The Narrative Structure of *Ashab al-Kahf* Story

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Abstract

This paper examined the narrative structure, language style, and chronology of *Ašḥāb al-Kahfi* story in Al-Qur’an. The research data were obtained from al-Qur’an. The Qur’anic verses which told about *Ašḥāb al-Kahfi* were collected in Surah al-Kahf (18) verses 9-26. The results showed that the narrative structure of this story consists of orientation I, sequence of events I, coda I, complication, orientation II, sequence of events II, orientation III, coda II, orientation IV, and resolution. These structures are interrelated and form a logical, holistic, and beautiful story unit that fulfil all elements of Mark Anderson’s and Kathryn Anderson’s narrative-structure concepts. Meanwhile, the dialogue style dominates in the presentation of stories that are in accordance with the journey of the Prophet’s da’wa. The dialogue style used in the presentation of the story is calm and acceptable. This style is intended to defend the call of the prophet’s da’wa and refute people’s rejection in the middle Meccan period through the theme of monotheism value and the mention of Allah’s powers. This study contributes to putting the theory of stylistics and narratology in the reading of story verses. Hence, this paper suggests a further study of the story verse covering the narrative structure’s meaning and function as well as aspects of the beauty of pronunciation and story verse meanings.

**Keywords:** Complications; dialogue; monotheism; middle Mecca period

**Abstrak**

Tulisan ini mengkaji tentang struktur narasi cerita, gaya bahasa, dan kronologi cerita Ašḥāb al-Kahfi dalam Al-Qur’an. Data penelitian

**Kata Kunci:** Komplikasi; Dialog; Monoteisme; Periode Mekah Tengah

**Introduction**

The construction of the appearance of the story verse in the Qur'an uses a distinctive and varied form of language and structure\(^1\),\(^2\),\(^3\). Likewise, the narrative structure of the story used also varies\(^4\),\(^5\). The narrative of this story is one of the distinctive stylistic features of the Qur'an\(^6\). This is certainly related to the

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situation and conditions faced when the verse was revealed. Therefore, understanding the story verse must be done around the text level, also related to the context, and then a comprehensive understanding of the values to be conveyed will be obtained. In presenting the story verses; \( \text{Aşhāb al-Kahf} \) is based on chronology, so it needs to be researched. According to Theodor Nöldke-Schwally\(^9\), the verse chronology of this story verse was included in the middle Meccan period\(^10\). The language style of the story was related to the historical social context of Arab society when the verse was revealed.\(^11\) The language style of this story was widely used in dialogue style, so that it came to terms with the situation faced by the Prophet. The dialogue style can present the psychology of the audience as if they are participating in the story so that it is easy to understand.\(^13\) Thus, this dialogue style is important in a story as what was conveyed by Muhammad 'Abd Allâh 'Abduh.\(^14\)

Several previous studies written by scholars related to this phenomenon were presented with their respective problems. First, Mutahar Qassim's study of the translation of stylistic variations in the Al-Qur'an discourse into English using a stylistic and exegetical approach.\(^15\) Second, Umar Sidik's study was about transformation analysis to compare the script of \( \text{Ablu al-Kahf} \) with the text of the verse of \( \text{Aşhāb al-Kahf} \). It is also different from the study by Mehwish Noor who interpreted Surah al-Kahf using various traditional literary approaches, such as historical, biographical, moral, and philosophical approaches which are


interrelated\(^\text{17}\). Furthermore, the study of stylistics by M.Ircham which was based on an exploratory study of the values of the Qur’an which still dwells on the substance of the verse, so he sought to reveal the educational values of the Al-Qur’an based on the style of language\(^\text{18}\). The study by Muzammir bin Anas\(^\text{19}\) et al, both discuss the story of Aşhāb al-Kahf, but more on the narrative elements and structural rhetoric and the correlation between the two\(^\text{20}\). Based on the search results, no studies have been found that discussed the issue of narrative structure and language style of story verses based on chronology. This paper examined the narrative structure and language style of the verse of the story of Al-Qur’an based on the chronology of Theodor Nöldeke-Schwally.

