

Divine Forgiveness in Context: An Analysis of Al-Ghafur's Collocational Pairs in the Qur'anic Corpus

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DOI : 10.29240/alquds.v10i2.17676

Abstract. This study offers an analysis of the Divine Name al-Ghafur through its recurrent pairing with other Divine Names in the Qur'anic corpus, examining what theological theme each pairing conveys in its specific verse context and how these themes collectively shape the Qur'anic representation of divine forgiveness. The study is motivated by al-Ghafur's recurrent co-occurrence with other divine names, a pattern previously classified by Norasid and Jais (2022) according to the linguistic relation between paired terms (mutual meaning, similarity, opposition, and word order). This study offers a complementary reading of the same phenomenon, organizing the same collocational data by theological theme rather than by linguistic relation. Employing a qualitative corpus-assisted approach, data were drawn from all 91 occurrences of al-Ghafur identified through a lemma-based search of the Qur'anic Arabic Corpus, of which 89 co-occur with another Divine Name within the same verse. The analysis is conceptually grounded in the collocation principles of Firth and interpreted through Qur'anic exegesis (al-Tabari, al-Razi, Ibn 'Ashur, among others). The results show that al-Ghafur predominantly collocates with al-Rahim, al-Halim, al-Shakur, al-Wadud, al-'Aziz, al-'Afuw, and Dhu al-Rahmah, each pairing corresponding to a distinct contextual theme, among them compassion, postponed punishment, divine appreciation, intimacy, the tension between majesty and clemency, complete effacement of sin, and deferred judgment. Rather than constituting an independent theological concept, the meaning of al-Ghafur is contextually enriched through these recurring lexical associations. The findings demonstrate that collocational analysis provides a productive linguistic framework for understanding how the semantic interpretation of Divine Names is shaped by their immediate textual environment in the Qur'an.

Keywords: Divine Names, Collocation, Al-Ghafur, Qur'anic Arabic Corpus.

Introduction

The Divine Names and Attributes occupy a central place in the Glorious Qur'an. As Ibn Taymiyyah states: *"The Qur'an contains more references to the names, attributes, and acts than it does to eating, drinking, and marital union in Paradise. The verses containing the mention of Allah's names and attributes carry greater weight than the verses concerning the Hereafter."*¹ They are described there as the most beautiful names, a designation derived from the Arabic term *al-husna* (الحسنى), the feminine elative form of *ahsana* (أحسن), from the triliteral root *h-s-n* (ح س ن), which denotes "most beautiful."² The term is explicitly invoked in QS 7:180.

¹ 'Abd al-Razzāq ibn 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-'Abbād al-Badr, *Fiqh Al-Asmā' al-Ḥusnā*, 2nd ed. (Dār al-Tawḥīd wa-al-Nashr, 2009), 9.

² Muḥammad ibn Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān Al-'Arab*, vol. 13 (Dār Ṣādir, 1956), 115-116.

And to Allah belong the most beautiful names, so invoke Him by them. And leave [the company of] those who practice deviation concerning His names. They will be recompensed for what they have been doing. (Al-A'raf/ 7:180)

Al-Zamakhshari explains that al-Asma' al-Husna (the Most Beautiful Names) refers to the most excellent of all names (*absan al-asma'*), because they denote noble meanings, such as glorification, sanctification, and other attributes of divine perfection.³

Throughout the Qur'an, divine names and attributes appear in diverse thematic contexts, including verses concerning divine promise (*al-wa'd*), warning (*al-wa'id*), legal rulings, the prophetic narratives, and those who denied the faith. In these contexts, the divine names function to affirm and reinforce the intended message of the verses. Likewise, numerous Qur'anic verses conclude with one or more divine names, each serving as an ending that closely aligns with the verse's meaning and purpose.⁴

Among the Divine Names, al-Ghafur is one of the most frequently occurring attributes in the Qur'an. Based on a morphological comparison of the three forgiveness-related Divine Names al-Ghafir, al-Ghaffar, and al-Ghafur, Hassan finds that al-Ghafur's intensified morphological form conveys a relatively broader sense of forgiveness than the other two. These observations indicate that al-Ghafur occupies a distinctive semantic position within the Qur'anic discourse.⁵

It should be noted that the term al-Ghafur rarely appears without an adjacent divine name within the same verse: out of 91 total occurrences, only 2 verses (QS 17:25 and 34:15) appear without such pairing, while all other occurrences co-occur with another divine name. Throughout the Qur'an, it repeatedly occurs alongside other Divine Names, including al-Rahim, al-Halim, al-Shakur, al-Wadud, al-'Aziz, and al-'Afuw. These recurring lexical pairings suggest that divine forgiveness is consistently presented within broader semantic relationships rather than as an independent attribute. This recurring pattern raises an important question concerning how these collocational partners contribute to the semantic construction of divine forgiveness in the Qur'an.

The language of the Qur'an is widely recognized for its multi-layered semantic structure. Within it, each word (*lafz*) conveys not only a basic lexical meaning but also deeper nuances that emerge through its relationships and associations with other words in various textual contexts. A word rarely appears on its own within a text; rather, it typically occurs alongside other words in systematic linguistic patterns. Such co-occurrences are not random but follow specific syntagmatic principles that enable the emergence of new meanings through the combination of two or more lexical units. In many cases, changes in lexical pairs can lead to significant shifts in meaning. The reciprocal relationship between words, which reflects the tendency of certain lexical units to occur together in a language, is known as collocation.⁶

Collocation has become an important area of research in corpus linguistics because it demonstrates that a word's meaning is influenced not only by its dictionary definition but also by the

³ Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar ibn Aḥmad al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshaf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl Wa-'Uyun al-Aqāwīl Fi Wujūh al-Ta'wīl*, 3rd ed., vol. 2, ed. Muṣṭafā Ḥusayn Aḥmad (Dār al-Rayyān li-l-Turāth, 1987), 180.

⁴ Muhammad Ratib Al-Nablusi, *Mengenal Allah*, 1st ed. (Zaman, 2016), 29.

