# Synonyms of *Basar* in Sahih Bukhari

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## Abstract

Synonymy, while generally understood as words with similar meanings, often carries subtle connotations that reflect deeper linguistic and semantic layers, highlighting the significance of specific terms within a language. Although much research on synonymy focuses on translation between languages, the study of synonyms in Prophetic sayings remains underexplored. This study investigates the synonyms of the word *basara* in Sahih Bukhari, seeking to uncover its semantic depth and linguistic nuances. The term *basara* and its related expressions encompass diverse meanings, ranging from physical vision to metaphorical insight. However, while *basara* is often used interchangeably with other terms, its precise connotations and contextual variations have not been thoroughly analyzed. This research identifies the synonyms of *basara* within selected Hadiths, examines their contextual applications, and analyzes their denotative and connotative meanings. Employing a qualitative approach rooted in corpus analysis, the study systematically explores occurrences of *basara* and its synonyms in Sahih Bukhari. Findings reveal that *basara* is synonymous with terms such as *ra'a*, *nazara*, and *shahida*. Each synonym, however, displays unique nuances depending on the thematic and situational context of the Hadith. For example, *ra'a* primarily denotes visual perception, while nazara often signifies deliberate contemplation. These results highlight the intricate semantic layers of Arabic and the stylistic precision of Prophetic speech. The study's findings provide valuable insights into the linguistic and interpretive frameworks of Quranic and Hadith studies, contributing to a deeper understanding of Arabic semantics and enriching Islamic scholarship.

*Keywords:* synonymy, Hadith, semantics, Sahih Bukhari, lexical variation

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## Introduction

Synonymy, a fundamental concept in semantic field theory, explores how words with similar core meanings differ in nuance, connotation, and contextual usage. In Arabic, the phenomenon of synonymy (*tarāduf*) reflects the language's lexical richness and stylistic depth, particularly within classical and religious texts. Classical scholars such as Sibawayh and Ibn Fāris debated the existence of true synonyms, often arguing that each term carries a distinct semantic value shaped by its contextual deployment (Osman Mohamed Gharib, 2015). This distinction is especially crucial in Islamic texts, where linguistic precision serves theological, legal, and rhetorical purposes. The Quran, for instance, exhibits deliberate variation in word choice, which contributes to both stylistic elegance and interpretive depth. Similarly, the Hadith literature that comprising the sayings, actions, and approvals of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) relies on carefully chosen vocabulary to convey complex layers of meaning, often through synonymous expressions (Brown, 2009).

Despite the well-documented use of synonymy in the Quran, its occurrence in Hadith literature remains under examined. While some studies have addressed lexical variation in Prophetic speech, there has been little focused attention on how synonymous terms function within specific semantic fields. A particularly overlooked area is the use of the term *basar* (بصر, sight/vision) and its near-synonyms such as *ra'a* (رأى), *nazara* (نظر), and *shahida* (شهد) in Sahih Bukhari, one of the most authoritative collections of Hadith. These words, though often translated similarly, differ significantly in usage: ra'a typically denotes physical seeing, nazara implies deliberate observation, and shahida involves bearing witness, often with legal or eschatological overtones. Yet the interpretive implications of such variations have not been systematically explored within Hadith studies.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining the usage of *basar* and its synonyms in Sahih Bukhari, with the aim of clarifying their contextual meanings and functional distinctions. Through qualitative semantic analysis and close reading of selected Hadiths, the research investigates how each term is employed to convey different modes of perception, ranging from sensory experience to intellectual reflection and legal testimony. The study reveals that the Prophet's linguistic choices are far from arbitrary; rather, they serve to guide the audience's understanding with theological and ethical precision. By uncovering the semantic depth and interpretive function of synonymy in Prophetic sayings, this research contributes to Arabic linguistic scholarship and enhances the methodological tools available to scholars of Hadith and Islamic theology.

