

## ARTICLE

# Sound and Its Role in Serving Meaning: The Poetry of Ibrāhīm Al-Khatīb as a Model

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## ABSTRACT

This research aims to highlight the importance of sound and its role in serving meaning, with a practical application to the poetry of the Jordanian poet Ibrāhīm Al-Khatīb. The value of this research lies in its examination of poetry that has not previously received much attention from a phonological perspective, by shedding light on a phonetic aspect that appears in the poetry of Ibrāhīm Al-Khatīb. Sound in Arabic poetry plays a significant role in conveying implicit meanings that the poet seeks to express by utilizing the power of sound. This sonic power arises from the qualities and characteristics of the sound itself, as well as its placement within the poetic line—whether through repetition or by employing the sound as a rhyme at the end of the verse. This research is based on the descriptive method, through an analytical reading of the poetry of Ibrāhīm Al-Khatīb, and identifying instances of phonetic repetition—whether at the level of sound repetition within the poetic line or through its use as a rhyme. The research concluded that the poet Ibrāhīm Al-Khatīb is fully aware of the semantic significance conveyed by Arabic sounds. He seeks to make use of these phonetic potentials, which are an inherent feature of the Arabic language and its letters, to express hidden meanings. The poet succeeds in crafting phonetic expressions with semantic implications through the use of various techniques.

**Keywords:** Sound; Meaning; Poetry; Ibrāhīm Al-Khatīb

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# 1. Background and Literature Review

the aesthetic effects resulting from the combination of specific sounds in particular contexts. They recognized the harmony between sound and the meaning it produces. Among the early Muslim scholars who focused on phonological phenomena were Al-Farāhīdī, Ibn Jinnī, and Ibn Sīnā, whose efforts laid the foundation for Arabic phonetics.

The study of sound did not stop with classical scholars but continued into the modern era, where notable contributions came from both Eastern and Western scholars such as Brockelman and Vendryes, who enriched the field with their linguistic insights.

Alongside phonetic studies, stylistic studies emerged, placing focus on sound-based phenomena within poetic texts—such as sound repetition, intonation, and supra segmental phonemes—through the works of key figures in modern stylistics like Jean Cohen, Salah Fadl, and others.

The emergence of free verse poetry in the modern era marked a turning point in both phonetic and stylistic analysis of poetic language. This shift necessitated a deeper exploration of the features that distinguish high-quality poetry, particularly in how modern poetry operates on both semantic and aesthetic levels.

This study focuses on one of the contemporary Jordanian poets, Ibrāhīm Al-Khatīb, who is considered a representative voice expressing the concerns, dreams, hopes, and sufferings of the Jordanian people. The motivation for this study stems from the distinguished poetic value of his work within Jordan and the scarcity of prior academic research dedicated to his poetry. While there are scattered publications in cultural magazines and on social media platforms, there remains a clear lack of serious scientific studies analyzing his poetic output—especially in terms of how sound functions within the structure of his poetry.

## About the Poet

The poet Ibrāhīm Al-Khatīb was born in Jenin, Palestine, in 1938. He moved to Jordan, where he completed his secondary education in Irbid. He then went to Damascus to study human medicine and graduated in 1973. In 1981, he pursued further medical studies in the United States. He worked in Saudi Arabia for nine years before returning to Jordan and settling in Irbid. He passed away on February 5,

2011, at the age of seventy-three.

Some of Ibrāhīm Al-Khatīb's poetry has been translated into several foreign languages, and his work was published in many Arab newspapers. He authored numerous poetry collections, including: *Sing to Me, My Tomorrow*, *Lanterns for the Extinguished Day*, *Izz al-Dīn al-Qassām*, *The Pen of Winds*, *I Seek Refuge in the Stone*, *Face to Face*, *The Ears of Purple Wheat*, *The Blood of Handala*, *Another Dhi Qar*, *Exposed to Life*, *I See Ripened Rhymes*, *Until the Thread of the Dream Appears to You*, and *A Pulse Away and Waiting*.

# 2. Introduction

Phonetic studies concerned with sound semantics focus on phonological units in terms of their being consonants or vowels. They also analyze phonetic features such as the repetition of specific sounds, examining whether they are voiced or voiceless, stressed or unstressed, and considering other characteristics like sonority or aspiration<sup>[1]</sup>. Phonetic analysis requires an understanding of the sound properties within the language, followed by the identification of patterns that deviate from the norm and an exploration of their semantic implications, which contributes to the study of stylistics<sup>[2]</sup>.

Considering the issue of phonetic significance requires examining the sound itself, with all its features and characteristics. Reaching phonetic meaning assumes linking it to the properties of sounds such as voicing and voicelessness, tension and softness, or to their specific qualities like pharyngealization, lengthening, and spread, among others. It may also involve what distinguishes certain sounds contextually from others, such as deflection and repetition<sup>[3]</sup>.