⁵ Eshraga Elhaj Abdalhafez Hassan, "The Most Beautiful Names of Allah 'Ghafir, Ghaffar, and Ghafoor' in the Holy Qur'an (Morphological and Semantic Study)," *EVOLUTIONARY STUDIES IN IMAGINATIVE CULTURE*, September 17, 2024, 134–41, <https://doi.org/10.70082/esiculture.vi.801>.

⁶ A. S. Barashi, "Arabic Collocations: Implications for Translation." (Doctoral Thesis, University of Western Sydney, 2005).

lexical environment in which it repeatedly occurs. This perspective is particularly relevant to Qur'anic studies, where recurrent lexical associations often reflect broader semantic and theological relationships. Consequently, examining the collocational behavior of al-Ghafur provides an effective means of investigating how the Qur'an constructs the concept of divine forgiveness through its recurrent associations with other Divine Names.

Collocation is a broad concept that warrants further in-depth study, particularly within the major linguistic systems of Arabic and English. In the context of Arabic, and specifically within the Qur'an corpus, collocation plays a crucial role as a source of distinctive linguistic expressions.⁷ As Barashi notes: *"The Qur'an has long been known for the richness of its expressions, including its word combinations, which continue to exert a profound influence on contemporary language use."*⁸

Previous studies have examined Qur'anic collocations from a range of linguistic perspectives, employing different datasets, analytical units, and interpretive objectives. Based on a broad corpus of Qur'anic vocabulary, Obeidat, Ayyad, and Mahadi developed a classification model that combines syntactic structure with semantic relations, providing a systematic framework for categorizing lexical collocations.⁹ Their model, however, addresses general lexical categories rather than the collocational behavior of a single recurring Divine Attribute. Focusing on the verb waqa'a, Alhusaiyan demonstrated through corpus analysis that its semantic prosody is determined primarily by its recurring lexical environment rather than by its dictionary definition.¹⁰ His analysis, however, is confined to a single lexical item and does not explore the interaction among co-occurring Divine Names. Adopting Ricoeur's hermeneutics, Al-Hamzi argued that Qur'anic collocations derive their interpretive significance from the interplay of linguistic, theological, and cultural contexts, emphasizing that their meaning cannot be separated from the exegetical tradition.¹¹ Collectively, these studies demonstrate the methodological value of collocation as an approach to Qur'anic analysis, yet none investigates the collocational behavior of a specific Divine Name across the Qur'anic corpus.

Studies specifically addressing the Divine Names associated with forgiveness provide a closer point of comparison. Hassan examined the morphological patterns of the three forgiveness-related Divine Names al-Ghafir, al-Ghaffar, and al-Ghafur and argued that the intensified form al-Ghafur conveys a comparatively broader sense of forgiveness than the other two.¹²

The study most closely related to the present research is that of Norasid and Jais. Identifying eighty-eight occurrences in which al-Ghafur is paired with other Divine Names, they employed thematic exegesis, textual analysis, and descriptive methods to classify these pairings into four

⁷ Adham Mousa Obeidat et al., "A New Vision of Classifying Quranic Collocations: A Syntactic and Semantic Perspective," *E-Bangi: Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 17, no. 7 (2020): 133–44.

⁸ Barashi, "Arabic Collocations: Implications for Translation."

⁹ Obeidat et al., "A New Vision of Classifying Quranic Collocations: A Syntactic and Semantic Perspective."

¹⁰ Eman Abdulaziz Alhusaiyan, "Semantic Prosody in Holy Qur'an: A Corpus Study of the Collocations and Meanings of the Verb Waqa'a'Fell," *Arab World English Journal For Translation and Literary Studies* 7, no. 4 (2023): 19–33, <https://doi.org/10.24093/awejtls/vol7no4.2>.

¹¹ Ali Mohammed Saleh Al-Hamzi, "Interpreting Collocations in the Holy Quran: A Ricoeurian Hermeneutic Study of Five Product Translation Interpretations," *Acuty: Journal of English Language Pedagogy, Literature and Culture* (Yemen) 11, no. 2 (2026).

¹² Eshraga Elhaj Abdalhafiz Hassan, "The Most Beautiful Names of Allah 'Ghafir, Ghaffar, and Ghafoor' in the Holy Qur'an (Morphological and Semantic Study)."

categories according to the linguistic relationship between the paired terms: mutual meaning, similarity, opposition, and word order (taqdim and ta'khir). Drawing upon classical tafsir sources, they demonstrate that these pairings are neither incidental nor merely stylistic, but instead convey deliberate linguistic and theological significance.¹³

Building on this contribution, the present study adopts a different analytical focus. Instead of classifying al-Ghafur's collocational pairs according to the linguistic relationship between the paired Divine Names, it organizes the same collocational data according to the theological and contextual themes expressed by each pairing within its respective verse. This thematic framework is intended not to replace the relational classification proposed by Norasid and Jais, but to complement it. Whereas their framework explains how paired Divine Names relate linguistically, the present study highlights the theological message conveyed by each pairing within its Qur'anic context.

This study employs a qualitative corpus-assisted approach to collocation analysis. The Qur'anic corpus is first examined to identify every occurrence of the Divine Name al-Ghafur and to determine which of these occurrences co-occur with another Divine Name within the same verse. For this study, a collocational pair is operationally defined as two Divine Names occurring within the same verse. Occurrences of al-Ghafur without an accompanying Divine Name in the same verse are treated as non-paired instances. The identified pairs are then read contextually and explained through classical Qur'anic exegesis to clarify how each collocational partner contributes to the meaning of divine forgiveness in that specific verse. Finally, the findings are synthesized thematically to describe the range of theological meanings associated with al-Ghafur across the Qur'anic corpus. The corpus-based collocation analysis is situated within the framework of corpus linguistics, drawing primarily on the theoretical foundation established by Firth,¹⁴ who asserted that “*you shall know a word by the company it keeps*”. These principles inform this study's premise that al-Ghafur's meaning is not fixed on its own, but is inflected by the Divine Names with which it habitually co-occurs. This study does not apply statistical collocation measures common in computational corpus linguistics; rather, it identifies collocational pairs through manual concordance search and interprets their significance through exegetical and thematic analysis.

