Linguistic Analysis of Holy Scriptures: A Comparative Study of Islamic Jurisprudence and the Western Hermeneutical Tradition

Authors : Sana Ammad

Abstract : The tradition of linguistic analysis in Islam and Christianity has developed independently of each other in lieu of the social developments specific to their historical context. However, recently increasing number of Muslim academics educated in the West have tried to apply the Western tradition of linguistic interpretation to the Qur'anic text while completely disregarding the Islamic linguistic tradition used and developed by the traditional scholars over the centuries. The aim of the paper is to outline the linguistic tools and methods used by the traditional Islamic scholars for the purpose of interpretating the Holy Qur'an and shed light on how they contribute towards a better understanding of the text compared to their Western counterparts. This paper carries out a descriptive-comparative study of the linguistic tools developed and perfected by the traditional scholars in Islam for the purpose of textual analysis of the Qur'an as they have been described in the authentic works of Usul Al Fiqh (Jurisprudence) and the principles of textual analysis employed by the Western hermeneutical tradition for the study of the Bible. First, it briefly outlines the independent historical development of the two traditions emphasizing the final normative shape that they have taken. Then it draws a comparison of the two traditions highlighting the similarities and the differences existing between them. In the end, the paper demonstrates the level of academic excellence achieved by the traditional linguistic scholars in their efforts to develop appropriate tools of textual interpretation and how these tools are more suitable for interpreting the Qur'an compared to the Western principles. Since the aim of interpreters of both the traditions is to try and attain an objective understanding of the Scriptures, the emphasis of the paper shall be to highlight how well the Islamic method of linguistic interpretation contributes to an objective understanding of the Qur'anic text. The paper concludes with the following findings: The Western hermeneutical tradition of linguistic analysis developed within the Western historical context. However, the Islamic method of linguistic analysis is much more highly developed and complex and serves better the purpose of objective understanding of the Holy text.

Keywords : Islamic jurisprudence, linguistic analysis, textual interpretation, western hermeneutics