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Taaruf Between Quranic Meaning and Premarital Usage in Quran 49:13 Exegesis and Indonesian Premarital Literature

ABSTRACT: This study examines the meaning of *li ta'ārafū* in QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13 and the use of the term *ta'āruf* in premarital literature. In contemporary Muslim discourse, *ta'āruf* is frequently used to refer to the introduction between a man and a woman before marriage. The study asks three questions: what the verse means by *li ta'ārafū*, how the term is used in premarital literature, and how the two meanings can be related. Using a qualitative library research design, it compares the interpretations of four exegetical works (*Tafsīr al-Jalālain*, *Tafsīr Ibn Kaśīr*, *Tafsīr al-Marāghī*, and *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāḥ*) with premarital and marriage-related literature, mapping three aspects: the purpose of *ta'āruf*, the parties involved, and the scope of the relationship. The exegetical works read the verse as a call to mutual recognition across tribal and national differences, while the premarital sources use the term mainly for recognizing a prospective spouse. In the sources examined, no explicit statement was found that limits the meaning of *ta'āruf* exclusively to marriage. The premarital usage is therefore treated as a specialization of usage, not as a proven reduction of the verse's meaning. Because several sources could be checked only through metadata or abstracts, this conclusion is provisional. The study proposes that *ta'āruf* be understood as an ethical principle of mutual recognition, within which premarital use is one application.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Human beings live in societies that differ in culture, ethnicity, temperament, race, and religion. Such diversity does not always come with mutual acquaintance, so human relations require an adequate process of getting to know one another. The Qur'an addresses this issue in QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13 through the expression *li ta'ārafū*.

The verse states that human beings were created from a male and a female, then made into nations and tribes so that they might come to know one another. In *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, Hamka explains that this diversity is meant for mutual acquaintance (Hamka, 1992), not for estrangement or hostility, because humankind shares a single origin and therefore there is no basis for claiming superiority on account of tribe or lineage. Honor before God is determined by piety and moral character rather than by descent. In the author's view, this interpretation suggests that diversity can serve as a means of building harmonious relations and avoiding hostility.

This interpretation places *ta'āruf* within a broader framework of human relations. Differences of tribe, nation, and background do not in themselves justify demeaning others; rather, they provide the context for mutual acquaintance and the building of social ties. From this perspective, *ta'āruf* in the verse is not directly oriented toward introduction leading to marriage, but toward wider

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social relations. This reading is the author's inference from the context of the verse and the cited exegetical explanations.

In some literature, the term *ta'āruf* is used to refer to the process of getting to know a prospective spouse before *khitbah* (formal proposal), and is even described as a matchmaking process (Hana, 2012). This usage represents a specialization within a particular field rather than a direct statement of the verse. Whether this pattern arose from changes in family tradition, shifts in the role of the marriage guardian (*wali*), or the influence of popular culture is a historical-sociological question that this library-based study does not test.

Previous studies on *ta'āruf* generally focus on the practice of introduction before marriage, from diverse perspectives. Mafhumah examines *ta'āruf* as a practice of introduction leading to marriage from the perspective of Islamic law. (Mafhumah, 2020). Munawaroh discusses the concept of *ta'āruf* from the perspective of Islamic education. (Munawaroh, 2018). Hamdi examines *ta'āruf* in relation to *khitbah* and marriage. (Hamdi, 2017). Ilhami examines *ta'āruf* in marriage from a sociological perspective; the abstract of the article also recognizes *ta'āruf* as part of *ukhuwah Islamiyah*, namely mutual acquaintance across tribes, nations, and individuals. (Ilhami, 2019).

Studies on *ta'āruf* in premarital literature are fairly diverse, but among the sources examined by the author, no study was found that systematically compares the meaning of *li ta'ārafū* in exegesis with the use of this term. Ilhami (2019) discusses *ta'āruf* in marriage from a sociological perspective, and its abstract also refers to the broader meaning of mutual acquaintance. Kamaluddin (2022) examines the construction of the meaning of *ta'āruf* in QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13 through a comparison of classical and modern exegeses using a *maqāṣidi* approach; according to its abstract, it also notes that in Indonesian Muslim society *ta'āruf* is often understood as family introduction leading to marriage. Accordingly, the contribution of this study does not lie in the finding that *ta'āruf* has already been restricted to marriage, but in articulating the relationship between the specialized usage and the meaning of the verse through three comparative aspects: purpose, parties involved, and scope of relations.