The primary data source is the Qur'an in its entirety, treated as a bounded, closed corpus of Classical Arabic. Data were collected and analyzed through four steps:

Step 1. All occurrences of the lexeme غفور (al-Ghafur) were retrieved using the Qur'anic Arabic Corpus <https://corpus.quran.com/> via a lemma-based concordance search (*lemma query: gafur*), given its morphologically annotated database that enables systematic lexical searches across the full Qur'anic text. This search yielded a total of 91 occurrences distributed across Meccan and Medinan verses.

Step 2. Each occurrence was examined to determine whether another Divine Name co-occurs within the same verse, the operational criterion adopted in this study for identifying a collocational pair. This step identified 89 occurrences forming collocations with other Divine Names, while two occurrences (QS. al-Isra' 17:25 and QS. Saba' 34:15) appear without an accompanying Divine Name and were therefore excluded from further collocational analysis.

¹³ Muhamad Alihanafiah Norasid and Mohd Ammar Redza Mohd Jais, “Paired Words of Asma’ al-Husna in The Qur’an: Analysis of ‘al-Ghafur’ and Its Pairing,” *International Journal of Quranic Research* 14, no. 2 (2022): 44–66, <https://doi.org/10.22452/quranica.vol14no2.4>.

¹⁴ John Rupert Firth, *Papers in Linguistics: 1934 - 1951*, 1. ed., 4. reprinted (Oxford Univ. Press, 1969).

Step 3. The 89 paired instances were grouped according to their collocational partner. Frequency counts for each pair were tabulated to establish which associations recur habitually across the corpus rather than appearing incidentally.

Step 4. Each pair was read against its specific verse context and interpreted through Qur'anic exegesis to identify the theological theme conveyed by that pairing. This step operationalizes Sinclair's idiom principle: rather than treating each Divine Name in its own, the analysis treats al-Ghafur and its habitual partner as a single interpretive unit whose combined meaning is read from its immediate Qur'anic context.

Discussion

Lexical Analysis of al-Ghafur

The Meaning of the Root gh-f-r

The name al-Ghafur derives from the trilateral root غ – ف – ر. According to *Lisān al-‘Arab*, it fundamentally denotes the meanings of covering or concealing, and may also be understood as forgiving and pardoning sins. In this context, forgiveness does not merely signify the erasure of wrongdoing; rather, it also encompasses the act of concealing sins so that they are neither exposed nor made known. Thus, the meaning of ghafara reflects the dimensions of divine mercy and protection, whereby forgiveness functions not only as the removal of sin but also as a means of preserving the dignity and honour of the sinner.¹⁵

According to *Al-Muhit* Dictionary, the word ghafara (غفر) primarily means “to cover” or “to conceal”. In its usage, the term may refer to both literal and figurative acts of covering. In a literal sense, it is used to describe the act of physically covering something. For example, when it is said that a person “covers objects inside a container,” it means that the objects are placed within the container and then tightly enclosed. A similar usage appears in the context of dyeing gray hair (*aghfarahu*), which denotes covering gray hair with dye so that its original color is concealed. Figuratively, the term is employed to describe God’s act of forgiving the sins of His servants. In another context, *al-maghfar* refers to a component of armor worn beneath a helmet or cap to protect the head. The term may also denote a ring-like protective device or military equipment designed to shield the body from attacks. In the context of clothing, *maghfir* can refer to a piece of fabric used by women to cover themselves, serving as protection against oil, stains, or other forms of contamination.¹⁶

According to *Al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur’ān*, the Arabic root *ghafara* (غفر) fundamentally means “to cover” or “to protect from impurity and contamination.” In the Islamic tradition, this root is closely associated with Allah’s attribute as the Most Forgiving (Al-Ghafur). Several lexical derivatives are derived from this root. For instance, *mighfar* refers to an iron protective headpiece worn in battle as a form of armor. The term is also used to denote a piece of cloth employed to cover a head covering so that it is protected from oil stains, a covering placed on the groove of a bowstring, and even a cloud that conceals another cloud.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ibn Manzur, *Lisānu Al-‘Arab* (booksbylanguage, 1994).

¹⁶ al-Fīrūzābādī Majd al-Dīn Abū Ṭāhir Muḥammad ibn Ya‘qūb, *Al-Qāmus al-Muḥīṭ*, Cet. 8 (Mu‘assasat al-Risālah, 2005), 451.

¹⁷ Ar-Raghib Al-Ashfahani, *Al-Mufradāt Fī Gharīb al-Qur’ān* (Dār al-Qalam and al-Dār al-Shāmiyyah, 1992), 609.

Distribution and Collocational Patterns of al-Ghafur

The analysis began by extracting all occurrences of the word ‘al-Ghafūr’ from the Quranic Arabic Corpus website <https://corpus.quran.com> using a lemma-based search with the query ‘*lem:ghafur*’. Using a lemma search ensured that every lexical form of ‘ghafur’ was included in the dataset, regardless of differences in grammatical inflection or morphology. Thus, variations such as *الغفور*, *غفورًا*, *غفور*, and *لغفور* are associated with the same lemma, because although there are differences in definiteness, case markers, or the presence of emphatic particles, they all represent the same lexical element.

This search identified 91 occurrences of al-Ghafur in the Qur'an. Each occurrence was examined to determine whether another Divine Name co-occurs within the same verse, the operational criterion adopted in this study for identifying a collocational pair. Based on this criterion, 89 occurrences were found to form collocations with other Divine Names (Asma' al-Husna), while two occurrences, QS. al-Isra' (17):25 and QS. Saba' (34):15, appear without an accompanying Divine Name in the same verse. Since this study aimed to examine the semantic implications of al-Ghafur's collocational patterns, the analysis that follows focuses on these 89 paired instances. The two standalone occurrences are noted here for completeness of the frequency distribution but are excluded from the collocational analysis, as they fall outside the object of inquiry.

