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Abstract: Shihab is an exegete who produced a complete Qur’anic exegesis entitled Tafsir Al-Mishbah. Shihab emphasised on the importance of understanding Qur’anic contextually supported by strong Arabic language ability. This is to ensure the focus not just lies in its textual connotations, so the Qur’anic meanings can be implemented in daily life. In relation to this, his Tafsir often practiced the language approach to obtain accuracy in his exegesis. Hence, this article aims at critically analysing his method pertaining to singular and plural.

To get a clearer view, this article used literature and document analysis method with Tafsir al-Mishbah as a source of study inclusive of language and Tafsir books as major references. The result findings revealed that singular in general refers to a single item in a class and the plural to three or more. Theoretically, Shihab adopted five methods related to these notions and acknowledged by the great scholars and exegetes. Inspite of that, some of his arguments differ from the Muslim scholars and this study also found an error writing in his Tafsir that was refined by the researchers. Besides that, this research also recognised one method formulated by the Muslim scholar which was applied in Shihab’s Tafsir but was not mentioned clearly. Finally, the outcome of this study suggests that it is not possible that a grammatical error occurs in the Qur’an. Indeed, the essence of the Arabic language methods is unparallel with the structure of the Qur’an, but the arrangement rule was implemented after the Qur’an was revealed. If both cannot be made consistent with one another, then this is due to the limitation of method.

Key words: Shihab · Tafsir Al-Mishbah · Singular · Plural · Arabic

INTRODUCTION

The Qur’an is the central religious text of Islam and, for Muslims, the book of divine guidance and direction. Its significance stems from the idea that it is the Word of Allah, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and therefore considered inimitable, as Allah states in the surah Al-Isra (The Night Journey), verse 88 [1].

One of the many fascinating aspects of the Qur’an is that it never ceases to astound those who study it. As each layer of knowledge is unravelled further levels of understanding and comprehension are revealed. The fact that Allah the Creator has a very fine and subtle knowledge of human nature in terms of how we think and feel is highlighted throughout the Qur’an. For example, whenever Allah uses the word sama ‘listen’ in the Qur’an it is usually in its singular rather than the plural form as in Surah al-Baqarah (The Cow, 2) verse 7 we read;

- “Allah has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, (i.e. they are closed from accepting Allah’s Guidance) and on their eyes there is a covering. Theirs will be a great torment.”

The highlighted verse above shows that although the words qulubihim ‘hearts’ and absarihim ‘eyes’ are in their plural forms the word sami’him ‘hearing’ is singular. This is due to the fact that if we listen to speech, our hearts and minds all react on an individual basis, whereby we will translate and understand the speech according to our own personal understanding and comprehension of what was said [2]. This type of subtlety is lost when the Qur’an is translated into another language, so the true linguistic miracle and magnificence of the Qur’an can only be fully appreciated from the original Arabic.

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The spread of Islam all over the world also encourages the spread of the Arabic language; the language of the holy Qur’an and its prophetic texts. Thus, the Arabic language has been learnt and taught by different races and tribes from all over the world involving various teaching and learning methods [3]. Therefore, this article elaborates an analysis of singular and plural method in the Qur’an that tie-up with one of the popular Tafsir in Indonesia, namely Tafsir Al-Mishbah by Shihab.

The elaborations begin with a brief introduction of his persona, who is an eminent exegete in Indonesia, followed by definitions of singular and plural and its application to strengthening his argument in Qu’ranic exegesis. In lieu of this, the data collection is the most common method to obtain data or facts related to the subject of research. The first source is Tafsir Al-Mishbah written by Shihab himself and another sources include books, journals and other suitable materials. All of these will be discussed by adopting library research method.

Shihab:
A Great Indonesian Exegete: Shihab [4] was born in Rappang, South Sulawesi on 16th February 1944. His early education was obtained from his father, Abdulrahman Shihab. His love towards the Qur’an blossomed from the age of six.

As a son of a famous exegete, he was often brought by his mother to attend religious classes given by his father. His mother also sparked his interest, as her Arabic, for example, by his mother to attend religious classes given by his and the incomplete action is denoted by a prefix. In constant encourgements and guidance resulted in his means ‘she writes’. (g) The feminine suffix -thanawiyyah

Cairo, Egypt and he was accepted to move up to grade levels, mainly because it is the language of the holy book, do not speak it as a native language, to learn it at different races and tribes from all over the world involving various teaching and learning methods. It has

than his parents’ early involvements at home, he also Arabic is spoken in large parts of the world extending

outstanding results qualified him as the first South East Asian student to obtain a Ph.D degree in Qur’anic sciences from al-Azhar University [7]. Thus, the process of intellectual growth experienced by Shihab for 13 years at the University of al-Azhar shaped his form of thought.