The tendency to use *ta'āruf* as the introduction of a prospective spouse needs to be tested rather than directly concluded to be a reduction of the verse's meaning. The question that arises is whether such restriction is exclusive or merely a specialization of usage in a particular context, and how the relationship between the two can be formulated scientifically.

The research questions are as follows: (1) what is the meaning of *li ta'ārafū* in QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13 according to the exegeses examined; (2) how is the term *ta'āruf* used in the premarital literature reviewed, across three comparative aspects; and (3) how can the relationship between the meaning of the verse and premarital usage be formulated, and to what extent can this specialized usage be described as a problematic restriction? The objectives of this study are to map the meaning of the verse in exegesis, to map the use of *ta'āruf* in premarital literature, and to analyze the relationship between the two without assuming that specialized usage automatically reduces the meaning of the verse.

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B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a library research design and comparative analysis. The corpus comprises the interpretations of QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13 in *Tafsīr al-Jalālain*, *Tafsīr Ibn Kaṡīr*, *Tafsīr al-Marāghī*, and *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāḥ*, as well as discussions of premarital *ta'āruf* in Ta'aruf, *Khitbah*, Nikah by Agus Ariwibowo, Fikih Pernikahan by Achmad Ngarifin, Bekal Pernikahan: Gerbang Menuju Kebahagiaan Bukan Penyesalan by Maulana Umar, and Panduan Lengkap Pernikahan (Fikih Munakahat) by Sati (2011). The corpus was selected purposively based on its relevance to the interpretation of *li ta'ārafū* and the use of the term *ta'āruf* in premarital contexts. Data were collected by reading and recording passages that explain the definition, purpose, parties involved, and scope of *ta'āruf*, which were then compared to identify similarities, differences, and the relationship between the meaning of the verse and the specialized use of the term. Statements in the premarital literature were read in their context to distinguish specialization of usage from explicit restriction that excludes meanings beyond the premarital context. *Tafsīr al-Azhar*, supporting literature on marriage, previous studies, and semantic and sociological studies were used to enrich the discussion. Several sources, including Ilhami (2019) and Kamaluddin (2022), could be checked only through metadata or abstracts, so observations drawn from them are provisional. The conclusions are limited to the portion of the corpus analyzed and are not generalized as historical semantic change or as an overall picture of public understanding.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Meaning of Ta'āruf in QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13

Lexically, the expression *li ta'ārafū* in QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13 derives from the root '-r-f, meaning to know or to recognize. The form *ta'ārafū* is the *tafā'ala* pattern (تَفَاعَلَ), which in morphological rules (*ṣarf*) denotes reciprocal involvement. The term *ta'āruf* is the verbal noun (*maṣdar*) of this form and is used in Indonesian to mean mutual acquaintance (Al-Ma'ani, n.d.). Accordingly, the basic lexical meaning of *ta'āruf* is mutual acquaintance. The specific sense of introduction of a prospective spouse is a narrower usage that is not contained in the form of the word itself.

In the usage of the verse, this meaning encompasses mutual acquaintance among human beings, whether between men and women or across tribes, nations, and religions. An unwillingness to understand and accept differences in identity can hinder the process of mutual acquaintance and give rise to long-standing suspicion. This interpretation is the author's inference from the context of the verse, not an explicit statement of the exegetical works examined (Badan Litbang dan Diklat Departemen Agama RI, 2015).