## Literature Review

Synonymy, a cornerstone of semantic-field theory, describes the relationship between lexical items that share a core meaning yet diverge in connotation, stylistic register, or pragmatic scope. Kamus Dewan (2013) illustrates this subtlety in Malay: *basah* and *lembap* both denote wet, yet only *basah* fits meteorological contexts (*jalan itu basah selepas hujan*), whereas *lembap* suits humidity substances (*baju itu masih lembap*). Even metaphorically, *lembap* can signal slow, underscoring how context selects among near-equivalents.

The term synonym originates from Greek (syn "together" + onoma "name") and entered modern linguistics via Latin and French. Western and Malay scholars like Verhaar (1978), Asmah (1982), and Lyons (1995) concur that perfect interchangeability is almost non-existent; most synonyms are merely proximate. Classical Arabic philologists sharpened this

debate: Sibawayh and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī defended true synonymy (*tarāduf*), while Ibn Fāris and Thaʿlab rejected it, insisting each lexical form carries an exclusive semantic hue.

Multiple forces generate synonym sets. Dialectal divergence yields pairs such as American bus versus British coach; borrowing introduces doublets like Malay *kereta* and *motokar*; social register distinguishes *wafat* (prophets' demise) from *mangkat* (royal passing). Metaphorical extension, phonological drift, and descriptive epithets further diversify vocabularies: Arabic offers *al-manzil*, *ad-dār*, and *al-maskan* that indicate "house," yet each coloured by historical nuance or functional emphasis (Norfarhana Ahmad Ghafar & Hishomudin Ahmad, 2023).

If synonymy displays the language's semantic precision, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī exemplifies methodological rigour. Imam Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī (194–256 H) sifted roughly 600,000 reports over sixteen years, accepting some 7,563 narrations (about 2,600 without repetition) that satisfied his stringent criteria: unbroken chains of trustworthy transmitters, freedom from hidden flaws, and textual consistency (Al-Bukhari, 1980).

Structured into ninety-seven books, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī opens with "The Revelation" and closes with "Monotheism," spanning creed, ritual, commerce, ethics, history, and the Prophet's biography. Its meticulous architecture where its combined with unrivalled scrutiny of transmitters has secures its rank, in Sunni scholarship, as the most reliable work after the Qurʾān (Lucas, 2004). Thus, while synonymy illuminates Arabic's expressive breadth, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī anchors that breadth in authenticated Prophetic discourse, guiding both academic inquiry and daily Muslim practice.

Building on earlier discussions of synonymy in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, recent work has mapped the denotative and connotative profiles of he verb naẓara (نظر), often rendered as "to look," demonstrates a semantic spectrum extending from physical sight to spiritual contemplation, deep reasoning, and even nominative use, as documented in 65 usages across 43 Hadiths in 27 books of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (Norfarhana Ahmad Ghafar et al., 2025). Similarly, the term baṣar (بصر) and its derivatives, examined in a parallel study, encompass not only literal vision but also theological depth, such as inner insight, epistemic awareness, and divine attributes, found in 17 Hadiths and classified into eyesight, spiritual perception, and symbolic referents (Norfarhana Ahmad Ghafar et al., 2024).

Through a two-phase qualitative design; textual extraction followed by semantic categorisation, the study shows that while the literal sense "to look/see" dominates, nearly half the occurrences function metaphorically, signalling inner vision, critical reflection, or the absence of divine mercy. This layered pattern confirms that Prophetic diction deploys ostensibly synonymous verbs with great precision, allowing a single lexical root to index multiple epistemic stances and ethical cues depending on context, thereby enriching exegetical depth and underscoring the need for semantic sensitivity when interpreting Hadith discourse.

## Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, text-analytical design centred on Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, selected for its canonical authority and lexical breadth in Prophetic discourse. The investigation proceeds in two sequential yet interdependent stages, defined as Phase 1 and Phase 2, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**
*Two Phases in of Analysis*
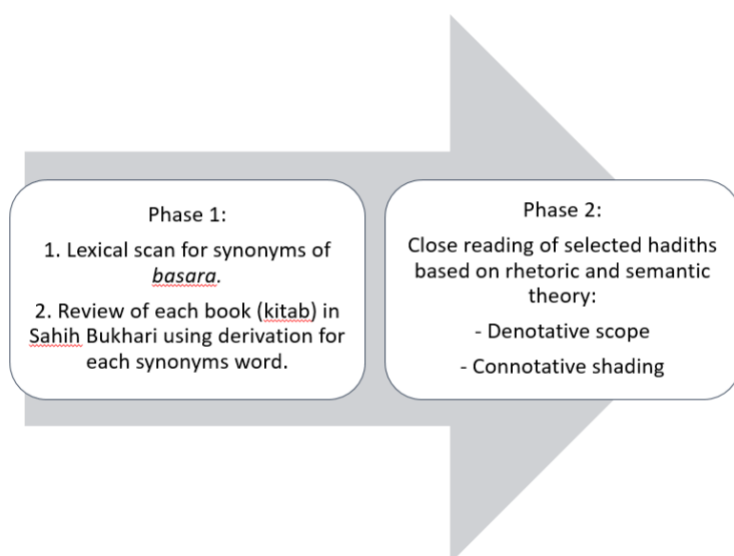


## Phase 1 – Data Identification and Extraction

An initial lexical scan isolated candidate verbs synonymous with baṣara (بصر, "to see/perceive"). Drawing on classical Arabic dictionaries and modern lexicographic sources, three principal equivalents were established: raʾā (رأى), naẓara (نظر), and shahida (شهد). Using these criteria, each book (kitāb) of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī was systematically reviewed and extracted.

## Phase 2 – Contextual-Semantic Analysis

The selected narrations were then subjected to close reading informed by traditional Arabic rhetoric and contemporary semantic theory. For each synonym, the analysis traced:
  a) Denotative scope – the baseline meaning (e.g., physical sight vs. judicial witnessing);
  b) Connotative shading – emotive or evaluative overtones triggered by co-text.

## Result and Discussion

This study classifies the Hadiths containing synonyms of *basar* into two distinct categories based on the number of synonymous terms present within each narration. The first category consists of Hadiths featuring pairs of synonymous words, accounting for twenty-five instances. The second category includes Hadiths in which three synonymous terms appear together within a single narration, with a total of three such occurrences identified.

**Table 1**
*The Pair of Synonyms*

| Word and its synonym | Count |
|---|---|
| بصر – رأى | 1 |
| بصر – نظر | 1 |
| شهد – رأى | 7 |
| شهد – نظر | 4 |
| رأى – نظر | 12 |
| **TOTAL** | 25 |

Table 1 indicates that the most frequently occurring synonym pair is raʾā (رأى) and naẓara (نظر), which appears in twelve Hadiths, reflecting a strong semantic affinity between the two terms. The pairing of raʾā with shahida (شهد) follows, with seven occurrences, while naẓara and shahida appear together in four instances. Less frequently, raʾā is paired with baṣara (بصر), and naẓara with baṣara, each combination occurring only once. These Hadiths are distributed across a wide range of thematic categories in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, including acts of worship, ethical conduct, interpersonal relations, prophetic narratives, and core theological concepts—underscoring both the linguistic versatility and interpretive depth of these synonymous expressions.

For example, in Hadith number 7047 from Sahih Bukhari, a nuanced semantic interplay between baṣara (بصر, insight) and raʾā (رأى, sight) is evident within the context of prophetic dream interpretation (Shihab al-Din Abi al-Abbas Ahmad Muhammad as-Syafi'e al-Qastalani, 1996). The narration recounts a dream experienced by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), in which he witnesses individuals receiving recompense based on their earthly actions. Here, raʾā denotes immediate sensory perception, reflecting the vivid visual elements of the dream, while baṣara signifies a deeper, interpretive understanding that allows the Prophet to grasp the symbolic and moral implications embedded within the vision. This distinction underscores the dual nature of true dreams (*ruʾyā*) in Islamic thought—recognized as one of the forty-six parts of prophecy (Al-Qaradawi, 2000)—which require both external observation and internal discernment. The interplay of raʾā and baṣara thus illustrates the harmonious relationship between literal seeing and spiritual insight, both of which are essential for decoding divine communication and extracting ethical meaning from prophetic experiences.