Although phonetic meaning arises from the characteristics and features of a sound, its true significance lies in the placement of the sound within the structure, or in the poet's use of it as a rhyme at the end of a poetic line. In this regard, Al-'Aqqād believes that what truly matters is the position of the sound within the word, not merely its presence in the word's composition<sup>[4]</sup>. Thus, he does not consider the sound in terms of its lexical or functional meaning, but rather focuses on the effect of its placement within the word—whether through emphasis or through clear repetition that suggests a subtle phonetic connotation.

The ancient Arab scholars observed that there is a corre-

spondence between the sounds of Arabic and their meanings. They also recognized that sounds carry a clear expressive value. Thus, they did not limit their study of phonetics to the fact that Arabic sounds have specific articulatory or phonetic characteristics; rather, they realized that sounds convey particular meanings and specific purposes, arising from the close relationship between the movement of the speech apparatus during pronunciation and the expressive meanings these sounds signify.

### 3. Scholars' Views on the Role of Sound in Serving Meaning

Perhaps the issue of sound's significance for meaning is one of the most frequently discussed specific topics among Arab scholars. It revolves around the idea that each individual sound carries its own distinct meaning, which arises from its inherent characteristics on the one hand, or from its position within the word on the other hand.

Ibn Jinnī provided examples of semantic differences in words that arise from the qualities of a single sound and the meanings it suggests. For instance, he said: "Al-Khaḍm refers to eating soft fruit like watermelon, while Al-Qaḍm refers to eating hard, dry food. Therefore, they chose the letter 'Kha' for its softness suited to soft fruit, and the letter 'Qaf' for its hardness suited to dry food<sup>[4]</sup>." In this, he demonstrates that the difference in meaning stems from the difference in sound, and thus the meaning derives from the sound itself, not from the word as a whole.

Ibn Jinnī believes that there is a connection between a word and its meaning, which can be observed by comparing words based on the qualities of their sounds. For example, he compares the words (ʿazza) and (hazza). The word (ʿazza) is associated with a human being, as in the Quranic verse: "Have you not seen that We sent the devils upon the disbelievers, urging them on fiercely?" [ʿAlam tara annā arsalnā ash-shayāṭīna ʿala al-kāfirīna tuʿuzzuhum ʿazzā]<sup>[5]</sup>, while the word (hazza) is used with an object that is non-human in nature, as in the verse: "And shake toward you the trunk of the palm tree; it will drop upon you ripe dates", [Wa huzzi ʿilayki bijidh ʿi ʿin-nakhlati tusāqit ʿilayki ruṭaban janiyyā]<sup>[5]</sup>. Ibn Jinnī, in differentiating between the two words, says: "It is as if they reserved this meaning for the hamza (ʿ) because it is stronger than the hā (h), and this meaning is greater in the

soul than shaking, because you can shake something without a mind, like a trunk or a tree branch and the like<sup>[6]</sup>."

Also, (ʿal-naḍkh) is considered stronger than (ʿalnadh); the letter ḥāʾ (h) is used for its softness to describe weak water, while the letter khāʾ (kh) is used for its strength to describe something stronger than that<sup>[6]</sup>.

Based on the above, we find that Ibn Jinnī distinguishes between the meanings of words through the differences between sounds in terms of their qualities and points of articulation. This clearly reflects Ibn Jinnī's approach that the meaning derived from sound lies in its qualities and articulation. Thus, the Arabs used the characteristics of sound as a means to clearly specify and convey meaning.

Ibn al-Sikkit believes that the two sounds involved in the substitution are governed by a relationship based either on similarity in quality or closeness in articulation point, which leads to the unification of the meanings of words, such as the merging of the articulation points of the letters *nūn* and *lām*. He gives many examples of this, including: *'the sky rained lightly (hatanat, tahtinu tahtinān, and tahtilu tahtilān* — referring to clouds described as *hutun* and *hutul*, respectively<sup>[7]</sup>.

Ibn Fāris followed this view regarding the relationship between sound and meaning, linking the two-consonant root to the overall meaning and considering this root as the basis of a general semantic concept that remains preserved even when a third sound is added to the two-consonant structure. He traced the origin of the letters *qāf* and *tāʾ* back to the meaning of cutting in words like *qaṭaʾa* (to cut), *qaṭaṭa* (to pick), and *qaṭama* (to sever). He holds that *qāf*, *tāʾ*, and *ʾayn* form a single true root that signifies severance and the clear separation of something from something else<sup>[8]</sup>.

In his treatise *The Causes of the Emergence of Letters*, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) explains that every articulated sound imitates a sound from nature. For example, he notes that<sup>[9]</sup>:

- The sound "kh" resembles the noise made when a soft object, like a peel, is scraped against a hard surface;
- The "q" sound evokes the sudden ripping or wrenching of something apart;
- The "k" resembles the thud produced when a large solid object strikes another hard surface;
- And the "t" mirrors the sharp clap of hands when the palms don't fully meet.

