

## DEBATE IN QS. 2:258 PERSPECTIVE OF RELEVANCE THEORY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR *KALĀM* LEARNING

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### Abstract

This study analyzes communication strategies in the debate dialogue between Prophet Ibrahim and King Namrud in QS. Al-Baqarah verse 258 using Sperber and Wilson's Theory of Relevance. This study aims to reveal how the cognitive mechanism in the Prophet Ibrahim's argument can achieve optimal relevance, namely, producing maximum comprehension effects with minimal processing efforts, and examining its implications for the development of the *Mahārah al-Kalām* learning model. The research uses a qualitative approach with a content analysis design, focusing on the text of Q.S. Al Baqarah, verse 258, as primary data, and studying it through the perspective of Relevance theory. The results of the study demonstrate that the Prophet Ibrahim's argument succeeded in fulfilling the principle of optimal relevance, thereby giving rise to a model of Qur'anic debate for the study of *Mahārah al-Kalām*. This model consists of four fundamental stages: first, opening with clear, rational basic premises; second, presenting objections that uphold communication ethics; third, grounding in concrete, irrefutable empirical evidence; and fourth, communicative closure by letting logic speak independently. These findings led to an integrated pedagogical framework that not only pursues linguistic fluency but also trains critical thinking, argumentation, and the ability to present relevant arguments in accordance with the principles of Relevance Theory. The novelty of this research lies in applying pragmatic analysis based on Relevance Theory to uncover the argumentative structure in Qur'anic debate and to transform it into a learning model for *Mahārah al-Kalām*, designed to cultivate logical, relevant, and ethical speaking skills.

**Keywords:** *debate; Kalām learning; relevance theory.*

### 1. Introduction

Arabic, with its status as the official language in 25 countries (Ali, 2021) and native speakers of more than 150 million people (Mualif, 2020), has proven its far-reaching influence on the global arena, not only in the fields of religion but also in politics, economics, and culture. This fact demands a learning approach that is no longer limited to mastering linguistic structures alone, but must answer the challenge of global readiness (Bakar & Alias, 2017). In this context, effective language education plays a crucial role in fostering intercultural dialogue, reducing prejudice, and supporting peaceful coexistence (Sopian et

al., 2025). Accordingly, debate methods can be integrated as part of 21st-century skills to train higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), while preparing learners to become competent communicators in a global environment.

In the Arabic rhetorical tradition, debates that feature argumentative dialogue play an important role because they can strengthen opinions and influence views (Cano-Basave & He, 2016) through logical, polite, and convincing language. Debate not only tests the truth but also trains critical thinking skills. Hatim (1990) stated that argumentation in classical Arabic rhetoric tends to support or reject a position without the need to make direct concessions to the opposing view, as well as in modern standard Arabic rhetoric, which prioritizes through-argumentation, although the classical tradition also recognizes a balanced form of counter-argumentation (Hatim, 1990; Hatim, 1991). The Qur'an, as the pinnacle of literary works, employs storytelling as a means of persuasion (Mohamed El-Baz El-Sheakh et al., 2023). One storytelling style is dialogue (Sopian, 2024), as seen in QS. Al-Baqarah verse 258 which records the debate dialogue between Prophet Ibrahim and King Namrud.

One major challenge faced by college students learning Arabic is low speaking proficiency and weak confidence in using Arabic as an active communication tool. This phenomenon stems from the lack of practical opportunities in authentic contexts, limited exposure to Arabic used in daily communication, and a learning environment that remains dominated by an emphasis on grammatical and morphological structures rather than the development of interactive competencies (Masnun et al., 2025). For example, research by Said & Saleh (2025) showed a significant positive correlation between students' confidence levels and their readiness to communicate in Arabic language learning, where low self-confidence is a significant barrier to active participation. This phenomenon shows that the ability to speak Arabic depends not only on linguistic factors but also on psychological factors such as self-confidence, as well as on learning strategies that foster a sense of courage in speaking Arabic and communication accuracy.

In learning Arabic, especially *Mahārah al-Kalām*, there is a learning method that emphasizes explicitly the development of confidence, the courage to argue, and the ability to express opinions, the debate method. Debate is an effective medium to train argumentative speaking skills because it involves active interaction. However, so far, debate practice has emphasized fluency and vocabulary mastery (Firdaus, 2024). To make debate learning more effective, it should focus on strengthening argumentation logic, language politeness, and communication relevance, ensuring that speaking skills are not only linguistically fluent but also solid in content and ethics. In the modern era, the practice of debate, especially in a religious context, is often no longer constructive and ends in confrontation or polarization with impolite language due to misunderstandings and differences of opinion (Azisi et al., 2023). This phenomenon can be seen in various religious discussion forums, both online and in real life, where differences of opinion actually worsen the situation and are accompanied by the use of unhealthy language (Asiah, 2017). Instead of emphasizing fact-based and logic-based arguments, the language of debate is often filled with personal attacks and emotional speech, so that the function of language as a medium of dialogue shifts into a tool of confrontation.