In addition, he is also known as a religious figure, educator and he also has his own publication house, Lentera Hati Publisher.

A scholarly work could not escape seven points, namely: a totally new article, completing the incomplete, explaining the vague and difficult, summarizing the long, updating the mixed, purifying the wrong and collecting the scattered. Hence, Shihab does all these things well and even links the limitations which often happen when someone wants to clarify the terms of Islamic scholarship in Arabic into Indonesian language quite successfully [8]. Therefore, there is no doubt that this Indonesian scholar is named a credible and respectable expert in Qur’anic exegesis.

The Notion of Singular and Plural: Linguistic Basis:
Arabic is the most developed Semitic language today and it is one of the major languages of the world. As a Semitic language, Arabic possesses some peculiar and unique characteristics like: (a) It is written from right to left. (b) There are three numbers - singular, dual and plural; and two genders - masculine and feminine. (c) In Arabic, words are generally formed from their roots and most of the root words are tri-consonantal. (d) In this language, nouns and adjectives possess genders. (e) The masculine nouns accept feminine numerals and vice versa. (f) In the verbal tenses the complete action is indicated by a suffix and the incomplete action is denoted by a prefix. In Arabic, for example, katabat ‘she wrote’ but taktubu means ‘she writes’. (g) The feminine suffix ta is used as grammatical gender in common [9].

Arabic is spoken in large parts of the world extending from the Arabian Peninsula to the Atlantic Ocean. It has become an interest for millions of non-Arab Muslims, who do not speak it as a native language, to learn it at different levels, mainly because it is the language of the holy book, the Qur’an and because of the fact that all Islamic terms are in Arabic [10]. Basically, this study concentrates on one semantically purpose used in the glorious Qur’an. Its all about singular ‘al-ifrad’ and plural ‘al-jam’ notion.

Standard Arabic, distinguish between nouns based on quantity. Thus, nouns can be singular if they refer to one, dual if they refer to two and plural if they refer to three or more [11]. Nouns can be further grouped based on whether the noun is human or non-human (animal, object, etc.). This distinction is important because plural non-human nouns may be treated as a mass entity and therefore be considered grammatically as singular feminine. Thus, they may be substituted by singular feminine pronouns and be treated grammatically as
singular feminine in every other respect. On the other hand, singular non-human nouns are grammatically indistinguishable from their human counter parts [12].

According to Fawwal [13] the actual meaning of a singular noun points at one quantity be it human beings such as imrā‘ah ‘a girl’, animals such as al-hīr ‘a cat’ as well as things like al-qalam ‘a pen’. In addition it is also inclusive of a singular verb, noun or alphabet [14].

Plural noun refers to the total number from two and more be it with prefix or suffix such as from mu’allim ‘teacher’ to mu’allimun ‘teachers’, changes in pronunciation lines such as from asadun to usudun ‘lions’ or reduction of one of the letters in a single word form such as from kitab to kutub ‘books’ as well as additional letter such as from nafs to anfus ‘souls’ [13].

In lieu of that, plural formation in Arabic, as in other Semitic languages such as Hebrew, relies on two processes: linear suffixation and non-linear stem modification. In linear suffixation, a suffix is added at the end of a stem to form the plural, very much like English (book, book-s). Suffixation is considered regular because it applies to many nouns and does not involve any change in the base word (the singular) from which it is derived. There are two forms: feminine sound plural (FSP) and masculine sound plural (MSP). The FSP suffix (-at) is more general and can apply even to singular nouns that do not have the grammatical feminine marker (-at). The MSP suffix (-in) is, however, limited to deverbal singular nominals (i.e. derived from verbs). Because the two plural affixes (-at and -in/-un) apply to many words and do not involve modification of the stem of the singular noun, they are considered regular or sound. In non-linear processes, known as the broken plural, the root is combined with a number of plural patterns that are different from those of the singular [15].