Collocate Pair	Freq.	Contextual Theme	Qur'anic Reference
Ghafur + Rahim	72	Forgiveness + Mercy	QS 2:173, 182, 192, 199, 218, 226; 3:31, 89, 129; 4:23, 25, 96, 100, 106, 110, 129, 152; 5:3, 34, 39, 74, 98; 6:54, 145, 165; 7:153, 167; 8:69, 70; 9:5, 27, 91, 99, 102; 10:107; 11:41; 12:53, 98; 14:36; 15:49; 16:18, 110, 115, 119; 24:5, 22, 33, 62; 25:6, 70; 27:11; 28:16; 33:5, 24, 50, 59, 73; 34:2; 39:53; 41:32; 42:5; 46:8; 48:14; 49:5, 14; 57:28; 58:12; 60:7, 12; 64:14; 66:1; 73:20
Ghafur + Halim	6	Postponed punishment	QS 2:225, 235; 3:155; 5:101; 17:44; 35:41
Ghafur + Shakur	3	Divine appreciation	QS 35:30, 34; 42:23
Ghafur + Wadud	1	Deep divine love	QS 85:14
‘Aziz + Ghafur	2	Paradox: absolute power (Jalal) + clemency	QS 35:28; 67:2

		(Jamal)	
Afuw + Ghafur	4	Total erasure and perfect concealment of sin	QS 4:43, 99; 22:60; 58:2
Ghafur Dhu al-Rahmah	1	Forgiveness + Mercy	QS 18:58
Ghafur (standalone occurrences)	2	Divine forgiveness toward the repentant	QS 17:25, 34:15

Semantic Analysis of Each Collocational Pair

Ghafur+Rahim

Based on an analysis of the contextual occurrences of the ghafur-rahim collocation across 72 verses distributed throughout the Qur'an, it was found that divine forgiveness (*maghfirah*), when paired with the attribute of rahim (the All-Merciful), does not follow a single fixed pattern. Rather, it manifests across a diverse range of contexts that can be classified into ten distinct themes, as presented below.

No.	Contextual Description	Freq	Verses
1	Forgiveness in the context of necessity or <i>rukhsah</i>	9	2:173; 5:3; 6:145; 9:91; 16:115; 24:33; 33:5; 58:12; 73:20
2	Involves absolution granted to those who commit sin or wrongdoing and subsequently repent	15	3:89; 4:110; 5:34; 5:39; 5:74; 6:54; 7:153; 9:27; 9:102; 16:119; 24:5; 25:70; 33:24; 33:73; 39:53
3	God's absolute authority over forgiveness and punishment	9	3:129; 5:98; 7:167; 10:107; 15:49; 25:6; 34:2; 46:8; 48:14
4	Forgiveness within the context of conflict resolution and reconciliation	7	2:182; 2:192; 2:226; 9:5; 24:22; 60:7; 64:14
5	Associated with divine pardon granted in connection with migration (<i>hijrah</i>), striving (<i>jihad</i>), and warfare	6	2:218; 4:96; 4:100; 8:69; 8:70; 16:110
6	Forgiveness within the context of marital and family law	6	4:23; 4:25; 4:129; 33:50; 33:59; 66:1
7	Accompanies the exhortation to seek repentance (<i>istighfar</i>) as an act	5	2:199; 4:106; 24:62; 42:5;

	of worship		60:12
8	Forgiveness within the narratives of the prophets	6	11:41; 12:53; 12:98; 14:36; 27:11; 28:16
9	Bestowed as a reward for obedience, faith, and piety	7	3:31; 4:152; 9:99; 41:32; 49:5; 49:14; 57:28
10	Arises within the context of life's hardships and human limitations	2	6:165; 16:18

The corpus analysis identified the collocation between al-Ghafur and al-Rahim as the most dominant lexical pairing. Among the 91 occurrences of al-Ghafur, 72 occur together with al-Rahim. The recurrent co-occurrence of these two Divine Names indicates a stable lexical association within the Qur'anic discourse. The pairing of these two terms reflects a reciprocal meaning. This refers to the co-occurrence of two words that do not have identical meanings but are semantically related.¹⁸ In line with Firth's view that a word's meaning is known through the company it habitually keeps, the recurrent collocation indicates that forgiveness and mercy form an integrated semantic unit within the Qur'an.

These ten thematic categories reveal that this pairing is not confined to a single register of forgiveness, but recurs across contexts ranging from personal repentance to prophetic narratives and eschatological reward. Instead of discussing all 72 occurrences individually, the analysis focuses on three representative verses: one concerning personal repentance (QS 3:89), one addressing ritual concession (QS 73:20), and the other explaining God's absolute authority (QS 3:129). These verses were selected because they represent the two largest categories within this collocational pairing.

QS. Ali Imran (3): 89

Except for those who repent after that and mend their ways, then indeed, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Al Imran/3:89)

Except for those who repent after that and correct themselves. For indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.
(Ali 'Imran/3:89)

Al-Tabari explains that the term **"Most Forgiving"** refers to the attribute of Allah SWT, who conceals the sins (of those who apostatize) and will not punish their evil deeds in the Hereafter if they return in repentance. Meanwhile, the term **"Most Merciful"** explains that through Allah's mercy, they will receive His compassion.¹⁹

Al-Razi further explains that when a person seeks forgiveness from Allah SWT, Allah conceals their wrongdoings in this world and grants them the forgiveness of sins in the Hereafter, along with a reward for their righteous deeds.²⁰ This interpretation reinforces the meaning of Ghafur as the One who covers and forgives sins, while also reflecting the manifestation of Allah's mercy (Rahmah) through His compassion and reward for His servants.

¹⁸ Norasid and Mohd Jais, "Paired Words of Asma' al-Husna in The Qur'an."

¹⁹ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Al-Tabarī, *Jamī' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān* (Dār al-Tarbiyah wa al-Turāth, n.d.), 578.