In the Qur'an, *ta'āruf* has a broader scope than acquaintance related to marriage. In general, the verse refers to relations of mutual acquaintance among human beings without restricting them to any particular party. The text of the verse under study is as follows:

يٰٓاَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اِنَّا خَلَقْنٰكُمْ مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ وَّاُنْثٰى وَجَعَلْنٰكُمْ شُعُوْبًا وَّقَبَاۤىِٕلَ لِتَعَارَفُوْا ۚ اِنَّ اَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللّٰهِ اَتْقٰىكُمْ ۗ اِنَّ اللّٰهَ عَلِيْمٌ خَبِيْرٌ

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> "O mankind, indeed We created you from a male and a female, and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may come to know one another. Indeed, the most honorable of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware." (QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13)

Some reports on the occasion of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) of this verse are linked to the event of Bilāl, a Black slave who called the *adhān* from atop the *Kaʿbah* after the conquest of Mecca. In one report cited by al-Suyūṭī and attributed to *Ibn Abi Mulaikah*, there is a conditional statement: "If Allah does not approve of this, He will change it" (إن يسخط الله هذا يغيره). This report appears in *Lubāb an-Nuqūl* (Al-Suyuti, 2002). This study has not undertaken *takhrīj* of the chain of transmission or an assessment of its authenticity; the report is therefore not treated as determining the historical context of the verse, but only as a narrative background.

If this report is used as a narrative context, the message that can be read from it is a prohibition against demeaning others on account of physical appearance, skin color, or social status, since all human beings are creations of Allah. From this, the verse affirms that mutual acquaintance must not be used as a means of boasting or belittling others (Kamaluddin, 2022). The reading that human diversity was created for mutual acquaintance rather than for mutual insult derives from the structure of the verse itself, namely the purpose clause *li ta'ārafū* that follows the creation of nations and tribes. This reading may also open space for acquaintance that fosters a sense of security and harmonious relations, insofar as such acquaintance does not turn into demeaning attitudes.

In general, this verse affirms that human beings were created from a single pair, namely a male and a female, and then made into various nations and tribes so that they might come to know one another, not so that they might feel superior to one another. The diversity of nations and tribes is read as a social necessity, that is, a condition of human life that is indeed diverse, and as a space for mutual understanding and cooperation. At this level, acquaintance does not stop at names but includes cultural values and traditions. Reading it as a starting point for intercultural dialogue and interfaith communication is the author's inference (Ali & Noor, 2025).

In *Tafsīr al-Jalālain*, Jalaluddin al-Maḥallī and Jalaluddin al-Suyūṭī interpret the phrase *li ta'ārafū* to mean that you should come to know one another (Al-Mahalli & As-Suyuthi, 2003). This interpretation indicates mutual acquaintance among human beings rather than acquaintance aimed at boasting of lineage. The honor in the verse, however, is placed on piety rather than on origin; this emphasis derives directly from the wording of the verse.

In *Tafsīr Ibn Kaśīr*, *li ta'ārafū* is explained as the purpose of mutual acquaintance among human beings, which in practice may take the form of acquaintance by lineage and clan. *Ibn Kaśīr* cites Mujāhid's explanation that such acquaintance may be expressed by identifying someone as "so-and-so, son of so-and-so, from this or that clan". *Ibn Kaśīr* also states that all human beings descend from Adam and Eve, so that what distinguishes people in the sight of Allah is piety. (Ad-Dimisyqi, 1997, hlm. 385).

In *Tafsīr al-Marāghī*, *li ta'ārafū* is interpreted to mean that you should come to know one another. The creation of human beings into nations and tribes is intended for mutual acquaintance, not for

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boasting, mocking, deriding, or backbiting, let alone for boasting about genealogy. This emphasis is consistent with the conclusion of the verse that the most honorable in the sight of Allah is the most righteous. (Al-Maraghi, 1946).

In *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāḥ*, Quraish Shihab interprets *li ta'ārafū* to mean mutual acquaintance. The exegete links acquaintance with learning from one another's experiences, so that acquaintance increases the likelihood of mutual benefit and helps enhance piety toward Allah. (Shihab, 2002).

