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SYNTACTIC PATTERNS OF GOVERNING VERBAL NOUNS (ISM AL-MAṢDAR AL-ʿĀMIL) IN THE QURʾĀN: AN ʿĀMIL–MAʿMŪL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Classical Arabic grammar recognizes that certain nouns can govern other constituents as verbs do, and the verbal noun (maṣdar) holds a distinctive place among them because it is nominal in form yet verbal in meaning. Although the naḥw tradition discusses the conditions of its governance (ʿamal) at length, its occurrence in the Qurʾān has rarely been inventoried. This study identifies the forms of ism al-maṣdar al-ʿāmil in the Qurʾān, classifies the syntactic patterns they generate, and explains the characteristics of the relationship between the governing element (al-ʿāmil) and the governed element (al-maʿmūl). Using a qualitative, descriptive library research design, the study draws its primary data from Qurʾānic verses containing governing verbal nouns and its supporting data from classical grammatical treatises, works of iʿrāb and tafsīr, and contemporary Arabic linguistic studies. The data were collected through documentation and analyzed through identification, verification, classification, and syntactic interpretation within the framework of al-ʿāmil wa-l-maʿmūl theory. Twenty constructions distributed across fourteen sūras were identified. Fourteen (70%) show the verbal noun assigning the accusative to a direct object (mafʿūl bih), two (10%) show it assigning the nominative to an agent (fāʿil), and four (20%) remain contested among grammarians. In twelve of the fourteen object constructions, the agent is expressed in the genitive through annexation. Qurʾānic verbal nouns tend to preserve the transitivity of their source verbs, suggesting that the verb–object relation is the most resilient trace of verbal syntax under nominalization. The study offers a systematic inventory of a phenomenon long treated mainly in theoretical terms.

Keywords: al-ʿāmil wa-l-maʿmūl; Arabic grammar; ism al-maṣdar; nominalization; Qurʾānic syntax

Abstrak

Tradisi nahwu Arab mengakui bahwa sejumlah isim dapat memengaruhi unsur lain dalam kalimat sebagaimana fiʿil, dan maṣdar menempati posisi khas di antaranya karena berbentuk nominal tetapi bermakna verbal. Meskipun syarat-syarat amalnya telah banyak dibahas dalam literatur nahwu, kemunculannya dalam Al-Qurʾan jarang diinventarisasi. Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi bentuk-bentuk ism al-maṣdar al-ʿāmil dalam Al-Qurʾan, mengklasifikasikan pola sintaksis yang dibentuknya, serta menjelaskan karakteristik hubungan antara unsur pengamal (al-ʿāmil) dan unsur yang dipengaruhinya (al-maʿmūl). Penelitian kepustakaan dengan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif ini menggunakan data primer berupa ayat-ayat Al-Qurʾan yang mengandung maṣdar yang beramal, serta data pendukung

dari kitab-kitab nahwu klasik, kitab iʿrāb dan tafsir, dan kajian linguistik Arab kontemporer. Data dikumpulkan melalui teknik dokumentasi dan dianalisis melalui tahap identifikasi, verifikasi, klasifikasi, dan interpretasi sintaktis berdasarkan teori al-ʿāmil wa-l-maʿmūl. Ditemukan 20 konstruksi yang tersebar pada empat belas surah. Sebanyak 14 konstruksi (70%) menunjukkan maṣdar yang menaṣabkan mafʿūl bih, 2 konstruksi (10%) menunjukkan maṣdar yang merafaʿkan fāʿil, dan 4 konstruksi (20%) masih diperselisihkan oleh para ahli nahwu. Pada dua belas dari empat belas konstruksi mafʿūl bih, pelaku diungkapkan dalam bentuk jarr melalui iḍāfa. Maṣdar dalam Al-Qurʾan cenderung mempertahankan sifat transitif fiʿil asalnya, yang menunjukkan bahwa relasi fiʿil–objek merupakan jejak sintaksis verbal yang paling bertahan dalam proses nominalisasi. Penelitian ini menyajikan inventarisasi sistematis atas fenomena yang selama ini lebih banyak dibahas secara teoretis.

Kata Kunci: al-ʿāmil wa-l-maʿmūl; ism al-maṣdar; nahwu; nominalisasi; sintaksis Al-Qurʾan

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INTRODUCTION

The Qurʾān has served as the foundational source of Arabic linguistic thought since the earliest stages of the discipline, and many of the rules that came to define Arabic grammar were formulated with reference to its verses. The distinctiveness of Qurʾānic language lies not only in its rhetoric and the beauty of its style (*uslūb*) but also in the diversity of its grammatical structures, which reflect intricate relations among form, meaning, and syntactic function. Within the *naḥw* tradition, the Qurʾān occupies a central position as a source of evidentiary citation (*istišhād*), because it attests a wide range of constructions on which the grammarians based their accounts of Arabic syntax (Baalbaki, 2008; Owens, 1988; Versteegh, 2014). This centrality continues to motivate contemporary research on Qurʾānic grammar, from studies of particles and modifiers to the semantic consequences of competing parsings (Andar et al., 2026; Shofiah et al., 2026; Suryadinata, 2020). Studying the syntactic structures of the Qurʾān therefore matters not only for the development of grammatical theory but also for understanding the mechanisms that give Qurʾānic expression its particular character.