In this vein, however, traditional grammars of Arabic distinguish between two modes of plural formation, the broken plural and the sound plural [16]. The broken plural primarily involves internal modification of the singular stem, as in jundub - janadib ‘locust/pl’. The sound plural is formed by suffixation of masculine -un or feminine -at to a usually unchanged stem [17]. The sound plural is of two kinds: sound masculine plural and the sound feminine plural. The sound masculine of nouns and adjectives is formed by adding the suffix -una for the nominative, e.g., mudarrisuna ‘male teachers’. The sound feminine plural is formed by changing the suffix -atun, of the singular into -atun for the nominative, e.g., mudarrisatun ‘female teachers’. As for the broken plural, it is necessary to know the importance of word forms, or patterns in Arabic. The great majority of Arabic roots are trilateral, consisting of three radical letters, or consonants. The combination of trilateral root gives a basic meaning. By modifying the root, by the addition of suffixes and prefixes and by the vowel change, a large number of word patterns can be formed from each root. These patterns have got to be learnt along with the singular, e.g., af alun as in aqlamun, plural of qalamun ‘a pen’ [18].

In this article, therefore, some of the singular and plural methods are selected to discuss and analyze to underline their role, contribution and significance in correct understanding of the revelational guidance. It is also aimed at exhibiting to what extent Allah has employed His words to make His verses comprehended and appreciated by humanity apart from showing His power. It is hoped that the discussion of singular and plural methods would further enhance the Qur’anic perspectives of the readers of the Qur’anic sciences and exegeses.

Singular and Plural in Tafsir Al-Mishbah: the Methods and Analysis: Shihab was very concerned about the importance of language in exegeting the Qur’an. He states that in order to understand the Qur’anic content, in-depth knowledge of the Arabic language used in the Holy book is pivotal. It can help one understand the meaning of each word in a verse, where one shall first review the meaning in the word and then set the most appropriate meaning after analyzing all aspects relating to the verse. This approach is used consistently in each verse he analyzed. He was very attentive to the vocabulary meaning or the Qur’anic expressions with reference to the opinions of the language experts. In addition, he always questioned how the vocabulary is used in the Qur’an [19].

His consistency in discussing about the Qur’anic vocabulary in Tafsir Al-Mishbah, to find out the true meaning of one verse has led him to produce different interpretations from other authentic exegetes. Even though the interpretation is different, there are times when his interpretation of the Qur’anic verses is more convincing, compared to other exegetes, as it is being supported by other qarinahs (indicators), as exemplified by his interpretation of Surah al-Mu’minun (The Believers) verse 31 [20]. In lieu of that, one of his approaches is analysing the Qur’an according to singular and plural methods. The researchers found five methods applied by him in Tafsir Al-Mishbah as stated in the following:
Method: The application of plurality referring to Allah imply the involvement of other than Him. This method means it is evident for singular form in the Qur’an when referring to Allah is exclusively to Him alone. Should there be other than Him it is considered in existence due to its limited role. Figure 1 illustrates this method:

An example of this method is present when Shihab interpreted the word ‘ibadi ‘My servants’ in surah al-Baqarah (The Cow) verse 186 as mentioned:

“...And if My servants ask you about Me, surely I am near. I answer the prayer of he who calls Me, so let them respond to My call and believe in Me, that they may be rightly guided.”

Shihab [21] pointed out that “If Qur’an used singularity when referring to Allah, it emphasises solely on Allah alone. Should there be other than Him, it is considered in existence due to its minor contribution. Hence, repentance and commands of worship from Allah have always been in singular form. This differs should Allah is referred in the plural form which only occur if there are any involvement other than Him. This is the reason for the clarification for the creation of Prophet Adam AS when Allah refers him in a singular form (see surah Sad 38: 75), even though human other reproductions were referred in plural form (see surah al-Tin [The Fig] 95: 4), since the process involved parents exception being for the creation of Prophet Adam AS”.

Hence, repentance and commands of worship existed in the word ‘ibadi is always in singular form since only Allah accepts both of them and that worship is only meant for Him. But once Allah is referred in plural form, it usually involved other involvements such as angels, human beings and others as reffered. An example is the creation of Prophet Adam AS in surah Sad verse 75 with the word khalaqtu ‘I created’ in singular form referring to Allah creation without aid. However, the creations of His offsprings and other creatures are referred in plural form. For example, the word khalaqna ‘We created’in surah al-Tin verse 4 due to parents involvements.