Across the four interpretations, the common point is that *li ta'ārafū* refers to mutual acquaintance among human beings in social life. Their emphases differ in three respects. Al-*Jalālain* and *Ibn Kaśīr* highlight acquaintance concerning identity, including lineage and clan, and place piety as the measure of honor. Al-Marāghī stresses the prohibition of boasting and of belittling others. Al-Miṣbāḥ emphasizes the benefits of acquaintance and of learning from one another. This synthesis shows that *li ta'ārafū* is understood as a general relation among human beings across tribes and nations, not a specific relation between prospective spouses. This pattern serves as the basis for comparison: at which points premarital usage is an application of the general meaning, and at which points it becomes a restriction.

Distinguishing between the exegetes' explanations and the author's elaborations is necessary so that the scope of an interpretation is not attributed to its sources excessively. In studies of the mediation of tafsir through artificial intelligence, Al-Hafi and Iman (2026) distinguish among the reproduction of interpretations, the synthesis of views, and normative application as types of claims that require separate assessment. This distinction is used here as a methodological consideration: the exegetes' explanations of *li ta'ārafū* form the textual basis, whereas the relationship between the meaning of the verse and the use of the term in premarital literature is the result of this study's comparative analysis.

This verse is addressed to *an-nās* (all human beings), not exclusively to believers. Accordingly, the application of *ta'āruf* is not limited by differences of religion, tribe, or nation; this inference derives from the form of address in the verse rather than from any particular exegetical statement. Acquaintance across differences can lead to mutual learning and understanding, so that a person can come to recognize the character of those who differ from them. (Chirzin, 2011). The author regards this kind of acquaintance as a means of upholding mutual respect, including toward minority groups; this view is the author's normative proposal. (Badan Litbang dan Diklat Departemen Agama RI, 2015).

In social life, people may fail to know one another because of diversity of tribes and nations. This verse provides the basis for encouraging mutual acquaintance, including introducing one another's customs and noble cultures, and for rejecting the use of such differences to demean other groups. Honor does not lie in nationality but in piety toward Allah (Basyir, 2013).

Accordingly, from the perspective of the exegeses examined, *ta'āruf* entails a dimension of recognizing identity and background, from which an ethical principle can be derived for building socially just and mutually respectful relations. The terms "harmonious" and "inclusive" in this section are the author's interpretation of the purpose of acquaintance, not conclusions explicitly stated by the exegetes.

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Specialization of the Use of Ta'āruf in Premarital Literature

In the premarital literature reviewed, the term *ta'āruf* is used to refer to the process of getting acquainted between a man and a woman with the aim of marriage. This usage differs from the general meaning in the exegeses, which refers to mutual acquaintance among human beings. In the verse, the context is the diversity of nations and tribes, and this diversity is not a reason to keep away from one another but a space for mutual acquaintance. Accordingly, the context of the verse shows a social dimension of *ta'āruf* that is broader than the relationship between prospective spouses.

The tendency to use this term in premarital contexts needs to be tested against literature that specifically addresses premarital practices of acquaintance. Such testing aims to distinguish two things: the meaning explained by the exegetes and the use of the term in premarital literature. This study does not measure the frequency of the term's use or public understanding; it only examines what is written in the accessible literature.

In the premarital literature reviewed, *ta'āruf* is understood as a process of mutual acquaintance between a man and a woman leading to marriage. Linguistically, the term still means to know or to get acquainted, whereas in premarital usage it refers to a specific form of acquaintance aimed at marriage. *Ta'āruf* is understood as one of the efforts undertaken before marriage to get to know a prospective spouse, including their occupation, family, and culture, and it is usually carried out before *khitbah* or proposal. Its purpose is to prevent both parties from regretting or being disappointed after marriage (Ariwibowo, 2017).The definition in the marriage jurisprudence (*fiqh*) book cited places *ta'āruf* as a process of mutual acquaintance between a man and a woman leading to marriage (Ngarifin, 2025).

In the practices described in the premarital literature, *ta'āruf* may be carried out directly or indirectly, through mutual questioning to explore each other's personality, performing the *istikharah* prayer and praying for one another to be granted ease, and seeking the blessing of parents. The literature also emphasizes what is needed and a mature attitude in choosing a spouse. The intention to worship Allah is placed as the foundation of this process. (Umar, 2022). These characteristics are normative and practical in nature and indicate that premarital *ta'āruf* has its own rules that are not identical to general acquaintance. (Sati, 2011).