One syntactic phenomenon of particular interest is the existence of nouns that can perform the grammatical work of verbs. The tradition refers to them as *al-asmāʾ al-ʿāmila ʿamal al-fiʿl*, nouns that govern other constituents in the way a verb governs its agent (*fāʿil*) or its direct object (*mafʿūl bih*) (al-Ġalāyīnī, 1993; Ibn Hišām, 1985). Among these, the verbal noun holds a special place: morphologically it is a noun, yet it retains part of the syntactic behavior of the verb from which it derives. The grammarians define the *maṣdar* as a word denoting an event stripped of time (*al-ḥadaṯ al-muǧarrad ʿan al-zaman*), whereas the Arabic verb encodes temporal contrasts through its inflection, broadly opposing the perfect (past) to the imperfect (non-past) (al-Ġalāyīnī, 1993; Ryding, 2005; Wahyudi & Masrukhi, 2023). The verbal noun thus keeps the event and its participants while setting aside the temporal anchoring of the finite verb. Modern linguistics describes the same tension as nominalization:

a deverbal noun may preserve some or all of the argument structure of its verb while taking on the external distribution of a noun (Comrie & Thompson, 2007; Koptjevskaja-Tamm, 1993). For Arabic, the *maṣdar* has accordingly been analyzed as a "mixed category" whose verb-like properties, such as an accusative object, coexist with a thoroughly nominal syntax (Börjars et al., 2015; Fassi Fehri, 1993).

This in-between status has consequences beyond grammatical theory. Because the case and position assigned to a word determine how a verse is construed, decisions about *iʿrāb* shape interpretation, and divergent parsings of the same expression can yield different readings of a verse (Andar et al., 2026; Djuaeni, 2019; Saputri et al., 2025). The phenomenon also matters pedagogically. Indonesian translations render Qurʾānic verbal nouns sometimes as verbs and sometimes as nouns, depending on syntax and translation technique (Nurmala et al., 2022), and learners whose first languages mark time on the verb through affixation, as Bugis does with its past, present, and future markers, must learn that an Arabic verbal noun can carry an object without carrying tense (Wahyudi, 2026). Precision in such matters is not merely academic: Qurʾānic verses are routinely quoted, translated, and explained in public religious communication, where the transparency of linguistic and exegetical sources remains uneven (Firdaus & Wahyudi, 2026). A clear account of how Qurʾānic verbal nouns govern their complements therefore serves grammarians, exegetes, translators, and teachers of Arabic alike.

The classical tradition laid strong theoretical foundations for this question. Sībawayh (d. 180/796) observed that certain nominal forms can act as verbs because of their semantic proximity to verbal action (Sībawayh, 2015). Ibn Mālik (d. 672/1274) elaborated the conditions of governance (*šurūṭ al-ʿamal*) and the relation between the governing and the governed element, treating the *maṣdar* and the *ism al-maṣdar* together in a single chapter on their verbal operation (Ibn ʿAqīl, 1980; Ibn Mālik, 1990). Ibn Hišām (d. 761/1360) extended the analysis by describing the range of syntactic relations a verbal noun may establish (Ibn Hišām, 1985), while al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) gathered and systematized the views of earlier grammarians on the governing nouns, offering a more comprehensive picture of their place in grammatical theory (al-Suyūṭī, 2014). These works, however, were primarily concerned with concepts, conditions, and rules. Their Qurʾānic examples are illustrative rather than exhaustive, and none of them sets out to inventory the governing verbal nouns of the Qurʾān or to classify the patterns they form.

Contemporary scholarship has broadened the study of the *maṣdar* in several directions, which can be grouped into three orientations. The first is morphological and inventorial: studies have catalogued verbal nouns in particular sūras or sections, identifying, for example, 37 forms in Sūrat al-Kahf (Suhemi, 2020), the types and functions of verbal nouns in Sūrat Yāsīn (Masnunah, 2015), and the formal and functional types found in the first *juzʾ* (Nurmala et al., 2022). The second is functional: Agisniani and Jamjam (2023) show that the *maṣdar* can occupy the positions of predicate, subject, object, and adverbial, and may behave like a transitive or intransitive verb, while Rija et al. (2024) and Karim et al. (2020) clarify that the *maṣdar* is a broader category than the cognate accusative (*al-mafʿūl al-muṭlaq*), with which it is

often conflated in teaching. The third is interpretive, focusing on how the parsing of nominalized structures, including the clausal *maṣdar muʾawwal*, generates exegetical meaning (Saʿadah, 2022; Saputri et al., 2025). Computational work has added a further resource: the Quranic Arabic Corpus annotates the entire text with morphological and dependency information grounded in traditional grammar (Dukes et al., 2013), although its annotation is designed for broad coverage rather than for the fine-grained disagreements among grammarians.

Read together, these studies reveal a consistent pattern. Inventories describe the forms of the *maṣdar* but not what those forms govern; functional studies describe the positions the *maṣdar* occupies but not the complements it controls; interpretive studies attend to individual verses rather than to a distribution across the text. The governing capacity of the verbal noun, its *ʿamal*, has thus rarely been taken as the unit of analysis in its own right. As a result, we still lack an empirical answer to a question the classical grammarians implicitly raised: when a verbal noun governs in the Qurʾān, which relation does it most often preserve, that with the object or that with the agent, and where do the grammarians disagree?