Therefore, an academic review is needed—one that not only examines contemporary practices of debate but also traces the intellectual model of scientific discourse embedded within the Islamic scholarly tradition and classical sources, particularly the Qur'an. Debate in

QS. Al-Baqarah, verse 258, which features a conversation between Prophet Ibrahim and King Namrud, is one of the most authentic examples of classical Arabic texts that can be studied in depth. However, this verse has not been widely studied from a pragmatic perspective, especially using the framework of Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). Within. With this theory, researchers can reveal the cognitive mechanisms and communication strategies that make the dialogue rhetorically and argumentatively effective. Therefore, a Relevance Theory-based analysis is important for understanding how the Qur'an constructs logical, relevant, and ethical arguments in the context of scientific debate. In addition, this study has direct implications for the learning model of *Mahārah al-Kalām*, as the text of the Qur'an debate can serve as an authentic model for students to practice argumentative speaking skills. By referring to the language strategies used by the Prophet Ibrahim, the learning of *Mahārah al-Kalām* is not only oriented towards fluency in speaking, but also trains students to deliver relevant, logical, and polite arguments.

Several previous studies have examined the debate dialogue in the Qur'an, especially related to QS. Al-Baqarah verse 258. Research by Ihya (2022) examined the story of the Prophet Ibrahim's debate with his people based on Tafsir al-Munir, and found that QS. 2:258 contains the pattern of rational argument that the Prophet Ibrahim used to dismantle Namrud's claim to divinity. Another study by Aulia (2022) uses *Ferdinand de Saussure's* semiotic approach to analyze the meanings of signs and symbols in the story of the debate between Prophet Ibrahim and Namrud recorded in QS 2:258. Moreover, Al Jufri (2022) examined the verse through *the ma'nā maghzā* approach and found that Ibrahim's argument is *a fortiori* and reflects the Qur'an's model of inclusive dialogue.

In the context of learning, Darman (2022) proves that *the munazarah* method increases students' motivation to speak, while Mahdi et al. (2022) highlight the diction errors of Arabic scientific debate participants and offer improvements. However, two gaps remain. First, there has been no research explicitly examining QS. Al-Baqarah, verse 258, debates between Prophet Ibrahim and King Namrud, using the Theory of Relevance (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) to reveal the text's communication strategies. Second, although the debate method has been widely applied in the study of *Mahārah al-Kalām*, studies that connect the results of Qur'anic debate analysis to the development of relevance-based learning models remain very limited.

Thus, the novelty of this research lies in the effort to present a new understanding of the Qur'anic debate text through pragmatic analysis based on Relevance Theory and relate it to the implications for the learning of *Mahārah al-Kalām* to cultivate logical, relevant, and ethical speaking skills.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Debate

According to Ninoersy and Akmal (2020), debate is an activity in which opinions are expressed by two or more parties, both individually and in groups, to discuss and find solutions to a problem. Moreover, debate is also used to give each other reasons to defend each other's opinions (Astutik, 2021). It is also noted that the purpose of active debate in learning is to train students to express opinions, fostering communication skills and improving their learning achievement (Liliweri, 2011, in Ninoersy & Akmal, 2020). It is associated with language learning, especially Arabic. The debate has significant urgency, as

research by Bakar and Alias (2017) indicates that it is used in education to enhance the learning process and student development. This is because debate is an activity that involves direct communication; interactions are complex and demand the use of high-level thinking and discussion skills, such as those found in Arabic, which has millions of native speakers worldwide, especially in the western region. This Arabic debate training can serve as a readiness for non-native speakers to interact within the context of Arabic culture and the international world.

Debate has various main characteristics of communicative language learning (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003), and student-centered learning, namely creating an active learning environment, encouraging cooperation, collaboration, competition, and presenting meaningful and authentic interactions (Bakar & Alias, 2017).

## 2.2 Relevance Theory

The relevance theory used in this study is the relevance theory of Dan Sperber and Diardre Wilson. In the theory of relevance, there are characteristics of its principles; the first is that its applicability is not limited to communication but extends to cognition in general. Second, the embodiment of its economic characteristics is a direct consequence of the cognitive origin of this principle. Moreover, third, its capacity to both shape the speeches the speaker contributes to communication and influence how the listener begins to process them (Cummings, 2007). Relevance theory is one of the important theories introduced by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson through their monumental work *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (1986, 1995 revised edition). Sperber and Wilson offer a single principle, the relevance principle, which states that every communication carries the assumption that the speech is relevant to the listener, that is, it provides maximum cognitive effects with minimal processing effort (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). Thus, communication is not only a matter of language structure, but also of how the human mind processes information to achieve optimal interpretation. Cummings (2007) emphasized that relevance theory is inherently rooted in human cognition, so its basic principles can be used to analyze verbal and nonverbal communication. In this study, the researcher will analyze five main aspects to assess the level of relevance in the verse fragment, namely the context of communication, ostension, inference process, cognitive effects, processing efforts, and the achievement of optimal relevance (Sperber & Wilson, 1995).

## 2.3 *Mahārah Al-Kalām*

Arabic linguists explain that speaking skills (*Mahārah al-Kalām*) involve reciting a series of speeches in a structured and deliberate manner. In other words, speaking is not just making sounds. However, it is a conscious activity that is carried out to convey specific meanings and messages to the interlocutor (Ritonga & Febriani, et al., 2022, quoted in Wahyuni, 2023). This view emphasizes that the ability to speak Arabic is not only a mechanical matter of pronouncing sounds and words, but also involves cognitive skills such as organizing ideas, choosing the appropriate language structure, and adjusting the communication context. Speaking skills are among the most complex abilities because they involve mastering linguistic, psychological, social, and cultural elements simultaneously (Marlius et al., 2021). Speaking skills are not only about pronouncing sounds and words correctly, but also about organizing ideas and adapting messages to the communication context. Through speaking activities, a person can convey opinions, desires, and even

emotions effectively, enabling an exchange of meaning between the speaker and the listener.