Based on these problems, this paper responded to solve the problem by applying the narrative structure theory of Mark Anderson and Kathryn Anderson and the stylistic theory of Syihabuddin Qalyubi to the story verse. As for looking at the chronological aspect of the verse, Theodor Nöldeke-Schwally theory was used. The verses that told about the story of Aşhāb al-Kahf in Surah al-Kahf (18) verses 9 to 26 were analyzed using the theory of Mark Anderson and Kathryn Anderson to find the narrative structure of the story. This analysis is carried out by dividing the narrative structure into five parts, which include orientation, complication, sequence of events, resolution, and coda\(^\text{21}\). Meanwhile, in reading the language style of Aşhāb al-Kahf’s story, it is done by using the stylistic theory of Syihabuddin Qalyubi which is devoted to the aspect of dialogue style\(^\text{22}\). This research used qualitative research and descriptive methods. This research also includes library research. Based on the explanation of the method used in this study, this study has a specific goal to be achieved by the researcher, namely to find the narrative structure of the verse of the story of Aşhāb al-Kahf and the language style used in presenting the story based on the chronology of Theodor Nöldeke-Schwally\(^\text{23}\).


\(^{21}\) Mark Anderson and Kathryn Anderson, *Text Types in English* (Sydney: Macmillan Education Australia, 1997).


Finally, the argument that the researchers wanted in realizing the purpose of this paper is that he hopes that through the study of narratology and stylistics of the Qur'an, especially the story of Aşḥāb Al-Kahf, surah Al-Kahf (18) verses 9 to 26. It can provide a comprehensive understanding of the explanation. The stories contained in the story of the Qur'an. An understanding that is not only limited to the level of style or language style but also includes the narrative structure of the story based on the chronology of the verses. This is a study that is expected to contribute to the theory of narratology and stylistics for the reading of stories in the Qur'an. The story shown in the Qur'an is in line with the prophet's career journey in preaching against the Quraysh infidels. The prophet's preaching did not always go well, but there were various attempts by the people to reject the preaching. Thus, the appearance of the story certainly provides a variety of values or religious messages to be conveyed to the readers or audience.²⁴,²⁵ The story in the Qur'an is full of messages contained in it.²⁶

Results and Discussion

Narrative Structure and Style of the Story of Aşḥāb al-Kahfī

The narrative structure of the story verse about Aşḥāb Al-Kahf in Surah Al-Kahf (18): 9-26 can be described in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Narrative Structure</th>
<th>Explanation/ Verse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Orientation I</td>
<td>Surah al-Kahf (18): 9 The characters involved in the narrative of this story were the people who inhabit the cave as the main character. The place is in the cave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sequence of events I</td>
<td>Surah al-Kahf (18): 10-12 The men took refuge in the cave and prayed for mercy from Allah. Allah closed their ears in the cave, then Allah woke them up again to let them know the exact time they spent in the cave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Coda I</td>
<td>Surah al-Kahf (18): 13 The story of Aşḥāb al-Kahf was addressed to the prophet by telling it actually as the first message of a lesson on the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

faith of the men in their God so that Allah strengthened their faith and Allah guided them.

4 Complication

Allah strengthened their hearts when they stood in front of their people who insisted to betray Allah. They refused and declared their determination that their God was the Lord of the heavens and the earth. Their people make other gods besides Allah. Instead, another character appears; His servants have made the other gods. Then, Allah ordered them to take refuge in a cave.

5 Orientation II

Another figure emerged. They were the people who worshiped other gods besides Allah as their gods.

6 Sequence of events II

Furthermore, they explained their condition while sleeping in the cave. Allah protects and protects His obedient and guided servants, namely the cave dwellers. Then, Allah also turned their bodies to the right and the left. After they woke up, they asked each other about how long they stayed in the cave. Then a difference of opinion arose between them, so one of them said that Allah knows best. Then because they were hungry, one of them went to the city to buy food by being gentle and not telling about their hiding place. Allah brought the people of the land together with the men to know the truth of Allah's promise. The people of the country disagreed about who the young men were, and how long they slept in the cave, so they agreed to build a house of worship above the cave to be enshrined.

7 Orientation III

There are other people who were the residents of the country and the rulers of the residents of the country.

8 Coda II

The second message of this story was addressed to the prophet and there would be differences of opinion of the people who come later about the cave dwellers. Allah commanded the prophet to say that He knew the best and there was no promise that no one knew for sure what would happen.

9 Orientation IV

It said that they lived in the cave for three hundred years and nine years.
Resolution

At the end of the last story, the narrative of this story ended with an affirmation that Allah is the God who knows best how long they stayed in the cave. God owns all that is hidden in the heavens and on the earth. His eyesight is clear, His hearing is sharp, and there is no protector for them but Allah. He is not assisted by anyone in making decisions.