A preliminary reading of the Qurʾānic text suggests that the answer is not uniform. Some constructions show a verbal noun followed by an accusative object, others suggest a relation with an agent in the nominative, and a number of forms are analyzed differently by different grammarians. This variation indicates that the governing verbal noun forms patterns that merit systematic mapping rather than isolated illustration. The novelty of the present study lies precisely here. Instead of describing the morphology of the *maṣdar* or its general grammatical functions, it treats the *ʿāmil–maʿmūl* relation as the object of analysis, compiles an inventory of governing verbal nouns across the Qurʾān, and distinguishes clearly established cases from contested ones. In doing so, it complements the classical literature, which emphasizes conditions of governance, with evidence about the distribution of governance in actual use.

Accordingly, this study addresses two research questions: (1) What forms of *ism al-maṣdar al-ʿāmil* occur in the Qurʾān? (2) What syntactic patterns characterize the relationship between these verbal nouns and their governed elements (*maʿmūl*)? The study aims to identify the governing verbal nouns of the Qurʾān, to classify the syntactic patterns they generate, and to explain the characteristics of the relation between *al-ʿāmil* and *al-maʿmūl*. Theoretically, it contributes to Qurʾānic grammatical studies by offering empirical evidence on how verbal syntax survives nominalization in Arabic. Practically, it provides an annotated inventory that teachers, translators, and students of Arabic can use when dealing with verbal nouns in Qurʾānic and classical texts.

METHOD

Analytical Approach

This study is a qualitative, descriptive library-based study (*library research*) grounded in the classical theory of *al-ʿāmil wa-l-maʿmūl*. This theory holds that a change in the case inflection (*iʿrāb*) of a constituent is caused by another constituent, the governor (*al-ʿāmil*),

while the constituent that receives the effect is the governed element (*al-maʿmūl*) (Ibn Hišām, 1985; Owens, 1988). The unit of analysis is the governing construction, that is, a verbal noun together with the element whose case or syntactic position is attributed to it. A descriptive design was chosen because the research questions concern what forms occur and how they pattern, rather than causal or experimental relations.

In line with the treatment of the *maṣdar* and the *ism al-maṣdar* in a single chapter of the grammatical tradition (Ibn ʿAqīl, 1980; Ibn Mālik, 1990), the term *ism al-maṣdar al-ʿāmil* is used in this study in its broad sense to refer to any verbal noun that governs a *fāʿil* or a *mafʿūl bih* as its source verb would. Following the conditions of governance set out in the commentary tradition on Ibn Mālik's *Alfiyya* (Ibn ʿAqīl, 1980) and summarized by al-Ġalāyīnī (1993), a construction was admitted as a candidate when the verbal noun could be paraphrased by *an* or *mā* plus a finite verb without loss of meaning; was not in the diminutive; and was not modified before its complement. For instance, *ka-ḏikrikum ābāʾakum* (Q 2:200) can be paraphrased as *ka-an taḏkurū ābāʾakum*, "as you remember your fathers."

Data Sources

The primary data consist of Qurʾānic verses containing constructions of governing verbal nouns, cited according to the reading of Ḥafṣ ʿan ʿĀṣim as printed in the Madīna *muṣḥaf*. Supporting data were drawn from four groups of classical and modern sources: (a) grammatical treatises, including Sībawayh (2015), Ibn Mālik (1990), Ibn ʿAqīl (1980), Ibn Hišām (1985), and al-Suyūṭī (2014); (b) works of Qurʾānic *iʿrāb*, including al-Zaǧǧāǧ (1988), al-Naḥḥās (2008), al-ʿUkbarī (1998), al-Samīn al-Ḥalabī (1996), and Yāqūt (2010); (c) exegetical works with substantial grammatical commentary, namely al-Ṭabarī (2001), al-Zamaḫšarī (1987), al-Qurṭubī (2006), Abū Ḥayyān (1993), al-Ālūsī (1994), and Ibn ʿĀšūr (1984); and (d) lexicons, namely Ibn Manẓūr (1994) and al-Fayrūzābādī (2005). Contemporary studies of Arabic linguistics were consulted to situate the findings. English renderings of the verses are adapted from Abdel Haleem (2004), with literal glosses added where the syntactic argument requires them.

Materials

The principal research instrument was the researchers themselves, guided by a data sheet that recorded, for each construction, the verse reference, the verbal noun, its source verb, the governed element, the case of the governed element, the grammatical relation (object or agent), the morphological type of the verbal noun (annexed, nunated, or with the definite article), and the positions taken by the *iʿrāb* and *tafsīr* sources. This sheet allowed each classification to be traced back to its textual basis.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through documentation. The researchers first read the Qurʾānic text to locate verbal nouns followed by a nominal element that could be construed as their complement. Each candidate was then checked against the grammatical conditions described in Section 2.1 and against the analyses offered in the *iʿrāb* and *tafsīr* works. Candidates for which no source attributed the following element to the verbal noun were excluded. The

resulting constructions were entered into the data sheet together with the relevant passages from the supporting sources.