Ghani et al. (2011) emphasized that speaking (*Kalām*) results from the integration of various complex factors, including physical, psychological, neurological, semantic, and linguistic factors. This means that speaking skills do not stand alone, but rather demand coordination between cognitive and physiological aspects. Meanwhile, Mahfudz's (2017) statement, as quoted in Marlius et al. (2021), highlights the social dimension of speech, which functions as a tool of social control and a means of shaping patterns of community interaction. Thus, *mahārah al-kalām* is not only a medium of communication, but also a vehicle for the formation of social and cultural character.

In practice, the teaching of *mahārah al-kalām* requires a supportive and communicative learning environment. Marlius et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of activating the language environment (*bi'ah lughawiyah*) to help students become accustomed to using Arabic in both formal and informal contexts. Debate activities in Arabic teaching are among the most effective ways to improve *mahārah al-kalām*, as they require students to speak actively, defend arguments, and interact with the interlocutor in Arabic. For example, research by Abdilah & Holilulloh (2022) shows that Arabic-language debate activities make a significant contribution to improving students' *mahārah al-kalām*. The study found that participation in the Arabic debate community improved speaking skills by up to 61.5%, with notable improvements in pronunciation (84%) and fluency (82%).

### 3. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach, as explained (Bogdan & Taylor, 1982, as cited in Abdussamad, 2021), which is oriented towards obtaining descriptive data in the form of words, both oral and written, as well as observable behaviors. This approach positions the researcher as the primary instrument for understanding reality holistically, so it is appropriate to examine the meaning and context of the debate between the Prophet Ibrahim and King Namrūd in QS. Al-Baqarah verse 258.

This research uses content analysis, focusing on QS Al-Baqarah 258 as the central unit of analysis. This design was chosen because content analysis allows researchers to examine a text objectively to obtain an accurate picture of its content, without being influenced by the researcher's personal views or interpretations. This approach emphasizes efforts to avoid bias, subjective biases, and personal constructions or interpretations (Ahmad, 2018).

The primary data source is QS. Al-Baqarah: 258, while secondary data include linguistic literature, Sperber & Wilson's theory of relevance as grand theory, as well as authoritative textbooks. Through an in-depth documentation technique approach to authoritative sources. Critical reading is applied to explore the textual and contextual meanings of the debate in Q.S. Al-Baqarah:258, with a focus on identifying debate practices using relevance theory.

Data analysis includes three stages: data reduction, is by selecting and grouping parts of verses that contain Ibrahim's arguments and Namrūd's rebuttals, data display, which is presenting findings through relevance analysis which then explains the context of communication, inference, cognitive effects, processing efforts, and optimal relevance, and drawing conclusions that formulate conceptual findings and pedagogical implications in the form of a debate learning model for *mahārah al-kalām*. The results of the analysis are then

verified by comparing the interpretation with relevant literature to ensure the data's validity.

Implicitly, the results of this study are expected to enrich the learning practice of *mahārah al-kalām* by emphasizing that debate activities in Arabic are not enough to focus only on fluency in speaking and vocabulary mastery, but must also train logical argumentation, selection of relevant diction, and linguistic politeness. Thus, QS. Al-Baqarah verse 258 can serve as a pedagogical model for developing argumentative speaking skills that balance fluency, content, and communication ethics.

## 4. Results and Discussion

QS. Al-Baqarah verse 258 tells the story of the fundamental theological debate between Prophet Ibrahim and the tyrannical ruler, King Namrud. Various classical commentaries, such as Tafsir ath-Thabari (2007) and Tafsir Ibn Kathir (2010), explain that Namrud bin Kan'ān was one of the four rulers of the world in his time. According to the historical record in Tafsir al-Qurthubi (2009), the four rulers are divided into two categories: two tyrannical rulers (Namrud and Bukhtanashar) and two righteous rulers (Prophet Sulaiman and Dzulqarnain).

Based on the consensus of the majority of scholars of interpretation, including Imam ath-Thabari (2007), Ibn Kathir (2010), and al-Qurthubi (2009), the background of the debate between Prophet Ibrahim and King Namrud began with an oppressive policy where everyone who wanted to buy food in the market had first to answer the question "Who is your Lord?" if he answers "You (Namrud)" then it is allowed to shop, but if he says "other than him (Namrud)" then it will be forbidden to buy food and even be tortured, until the time when the Prophet Ibrahim who was firm in his monotheism was asked directly by Namrud about divinity, triggering a theological debate recorded in the Qur'an. Al-Baqarah verse 258.

### 4.1 Data 1

قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّيَ الَّذِي يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ  
*qâla ibrahîmu rabbiyalladzî yuhyî wa yumîtu*  
"Ibrahim said: " My Lord is the One Who has power to give life and cause death."