²⁰ Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad bin 'Umar al-Husayn Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *Mafatih Al-Ghayb* (Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1999).

The collocation of the term Ghafur with the term Rahim here conveys the meaning of forgiveness as a manifestation of Allah's mercy. The forgiveness granted by Allah is not limited to the removal of sins, but rather represents a manifestation of Allah's compassion toward His servants. This is emphasized in many verses of the Qur'an that place Ghafur and Rahim together, indicating that Allah's forgiveness is grounded in His extensive love and mercy.

QS. Al-Muzammil (73): 20

Indeed, your Lord knows that you pray nearly two-thirds of the night, or half of it, or a third of it, and so do some of those with you. And Allah measures the night and the day. He knows that you cannot count them, so He has forgiven you. So, recite what is easy for you of the Qur'an. He knows that among you there will be some who are sick, and others traveling through the land, seeking the bounty of Allah, and others fighting in the cause of Allah. So, recite what is easy for you of it, establish prayer, give zakat, and lend to Allah a goodly loan. And whatever good you send for yourselves, you will find it with Allah, better and greater in reward. And ask forgiveness of Allah. Indeed, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Al-Muzzammil/73:20)

Indeed, your Lord knows, [O Muhammad], that you stand [in prayer] almost two thirds of the night or half of it or a third of it, and [so do] a group of those with you. And Allah determines [the extent of] the night and the day. He has known that you [Muslims] will not be able to do it and has turned to you in forgiveness, so recite what is easy [for you] of the Qur'an. He has known that there will be among you those who are ill and others traveling throughout the land seeking [something] of the bounty of Allah and others fighting for the cause of Allah. So recite what is easy from it and establish prayer and give zakah and loan Allah a goodly loan. And whatever good you put forward for yourselves - you will find it with Allah. It is better and greater in reward. And seek forgiveness of Allah. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. (Al-Muzzammil/73:20)

In the above verse, the collocation of the terms Ghafur and Rahim indicates that Allah grants forgiveness. Al-Tabari, in his interpretation, connects the two divine attributes, al-Ghafur and al-Rahim, with the process of human repentance. The phrase "و استغفروا الله" means "and seek forgiveness from Allah". Allah, the Most High, states: Ask Allah for forgiveness of your sins by His pardoning and removing those sins from you. The phrase *إن الله غفور رحيم* (indeed, Allah is Most Forgiving and Most Merciful) means that Allah possesses the attribute of granting forgiveness for the sins of His servants who repent from those sins, and He possesses the attribute of mercy, namely that He does not punish them for those sins after they have repented from them.²¹

The collocation of Ghafur and Rahim conveys a broader meaning, namely that Allah not only forgives the faults of those who repent, but also treats them with mercy after they return to Him. In other words, based on al-Tabari's explanation, forgiveness in the Qur'anic context is closely intertwined with mercy, forming the concept of divine forgiveness manifested through mercy.

QS Ali 'Imran (3): 129

English Sahih Internasional

129. And to Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. He forgives whom He wills and punishes whom He wills. And Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. (Ali 'Imran/3:129)

Al-Razi interprets the verse as an affirmation of Allah's absolute sovereignty. The statement that everything in the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah reinforces the preceding declaration

²¹ Al-Tabari, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Ay al-Qur'an*, Vol 23, 700.

that ultimate authority does not rest with the Prophet, but with Allah alone. Because all dominion belongs exclusively to Him, the authority to forgive whom He wills and to punish whom He wills likewise belongs solely to Him. Against this backdrop of absolute divine sovereignty, al-Razi then turns to the verse's concluding expression "And Allah is All-Forgiving, Most Merciful". The verse concludes with the expression al-Ghafur al-Rahim to emphasize that the dominant aspect of Allah's dealing with His servants is forgiveness and mercy. He further notes that this predominance does not arise from necessity or obligation, but from Allah's grace (*fadl*) and beneficence (*ihsan*).²²

Ghafur + Halim

Analysis of the six Qur'anic occurrences of the Ghafur-Halim collocation shows that divine forgiveness, when paired with al-Halim, reflects God's patience and restraint toward human shortcomings. Despite the diversity of the verses, their context can be classified into two major themes, as presented below.

No.	Contextual description	Freq	Verses
1	Forgiveness in the context of human weakness and unintentional mistakes	4	QS 2:225; 2:235; 3:155; 5:101
2	Divine forbearance despite human ignorance and disobedience	2	QS 17:44; 35:41

The pair Ghafur-Halim appears in contexts involving violations that are not yet accompanied by active repentance. It appears 6 times in the Qur'an, 4 times in the combination Ghafur-Halim, and twice in the combination Halim-Ghafur. This pairing is referred to as *taqdim* and *ta'khir*, two terms that appear together but exchange their positions in other verses.

QS. Al-Baqarah (2): 225

Allah will not call you to account for your unintentional oaths, but He will call you to account for what is in your hearts. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Forbearing. (Al-Baqarah/2:225)

Allah does not impose blame upon you for what is unintentional in your oaths, but He imposes blame upon you for what your hearts have earned. And Allah is Forgiving and Forbearing. (Al-Baqarah/2:225)

Abu Ja'far explains that the statement "and Allah forgives His servants for their unintentional oaths (*laghw al-ayman*)" refers to concealing their faults and pardoning them from punishment. Although Allah has the power to punish, He chooses not to hold them accountable when they repent. The attribute **حليم** indicates that Allah does not immediately punish those who commit acts of disobedience.²³

Ibn 'Ashur argues that the statement "والله غفور حليم" serves as a concluding statement that reinforces the ruling concerning the absence of punishment. He explains that the combination of the attributes "غفور" and "حليم", rather than "رحيم" is appropriate because this forgiveness relates to a mistake involving a lack of proper respect toward Allah, the Exalted. Thus, Allah describes Himself

²² Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn 'Umar ibn al-Ḥasan ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Taymī al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb: Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 3rd ed., vol. 8 (Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1420), 357-358.