Recently, the research findings included the application of singular and plural in referring to Allah are actually related to the secret of Arabic language speaking. This applies to someone who thinks highly of himself with plural. As mentioned in al-Mu’jam al-Wasit that nahnu ‘we’ is a pronoun referring to two or more inclusive of the many doers that sometimes contained singular word with the glorification of meanings [22]. This is similar to statements by al-Khamis [23] that Allah declares His own name via singular or plural but never with dual. This is due to the plural form pointing at the greatness of the Creator Himself and sometimes referring to His many majestic names. The dual signifies limited number whereas Allah is free from any limitations. Hence, Allah’s great attributes are paralleled with His characteristics as well. For example, once Allah stated khalaqna, the meaning should not be understood as against His almightiness. This subject falls under the category of ‘greatness’ as what the Arabs used in their daily conversations.

In lieu to that, Shihab [21] added if Qur’an were to apply words in plural forms (does not have any singular form) it implies Allah does not prefer to reveal Himself clearly. When analyzing the word intaqamna in surah al-Zukhruf verse 25 for example, he believes that there is no singular for naqama in the Qur’an. The application of the plural form is a sign for penalty or punishment involved inflicted by other than Him, even though He is attributed as Dhu Intiqam ‘The Owner of Retribution’.

Method: The usage of plural form is allowed should it implies to queries oftenly thought about by the mass.

This method means the use of plural is allowed (even though it refers to singular) due to its frequent use by the public, as illustrated in Figure 2.
A good example for this method is mentioned by Shihab upon analysing the utterance *yastaftunaka* ‘they consult you’ in surah *al-Nisa*’ (The Women, 4) verse 176 as stated below:

- “They request from you a [legal] ruling. Say, “Allah gives you a ruling concerning one having neither descendants nor ascendants [as heirs]…”

Shihab [21] mentions that *yastaftunaka* is in the plural form even though only one person, Jabir ibn ‘Abdillah RA queried about it. This is because the question was asked repeatedly or probably appeared in public attention many a time. To support this analysis, Shihab wrote a narration which included mentioning ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab RA whom with much curiosity asked Rasulullah (p.b.u.h) on the topic of *kalalah*, until he patted Umar’s shoulder and said “It is sufficient enough for you on *kalalah* stated in the last verse of surah *al-Nisa*”.

Shihab’s analysis above was gained recognition from ‘Ashur [24] when he said that the pronoun for plural in *yastaftunaka* does not refer to many. Instead, it points at a person who asked the same question continuously. It may also imply the same question raised by many and upon reaching the last person, Jabir RA, the answer was concluded with the person who queried before him. Jabir’s inquisition was clarified due to desperate needs ‘waqta al-hajah’ since he fears that his death was approaching due to illness and that he needed to write a will for his family. In addition, the question mentioned earlier used present tense. This goes to show that the topic is a favorite due to its repetitions.

The topic on *kalalah* ‘someone who dies and does not have any children and father’ [25] was raised many times. However, the answer is postponed right until Jabir RA enquired about the matter was the time when the matter was clarified together with the previous enquiries. The postponement was due to its needful context. This was triggered by Jabir RA’s illness when the questions were issued and at the same time concern over his wealth that needed to be distributed after his demise [26]. His concern was death to fall upon him sooner than the law of *kalalah* was clarified. Moreover, this study suspects an error writing in *Tafsir Al-Misbah* particularly when Shihab interprets above verse. He [21] wrote *yas‘alunaka*, when the pronouncement was referred to *yastaftunaka*.

**Method:** Familiarity Arabs apply the singular form with pronunciation pointing at dual, plural or vice versa.

Considering semantical meanings, this method can be divided into two parts as the following:

- The Arabs usually pronounce singular form word which also points at plural and vice versa. An example of this method via Shihab’s exegesis in surah *al-Sajdah* (The Prostration, 32) verse 11 as mentioned in the following:

  - “Say: The angel of death, who has been appointed to you, shall seize your souls, then to your Lord shall you be returned”.

Shihab [21] states this verse refers to the angel of death is one, since *malak* is in the singular form whereas *malaikah* is plural. The question arises is whether the angel of death is either one or plenty? The answer is obtained based on the linguistic method whereby plurality is allowed when the intended meaning is in a form of grouping. Therefore, when this verse is seen from its contextual form, it examines human lives as a whole; when its meanings are abundance. This becomes the reason when human lives are taken away by one angel even though the total number of people are big allows this verse to apply singular form. This claims that each death is carried out by one angel as the meaning of this verse deems at.