#### 4.1.1 Context of Communication/Debate

At this stage, the Prophet Ibrahim's speech is an argumentative response to the statement King Namrud previously made. Although Namrud's dialogue is not explicitly stated in the text of the verse, in the commentary of Ibn Kathir (2010), it is explained that Namrud first asked the Prophet Ibrahim a question with his arrogance and opposition (Rashid & Anshori, 2025), namely, "Who is your Lord, O Ibrahim?" The question shows the arrogance of a ruler who refuses to acknowledge Divine power. Thus, the statement of the Prophet Ibrahim affirms that "My Lord is the One Who has power to give life and cause death."

#### 4.1.2 Speech/text Analysis

Linguistically, the sentence "رَبِّيَ الَّذِي يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ" (*My Lord is the One Who has power to give life and cause death.*) has the structure of the sum of ismiyyah (nominal sentences).

The element رَبِّي (*rabbī*) functions as *mubtada'* (subject), as explained by the position of the word at the beginning of the number of *ismiyyah*, which is its position as *mubtada* (al-Ghulayaini, 2010), which means "my Lord", while الَّذِي يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ functions as *khabar* (predicate), which explains the nature of God as "The One Who has power to give life and cause death" (al-Darwish, 1999). Morphologically, the verbs يُحْيِي (*yuhyī*) and يُمِيتُ (*yumītu*) are forms of *fī'il mudhore* that denote repetitive and continuous actions, signifying God's constant power over life and death.

### 4.1.3 Relevance Theory Perspective

#### 4.1.3.1 Ostensi

In the context of debate, the words of the Prophet Ibrahim function as ostension, which is a deliberate communicative action to attract the attention (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) of Namrud and direct his thought process towards the main message, namely the recognition of the absolute power of Allah (Ibn Kathir, 2010). The Prophet Ibrahim did not oppose directly; instead, he chose a cognitive communication strategy that had a dramatic effect, leading his interlocutor to realize his own limitations (Lalahwa et al., 2025). Linguistically, this ostension is manifested through a firm, rational declarative sentence structure (*Jumlah Khabriyyah*), which, in the science of *balāghah*, is called *kalām khabari*, a word that conveys information or news (al-Hasyimi, 1988).

#### 4.1.3.2 Inference

After the ostensive stage carried out by the Prophet Ibrahim, an inference process occurs within the framework of Sperber and Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory. The inference process is the drawing of conclusions based on the relationship between speech and the context of communication (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). The saying "My Lord is the One Who has power to give life and cause death" explicitly affirms that Allah has absolute power over life and death (al Duwailah, 2018), as explained in Tafsir Ibn Katsir (2010), that this verse affirms the nature of Allah's *rububiyyah* as the only creator of life and death. And this verse prompted Namrud to realize the logical limitations of his power.

#### 4.1.3.3 Processing Efforts and Cognitive Effects

Effective communication produces large cognitive effects with minimal processing effort (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). The argument presented by the Prophet Ibrahim, when viewed linguistically, is very simple, which only contains subjects and predicates (al-Darwish, 1999). So that the processing efforts carried out have reached a minimum level. Rhetorically, this statement guides the conversation toward the themes of power and life (Toriyono & Syahputra, 2021), a topic that is readily accepted by common sense.

#### 4.1.3.4 Optimal Relevance

Optimal relevance is achieved when listeners acquire significant meaning with minimal processing effort. Prophet Ibrahim chose a communication strategy that was cognitively economical but conceptually productive. There was no long debate, not even the way Prophet Ibrahim was delivered was good (Budiono, 2020). However, a simple sentence was enough to force Namrud to put forward a new argument, which showed that the cognitive effect had been achieved, prompting Namrud to respond to the arguments

presented by the Prophet Ibrahim. Therefore, the initial argument of the Prophet Abraham was sufficient to reach the level of Relevance (Sperber & Wilson, 1995).

## 4.2 Data 2

قَالَ أَنَا أَحْيِي وَأُمِيتُ  
qāla anā uḥyī wa umite  
"Namrud said: " I give life and cause death."

### 4.2.1 Communicative Context/Debate

This statement by King Namrud appears to be a direct response to the Prophet Abraham's argument. He tries to match Ibrahim's statement by showing similar abilities to turn on and off, but in the context of human power (Rashid & Anshori, 2025). As explained in *Tafsir Ath Thabari*, Namrud interprets the concept of reviving and dying superficially and literally, namely by freeing a prisoner and letting him live as a symbol of reviving and executing or killing another person as a symbol of death (Ath Thabari, 2008). Thus, his statement is not an acknowledgment of Allah's power but rather arrogance and a rejection of arguments grounded in the divine logic conveyed by the Prophet Abraham.