²³ Al-Tabari, *Jāmi' Al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Ay al-Qur'an*, Vol 4, 455.

as “Most Forbearing,” because Halim means that He is not affected by His servants’ shortcomings, does not hasten to punish due to their negligence, and accepts their excuses.²⁴

QS. Al-Isra’ (17): 44

The seven heavens and the earth and all that is therein glorify Him. There is not a single thing but glorifies Allah with His praise, but you do not understand how they glorify Him. Indeed, He is Forbearing, Forgiving. (Al-Isra’/17:44)

The seven heavens and the earth and whatever is in them exalt Him. And there is not a thing except that it exalts [Allah] by His praise, but you do not understand their [way of] exalting. Indeed, He is ever Forbearing and Forgiving. (Al-Isra’/17:44)

Ibn ‘Ashur explains that the statement “**The Lord is the Most Merciful**” is a new sentence (*jumlaḥ isti’nāfiyyah*) that indirectly indicates that their statement would have required an immediate punishment to befall them in this world, had Allah not treated them with His attribute of forbearance and granted them respite. This also contains an implicit encouragement to abandon their false statement so that Allah may forgive them. As for the addition of the word (كان), it indicates that forbearance and forgiveness are two established and constant attributes inherent in Him.²⁵

According to this, Ghafur is placed first (Ghafur–Halim) when the context focuses on forgiving a mistake or sin. Therefore, Allah’s forgiveness is mentioned first, followed by his forbearance in delaying punishment. Halim is placed first (Halim–Ghafur) when the context focuses on Allah’s restraint and patience in the face of punishment despite human wrongdoing. Then His forgiveness is mentioned.

Ghafur + Shakur

Based on an analysis of the contextual occurrences of Ghafur-Shakur collocation across three verses in the Qur’an, it was found that this lexical pairing appears in contexts related to divine reward for faith and righteous deeds. Unlike other collocations that emphasize repentance or legal concession, Ghafur-Shakur highlights the relationship between divine forgiveness and God’s appreciation of human obedience. The contextual distribution of these verses is presented below.

No.	Contextual Description	Freq	Verses
1	Forgiveness in the context of divine reward for faith and righteous deeds	3	QS 35:30; 35:34; 42:23

QS. Fatir (35): 30

May He give them their due reward and increase them from His bounty. Indeed, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Appreciative. (Fatir/35:30)

²⁴ Muḥammad al-Tāhir Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa al-Tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-Ma’nā al-Sadīd Wa Tanwīr al-‘Aql al-Jadīd Min Tafṣīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd*, vol 2 (al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah li al-Nashr, 1984), 384.

²⁵ Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa al-Tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-Ma’nā al-Sadīd Wa Tanwīr al-‘Aql al-Jadīd Min Tafṣīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd*, Vol 15, 115.

That He may give them in full their rewards and increase for them of His bounty. Indeed, He is Forgiving and Appreciative. (Fatir/35:30)

This verse explains that forgiveness and gratitude as divine recompense are among Allah's attributes, reflected in His names al-Ghafur and al-Shakur: The One who abundantly forgives and greatly rewards good deeds. Forgiveness (*maghfirah*) covers the shortcomings of obedient servants, as human beings cannot fulfill perfect devotion through their hearts, actions, and thoughts except those protected from sin (*ma'sum*). Therefore, Allah overlooks inner thoughts, intentions that are not acted upon, minor sins (*lamam*), and previous sins erased through repentance. Meanwhile, *shukr* refers to Allah's rewarding of His servants by multiplying the value of their deeds. His recompense demonstrates His appreciation for their actions. The emphasis in the verse reinforces the certainty of this promise, indicating that Allah's forgiveness and gratitude are the basis for the completion and increase of rewards.²⁶

Based on the explanation, the collocation Ghafur-Shakur conveys the main theme of Allah's mercy, which compensates for human shortcomings and multiplies their good deeds. It occurs in the context of divine reward and mercy, where Allah forgives the deficiencies of human deeds and multiplies the recompense of their righteous action beyond their actual worth.

Ghafur + wadud

The pair Ghafur-Wadud appears only once in the entire Qur'an, at QS. Al-Buruj (85): 14, immediately after the narrative of *Ashab al-Ukhdud*. This collocation appears in the context of divine love and reassurance for believers, following the condemnation of those who persecute the faithful.

QS. Al-Buruj (85): 14

وَهُوَ الْغَفُورُ الْوَدُودُ (البروج/85: 14)

And He is the Forgiving, the Affectionate, (Al-Buruj/85:14)

This verse is connected to the verse “إن بطش ربك لشديد” as a contrasting expression. After explaining the punishment for those who persecute the believers, Allah explains the reward for those who believe and perform righteous deeds. Therefore, Allah is described as al-Ghafur al-Wadud: He forgives those who repent, believe, and perform righteous deeds for their shortcomings, and He loves those who turn to Him in repentance. Al-Wadud is a fa'ul form with the meaning of fa'il, derived from the word al-wudd, which means love. Its meaning is “the One who loves,” and it is one of Allah's names. The love attributed to Allah is understood through the implications of the meaning of love in language, as an approach to a meaning whose true nature cannot be comprehended, and it is included within the meaning of mercy.²⁷

The use of al-Wadud in this context indicates that the verse not only emphasizes Allah's forgiveness of the believers' sins, but also highlights that, after granting forgiveness, Allah grants them His love and closeness.

'Aziz + Ghafur

²⁶ Ibn 'Ashūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa al-Tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-Ma'nā al-Sadīd Wa Tanwīr al-'Aql al-Jadīd Min Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd*, vol 22, 308.

²⁷ Ibn 'Ashūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa al-Tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-Ma'nā al-Sadīd Wa Tanwīr al-'Aql al-Jadīd Min Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd*, vol 30, 249.

The pair ‘Aziz-Ghafur appears twice in the Qur’an. This pair brings together a name of Jalal (majesty), ‘Aziz, the Incomparably Powerful, with a name of Jamal (beauty), Ghafur, the All-Forgiving. Conceptually, they appear opposed, but the theological tension between them is precisely where their deepest meaning emerges. The two Qur’anic occurrences of Ghafur- ‘Aziz collocation indicate that this lexical pairing consistently appears in contexts highlighting God’s absolute authority and sovereignty.