Data Analysis

The analysis proceeded in four stages. In the identification stage, verbal nouns with potential governing force were isolated. In the verification stage, each construction was tested against the conditions of governance and the parsings recorded in the classical sources. In the classification stage, constructions were assigned to one of three categories: (a) the verbal noun assigns the accusative to a direct object (*naṣb al-mafʿūl bih*); (b) the verbal noun assigns the nominative to an agent (*rafʿ al-fāʿil*); and (c) the status of the verbal noun or of its complement is disputed among the grammarians (*ẖilāfiyya*). Frequencies and percentages were calculated for each category. In the interpretation stage, representative constructions were analyzed in detail with reference to the theory of *al-ʿāmil wa-l-maʿmūl*, and the distributional results were compared with classical claims and with previous studies.

Trustworthiness and Ethics

Trustworthiness was pursued through source triangulation, in which each classification was checked against grammatical treatises, *iʿrāb* works, and exegetical commentaries rather than a single authority. Constructions that the sources analyzed in mutually incompatible ways were not forced into a clear category but were reported separately as contested cases, a conservative decision intended to avoid inflating the category of governing verbal nouns. The complete inventory, with verse references, is reported in Table 1 so that every classification can be checked by readers. The study involved no human participants and relied exclusively on published texts; ethics approval was therefore not required.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Distribution of Governing Verbal Nouns in the Qurʾān

Classical discussions of *ism al-maṣdar al-ʿāmil* mostly explain its rules and conditions without showing how it is distributed across the Qurʾān. Mapping the data is therefore a necessary first step: it reveals how often the phenomenon occurs, which forms are involved, and which relations they tend to establish with the elements they govern. The identification and verification stages yielded 20 constructions in which a verbal noun governs like a verb. They are spread across fourteen sūras whose themes include worship, law, the histories of the prophets, social relations, and creed (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of governing verbal nouns (*ism al-maṣdar al-ʿāmil*) in the Qurʾān

No.	Verbal noun	Sūra	Verse	Governed element (*maʿmūl*)	Type of governance
1	ذِكْر (*ḏikr*)	al-Baqara	2:200	آبَاءَكُمْ	Accusative object
2	دَفْع (*dafʿ*)	al-Baqara	2:251	النَّاسَ	Accusative object
3	قَتْل (*qatl*)	Āl ʿImrān	3:181	الْأَنبِيَاءَ	Accusative object
4	نَقْض (*naqḍ*)	al-Nisāʾ	4:155	مِيثَاقَهُمْ	Accusative object
5	قَتْل (*qatl*)	al-Nisāʾ	4:155	الْأَنبِيَاءَ	Accusative object
6	أَخْذ (*aẖḏ*)	al-Nisāʾ	4:161	الرِّبَا	Accusative object

7	أَكْل (*akl*)	al-Nisāʾ	4:161	أَمْوَالَ النَّاس	Accusative object
8	أَكْل (*akl*)	al-Māʾida	5:62	السُّحْتَ	Accusative object
9	قَوْل (*qawl*)	al-Māʾida	5:63	الْإِثْمَ	Accusative object
10	مَقْعَد (*maqʿad*)	al-Tawba	9:81	خِلَافَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ	Contested
11	ذِكْر (*ḏikr*)	Maryam	19:2	عَبْدَهُ	Accusative object
12	سَوَاء (*sawāʾ*)	al-Ḥaǧǧ	22:25	الْعَاكِفُ وَالْبَادِ	Nominative agent
13	دَفْع (*dafʿ*)	al-Ḥaǧǧ	22:40	النَّاسَ	Accusative object
14	دُعَاء (*duʿāʾ*)	al-Nūr	24:63	بَعْضِكُم بَعْضًا	Accusative object
15	خِيفَة (*ḫīfa*)	al-Rūm	30:28	أَنفُسَكُمْ	Contested
16	سَوَاء (*sawāʾ*)	al-Ǧāṯiya	45:21	مَحْيَاهُمْ وَمَمَاتُهُمْ	Nominative agent
17	ذِكْرًا (*ḏikran*)	al-Ṭalāq	65:10–11	رَسُولًا	Contested
18	كِفَاتًا (*kifāt*)	al-Mursalāt	77:25–26	أَحْيَاءً وَأَمْوَاتًا	Contested
19	إِطْعَام (*iṭʿām*)	al-Balad	90:14–15	يَتِيمًا	Accusative object
20	إِيلَاف (*īlāf*)	Qurayš	106:2	رِحْلَةَ	Accusative object

Source: Authors' analysis of the Qurʾānic text (reading of Ḥafṣ ʿan ʿĀṣim), verified against the classical iʿrāb *and* tafsīr *sources listed in Section 2.2.*

As Table 1 shows, most constructions display a direct relation between the verbal noun and an element functioning as its *mafʿūl bih*. Forms such as *ḏikr*, *dafʿ*, *qatl*, *naqḍ*, *aḫḏ*, *akl*, *qawl*, *duʿāʾ*, *iṭʿām*, and *īlāf* clearly preserve the syntactic relation characteristic of their source verbs. In these constructions the verbal noun functions as *al-ʿāmil*, and the object it requires appears as *al-maʿmūl*. Two constructions, both involving *sawāʾ* (Q 22:25; Q 45:21), are analyzed by some *iʿrāb* scholars as having governing force over an element in the position of *faʿil*. Although few in number, they show that the governing capacity of the verbal noun in the Qurʾān is not confined to the transitive relation with an object but may also extend to the agent. Finally, four forms, namely *maqʿad*, *ḫīfa*, *ḏikran*, and *kifāt*, have a disputed status, since each can be analyzed as a verbal noun, a *maṣdar mīmī*, a noun of place (*ism makān*), or another nominal form. These forms are therefore not treated as core data but are discussed separately in Section 3.3.