### 4.2.2 Speech/text Analysis

Linguistically قَالَ أَنَا أَحْيِي وَأُمِيتُ has a structure that shows a form of direct statement full of self-affirmation. The word قَالَ is *fi'il madhi* (al-Ghulayaini, 2010) or in Indonesian it is called a past verb, which means "he said", with the implicit subject returning to Namrud as the perpetrator of the speech. After that, the أَنَا أَحْيِي وَأُمِيتُ clause appears which serves as the content of the word. In this clause, أَنَا is a *dhamir munfasil* (separate pronoun) that functions as a *mubtada'* (subject), while أَحْيِي وَأُمِيتُ is *fi'il mudhare marfu'* (present/future verb) which acts as a *khobar* (predicate) (al-Darwish, 1999). Thus, the sentence structure أَنَا أَحْيِي وَأُمِيتُ forms the number of ismiyyah (nominal sentences) that are used as the content of speech in the structure of the total number of fi'liyyah (verbal sentences) as a whole. Semantically, this arrangement highlights the ego and superiority of the speaker through the use of the pronoun أَنَا at the beginning of the sentence, which indicates a form of self-claim and affirmation of power (Ariza & Kurniawan, 2024). The two verbs أَحْيِي (I turn on) and أُمِيتُ (I turn off) describe actions that are actually only worthy of being attributed to God, but are used by Namrud to show arrogance and opposition to the concept of divinity conveyed by the Prophet Abraham. This structure shows that Namrud's speech is declarative and confrontational, where the linguistic aspect is used not to seek the truth, but to maintain honor and self-power, so he throws agumen in the form of figurative examples so that Namrud can lie to his people (al Qurthubi, 2009). Thus, linguistically, this sentence not only contains semantic claims, but also contains pragmatic functions that challenge and reject the interlocutor's arguments.

### 4.2.3 Relevance Theory Perspective

#### 4.2.3.1 Ostensi

Namrud's claim "أَنَا أَحْيِي وَأُمِيتُ" can be seen as an act of ostentation that guarantees that his speech is worthy of attention (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). However, an in-depth analysis shows that this is illusory. Namrud's ostension does not aim to convey the truth, but to create cognitive disorders through language manipulation that creates the impression of

pseudo-relevance, counterattacks, and aims to break the arguments of the Prophet Ibrahim (Budiono, 2020). Rhetorically, this is an example of how language can be used to create the illusion of relevance to give the impression that there is important new information, even though it is only a pseudo-repetition of an existing concept, as explained in Tafsir Ibn Katsir (2010), that Namrud does not really turn on or off.

#### **4.2.3.2 Inference**

At the level of inference, Namrud's speech fails to produce a meaning consistent with the context of established world knowledge, namely that the power of life and death is God's prerogative (Al Jufri, 2022). Instead of invalidating the theological premise of the Prophet Abraham, Namrud's argument actually creates cognitive confusion for his listeners. This process of drawing conclusions reveals the fundamental contradiction: the claim is incoherent with reality (Ar Razi, 1981). Thus, the inference formed reveals the weakness of Namrud's argument itself.

#### **4.2.3.3 Processing Efforts**

In terms of processing effort, Namrud's speech appears simple because it imitates the pattern of the divine claim made by the Prophet Ibrahim, making it easy to understand from a linguistic perspective. However, this simplicity is misleading and contains lies (al Qurthubi, 2009). Such ease of processing does not lead to a correct understanding, but to the acceptance of an erroneous claim. Therefore, this argument is inappropriate to counter the arguments presented by the Prophet Ibrahim (Toriyono & Syahputra, 2021) and is a form of communicative exploitation in which ease of processing is used to disguise the validity of arguments.

#### **4.2.3.4 Cognitive Effects**

Viewed in terms of impact and cognitive effects, Namrud's speech failed to produce positive and correct cognitive effects. As Sperber and Wilson, (1995) point out:

"The concept of [contextual impact] is very important for the characterization of 'relevance'. We would like to make the argument that having a contextual impact is a necessary condition of 'relevance', and that if everything else is the same, then the greater the contextual impact, the greater the 'relevance'.

Based on this explanation, Namrud's argument fails to achieve a great contextual impact because the claim is not able to produce a form of contextual impact, in fact the argument weakens the correct belief in the power of God, the argument presented by Namrud also does not succeed in invalidating the theological premise of the Prophet Ibrahim, but instead gives birth to cognitive confusion to his listeners.

#### **4.2.3.5 Optimal Relevance**

Returning to the principle of relevance, Namrud's argument failed to meet the optimal relevance criteria. Although in terms of processing efforts it looks minimal due to its linguistic simplicity, this speech fails to produce adequate cognitive effects and contextual impacts, even if the resulting is negative by weakening correct beliefs and creating

confusion. Thus, Namrud's claim is a clear example of the exploitation of the principle of relevance, where ease of processing is used to disguise the validity of arguments, thus creating an illusion of relevance that exposes the logical flaws of his own divine claim.

#### 4.3 Data 3

قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْتِي بِالشَّمْسِ مِنَ الْمَشْرِقِ فَأْتِ بِهَا مِنَ الْمَغْرِبِ  
qāla ibrahīmu fa inna llāha ya'tī bi al-syamsi min al-masyriqi fa'ti bihā min  
al-maghribi  
"Abraham said: 'Indeed, Allah brings up the sun from the east, so bring it  
up from the west.'"