Based on table A.1, the narrative structure of the verse *qasas* al-Kahf (18): 9-26 which narrates the story of *Aṣḥāb al-Kahf* is fully described. The narrative structure of *qasas* verse is presented in accordance with the concept of the narrative structure of Mark Anderson and Kathryn Anderson covering five aspects, namely orientation, complication, sequence of events, resolution, and coda. This *qasas* verse begins with a verse (al-Kahf (18):9) which contains the question of whether the stories of the people who inhabit the cave are signs of Allah's power. This verse describes who is involved in this story and the place where the incident took place. In the concept of Mark Anderson and Kathryn Anderson named the element orientation. In the context of this verse, the actors who appear are the cave dwellers with the location of the incident in the cave as orientation I. The next presentation contains elements of orientation II, orientation III, and orientation IV.

The next section after orientation should be a complication. This stage describes how the incident started. The context of this *qasas* verse is precisely this element whose position is paused after the sequence of events and coda elements. These two elements are also found twice, so there are elements of sequences of events I, II and coda I, II. The sequence of events element contains the stages of events, while the coda is related to the message as the closing of the story. The context of this *qasas* verse, sequence of events I (al-Kahf (18): 10-12) describes about the men taking refuge in a cave, then they pray for Allah's mercy. Allah closed their ears in the cave, then Allah woke them up again. Next is shown coda I (al-Kahf (18): 10-13) which describes the message of lessons on the men’s faith in their God with true faith so that Allah strengthens faith and Allah adds guidance to them.

The next section presented a complication (al-Kahf (18): 14-16) which described how the incident started when they stand before their people who insist on associating partners with Allah. They refused and declared their determination that their God was the God of the heavens and the earth. Their people created other gods besides Allah. Indirectly, this section also displays orientation II, namely that the people created other gods than Allah. Then this *qasas* verse is continued with the elements of the sequence of events II (al-Kahf (18): 17-21). Previously, the sequence of events I described was the men
taking refuge in a cave. Then, they prayed for Allah's mercy. Allah closed their ears in the cave, then Allah woke them up again. In this sequence of events II, the conditions when they slept in the cave are described, and after they wake up. They asked each other about how long they had stayed in the cave. Then a difference of opinion arose between them, so one of them said that Allah knows best. Then because they were hungry, one of them went to town to buy some food. Allah brought the people of the land together with the men to know the truth of Allah’s promise. The people of the country debated about who the men were, so they agreed to build a house of worship above the cave.

Before the narrative structure of the qasas verse is closed with a resolution, interspersed with the appearance of elements of orientation III (al-Kahf (18): 21), coda II (al-Kahfi (18): 22-24) and orientation IV (al-Kahf (18): 25). Previously in the orientation I, the characters of the cave dwellers were mentioned in the cave, then in orientation II it was mentioned other characterizations, namely people who worship other Gods but Allah. As for the orientation III elements, other actors appeared, they were the residents of the country and the rulers of the residents of the country. Meanwhile, orientation IV brought up the time aspect of dwelling in the cave which was three hundred years and nine years. This element of coda II showed the message of the final conclusion of the story addressed to the prophet that there would be differences of opinion from people who came later about the cave dwellers. Allah commanded the prophet to say that He knew the best and there was no promise that no one knew for sure what would happen. Previously, coda had a part which described the educational value of the men’s faith in God.

Finally, as a closing of the narrative structure of the qasas verse of al-Kahf (18): 9-26 which narrated the story of Aşḥāb al-Kahf, the element of resolution II (al-Kahf (18): 26) describes the end of the story. Previously, the resolution I element was also displayed in the form of Allah showing signs of His greatness, while the resolution II element also described the ending of the story with an affirmation that Allah is the God who owns all that is hidden in the heavens and on the earth. His eyesight is clear, His hearing is sharp, and there is no protector for them but Allah. He does not take anyone to be His partner in making decisions. The narrative structure of the story about Aşḥāb al-Kahf in Surah al-Kahf (18): 9-26 is presented at the end in the form of a message
related to faith in Allah.\textsuperscript{27} There are life lessons\textsuperscript{28} and divine messages from each fragment of the story of \textit{Aşhab al-Kahf} in the Qur'an.\textsuperscript{29}

Based on the study of the story verse about \textit{Aşhab al-Kahf}, it can be seen that the narrative structure of the story used in presenting the story consists of several parts, namely orientation I, sequence of events I, coda I, complication, orientation II, sequence of events II, orientation III, coda II, orientation IV and resolution. The narrative structure that is built is interrelated and forms a logical, complete, and beautiful story unit that fulfills all elements of the narrative structure of the concepts of Mark Anderson and Kathryn Anderson. In addition, the narrative structure of the verse of the story of the Qur'an also shows the dimension of the narratological miracle (\textit{al-i'jâz al-sardiy}) of the Qur'an as the narrative of the story of Moses.\textsuperscript{30} Then it was conveyed that the story of \textit{Aşhab al-Kahf} had its storyline which started from the summary of the story and continued with the details of the events in it.\textsuperscript{31}