- The Arabs also apply the singular form with dual pronunciation ‘*tathniyyah*’ and vice versa. Shihab’s application is visible upon analysing surah *Sad* verse 21 and 22 as the following:

  - “*And has there come to you the news of the adversaries, when they climbed over the wall of [his] prayer chamber - When they entered upon David and he was alarmed by them? They said, “Fear not. [We are] two adversaries, one of whom has wronged the other, so judge between us with truth and do not exceed [it] and guide us to the sound path.”*

When analysing the *khasmani*, Shihab [21] believes that it is in its dual form originated from the word *al-khasm*, whereas *tasawwaru* is in the plural. It can be assumed the meaning of *khasmani* is two groups with each comprises two or more until both groups are equivalent to three resulting to *tasawwaru* word be applied via its plural form. This brings the reason why
Shihab does not translate *khasmani* as two people, instead as two parties. It can also be argued that they are only two, but here used the plural form, because the Arabic language often applies plurality when the word is difficult to be uttered. As an example when referring to Allah’s words in surah al-Tahrim verse 4 with the application of *qulub* in plural form even though it refers to two people or *kuma*.

Hence, it can be understood that *khasmani* ‘two adversaries’ is the dual from from the word *al-khasm* ‘the adversaries’, since *tasawwara* ‘they climbed’ is in plural an ought to be in dual (*tasawwara*). Shihab believes that plural form in *tasawwara* is due to *khasmani* which can be referring to two groups with more than two people in each resulting to both with more than three individuals. In relations to that, he does not translate *khasmani* as two people but two parties. Furthermore, the Arabs prefer to use plural form when referring to two people if the form is difficult to be uttered. This information is based on surah al-Tahrim verse 4 suggesting that *qulub* ‘hearts’ is using plural even it clearly signifies two persons by *kuma* ‘two wives’.

Based from the analysis above, the researchers found Shihab’s exegesis was supported by the method mentioned earlier [27] and also stated by al-Zarkashi [28] and Ibn ‘Atiyyah [29]. In shortly, Figure 3 illustrates the point of method above.

**Method:** Several words in the Qur’an are in singular form to indicate specific meaning whereas plural form is meant for certain meaning; or the use of the plural indicates singular meaning or vice versa.

This method is mentioned by al-Qattan [30] which is believed to give emphasis on the following:

- The application of singular and plural forms in the Qur’an are in accordance to their meanings.

Once an exegete understands that in the Qur’an contain a singular word, the meanings need to be understood in its original form and vice versa for plural form. An example is apparent in Shihab’s exegesis in surah al-‘Araf (The Heights, 7) verse 57 below:

- “And it is He who sends the winds as good tidings before His mercy until, when they have carried heavy rainclouds, We drive them to a dead land and We send down rain therein and bring forth thereby [some] of all the fruits. Thus will We bring forth the dead; perhaps you may be reminded”.

In all its normaly, should Qur’an applies plural form for the wind, its meaning is pointing at *rahmat* ‘Allah’s blessings’ in general implying the rain or freshness that comes with it. In contrast, if it’s usage is in singular form (*rih*), it connotes disaster. This may be due to the diversity of wind patterns when unite becomes a huge force that brings destructions [21].

Based on the analysis, it is understandable that the meaning of *al-riyah* ‘the winds’ in plural form indicates blessing from its Creator. This meaning is strengthened with the elaboration of *al-rih* which uses singular indicating disaster. These two different meanings as a result of both singular and plural forms will always be references for exegete if other verses use the same word. In other words, the usage of singular and plural refer to its own meaning as mentioned earlier in the method.

The researchers believe the method applied by Shihab is in harmony with was stated by Ibn Abi Hatim from Ubay ibn Ka‘ab that any words pronounced in the form of *al-riyah* in the Qur’an indicate *rahmat*. But if the word *al-rih* is uttered, it brings with it the contextual meaning of torments [31]. In relations to that, Ibn Qayyım [32] elaborated on the secret of pronounciong words in the Qur’an based from these method. *al-Rih* in the plural form is *al-riyah* contains the meaning regarding the blessed
wind blow that differ from its characteristics and beneficial aspects. This indicates that should there be wind blowing there probably be other breezes to balance its quality. This persists until light breeze that benefits the flora and fauna arrives. Even though al-rih is in the singular form means the wind blowing has only one characteristic excluding anything to balance its presence; the meaning in this context is just more torment.