##### 4.3.1 Context of the Debate

The words of the Prophet Ibrahim in Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 258 are a response to the claim of the divinity of King Namrud. The transition of the argument from the concepts of life and death to cosmological phenomena demonstrates the pedagogical approach of the Prophet Ibrahim, which adjusted the level of argument to the capacity of his interlocutor. Prophet Ibrahim's response to Namrud's claim was not only limited to the presentation of rational arguments, but also affirmed the inherent limits of human power in contrast to the absolute power that Allah has (Anisah, 2025). After Namrud delivered a counter-argument against Prophet Abraham, and Prophet Ibrahim heard the absurd answer, considering that the debate was going on fiercely, but what Prophet Ibrahim caught was only a logically wrong answer, so Prophet Ibrahim did not immediately refute it directly. Instead, he switched to a stronger, final postulate, a form of argument that is impossible for Namrud to either fulfill or refute in response to the challenge (Az-Zamarkasyi in al Qurthubi, 2009). After Namrud gave false proof of his claim to be able to live and die by killing one person and letting another live, Prophet Ibrahim was not caught up in a debate on the same level. He cleverly turned to the final cosmological and theological objection by challenging Namrud to reverse the law of nature that God had established: "My Lord is the One who sent forth the sun from the east. So, if you do have actual power, try to bring the sun out from the west (Ar Razi, 1981).

##### 4.3.2 Speech/Text Analysis

Linguistically, this verse begins with the word قَالَ (*qāla*) *fi'il madhi* al-Ghulayaini, 2010) or in Indonesian it is a past tense verb meaning "he said," with an implied subject that goes back to the Prophet Ibrahim. The explicit subject is then mentioned through the word إِبْرَاهِيمُ, which serves as *fā'il* (doer). Furthermore, the clause فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْتِي بِالشَّمْسِ مِنَ الْمَشْرِقِ is the content of Ibrahim's speech. The letter فَ at the beginning serves as an explanatory that arises in response to an implied condition. That is, if you are capable, as you falsely and deceptively claim (al-Darwish, 1999). The particle إِنَّ is used to provide affirmation, while اللَّهُ becomes *ism inna* (the grammatical subject of the word "true"), and يَأْتِي *fi'il mudhāri'* (present/future verb) meaning "to bring" or "to bring forth." The phrase بِالشَّمْسِ مِنَ الْمَشْرِقِ describes the object of the action, namely the sun coming from the east (al-Durrah, 2009). The second clause, فَأْتِ بِهَا مِنَ الْمَغْرِبِ, is a challenge conveyed in the form of *amr*, "so bring it in or issue it from the west (al-Darwish, 1999)." Syntactically speaking, the use of this form of command has strong rhetorical value. It is not a command in the literal sense, but an argumentative strategy to expose the incompetence of the interlocutor. Semantically, the use of *amr* in this context is *iltifātī*, namely a change in language style (Noor, 2020) from

descriptive to confrontational which marks a change in the speaker's position from explaining to challenging.

### **4.3.3 Relevance Theory Perspective**

#### **4.3.3.1 Ostensi and Inference**

The Prophet Ibrahim's argument is a form of ostensive communication deliberately designed to attract the listener's attention and direct their inference process toward recognizing the absolute power of Allah (al-Duwailah, 2018). By making the sun the standard for universal, measurable, and undeniable natural phenomena, Ibrahim ensured that his theological message was directly connected to the audience's empirical experience. This ostension then triggers the first two levels of inference, the listener understands the literal fact that the sun rises from the east. Second, they concluded that the cosmic order indicated the existence of a divine power that governed the natural system. Through this multi-layered logic, Ibrahim emphasized that humans, including Namrud, use the natural system, not control it, thereby proving Namrud's claim to divinity to be pseudo-(Ar-Razi, 1981).

#### **4.3.3.2 Processing Efforts and Cognitive Effects**

Judging by the effort required, Prophet Ibrahim's communication succeeded in minimizing the audience's cognitive burden through simple yet effective delivery. By using the example of the sun, a natural phenomenon already very familiar in daily experience, the information conveyed becomes easily accessible and understandable (Toriyono & Syahputra, 2021). Straightforward sentence structure and concrete analogies allow messages to be digested with minimal processing effort. This approach is strategic, directing the listener's entire mental energy to the substance of the argument rather than to understanding linguistic complexity. As stated in the relevance theory of Sperber and Wilson (1995):

"We assume that people have an 'intuition of relevance': they can distinguish between relevant information and irrelevant information, or in some cases, distinguish between more relevant or less relevant information."

If we look at the cognitive effects, in this context, the Prophet Ibrahim intelligently conveys an argument that directly utilizes the intuition of the relevance of his audience to produce significant cognitive effects. By giving the example of the sun rising from the east, a phenomenon that is already very familiar and verifiable to everyone, he presents information that will be recognized as highly relevant by his listeners, including Namrud. Therefore, the resulting cognitive effect is very high because the statement directly reveals the truth and exposes the opponent's lies.

#### **4.3.3.3 Optimal Relevance**

The speech has two layers of relevance that reinforce each other. First, conceptual relevance, because Ibrahim presents an undeniable empirical fact, namely that the sun always rises from the east (Lalahwa et al., 2025). Moreover, contextual relevance, because this statement is directly related to the subject of the debate over who actually has absolute power over life and the universe (Ridho, 1945). By presenting such clear natural evidence,

Ibrahim does not merely convey new information but also reinforces previous arguments (Ar Razi, 1981) and puts his interlocutor in a logical position that is impossible to maintain. For Namrud, this statement has a cognitive effect. To justify his claim to power, he must be able to reverse the direction of the sun, something impossible for humans to do (Thantawi, 1987). In other words, Ibrahim's speech forces the listener to confess the truth without the need for additional arguments. In one short but concise sentence, Prophet Ibrahim shattered the illusion of Namrud's power and established the truth about the absolute power of Allah.