The next aspect of the analysis is seen based on the style of language used. The story of \textit{Aşhab al-Kahf} in Surah al-Kahf (18): 9-26 is mostly shown by using the dominance of the dialogue style. This can be seen from the use of several enunciations in the verse of this story which shows the context of the dialogue such as \textit{qālu}, \textit{qāla}, \textit{sayaqu>lu>n}, \textit{yaqu>lu>n}, \textit{qul}, and \textit{taqu>lamma}. These words are found in several verses and they varied. The distribution of the use of dialogue enunciations is described as follows:

Table 2: Dialog Enunciation in the Story of Aṣḥāb al-Kahf

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Surah</th>
<th>Enunciation</th>
<th>Verse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>al-Kahfi (18): 10</td>
<td>qālu&gt;</td>
<td>اِذَّ أُوَى الْفِتْيَةُ إِلَى الْكَهْفِ قَالُوا رَبَّنَا أَنَّا مِنْ آنِيَةٍ رَحْمَةً وَقَدْ رَحَمَنَا لَنَا مِنْ أَمْرِهِ رَضِيَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالْجَنُّ بِهِ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>al-Kahfi (18): 14</td>
<td>qālu&gt;</td>
<td>فَرَنَّا عَلَى قَلُوْبِهِمْ إِذْ قَامُوْا قَالُوْا رَبُّنَا رَبُّ السَّمَوٰتِ وَالَّْرِضِ لَنْ نَّدْعُوَا مِنْ دُوْنِهِ إِلَّهًا لَقَدْ قُلْنَا إِذًا شَطَطًا</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>al-Kahfi (18): 19</td>
<td>qālu&gt;</td>
<td>قَالُوْا لَبِثْنَا يَوْمًا اَوْ بَعْضَ يَوْمٍۗ قَالُوْا رَبُّكُمْ اَعْلَمُ بِمَا لَبِثْتُمۖ فَابْعَثُوْا اَحَدَكُمْ بِوَرِقِكُمْ هٰذِهِ إِلَى الَّذِينَ غَلَبُوْا عَلَيْهِمْ لِيَعْلَمُوْا اَنَّ وَعْدَ اللّٰهِ حَقٌّ وَإِنَّ السَّاعَةَ لَرَيْبَ فِيهَاۚ اِذْ يَتَنَازَعُوْنَ بَيْنَهُمْ اَمْرَهُمْ فَقَالُوا لَنَتَّخِذَنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ مَّسْجِدًا لَِْقْرَبَ مِنْ هٰذَا رَشَدًا</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>al-Kahfi (18): 21</td>
<td>qāla</td>
<td>قَالُوْا كَذٰلِكَ بَعَثْنٰهُمْ لِيَتَسَاۤءَلُوْا بَيْنَهُمۖ قَالَ قَاۤىِٕلٌ مِنْهُمْ كَمْ لَبِثْتُمۖ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>al-Kahfi (18): 22</td>
<td>sayaqu&gt;lu&gt;n</td>
<td>وَكَذٰلِكَ اَعْثَرْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ لِيَعْلَمُوْا اَنَّ وَعْدَ اللّٰهِ حَقٌّ وَإِنَّ السَّاعَةَ لَرَيْبَ فِيهَاۚ اِذْ يَتَنَازَعُوْنَ بَيْنَهُمْ اَمْرَهُمْ فَقَالُوا لَنَتَّخِذَنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ مَّسْجِدًا</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>al-Kahfi (18): 22</td>
<td>yaqu&gt;lu&gt;n</td>
<td>وَيَقُوْنَ ثَلٰثَةٌ رَّابِعُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْۚ سَيَقُوْلُوْنَ تَلَّهَ وَلَسْتُمُ ۖ وَيَقُوْنَ خَمْسَةٌ سَادِسُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ رَجْمًا بِالْغَيْبِۚ وَيَقُوْنَ سَبْعَةٌ وَّثَامِنُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ ٍۗ فَلا يَسْتَفْتُ فِيهِمْ أَحَدًا</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>al-Kahfi (18): 23</td>
<td>qul</td>
<td>قُلْ لَِْقْرَبَ مِنْ هٰذَا رَشَدًا وَإِذَا نَسِيْتَ قُلْ عَسَٰى اَنْ يَّهْدِيَنِ رَبِّيِ اِذَا قُلْتِ اَرْجُح مِنْهُ وَلَْ يُشْرِكُ فِيْ حُكْمِه ٓ اَحَدًا لَِْقْرَبَ مِنْ هٰذَا رَشَدًا</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the presentation of table 2, it can be understood that the story of Aṣḥāb al-Kahf emphasizes more on one element of the story, which is the element of dialogue. The dialogues in this story have their own themes. The dialogue in the 1st chapter (al-Kahf (18): 10) contains the theme of monotheism which the men prayed to Allah for His mercy and His guidance. Likewise, in the 10th chapter, it is also related to the theme of monotheism due to permission to be guided by Allah. The theme of monotheism is also found in the dialogue of the 2nd chapter (al-Kahf (18): 14), namely when they face King Dikyanus by saying that their God is the God of the heavens and the earth. There is no other God but Him.
The theme of the dialogue in chapter 3 (al-Kahf (18): 19) is about the power of Allah who knew how long they slept in the cave. There is a controversy about the time. Likewise, the fourth chapter (al-Kahf (18): 21) also contains the theme of the power of Allah who knew more about them. The theme of Allah’s power is also presented in the 11th dialogue (al-Kahf (18): 26), that Allah knew best how long they stayed in the cave. God owns all that is hidden in the heavens and on the earth. His eyesight is clear, His hearing is sharp, and there is no protector for them but Allah. He is not assisted by anyone in making decisions. The theme of the 5th chapter of the dialogue (al-Kahf (18): 19) is about how long they slept in the cave. Then, the 6th surah (al-Kahf (18): 21) contains the theme of the plan to build a house of worship above the cave.