The spread of these constructions across fourteen sūras and several thematic domains suggests that the governing verbal noun is not a sporadic exception tied to a particular subject matter. It is better understood as part of the syntactic system of Arabic, which allows functions to pass between nominal and verbal categories. This observation is consistent with the grammarians' view that the link between form and function in Arabic rests on semantic relations rather than on the morphological category of a word alone (Sībawayh, 2015; Versteegh, 2014).

Syntactic Patterns of Governing Verbal Nouns

The governing verbal nouns of the Qurʾān do not appear in a single, uniform syntactic shape. Although all of them perform verb-like functions, the relations they establish between *al-ʿāmil* and *al-maʿmūl* vary. The classification stage produced three patterns: the verbal noun with an accusative object, the verbal noun with a nominative agent, and the contested cases (Table 2; Figure 1).

Table 2. Classification of the syntactic patterns of governing verbal nouns

Syntactic pattern	Frequency	Percentage	Constructions (No. in Table 1)
Verbal noun + accusative object (*naṣb al-mafʿūl bih*)	14	70%	1–9, 11, 13, 14, 19, 20
Verbal noun + nominative agent (*rafʿ al-fāʿil*)	2	10%	12, 16
Contested cases (*ḫilāfiyya*)	4	20%	10, 15, 17, 18
Total	**20**	**100%**	

Source: Authors' classification based on Table 1.

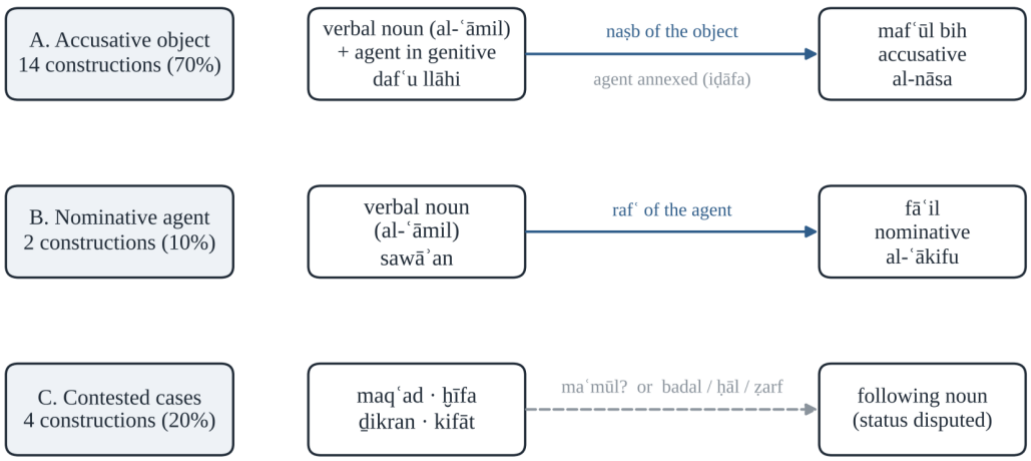


Figure 1. The *ʿāmil–maʿmūl* relation in the three patterns of governing verbal nouns

Source: Authors' synthesis of Tables 1 and 2. Alt text: Three rows of boxes linked by arrows. Row A shows a verbal noun annexed to its agent in the genitive and assigning the accusative to an object (dafʿu llāhi → al-nāsa, 14 cases). Row B shows sawāʾan assigning the nominative to an agent (al-ʿākifu, 2 cases). Row C shows four forms whose relation to the following noun is disputed, drawn with a dashed arrow (4 cases).

The dominant pattern is the verbal noun that assigns the accusative to a direct object, which accounts for 70% of the data. It appears in such phrases as *ḏikrikum ābāʾakum* (Q 2:200), *dafʿu llāhi l-nāsa* (Q 2:251), *qatlahumu l-anbiyāʾa* (Q 3:181), *aḫḏihimu l-ribā* (Q 4:161), *aklihimu l-suḥta* (Q 5:62), duʿāʾi *baʿḍikum baʿḍan* (Q 24:63), *iṭʿāmun … yatīman* (Q 90:14–15), and *īlāfihim riḥlata* (Q 106:2). In all these constructions the verbal noun preserves the transitive relation of its source verb and thereby governs the element functioning as *mafʿūl bih*. This dominance is consistent with Sībawayh's position that the governing force of a nominal form depends on the strength of its semantic bond with the source verb (Sībawayh, 2015): the stronger that bond, the more readily the verbal noun retains the syntactic relations of the verb. It also indicates that most of the governing verbal nouns in the Qurʾān derive from transitive verbs (*afʿāl mutaʿaddiya*), which inherently relate an action to its object.