**Table 2**
*The Triplet of Synonyms*

| Word and its synonym | Count |
|---|---|
| بصر – رأى – شهد | 1 |
| بصر – رأى – نظر | 1 |
| شهد – نظر – رأى | 1 |
| TOTAL | 3 |

Table 2 outlines the occurrences of the term *basar* (بصر) in conjunction with its three primary synonyms across selected Hadiths in Sahih Bukhari. The data reveals three distinct triadic combinations, each occurring only once: *basar–raʾā–shahida* (بصر – رأى – شهد), *basar–raʾā–naẓara* (بصر – رأى – نظر), and shahida–naẓara–raʾā (شهد – نظر – رأى). These unique groupings are each found in different Hadiths, appearing respectively in the thematic books of the Virtues of Madinah, the Prophetic Commentary on the Qur'an, and the Interpretation of Dreams.

The Hadith depicting the interrogation of the deceased in the grave weaves a nuanced semantic tapestry through the use of three near-synonyms—*shahida, naẓara, and raʾā*. After burial, every soul is questioned by the angels Munkar and Nakir, and its fate hinges on the answers given (Badr al-Din Abi Muhammad Mahmud al-'Ainiy, 2001). Here, *shahida* extends beyond simple acknowledgment to signify a solemn testimony of faith, as the departed declares adherence to the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) message. *Naẓara*, by contrast, conveys an intense, deliberate gaze, capturing the focused vision of one's ultimate destination whether Paradise or Hell and thereby highlighting the gravity and immediacy of divine judgment. Complementing these, *raʾā* denotes the initial, sensory act of seeing, the first apprehension of the afterlife's realities. Together, these three lexical choices construct a layered narrative that emphasizes Islam's core themes of accountability, authentic belief, and the inescapable justice of God's final reckoning.

## Conclusion

This study highlights how Sahih Bukhari deploys a carefully layered synonymy around baṣar (بصر) and its near-equivalents—raʾā (رأى), naẓara (نظر), and shahida (شهد)—to calibrate meaning: raʾā frames raw sensory perception, naẓara signals reflective scrutiny, shahida registers testimonial certainty, and baṣar conveys inward spiritual insight. By charting these terms across diverse narrative settings, from dream interpretation to eschatological questioning, the study demonstrates that seemingly interchangeable verbs in Prophetic speech actually perform discrete semantic and rhetorical tasks, thereby enriching exegetical precision and deepening appreciation of the linguistic–theological nexus in Hadith discourse.

Implications include sharpening Arabic semantic theory, offering finer-grained tools for Hadith commentators, and alerting translators to the doctrinal weight carried by subtle lexical choices. Limitations stem from the study's qualitative scope, its restriction to a single Hadith collection, and reliance on close reading rather than quantitative frequency analysis, which may overlook broader usage patterns.

Recommendations for future research are three-fold: (1) extend the analysis to other canonical compilations and to Qurʾānic usages to test the consistency of these semantic roles; (2) integrate corpus-linguistic or computational methods to capture larger distributional trends; and (3) explore how medieval and contemporary exegetes have interpreted these verbs to trace the diachronic evolution of their theological resonances. Such avenues would deepen our understanding of Arabic synonymy and further illuminate how the Prophet's lexical precision continues to guide both scholarly inquiry and devotional practice.

**Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

AI-assisted technology was used in the preparation of this manuscript. Specifically, OpenAI's ChatGPT (GPT-4) was employed to assist with language refinement, structural editing, and enhancing academic clarity. The use of the tool was limited to improving the expression of ideas already formulated by the author, organizing content according to academic conventions, and proofreading for coherence and consistency. No content was generated independently by the AI; all substantive arguments, interpretations, and data analysis were conducted and verified by the author. The AI tool functioned solely as a language and editorial aid.

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