The dialogue theme regarding the number of people in the cave is shown in the 7th, 8th, and 9th surah (al-Kahf (18): 22). In addition to the diversity in terms of the theme or content of the message conveyed, the form of dialogue that occurs in this story is also not monotonous from the side of interlocutors. The givers and recipients of the message were the men to Allah, the men to King Decius, among the men themselves, between those people who have power over their affairs, between the people of the book and between Allah and the prophet.

The verses in the dialogue form about Asḥāb al-Kahf, based on the chronology of the revelation of the verse according to Theodor Nöldeke-Schwally, it is known that the verses were revealed in the middle Meccan period, a period which was full of rejection from Quraysh. The realities and circumstances were not easy for the prophet and his followers to face. The presentation of the style of the story verse in each period follows the journey of the prophet’s da’wa. The style of language in this period indicated a transition from the form of the early Meccan period which tends to have high enthusiasm towards the middle Meccan period which tends to be calmer and more acceptable through the style of the dialogue. Da’wa through dialogue with all its variations is in harmony with all segments of interlocutor and various conditions. Dialogue is a medium that connects communication between creatures and their Creator and among creatures.

Moreover, the use of one element of the story in the verse is in line with the development of Islamic da’wa. According to Khalafullah, the emphasis on this aspect of dialogue style is intended to maintain Islamic da’wa by the prophet in the era of rejection and as the rebuttal. It was the rebuttal of the Meccan polytheists on the truth of the prophet as the messenger of God and the truth.

of his teachings. Thus, the appearance of the dominance of the dialogue style in the story about Aḥḥāb al-Kahf in Surah al-Kahf (18): 9-26 is in harmony with the chronology of the revelation of the verse in the middle Meccan period. Various rejections of the prophet’s da’wa, made the dialogue style in the story of Aḥḥāb al-Kahf an effort to defend the prophet’s da’wa and refute the rejection of the people. The dialogue style contains the theme of monotheism (tawhid) and God’s power so that it also contains theological meaning.  

Conclusion

The most important finding in this research was the narrative structure of Aḥḥāb al-Kahfi’s story which consists of orientation I, sequence of events I, coda I, complication, orientation II, sequence of events II, orientation III, coda II, orientation IV and resolution. These structures are interrelated and form a logical, holistic, beautiful story unit that fulfills all elements of the narrative structure of the concepts of Mark Anderson and Kathryn Anderson. Then, the appearance of the dialogue style dominates the presentation of the story of Aḥḥāb al-Kahf. The style of language is in accordance with the prophet's journey. Thus, the theory used in this study can reveal the problem of story texts that are read from the perspective of narratology and stylistics. The drawback of this study is that the speakers are new at the level of narrative structure and dialogue style. Therefore, the researcher provides suggestions for further research in the form of studies that include the meaning and function of the narrative structure as well as the aspects of the beauty of enunciation and the beauty of the meaning of the story verse of Aḥḥāb al-Kahf.

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