through thy brother… (Chp. 28 v. 35).

Therefore, the choice of these words is deliberate to strengthen Moses confidence and assure him of the reliability of the supreme God in his deadly mission. To demonstrate these, Moses was commissioned a prophet, equipped with a staff and a shining hand among other signs, and was asked to convince Pharaoh about the existence of a supreme being called God, as well as to rescue the oppressed Israelites from Pharaoh's clutch.

### 3.2.3.   Modal Auxiliary

Likewise, the use of modal auxiliaries like "shall" and "will" strongly signify certainty and authority and, even more importantly, is "may" when uttered by the all-knowing God. Examples:

1.   For we **shall** restore him to thee…. (Chp. 20 v. 40)
2.   We **may** show thee of our greater signs…" (Chp. 20 v. 230).

3.    He **will be** taken up by one who is an enemy to me and an enemy to him. (Chp. 20 v. 39).

These modal auxiliaries express moods of heavy-handed authority "to asset or deny the possibility, impossibility, contingency or necessity of something" (McGregor, 2003). The fact that all these promises came to pass shows that the speaker was actually powerful. Both adjuncts and modal auxiliaries not only give an idea of who God is but also portray Him as powerful and a reliable source of power.

### 3.2.4    Imperative and other Function-based Sentence types

Looking at another dimension of power demonstration, imperative sentences are used to signal power. God uses the following sentences to issue orders and commands:

1.    **Go thy and thy brother…** and **slacken not,** either of you in keeping me in remembrance (Chp. 20 v. 42).
2.    **Go both** of you to Pharaoh, **fear not…**" (Chp. 28 v. 43).
3.    **Throw it** O Moses… **seize it** and **fear not…** now, **draw thy hand** close to thy side…" (Chp. 20 vs. 19 – 22).
4.    **…put off thy shoes:** thou art in the sacred valley of tuwa" (ch 20 v. 12).

All these sentences further strengthen how authoritative and powerful God is. To further demonstrate the exercise of power and authority, this time by Pharaoh, an order was issued by Pharaoh since it is assumed that an order is mostly given by a superior. Here is the imperative sentence used to exercise authority by Pharaoh.

1.    O Haman! **Light me** a klin (to bake bricks) out of clay and **build me** a lofty palace that I may mount up to the god of Moses….(Chp.28 v. 38).

In a society plagued with deception and oppression, impregnable evidence and some measures of diplomacy and toughness are sometimes needed to excel. Moses' staff and shining hand serve as impregnable evidence against the magicians. To convince people of the genuineness of Moses mission, God commanded that Moses' discussion with Pharaoh should exhibit some measures of politeness. Thus, God requested Moses to:

> *speak to him (Pharaoh) mildly, perchance he*
> *may take warning or fear (Allah) (Chp. 20 v 44).*

Pharaoh however rejected a gentle approach and tried to implicate Moses before the conservative spectators by accusing him of castigating their ancestors who did not also recognize the monotheism of God. He asked maliciously:

> *What then is the condition of previous*
> *generation?(Chp. 20 v. 51).*

The above statement by Pharaoh was to trap Moses into scathing denunciation of his fore bearers, which would have deprived him of the sympathy of the Egyptian crowd. Another example of the use of interrogation is when Pharaoh perceived Moses as a grand magician. Thus, he accused Moses that:

> *Hast thou come to drive us out of our land with*
> *thy magic O Moses?*

By referring to the Moses' miracle as a mere magic, he was trying to convince the crowd that there was nothing divine in what Moses was performing; it was just a magical skill like theirs. Below is a breakdown of function-based sentence types as used in the two narrations.

| Sent. types/ function | SUB –CLAUSES | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | **Imperative Request** | **Decl** | **Inter** | **Excl** |
| Chp. 20 | 48 | 80 | 13 | 28 |
| Chp. 28 | 32 | 66 | 08 | 45 |

*Table 1: A statistics of the frequencies of sentence types based on functions*

The dominance in number of the declarative sentence is due to two reasons. One, the data is narrative in nature. Two, declarative sentences give information which is subject to verification, so, though it is expected that any information from "all knowing" God will be reliable because, after all, it is open to confirmation. Comparatively, a higher number of imperative sentences recorded in Chp. 20 because the datum

is mostly conversational (i.e. direct speeches). While most exclamatory sentences were used to invoke names, interrogatory ones were used to advance arguments and counter-arguments or to instigate the people of Egypt.

3.2.5   **Names and Naming Practice:**
As another means of marking identity, names and naming practices are also significant. As for God, He has ninety nine names in Islamic tradition. These names are also His attributes. Most of these attributes which depict role-relations either explicitly or implicitly are self-assertive while some are man-perceived. Evidence abounds in the Qur'an, for instance, "the One" "the Creator" the Master", etc. In a nutshell, names and naming tradition are aspects of language use that shape and constrain our identities in society.