A closer look at the morphology of the fourteen object constructions adds a further dimension to this result. Thirteen of them involve an annexed verbal noun, and in twelve of

these the annexed element is the agent, as in *dafʿu llāhi l-nāsa*, "God's repelling of people," where the agent *Allāh* stands in the genitive and the object *al-nās* in the accusative. Only one, *iṭʿāmun … yatīman*, involves a nunated verbal noun, and none involves a verbal noun with the definite article. In Q 19:2 (*ḏikru raḥmati rabbika ʿabdahu*), some *iʿrāb* authorities attribute *ʿabdahu* to *raḥma* rather than to *ḏikr*; on either analysis, however, the object is governed by a verbal noun. This distribution matches closely the frequency ranking stated by the grammarians, according to whom the governing *maṣdar* is most frequent when annexed, most analogically regular when nunated, and rare when definite (Ibn ʿAqīl, 1980). The Qurʾānic data thus confirm empirically a ranking that the classical tradition had stated largely on the basis of its intuitions and illustrative citations.

3.2.1 Representative Analysis of the Accusative Object Pattern

The first example comes from Q 2:200:

فَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَذِكْرِكُمْ آبَاءَكُمْ أَوْ أَشَدَّ ذِكْرًا

"…remember God as you remember your fathers, or even more fervently." (Q 2:200)

Here *ḏikr* is the verbal noun of *ḏakara–yaḏkuru*, "to remember, to mention." The pronoun *-kum* attached to it is its agent in the genitive, while *ābāʾakum* stands in the accusative as its *mafʿūl bih*, governed by the verbal meaning that the noun retains. The relation can be represented as *ḏikr* (*al-ʿāmil*) → *ābāʾakum* (*mafʿūl bih*, *al-maʿmūl*). Nominalization, in other words, has not erased the transitivity of the verb; *ḏikr* operates here just as *ḏakara* would, which supports Sībawayh's view that the governing force of a nominal form depends on its proximity in meaning to the verb from which it is formed (Sībawayh, 2015).

The second example comes from Q 24:63:

لَا تَجْعَلُوا دُعَاءَ الرَّسُولِ بَيْنَكُمْ كَدُعَاءِ بَعْضِكُم بَعْضًا

"Do not consider the Messenger's summons to you to be like your summons to one another." (Q 24:63)

The noun *duʿāʾ* is the verbal noun of *daʿā–yadʿū*, "to call, to summon." It is annexed to *baʿḍikum*, which expresses the agent, while *baʿḍan* stands in the accusative as its object. The construction shows that governance continues even though the governor is a noun, and it illustrates how the action–object relation remains the most productive pattern of the governing verbal noun in the Qurʾān. The verse is also instructive for translators: the elegant Arabic nominal phrase must often be unpacked into a clause in English or Indonesian, a shift that has been documented in Indonesian translations of the Qurʾānic *maṣdar* (Nurmala et al., 2022).

3.2.2 Representative Analysis of the Nominative Agent Pattern

The nominative agent pattern is illustrated by Q 22:25:

الَّذِي جَعَلْنَاهُ لِلنَّاسِ سَوَاءً الْعَاكِفُ فِيهِ وَالْبَادِ

"…which We made for all people, residents and visitors alike." (Q 22:25)

Unlike the previous pattern, this construction shows a relation between the verbal noun and an element understood as its agent. Several *iʿrāb* scholars explain that *sawāʾ* is a verbal noun meaning *al-istiwāʾ*, "being equal," which here carries the sense of the participle *mustawin* and retains governing force. On this analysis, *al-ʿākifu* and *al-bādi* stand in the position of agent with respect to the verbal meaning of *sawāʾ*: *sawāʾ* (*al-ʿāmil*) → *al-ʿākifu* / *al-bādi* (*fāʿil*) (Abū Ḥayyān, 1993; al-ʿUkbarī, 1998; al-Samīn al-Ḥalabī, 1996). The same analysis is applied to *sawāʾan maḫyāhum wa-mamātuhum* (Q 45:21). It is worth noting that the accusative *sawāʾan* reflects the reading of Ḥafṣ adopted in this study, whereas other canonical readings have *sawāʾun*, which permits a different parsing. Although this pattern accounts for only 10% of the data, its theoretical significance is considerable: it shows that the verbal noun can, under certain conditions, sustain a relation with the doer of the action and not only with its object.

3.3 Contested Cases (Ḫilāfiyya)

Although most of the data can be classified with confidence, four forms remain the subject of disagreement among the grammarians. The disagreement concerns the morphological status of the word, its position in the clause, and the type of relation it establishes with neighboring elements. These cases show that the analysis of the governing verbal noun is not always univocal but depends on the grammatical approach adopted by each scholar.

3.3.1 Maqʿad in Q 9:81

فَرِحَ الْمُخَلَّفُونَ بِمَقْعَدِهِمْ خِلَافَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ

"Those who stayed behind were glad to remain behind the Messenger of God." (Q 9:81)

Some philologists regard *maqʿad* as a *maṣdar mīmī* meaning *al-quʿūd*, "sitting, staying behind," which keeps a strong semantic link with the verb *qaʿada*. On this view *maqʿad* approaches the governing verbal noun, since it denotes the action without following the pattern of the basic *maṣdar* (al-Samīn al-Ḥalabī, 1996; Ibn Hišām, 1985). Other exegetes and *iʿrāb* scholars, however, locate the syntactic focus of the verse not in the governing force of *maqʿad* but in the phrase *ḫilāfa rasūli llāh*, which they analyze as an adverbial (*ẓarf*) or a circumstantial complement (*ḥāl*). In this reading *maqʿad* is better understood as a noun of place or state than as a governor acting directly on a complement (al-Ālūsī, 1994; al-Zamaḫšarī, 1987). Given these competing analyses, *maqʿad* is classified as a contested case, since its governing relation is less evident than in constructions that explicitly assign the accusative to an object.