#### 4.4 Data 4

فَبُهِتَ الَّذِي كَفَرَ

*fa-buhita alladhī kafar*

*"Then the one who disbelieved was confounded."*

##### 4.4.1 Context of the Debate

This verse explains the end of the dialogue between Prophet Ibrahim and King Namrud in Surah al-Baqarah, verse 258. After Namrud tried to refute the Prophet Abraham's argument with the claim *"I give life and cause death,"* Ibrahim then replied with a rational and empirical argument: *"Indeed, Allah brings up the sun from the east, so bring it up from the west."* This challenge broke all of Namrud's claims to power because it exceeded the limits of human ability. The reaction shown by the phrase *فَبُهِتَ الَّذِي كَفَرَ* describes the State of Namrud being silent without a word, unable to give the slightest response or rebuttal to the logical arguments presented by the Prophet Ibrahim (Ath Thabari, 2008). According to Tafsir Ath-Thabari (2009), the word *"بُهِتَ"* indicates a State of silence due to confusion and loss of argument. Meanwhile, Al-Qurthubi (2009) interprets that Namrud was *"astonished and silent"* because the logic conveyed by the Prophet Ibrahim was too clear and undeniable. Thus, this verse describes not only physical silence but also an ideological defeat in which human pride collapses in the face of divine truth.

##### 4.4.2 Speech/text Analysis

Linguistically, the phrase *فَبُهِتَ الَّذِي كَفَرَ* reveals a very dense and meaningful linguistic structure. The particle *فَ* serves as the letter 'athaf which shows a direct consequential relationship between the Prophet Ibrahim's earlier argument and Namrud's reaction. The word *بُهِتَ* as *fi'l madhi majhūl* (past passive verb) describes the state of silence and fixation that Namrud involuntarily experienced, as a direct result of the power of logic conveyed by the Prophet Ibrahim. The phrase *الَّذِي* acts as *Isim Maushul* which is also the *nā'ib al-fā'il* (subject of the perpetrator) of the passive verb, while *كَفَرَ* is *fi'l Madhi* with *fa'il* in the form of *dhamīr mustatir* which refers back to *"الَّذِي"*, forming a definitive description of the identity of the perpetrator as a disobedient person (al-Darwish, 1999). This structure forms a passive sentence that means, *"Then the one who disbelieved was confounded."* The use of the passive form (*majhūl*) has an important rhetorical value because it removes the explicit perpetrator who caused the confusion. This shows that the state of confusion or surprise arises automatically and indisputably as a logical consequence of the truth of the Prophet Abraham's argument. In a syntactic context, this sentence serves as an answer to the previous argument, confirming the cause-and-effect relationship between the power of Prophet Ibrahim's logic and its effect on his opponent.

#### 4.4.3 Relevance Theory Perspective

This verse is a description of the conditions of the debate that reached the final stage. The Prophet Ibrahim has presented an argument that contains a logical challenge about the direction of the sun that has optimal relevance, namely producing maximum cognitive effects (revealing divine truth) with minimal processing effort (clear empirical facts) as explained in Sperber and Wilson's Theory of Relevance (1995):

*"The processing efforts involved in achieving contextual impact are the second factor that must be considered in measuring relevance. Processing efforts are a negative factor: all else is the same, the greater the processing effort, the lower the 'relevance'."*

On the other hand, at this stage, the infidel person experiences a stalemate and fails to produce a relevant response (Kusnadi, 2016) because his cognitive system is unable to resist and refute the arguments presented by the Prophet Ibrahim within the framework of correct logic (Thantawi, 1987). The State of *نُهَيْت* indicates an inferential impasse, in which Namrud is stunned and confused, and loses the capacity to relate new information to the cognitive context he previously held (Toriyono & Syahputra, 2021). In the view of relevance, *نُهَيْت* is not merely an emotional reaction, but a representation of the old cognitive context based on the arrogance and illusion of human power in the face of a new, more relevant context of divine truth. This inferential process makes the words of the Prophet Ibrahim a deliberately designed means of communication, designed to trigger the listener's thought process and achieve maximum relevance, as it can change the interlocutor's mental representation even without the need for further debate.

#### 4.5 Implications for Learning *Maharah Al Kalam*

Based on an in depth analysis of the dialogue between Prophet Ibrahim and King Namrud in Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 258, it is possible to formulate a model of debate that is not only logically effective but also very polite in the use of language, which is in line with the principles of Relevance Theory. This model emphasizes the delivery of messages that achieve optimal relevance, where the processing effort required by the listener is minimized while the resulting cognitive impact is maximized (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), and all of this is expressed in good, polite language (Budiono, 2020). The Prophet Ibrahim began the debate by affirming a clear and indisputable basic principle of God's life-giving and deadly power (Thantawi, 1987), using a clear language structure (*the number of ismiyyah*), without reproach or harsh words, so that it is easy to understand without requiring complicated interpretation.