Similarly, "Moses" is a Hebrew word which literally means (1) clipper (2) someone rescued from drowning and (3) helper. Connotatively, therefore, it is not out of context to identify Moses as a child rescued from drowning so that he can clip Pharaoh's wings of arrogance and pride as well as help the oppressed Israelites (Munjid, 1986).

Also, first name as well as second person singular pronoun ''you'' are used to address Moses. This mode of address shows intimacy and informality. It is also observed that God created a friendly atmosphere with Moses by addressing him with his first name in an affectionate manner, e.g. "O Moses", even though Moses still addressed his boss "My Lord" or "O Lord". This form of address depicts a role-relation signaled by the statuses of the two discourse participants.

The pronouns "You" and "Him" are also significant in this context. "You" is either used to refer to God or Moses to avoid constant repetition of proper nouns especially when the speech was direct between Moses and God. The capitalization of letter 'H' in the third person pronoun "Him" is worthy of explanation; it is an exclusive pronoun used to refer to God in written convention.

The constant but unusual use of first person plural pronoun (honorific) "We" is equally significant especially when the referent is not plural in terms of number. God's constant use of "We" in this story does not denote plurality; it is rather a linguistic device employed to achieve

two paradoxical objectives: one, to show modesty in the exercise of power as in examples 1 & 2 below. Two, it is used to demonstrate an aura of arrogance emanating from power and authority as in examples 3 & 4 below. It is clear however, that there is an overall target for which this linguistic device is used notwithstanding the manners and circumstances that surround its utterances. For instance, the pronoun ''we'' is used to give an assurance or a guarantee. Examples:

1. We said: **fear not!** For thou hast indeed the upper hand (Chp. 20 v 68).
2. **We shall restore him to thee** (Chp. 28 v 7). Or claim responsibility and/or promise the possibility of repeating some if need be. Examples:
3. "When he reached full age, and was firmly established (in life), we **bestowed on him wisdom and knowledge"** (Chp. 28 v. 14).
4. "And indeed we **conferred a favour on thee** another time" (Chp. 20 v 37).

It is also noted that whenever God claims responsibility for an event or assures of security, these claims or assurances as demonstrated in the story of Moses, are always translated into action, thus strengthening or confirming His power and authority. Instances abound in the story. Example:

1. …We shall restore him to thee, and we shall make him one of our messengers" (Chp. 28 v. 7).
2. He said": We will certainly strengthen thy arm through thy brother, and invest you both with authority so they shall not be able to touch you: with our signs shall ye triumph – you two as well as those who follow you" (Chp. 28 v. 35)

### 3.3    Language of Conflict

The story further reveals how words and utterances can be politicized to reveal power struggle or individualism in society. For instance, in that society, Pharaoh made himself God. Pharaoh said, **"I am your Lord,** "most high". (Chp.79 v.24). But Moses was commanded to refute this claim and assert God as the only God. The following argument is illustrative of the difference of opinions between God

(represented by Moses and Aaron) and Pharaoh on who is actually **God**, the Supreme Being as God Himself proclaimed.

1.       "Verily, I am Allah; **there is no God but I.** Serve me only" (Chp. 20 v 14).
         This provocation of Pharaoh was further heightened by Moses and Aaron's declarations as in the excerpt that:
2.       "Verily, we are messengers sent by thy Lord" (Chp. 20 v. 47).
3.       "Verily, we are messengers sent by **thy Lord"** (Chp. 20 v 49).

        Note that Moses and Aaron unequivocally maintained God as "thy Lord", i.e. Pharaoh's Lord. But Pharaoh refused this vocative element and instead preferred to describe God as "the Lord of you two" i.e. Moses and Aaron.

        This marks tension and great challenge in the story. These utterances portray that language can be used to manipulate and express an individual thought, sentiment or belief system. However, the final defeat of Pharaoh and his magicians changed the perception of people to God as the only Supreme Being the most powerful. Pharaoh's identity initially as he tried to portray, was that of 'God'. His eventual failure to subjugate Moses however could not earn him the identity he was claiming.

        Again, when Moses and Aaron were accused of being mere magicians, they denounced it and retorted" "Woe to you" (Chp. 20 v. 61). Evidently, the tension was mounting very high. Moreover, when the contest was won by Moses, Pharaoh threatened to decisively deal with the magicians who were hitherto his followers for denouncing him. He said:

> Be sure, **I will cut off your hands** and feet on
> opposite sides, and **I will have you crucified** on
> trunks of palm trees (Chp. 20 v. 71).