3.3.2 Ḏikran in Q 65:10–11

قَدْ أَنزَلَ اللَّهُ إِلَيْكُمْ ذِكْرًا ۝ رَّسُولًا يَتْلُو عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ مُبَيِّنَاتٍ

"God has sent down a reminder to you, a messenger reciting to you God's revelations, which make things clear." (Q 65:10–11)

Some grammarians regard *ḏikran* as a verbal noun that retains governing force, so that *rasūlan* is construed as its object, the sense being that God has sent down a mention of a messenger. On this analysis *ḏikran* means not only "reminder" but also preserves part of its verbal function, allowing a governing relation to be formed with the following noun (Abū Ḥayyān, 1993; al-Zamaḫšarī, 1987). Other scholars hold that *rasūlan* is not the *maʿmūl* of *ḏikran* but a substitute (*badal*) or an explicative apposition (*ʿaṭf bayān*), in which case *ḏikran* is simply a noun meaning "reminder" with no direct governing relation to what follows (Ibn ʿĀšūr, 1984; al-Qurṭubī, 2006). Because its syntactic status remains disputed, *ḏikran* is more appropriately classified as a contested case than as a definite instance of *ism al-maṣdar al-ʿāmil*.

3.3.3 Ḫīfa in Q 30:28

تَخَافُونَهُمْ كَخِيفَتِكُمْ أَنفُسَكُمْ

"…would you fear them as you fear one another?" (Q 30:28; literally, "as your fearing yourselves")

The form *ḫīfa* derives from the root of *ḫāfa–yaḫāfu*, "to fear." Some scholars explain *ḫīfa* as a verbal noun that preserves its relation with an object, so that *anfusakum* is understood as the element it governs (al-Samīn al-Ḥalabī, 1996; al-Suyūṭī, 2014). Abū Ḥayyān (1993), by contrast, explains that the construction can be understood as a comparison (*tašbīh*) or as an attribute of an implied verbal noun (*maṣdar maḥḏūf*), in which case the governing force of *ḫīfa* does not stand independently. In view of this disagreement, *ḫīfa* is treated as supporting rather than core evidence for the governing verbal noun.

3.3.4 Kifāt in Q 77:25–26

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ كِفَاتًا ۝ أَحْيَاءً وَأَمْوَاتًا

"Did We not make the earth a container for the living and the dead?" (Q 77:25–26)

Some philologists explain *kifāt* as the verbal noun of *kafata*, "to gather, to hold together," in which case *aḥyāʾan wa-amwātan* is understood as related to the verbal meaning it carries: the earth gathers the living and the dead (al-Fayrūzābādī, 2005; Ibn Manẓūr, 1994). Another view treats *kifāt* as a noun of place or as a noun denoting the place where people are gathered in life and after death. On this view *kifāt* is no longer a governing verbal noun but a noun forming part of the predicative structure of the verse, with *aḥyāʾan wa-amwātan* analyzed differently (al-Qurṭubī, 2006; al-Ṭabarī, 2001). For this reason, *kifāt* is placed among the contested cases rather than the core data.

Taken together, the contested cases show that the analysis of the governing verbal noun cannot be separated from the different approaches of grammarians and exegetes. Some forms can be understood as having governing force, while others are better explained as ordinary nouns or derived forms with different syntactic functions. This study therefore separates core data from contested data in order to keep the classification precise and to avoid an excessive expansion of the category. The disagreements themselves are informative: they arise precisely where the boundary between nominal and verbal function is least sharp.

3.4 Characteristics of Governance and Their Theoretical Implications

The patterns described above point to three characteristics of the governing verbal noun in the Qurʾān. The first is the dominance of object governance, observed in 14 of the 20 constructions (70%). The verbal noun consistently preserves the transitive relation inherited from its source verb, which suggests that transitivity is the most stable syntactic property in the passage from verb to noun. When a verb is nominalized, its relation to the object tends to survive more readily than its other relations.

The second characteristic is the scarcity of the nominative agent pattern. Only two constructions show a verbal noun governing an agent in the nominative. This scarcity, however, should not be read as a loss of the agent. As shown in Section 3.2, the agent is very often present but is realized in the genitive through annexation, as in *ḏikrikum* and *dafʿu llāhi*. Nominalization in Qurʾānic Arabic thus tends to reassign the agent to the genitive slot of the noun phrase while leaving the object in the accusative. This is precisely the configuration that typological studies of nominalization identify as common, in which the subject of the verb becomes a possessor-like dependent while the object retains verbal marking (Comrie & Thompson, 2007; Koptjevskaja-Tamm, 1993). It is also compatible with analyses of the Arabic *maṣdar* as a mixed category that inherits the argument structure of its verb while remaining nominal in its external syntax (Börjars et al., 2015; Fassi Fehri, 1993).