Based on the above discussion, there is a difference between the meaning in exegesis and the meaning in premarital literature. Premarital literature uses *ta'āruf* specifically for getting to know a prospective spouse before marriage, whereas the exegeses place *li ta'ārafū* within a broader social relationship. Two possibilities arise from this difference: premarital usage is a specialization of the general meaning, or it is a restriction that closes off the general meaning. Both possibilities are tested in the following section.

Testing the Relationship between the Meaning of the Verse and Premarital Usage

The use of *ta'āruf* as a premarital process needs to be read critically by distinguishing two things: the use of the term in premarital practice and the scope of meaning indicated by the verse. In the premarital literature reviewed, this usage can be understood as the application of the value of mutual acquaintance between a man and a woman who intend to marry. A problem arises if this usage is regarded as the only valid meaning of *ta'āruf*, so that the scope of the verse, namely

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acquaintance among human beings within the diversity of nations and tribes, becomes invisible. This distinction determines whether what is being tested is a specialization or a restriction.

The three comparative aspects reveal the following pattern. First, in terms of purpose, the exegeses place *li ta'ārafū* in mutual acquaintance and the prevention of suspicion, whereas the premarital literature directs *ta'āruf* toward the decision to marry. Second, in terms of the parties involved, the exegeses refer to human beings in general, whereas the premarital literature refers to prospective husbands and wives, with the role of family in some works. Third, in terms of the scope of relations, the exegeses encompass relations across tribes, nations, and backgrounds, whereas the premarital literature limits relations to prospective spouses. From this pattern, premarital usage appears as a specialization in terms of parties and scope, while its purpose intersects with the general meaning, namely acquaintance as the basis for good relations.

The description of Ariwibowo's book (2017) places *ta'āruf* as the acquaintance with a prospective spouse, including occupation, family, and culture, before deciding to proceed toward marriage. Meanwhile, the official description of Bekal Pernikahan by Maulana Umar (2022) places the discussion of *ta'āruf* within the framework of marriage preparation, including getting to know the character of a prospective spouse and determining topics of conversation. Both descriptions show the use of the term in a premarital context, but they are not sufficient to prove the existence of a statement that negates the meaning of *ta'āruf* outside that context. Therefore, the focus on premarital usage needs to be distinguished from the restriction of the interpretation of QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13.

Semantically, a shift from a general meaning to a specific meaning can be read as specialization, namely when a word with a broad scope is used in a particular field with a narrower meaning. Tamami et al. (2026) discuss the dynamics of meaning change in Arabic and Indonesian semantics as a general framework. (Tamami et al., 2026). This general framework does not by itself prove that *ta'āruf* has undergone lexical narrowing. Accordingly, this analysis assesses tendencies of usage and understanding in the reviewed literature, rather than a lexical change of meaning that is already established in Arabic.

In the premarital literature examined, *ta'āruf* is used specifically for the introduction of a prospective spouse before marriage; this constitutes a specialization of usage, not a historical change of meaning. In the author's view, this specialized usage appears to be related to the practical need to know the stages before marriage. This usage can be understood as a specialization of a term with a practical function, insofar as it is not asserted as the only meaning.

The author considers that the understanding that *ta'āruf* means only introduction leading to marriage needs to be bounded. This study does not judge premarital usage to be erroneous; what is questioned is the claim that it is the only meaning.

Reconstructing the Meaning of Ta'āruf Based on QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13

The reconstruction proposed here does not create a new meaning; rather, it repositions the general meaning of the verse as a framework for reading premarital usage. Kamaluddin (2022) likewise formulates the meaning of the verse as mutual understanding and acceptance of differences; the present study differs in its emphasis on distinguishing specialization from restriction and in its

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three comparative aspects. Within this formulation, the element derived from earlier exegesis is the meaning of mutual acquaintance across identities and the purpose of building good relations. The analytical contribution of this study lies in distinguishing the specialized use of the term *ta'āruf* in premarital literature from the restriction of the interpretation of *li ta'ārafū* in QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13, through comparison of purpose, parties involved, and scope of relations. The use of the term for acquaintance with a prospective spouse does not by itself negate the broader meaning; a restriction of interpretation must be demonstrated through a statement that places premarital relations as the sole scope of the verse's meaning. This distinction makes it possible to position premarital *ta'āruf* as a specific application of the principle of mutual acquaintance. Its ethical implication is that the purpose of marriage may guide the use of the term in a particular context without closing off the verse's message about human relations within diversity.