        It is observed that out of the total number of 67 verses in Chp. 20 ( vs. 9 – 76), only 24 verses capture the conflict between Moses and Pharaoh while in Chp. 28, the story narration covers verses 1 – 42 out of which only 3 verses mark this tension / conflict. Therefore, apart from being more comprehensive, the first narration also comprises direct utterances of the three principal actors in the conflict. Thus, the

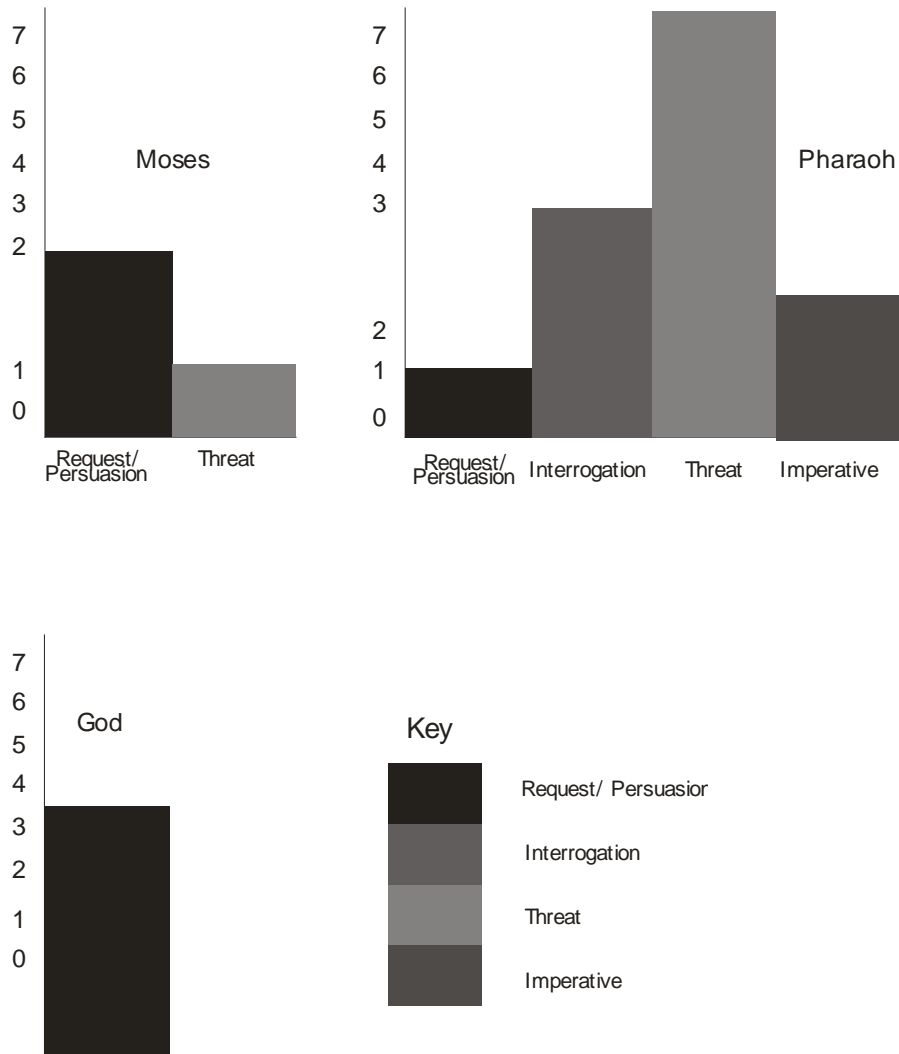researcher opted for the former to compute the histogram shown as follows.



*Fig. 2: A histogram showing frequencies of language of conflict in the story*

It is noteworthy that the translated sentences of the holy Qur'an are multi-clausal. As such, all the four 'conflict language' parameters identified in the histogram are expressed in clauses. For instance, it is observed that most sentences are multi-clausal,

and as many as five clauses could be present in one sentence. The table on the next page gives quantitative explanation of this fact.

| Chapters | No. of verses in the story | Mono-clausal | Multi-clausal |
|----------|----------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Chp. 20  | 68 (100%)                  | 18 (26.4%)   | 50 (73.5%)    |
| Chp. 28  | 48 (100%)                  | - (0%)       | 48 (100%)     |

*Table 2: A statistics showing the frequencies of mono/multi-clauses*

The preponderance of multi-clausal sentences enhances externalization of unbroken chain of complex and multiple thoughts. Apart from this view, multi-clausal utterances/sentences are characteristic of a spoken discourse, like the one in focus. One can therefore observe that the use of language during conflicts and tension is hot, full of diatribes and threats.

## 4.0     CONCLUSION

This paper attempts an analysis of Quranic – based narration of the story of Moses from the sociolinguistic perspective. It identifies certain linguistic elements, and makes more explicit, the ways these elements serve as signals of the identity and power of the speaker. It also identifies and provides justification for how communicative patterns correlate with various social settings. Thus, various ways through which the use of language can convey feelings were studied, for instance, how is the language manipulated to depict persuasion, threat and tension. Through this academic analysis, we are able to provide rationale for the utterances in the story of Moses, thus making an aspect of religious discourse, specifically story narration, open and susceptible to a non-religious neutral analysis.

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