The third characteristic is variation in the strength of governance. Not every verbal noun shows the same governing capacity. Some establish an unmistakable relation with their *maʿmūl*, whereas others, such as *maqʿad*, *ḫīfa*, *ḏikran*, and *kifāt*, give rise to competing analyses. Governance thus appears to be influenced by syntactic context, verse structure, and the analytical approach of the grammarians. The *ʿamal* of the verbal noun is better understood as a gradient than as a uniform property: it is strongest where the noun remains semantically close to its verb and weakest where the noun has drifted toward a concrete or locative meaning.

These findings support the theory of *al-ʿāmil wa-l-maʿmūl* developed by the classical grammarians. Sībawayh held that the governing force of a form depends on its semantic proximity to the element from which it derives (Sībawayh, 2015), and Ibn Mālik affirmed that the verbal noun can perform the function of the verb as long as it maintains its semantic relation with that verb (Ibn Mālik, 1990). The present data confirm both positions: forms that remain semantically close to their verbs, such as *ḏikr*, *dafʿ*, *qatl*, *aḫḏ*, *akl*, and *duʿāʾ*, show clear governing force, while forms that have undergone semantic extension show weaker or disputed governance. At the same time, the study adds something that the classical literature does not spell out, namely the differing productivity of the object and agent relations and the distribution of governing nouns by morphological type. In this sense, it complements the grammarians' emphasis on conditions of governance with evidence about how governance is actually distributed in the text.

Compared with contemporary research, the present study differs in focus. Agisniani and Jamjam (2023) examine the syntactic functions of the *maṣdar* in general, Karim et al. (2020) and Rija et al. (2024) concentrate on the cognate accusative and its distinction from

the *maṣdar*, and Suhemi (2020), Masnunah (2015), and Nurmala et al. (2022) inventory verbal nouns in particular sections of the Qurʾān without examining the syntactic relations they form. Studies of the *maṣdar muʾawwal* (Saʿadah, 2022; Saputri et al., 2025) concern clausal nominalization and its exegetical effects rather than the governing capacity of the lexical verbal noun. The present study, by contrast, places the governing verbal noun at the center of analysis and examines the relation between the governor and the governed. Its main contribution is a distributional map of the Qurʾānic data and a classification of syntactic patterns that has so far received little dedicated attention.

The Qurʾānic use of governing verbal nouns also has a rhetorical dimension. A nominal form that retains governing force can convey an action more compactly than a finite verb, foregrounding the action itself while backgrounding its time. In *ka-ḏikrikum ābāʾakum*, for example, the comparison is drawn between two acts of remembrance as such, not between two events located in time. The governing verbal noun is thus not only a grammatical phenomenon but also part of the linguistic strategy through which the Qurʾān condenses meaning. This dimension also bears on teaching. For Indonesian learners, and particularly for speakers of languages such as Bugis in which time is marked on the verb by affixes (Wahyudi, 2026), the Arabic verbal noun presents an unfamiliar combination of an event, its participants, and an accusative object without any tense marking (Wahyudi & Masrukhi, 2023). Teaching the governing verbal noun explicitly, with Qurʾānic examples such as those in Table 1, could help learners parse such phrases correctly and translate them more naturally.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the governing verbal noun (*ism al-maṣdar al-ʿāmil*) is a productive syntactic phenomenon in the Qurʾān and reflects the flexibility of Arabic grammar in combining nominal and verbal functions within a single form. Twenty constructions in which a verbal noun governs like a verb were identified across fourteen sūras and a range of themes, from worship and law to creed and social relations. The dominant pattern is the verbal noun assigning the accusative to a direct object (70%), while the pattern with a nominative agent is limited (10%) and four constructions (20%) remain contested. These results indicate that the transitive relation between an action and its object is the syntactic property most strongly preserved when a verb is nominalized, while the agent is usually retained in the genitive through annexation rather than lost.

Theoretically, the study confirms the classical view that the governing force of a verbal noun depends on its semantic proximity to its source verb, and it goes beyond this confirmation by providing an empirical inventory of Qurʾānic data and a classification of the patterns formed by the relation between *al-ʿāmil* and *al-maʿmūl*. The distribution of the object constructions by morphological type also lends textual support to the grammarians' ranking of annexed, nunated, and definite verbal nouns. Practically, the inventory offers teachers, translators, and students of Arabic a set of verified examples for explaining how a noun can

carry an object, a point that is often difficult for learners whose first languages encode time and participants differently.

This study has limitations. It focuses on identifying and classifying syntactic patterns and does not examine in depth the semantic, rhetorical (*balāġa*), and exegetical functions of each construction in its context. Several forms, including *maqʿad*, *ḫīfa*, *ḏikran*, and *kifāt*, as well as the analysis of *sawāʾ*, still leave room for debate that calls for further multidisciplinary investigation. Moreover, the inventory was compiled through close reading supported by classical sources; future studies could test its completeness against digital resources such as the Quranic Arabic Corpus, extend the analysis to other governing nouns, and integrate grammatical, semantic, exegetical, and rhetorical perspectives to obtain a fuller picture of the verbal noun in Qurʾānic Arabic.

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