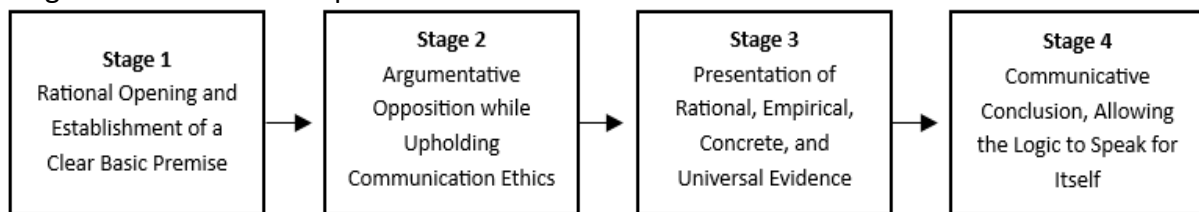
In the face of Namrud's erroneous and arrogant rebuttal (Thantawi, 1987), Prophet Ibrahim set an example of polite debate. He did not use harsh words, did not attack personally, and maintained communication ethics even though Namrud's claims were clearly contrary to common sense (Al Khumairi, 2019). Intelligently, he shifts his argument to the more concrete empirical realm of the phenomenon of sunrise, while maintaining neat, polite language (Ar Razi, 1981). The selection of cosmological examples that are universal and easy to understand makes Ibrahim's message almost unnecessary processing effort. It is precisely through this simplicity and clarity that the challenge of reversing the sun's direction exerts a powerful cognitive impact, destroying Namrud's argument while, at the same time, confirming that the politeness of language does not weaken the power of argumentation.

The final stage of this model is to let the power of logic speak for itself, which is manifested by Namrud's confusion and silence "فَبُهِتَ الَّذِي كَفَرَ" (Ibn Kathir, 2010), without the need for the Prophet Ibrahim to add words of contempt or triumph. This situation represents the total failure of Namrud's inferential process, which actually further strengthens the ethics of Prophet Ibrahim's argument. Thus, this model of the debate between Prophet Ibrahim offers an elegant and practical communication framework.

Based on what was explained earlier, the model of the Qur'anic debate between Prophet Ibrahim and Namrud can serve as a pedagogical model for the teaching of *maharah kalām*, which consists of four main stages that align with the previous analysis:

### Diagram 1

#### Stages of Instructional Implications for *Mahārah al-Kalām*



The first stage, rational opening and determination of the topic and then speech must show a clear communication purpose, reflected in the firm statement of the Prophet Ibrahim "رَبِّيَ الَّذِي يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ" which uses a simple but deeply meaningful language structure, according to the principle of relevance (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) where information is conveyed with minimal processing effort but maximum cognitive impact. The second stage, the presentation of argumentative opposition, is evident when the Prophet Ibrahim confronts Namrud's claim "أَنَا أُخِي وَأُمِيتُ" without resorting to rude language, but by maintaining communication ethics while preparing a more substantive response.

The third stage, the use of rational-empirical evidence, is manifested through the argument of the sun "فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْتِي بِالشَّمْسِ مِنَ الْمَشْرِقِ فَأْتِ بِهَا مِنَ الْمَغْرِبِ" where the Prophet Ibrahim chose natural phenomena that are easy to understand but undeniable (Thantawi, 1987), once again applying the principle of relevance by minimizing processing efforts through familiar examples but producing substantial cognitive impacts. The fourth stage, effective communicative closing, is illustrated in Namrud's reaction "فَبُهِتَ الَّذِي كَفَرَ" which shows how relevant arguments delivered in polite language can produce cognitive resolution without the need for coercive closing words.

The four stages form an integrated pedagogical framework that aligns with the concept of critical thinking-based learning in language education (Todorovska, 2024). This argument is relevant because the Qur'anic debate model not only focuses on linguistic aspects but is intrinsically designed to train higher-order cognitive skills, in accordance with the demands of 21st-century competencies (Todorovska, 2024). Each stage in this model genuinely reflects the integration of linguistic structures, pragmatic strategies, and cognitive relevance principles as thoroughly analyzed in this study. Through the implementation of this model, the learning of *Mahārah al-Kalām* not only trains speaking fluency in Arabic but also instills logical, critical, and ethical thinking abilities in argumentation according to Qur'anic values, where linguistic politeness does not compromise argumentative strength, and depth of meaning does not have to be sacrificed for simplicity of delivery.

## 5. Conclusion

An analysis of QS. Al-Baqarah verse 258, through the lens of Relevance Theory, successfully reveals the superiority of Prophet Ibrahim's communication strategy, which achieves optimal relevance by presenting arguments that minimize processing effort while maximizing cognitive effects. This dialogue offers not only a debate paradigm that combines logical sharpness with linguistic politeness but also an integrated, implementable model for developing Mahārah al-Kalām (Arabic-speaking skills). The model begins with a rational opening that clearly establishes basic premises, continues by presenting opposition while maintaining communication ethics, is strengthened by the use of concrete and undeniable empirical evidence, and concludes with a communicative closure that allows the power of logic to speak for itself. Pedagogically, integrating the wisdom of the Qur'anic text with a modern, pragmatic theoretical framework offers an alternative learning approach relevant to 21st-century challenges. This approach not only emphasizes linguistic fluency but also builds critical thinking capacity, creativity, and argumentative etiquette, core competencies in modern-era skills. Thus, this approach can produce communicators who are academically excellent, ethically mature, and prepared to navigate the dynamics of global dialectics.

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