QS. Fatir (35): 28

And among humans, animals, and livestock there are various colors. In fact, only His servants who have knowledge truly fear Allah. Indeed, Allah is Almighty, Most Forgiving. (Fatir/35:28)

And among people and moving creatures and grazing livestock are various colors similarly. Only those fear Allah, from among His servants, who have knowledge. Indeed, Allah is Exalted in Might and Forgiving. (Fatir/35:28)

The phrase **“Indeed, Allah is the Most Gracious”** functions as a concluding statement that reinforces the idea that Allah does not require the faith of the polytheists, while also indicating that He wills good for them. Since mentioning Allah’s power may suggest a sense of turning away from them and could lead those approaching faith to feel hopeless, their hearts are reassured by the combination of the attributes al-‘Aziz and al-Ghafur. This pairing indicates that Allah remains willing to accept their repentance if they respond to His call and return to the guidance He has revealed. Furthermore, the attribute al-Ghafur also holds a profound significance for one of the two parties included in the context of restriction, namely the scholars, meaning that Allah grants forgiveness to them.²⁸

In both verses, al-‘Aziz is consistently placed first, emphasizing that God’s authority and might constitute the existential foundation of all His relationships with the universe and humanity. However, this dominant position does not overshadow the attributes of Jamal; rather, al-Ghafur appears as a balancing attribute that complements rather than negates. This demonstrates that, within Islamic theology, divine majesty is inseparable from mercy, and divine power does not eliminate the possibility of forgiveness.

‘Afuw + Ghafur

Based on an analysis of the contextual occurrences of ‘Afuw-Ghafur collocation across four verses in the Qur’an, it was found that this lexical pairing appears in contexts involving human limitations and the resolution of wrongdoing. Despite the diversity of the verses, their contextual patterns can be classified into two major themes.

No.	Contextual Description	Freq	Verses
1	Forgiveness in response to human limitations	2	QS 4:43; 4:99
2	Forgiveness through expiation and justice	2	QS 22:60; 58:2

QS. Al-Hajj (22): 60

²⁸ Ibn ‘Ashūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa al-Tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-Ma’nā al-Sadīd Wa Tanwīr al-‘Aql al-Jadīd Min Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd*, vol 22, 305.

Indeed, that is so. And whoever responds [to injustice] with the equivalent of that with which he was harmed and then is tyrannized—Allah will surely aid him. Indeed, Allah is Pardoning and Forgiving. (Al-Hajj/22:60)

That [is so]. And whoever responds [to injustice] with the equivalent of that with which he was harmed and then is tyrannized - Allah will surely aid him. Indeed, Allah is Pardoning and Forgiving. (Al-Hajj/22:60)

The phrase “*إن الله لعفو غفور*” functions as an explanation for why the permission to retaliate is restricted to an equivalent response, as stated in His words: “*و من عاقب بمثل ما عوقب به*”. It indicates that retaliation should not exceed the original wrongdoing, even if the initiator of the injustice bears greater blame. This limitation is rooted in Allah’s wisdom, as His pardon and forgiveness toward His creation entail that He only allows retribution within the boundaries of proportional justice, which is more aligned with truth and fairness.²⁹

QS An-Nisa (4): 43

English Sahih Internasional

43. O you who have believed, do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated until you know what you are saying or in a state of janabah, except those passing through [a place of prayer], until you have washed [your whole body]. And if you are ill or on a journey or one of you comes from the place of relieving himself or you have contacted women and find no water, then seek clean earth and wipe over your faces and your hands [with it]. Indeed, Allah is ever Pardoning and Forgiving. (An-Nisa'/4:43)

Al-Zamakhshari interprets the expression ‘Afuw Ghafur as *kinayah* (figurative expression) for divine concession and ease (*tarkhis and taysir*). He explains that because Allah’s established way is to pardon those who err and forgive their sins, He wills ease rather than hardship for His servants.³⁰

Ghafur dhu al-Rahmah

The pair Ghafur dhu al-Rahmah appears only once in the entire Qur’an, at QS 18:58. Unlike the Ghafur–Rahim pairing, which employs the adjectival form *rahim*, this collocation uses the construct (*idafah*) phrase *dhu al-rahmah*, literally “possessor of mercy”, a distinct morphological pattern found nowhere else among al-Ghafur’s collocational partners. Contextually, this pairing appears within a passage warning those who turn away from God’s signs, immediately following a description of their heedlessness. Here, forgiveness and mercy are invoked not to signal the removal of sin, but to explain why punishment is delayed rather than immediate: God’s mercy accounts for His patience, while the verse simultaneously affirms that a fixed appointed time (*man’id*) for reckoning remains certain and inescapable.

QS Al-Kahf (18): 58

English Sahih Internasional

58. And your Lord is the Forgiving, full of mercy. If He were to impose blame upon them for what they earned, He would have hastened for them the punishment. Rather, for them is an appointment from which they will never find an escape. (Al-Kahf/18:58)

²⁹ Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa al-Tanwīr: Taḥrīr al-Ma’nā al-Sadīd Wa Tanwīr al-‘Aql al-Jadīd Min Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd*, vol 17, 313.

³⁰ al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf ‘an Ḥaqā’iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl Wa-‘Uyūn al-Aqāwīl Fī Wujūh al-Ta’wīl*, vol. 1, 515.

Ibn 'Ashur explains that the verse follows the Qur'an's characteristic rhetorical pattern of balancing warning (*tarhib*) with encouragement (*targhib*). After presenting severe threats, the verse recalls Allah's forgiveness to encourage people to seek His pleasure and repent. For this reason, he notes that the Divine Name al-Ghafur is mentioned specifically as an implicit encouragement to seek forgiveness (*targhib fi al-istighfar*).