However, according to Shihab [21] is not necessarily regularly to be applied for al-rih in the Qur’an. For example in surah Yunus (Jonah, 10) verse 22 as stated below:

- “It is He who enables you to travel on land and sea until, when you are in ships and they sail with them by a good wind and they rejoice therein, there comes a storm wind and the waves come upon them from everywhere and they assume that they are surrounded, supplicating Allah, sincere to Him in religion, "If You should save us from this, we will surely be among the thankful."

Based on the mentioned method, the word al-rih ought to be in plural form which is bi riyahin tayyibah since the meaning implies blessed wind blow. However, this verse is in singular form. According to al-Suyuti [31] it is singularised due to two reasons: Firstly, is based on its pronunciation when the word al-rih in rihin tayyibah as a comparison ‘muqabalah’ to the word al-rih in phrase rihun ‘asifun. Secondly, is from the aspect of meaning for because it wasn’t for the wind blowing from one direction alone or it will be destroyed. Hence, the word al-rih in this verse is characterised as good ‘al-tayyibah’. This is visible in surah al-Shura (The Consultation, 42) verse 33 below:

- “If He willed, He could still the wind and they would remain motionless on its surface. Indeed in that are signs for everyone patient and grateful”. 

Al-Suyuti [31] said this verse does not contradict with the method since the in existence of wind will cause disaster to the vessel navigator. Therefore, the application of this method is allowed in surah Yunus (Jonah, 10) verse 22 and al-Shura verse 33. However, through understanding and language analysis on the verse context are required.

If an exegete identified the application of plural words in the Qur’an but refer to singular meaning; it is based upon observations among the Arabs who practiced the same method as well. This is supported by the method mentioned by al-Sabt [27]. Example is present in Shihab’s analysis in surah al-Baqarah verse 199 below:

- “Then depart from the place from where [all] the people depart and ask forgiveness of Allah. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful”. 

Shihab [21] believes the word al-nas and Prophet Abraham AS are connected with concrete evidences since the other verse also distinguishes him as umat ‘people’ (see al-Nahl [The Bee] 16:20) due to his many special characteristics that can only be equalized by many individuals.

It can be deciphered that al-nas in plural form is analysed by Shihab together with Prophet Abraham AS containing singular meaning that is based on the method stated earlier. In addition, this analysis is supported by al-Tabari [25] who focused on the Arabs pronouncing plural words even though the meaning reflects singularity. This fact is based on Allah’s words in surah Ali ‘Imran verse 173 and al-Mu’minun verse 51. As clearest understanding, Figure 4 illustrates the method above.

**Method:** The differences in applying plural form in the Qur’an based on the context of the verse.

Shihab practiced this method when analysing surah Ali ‘Imran (Family of Imran, 3) verse 24 below:
"That is because they say, "Never will the Fire touch us except for [a few] numbered days," and [because] they were deluded in their religion by what they were inventing".

Shihab [21] mentioned the usage of *ma'dudat* in this verse differs from surah al-Baqarah verse 80 that also included the same word as Allah stated:

"And they say, "Never will the Fire touch us, except for a few days." Say, "Have you taken a covenant with Allah? For Allah will never break His covenant. Or do you say about Allah that which you do not know?".

Even both words refer to plural (*ma'dudat* and *ma'dudah*); its application in surah al-Baqarah is in plural form containing a plurals of paucity ‘*jama' al-qillah*’. This differs in surah Ali ‘Imran whereby plurals of multiplicity ‘*jama' al-kathrah*’. These differences are due to the verse verifying the context of rejecting penitence at its highest degree. In addition, the verse also points at the uttered words that are constantly pronounced. This was acknowledged initially when the words were false but when continuously said; they became believable and betrayed people in their religious issues.