This reconstruction begins from the context of the verse, which concerns human diversity and the need to build relations. The verse states that human beings were created from a male and a female, and then made into nations and tribes so that they might come to know one another. Accordingly, *ta'āruf* in the verse can be linked not only to the relationship between prospective spouses but also to acquaintance in broader social life.

From the substance of the verse, *ta'āruf* can be understood as a process of acquaintance that enables a person to understand the identity, background, and characteristics of others in social life. This scope is not limited to personal acquaintance but also includes understanding the origins, tribes, nations, and social backgrounds that shape a person's identity. According to the verse, differences of identity do not provide grounds for building barriers or reinforcing hostility. This principle can be read as an ethical proposal that acquaintance serves as a means of understanding oneself and others in a plural society. (Rasyid & Tubangsa, 2024).

From this reading, at least three principles can be derived as part of the reconstruction. First, *ta'āruf* emphasizes relationships that are sustained and mutually beneficial. Second, *ta'āruf* calls for closeness built through listening, understanding, and respecting the views of others. Third, *ta'āruf* is directed toward a harmonious life amid diversity. These three principles are the author's derivations from the verse and its interpretation, not explicit formulations by any single exegete.

These principles can be tested against the practice of premarital *ta'āruf*. The premarital literature reviewed generally places *ta'āruf* within a framework of worship, consideration of character, and family blessing, so that the principles of mutual acquaintance and mutual respect can be applied within it. However, if the purpose of marriage is treated as the sole measure, the ethical scope of the verse does not become visible. Accordingly, premarital usage can be read as a specific application of a more general principle. Social outcomes such as brotherhood, solidarity, and mutual assistance are ethical orientations that are expected, not results demonstrated by this library-based study. (Kamaluddin, 2022).

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion, the expression *li ta'ārafū* in QS. al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13 refers to mutual acquaintance among human beings within diverse social life. The exegeses examined, namely *Tafsīr al-Jalālain*, *Tafsīr Ibn Kaṡīr*, *Tafsīr al-Marāghī*, and *Tafsīr al-Miṣbāḥ*, converge on this meaning insofar as the passages quoted are read, while differing in emphasis on identity, the

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prohibition of boasting, and the benefits of acquaintance. The verse also affirms that honor before Allah is determined by piety rather than by lineage, tribe, or nation. Accordingly, the scope of the meaning of *ta'āruf* in the verse is broader than premarital acquaintance.

In the premarital literature reviewed, *ta'āruf* is used mainly for the introduction of prospective spouses leading to marriage. This usage can be understood as a specialization of the term and need not be rejected, provided it is not claimed to be the only meaning. In the sources examined, no explicit statement was found that restricts *ta'āruf* exclusively to the premarital context; the limited verification of the corpus makes this conclusion provisional. Accordingly, this study does not claim that a restriction has been demonstrated. What is formulated is the boundary between the meaning of the verse and premarital usage, so that the claim of "semantic narrowing" in the sense of a reduction of the verse's meaning is not maintained as a finding.

As a proposed reconstruction, *ta'āruf* can be understood as a process of mutual acquaintance that encompasses identity, background, character, and the diversity of human life. Within this understanding, premarital acquaintance is one application rather than the sole scope. The contribution of this study is limited to explaining the specialization of usage and mapping three comparative aspects. Future research should test a more complete premarital corpus, conduct *takhrīj* of the occasion-of-revelation reports and, where necessary, examine the practices and understanding of communities directly.

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Author Contributions

The authors contributed to the conceptualization, analysis, drafting, and revision of the manuscript. Both authors approved the final version and accept responsibility for the work.

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