Ibn 'Ashur further explains that al-Ghafur signifies the vastness of Allah's forgiveness, for He forgives innumerable sins committed by countless servants who sincerely repent. He also remarks that Allah's postponement of punishment for disbelievers and sinners may itself be regarded as an expression of forgiveness, in the sense that it grants them additional time before punishment is carried out. Regarding the expression Dhu al-Rahmah, Ibn 'Ashur considers it to be the principal focus of the statement because it prepares for the following clause, "If He were to call them to account for what they have earned, He would hasten the punishment for them." Although those who persist in disbelief deserve immediate punishment, Allah delays it until an appointed time. According to Ibn 'Ashur, this deferment is itself an act of mercy, as it gives people the opportunity to reconsider their conduct, abandon their misguidance, and return to the right path before the appointed time arrives.

Taken together, Ibn 'Ashur's interpretation presents al-Ghafur and Dhu al-Rahmah as conveying complementary aspects of the verse. While al-Ghafur emphasizes Allah's readiness to forgive those who repent, Dhu al-Rahmah explains that His mercy is manifested in delaying punishment and granting human beings an opportunity to return to Him before judgment is carried out.³¹

The Theological Tendency of Al-Ghafur: A Synthesis

The collocational distribution of al-Ghafur across its 89 paired occurrences reveals a recurring tendency: in the Qur'an, divine forgiveness is rarely presented as a self-contained attribute, but is most often accompanied by another Divine Name. Rather than functioning merely as modifiers, these collocational partners appear to reflect different theological dimensions of forgiveness within their respective contexts.

When paired with al-Rahim, forgiveness is associated with divine mercy, indicating that pardon is accompanied by compassion toward those who repent. In combination with al-Halim, forgiveness is linked to divine forbearance, portraying Allah as withholding immediate punishment even before repentance occurs, thereby suggesting that patience precedes forgiveness in this context. The pairing with al-Shakur associates forgiveness with divine reward, presenting Allah's pardon alongside His generosity in multiplying the reward for righteous deeds. The unique pairing with al-Wadud relates forgiveness to divine love, suggesting that forgiveness is followed by an expression of God's affection toward His servants. When paired with al-'Aziz, forgiveness appears alongside divine might, indicating that mercy is presented in harmony with, rather than in opposition to, divine authority. The combination with al-'Afuw portrays forgiveness in a more comprehensive sense, in which sin is not only covered but also erased. Finally, when paired with Dhu al-Rahmah, forgiveness is associated with the postponement of punishment, where mercy is manifested not by eliminating judgment but by delaying it to provide an opportunity for repentance before the appointed reckoning.

³¹ Ibn 'Ashūr, *Al-Tahṛīr Wa al-Tanwīr: Tahṛīr al-Ma'nā al-Sadīd Wa Tanwīr al-'Aql al-Jadīd Min Tafṣīr al-Kitāb al-Majīd*, vol 15, 356-357.

The lexical form of al-Ghafur remains unchanged across its seven collocational pairings, yet its contextual emphasis varies according to the Divine Name with which it co-occurs. When paired with al-Rahim, forgiveness is associated with mercy following repentance. With al-Halim, it is linked to divine forbearance preceding punishment. With al-'Afuw, it conveys the complete effacement of sin rather than its concealment alone. This contextual variation, despite the lexical stability of al-Ghafur, is consistent with Firth's premise that a word's meaning is shaped by the company it habitually keeps. The predominance of al-Rahim (72 of 89 occurrences) identifies it as al-Ghafur's most recurrent collocational partner, whereas the single occurrences of al-Wadud and Dhu al-Rahmah are associated with more context-specific theological emphases, namely divine intimacy and the deferment of judgment.

These findings relate to the classification proposed by Norasid and Jais, who grouped al-Ghafur's collocational pairs according to the linguistic relation between paired terms. Read thematically, the same data suggest that al-Ghafur's collocational partners are not interchangeable and may each be associated with a different aspect of forgiveness. Taken together, these seven patterns suggest that Qur'anic forgiveness is not presented as a single, self-contained concept, but rather appears to be shaped, in part, by the Divine Name with which al-Ghafur is paired.

Therefore, the Qur'anic representation of al-Ghafur indicates that divine forgiveness involves not only the concealment and removal of sins, but also the restoration of the relationship between Allah and His servants.

Conclusion

This study examined how the divine names collocating with al-Ghafur contribute to the theological expression of divine forgiveness in the Qur'an and how, when considered collectively, these pairings present a broader understanding of that concept. In response to the first research question, the analysis of seven collocational pairs indicates that each collocational partner highlights a distinct theological dimension of forgiveness: al-Rahim associates forgiveness with mercy, al-Halim with divine forbearance before punishment, al-Shakur with divine reward, al-Wadud with divine love, al-'Aziz with the coexistence of mercy and divine authority, al-'Afuw with the complete effacement of sin, and Dhu al-Rahmah with the postponement of judgment. In response to the second research question, these seven patterns collectively suggest that forgiveness in the Qur'an is not presented as a standalone concept but is contextually specified by the divine name with which al-Ghafur is paired. This observation is consistent with Firth's premise that meaning is understood through habitual lexical company.

These findings contribute to the growing field of Qur'anic semantics by demonstrating how collocational analysis can reveal the contextual construction of meaning within the Qur'anic discourse. Specifically, the recurrent associations of al-Ghafur with other Divine Names show that divine forgiveness is presented as a multidimensional concept shaped by complementary attributes. This study, however, has several limitations. First, despite reporting all 89 collocational occurrences, the analysis focuses on representative verses rather than examining every occurrence individually. Second, collocational pairs were identified through manual concordance searches and frequency counts rather than statistical association measures. Third, the thematic classification and exegetical interpretation were conducted by a single researcher and draw on a limited selection of classical tafsir and a single English translation. Future research may extend this study by applying statistical collocation measures, incorporating multiple coders to strengthen the reliability of thematic classification, and drawing on a broader range of exegetical sources and translations. The same

thematic approach may also be applied to other Divine Names to explore whether similar collocational patterns characterize the wider network of Asma' al-Husna.

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