Semantically, broken plurals fall into two major types: plurals of paucity (denote the numbers from 3 to 10) and plurals of multiplicity (indicate more than 10) [33]. In this vein, based on the analysis of surah Ali ‘Imran verse 24 and its connection with surah al-Baqarah verse 80 mentioned earlier, Shihab believes that both *ma'dudat* and *ma'dudah* are in plural form. Surah al-Baqarah contained *jama' qillah* referring from three to ten items, whereas surah Ali ‘Imran is otherwise; with *jama' kathrah* meanings, referring to more than ten items. However, the researchers perceived this theory as very basic because *ma'dudah* is not plural but singular in form [31], rejecting it as *jama' qillah* as stated before. Shihab understands *ma'dudat* in surah Ali ‘Imran verse 24 with various meanings due to differences in its contexts. This verse justifies on numerous deadly sins committed by the non-believers. The verse also suggested that their statement such as “We will not be harmed by hell fire but only for several days only” was commonly pronounced.

This study identified either *ma'dudat* or *ma'dudah* can be applied, with *ma'dudah* indicating many whereas *ma'dudat* is little. Al-Zajjaj stated each quantity ‘*adad*’, little or many is *ma'dud*. However, *ma'dudat* indicates small quantity since it became plural with the additional *alif* and *ta’*, like *hammamat ‘toilets’*. Similarly, it is permissible to use *alif* and *ta’* in indicating plurality in meaning. This verifies a reason why surah al-Baqarah verse 80 contains a small amount of meanings. This differs from surah al-Baqarah verse 203 whereby *ma'dudat* indicates three nights stay in Mina which is categorised as a small number in the proces of manasik ‘rites’ for those going for pilgrimage [34]. The method above could be understood easily as illustrated in Figure 5.

Besides the five methods of singular and plural described before, this study also identified one method concluded by a Muslim scholar in *Tafsir Al-Mishbah* but was not clearly mentioned by Shihab. The method practiced is as the following:

**Method:** The presentation of plural with plural form in one verse sometimes reflects every one individual with another individual. If plural with singular form in one verse, basically does not refer to specific meaning of the singular form since there is possibility for it to refer to its general meanings.

This method is mentioned by al-Zarkashi [28] who clarifies each individual in the first plural word when its combine with the next second individual plural will containing a general meaning. In this matter, each individual in a plural group for a certain verse is referred to as an object resulting from its plural form. Figure 6 illustrates this point of view.

The example of the method is when Shihab interpretes surah Nuh (Noah, 71) verse 7 as follows:

"And indeed, every time I invited them that you may forgive them, they put their fingers in their ears, covered themselves with their garments, persisted and were arrogant with [great] arrogance".
This verse contains general meanings; that is the non-believers plugged their ears with their fingers and blanketed themselves with their clothes [30]. In addition, this method also clarifies that sometimes plurality only requires each condemned individuals only as stated in surah al-Nur (The Light, 24) verse 4 below:

- “And those who accuse chaste women and then do not produce four witnesses - lash them with eighty lashes and do not accept from them testimony ever after. And those are the defiantly disobedient”.

There exists specific meanings in this verse; to those who commit slanderous accusation on fornication ‘zina’ towards a good-behaving woman and fails at producing four witnesses will result to eighty canings [35]. He who fulfills these conditions will be liberated from the punishment.

An extension of this method also elaborated on each first plural word does not indicate a general meaning if met with the second word in singular form even though it is able to include general meanings as well. An example is in surah al-Baqarah verse 184 below:

- “[Fasting for] a limited number of days. So whoever among you is ill or on a journey [during them] - then an equal number of days [are to be made up]. And upon those who are able [to fast, but with hardship] - a ransom [as substitute] of feeding a poor person [each day]. And whoever volunteers excess - it is better for him. But to fast is best for you, if you only knew”.

This verse refers to the people who are incapable of fasting (due to old age and others) and facing with fidyah in singular form. This verse refers to the obligation of paying fidyah which becomes a general meaning for all who are incapable of completing their fast during Ramadan month.

**CONCLUSION**

Shihab is known as the greatest exegete in Indonesia. His emphasis in the importance of understanding the meaning of the verse based on analysis to ensure its adequacy. This importance is acknowledged and applied by Shihab in analysing Qur’anic verses in *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, specially the application of singular and plural method.

There are five methods were mentioned clearly by Shihab and approved by the scholars and exegetes. However, there is a need for the fourth method to be emphasized in terms of thorough understanding and analysis of the contexts as well as Qur’anic words. His argument over the fifth method needs to be refined also, since he believes that ma’dudah is not categorised as plural but singular instead; and not becoming jama’ gillah. Besides, this research has identified a different method formulated by scholar yet to be analysed and mentioned clearly by Shihab in his *Tafsir* other than views by the exegetes only.

**REFERENCES**