Ibn Sina goes further to argue that the meaning con-

veyed by a word is sensed internally by the human soul in a way that reflects a natural connection between sound and meaning. He writes: “The meaning of a word’s indication is that when its sound is imagined in the mind, a corresponding meaning is simultaneously formed in the soul. The soul then instinctively recognizes that this sound relates to that particular meaning. So whenever the senses bring this sound to the soul, it instinctively turns toward the meaning it signifies <sup>[10]</sup>.”

Al-Suyūfī quotes from the words of Arab linguists who supported the natural connection between the word and its meaning, saying: “The Arabs differed in their choice of words that are closely related in meaning, assigning the weakest, softest, lightest, easiest, and most whispered letter to what is lesser, lighter, or weaker in action or sound. Conversely, they assigned the strongest, harshest, most apparent, and most forceful letter to what is stronger in action and greater in sensation. An example of this is the difference between *madd* and *maṭṭ*; the act of *maṭṭ* is stronger because it involves stretching and increase in tension, so it corresponds to the letter ṭā, which is stronger than dāl <sup>[11]</sup>.”

Accordingly, the quality of sound plays a role in generating meaning. “Phonetic laboratory studies have shown that the clustering of voiced and voiceless sounds in a given text reveals the semantic map related to the psychological state under which the discourse is produced, based on the principle of available time and effort. This variation in sound qualities may imitate certain emotions and meanings that the speaker or poet intends to evoke, or that seep through the structural fabric alongside the flow of hidden connotations <sup>[12]</sup>.”

Ibrāhīm Anīs believes that poetic meanings, including both delicate and intense meanings, manifest in texts according to the harmony of sounds that correspond to them. Some sounds align with delicate meanings, while others align with intense meanings. This classification is based on the qualities of the sounds and their effect on the ear, provided their frequency is not excessive or in violation of the principles of sound dissonance. As a result, we perceive in the music of such poetry something we do not perceive with other sounds, and this represents the ultimate perfection in the music of poetry <sup>[13]</sup>.

Arabic poetry, with its depth of meaning and the beauty in choosing words and their conveyed meanings, has helped

Arabic sounds to be more active in expressing meanings, whereas these sounds alone do not perform this function outside of poetry. The sound “acquires an added rhythmic value upon entering poetry; this happens through the activities undertaken by groups of harmonious and scattered sounds, which compose directives approximating certain semantic values. This is because it is absolutely impossible to separate the poetic word from its semantic content. And although this relationship is surrounded by much ambiguity and secrecy in its abstract non-poetic form, it fully manifests its strength and generosity in poetry; poetry has the power to reveal the secret of the relationship and to clarify the mysterious mechanism by which the meaning of the sound and the sound of the meaning are connected <sup>[14]</sup>.”

Some scholars have proposed that each sound (or phoneme) carries a specific inherent meaning. As’ad Al-’Alayli, for instance, believes that <sup>[15]</sup>:

- The sound “**b**” indicates the complete attainment of a meaning or goal;
- “**j**” (as in “jim”) reflects grandeur or magnitude in a general sense;
- “**kh**” signifies flexibility and diffusion;
- “**d**” suggests hardness or rigidity;
- “**dh**” (as in “this”) conveys uniqueness or singularity;
- “**r**” implies mastery or a widespread quality;
- “**s**” is associated with vastness and expansiveness;
- “**sh**” (as in “shine”) points to chaotic or unordered spreading;
- “**ayn**” denotes inner emptiness or hollowness;
- “**ghayn**” indicates the deep, complete internalization of meaning;
- “**f**” carries a figurative or metaphorical nuance;
- “**q**” relates to suddenness or a jolt, often accompanied by sound;
- “**m**” suggests gathering or compactness;
- and “**h**” symbolizes fading or vanishing.

Similarly, Ahmad Al-Shidyaq offers his own view on the qualities of individual sounds. He suggests, for example <sup>[16]</sup>:

- The sound “**h**” conveys openness and breadth, like a wide, flat valley (al-abṭāḥ);
- While “**d**” implies softness, gentleness, and tenderness,

as in something smooth and supple (like the word *amlūd*).

This perspective reflects a belief in the intrinsic relationship between sound and meaning in language—a concept explored by various linguists and philosophers over time.

Some scholars believe that long vowel sounds (madd) play a significant role in conveying emotional and semantic depth in poetry. In certain contexts, specific phonemes can carry suggestive or evocative meanings. Long vowels, in particular, are thought to enhance the expressive power of words and imagery <sup>[17]</sup>.

A clear example of this is given by researcher Abdel-Hāfiz Abdel-Hadi in his study “*Phonetic Composition and Meaning-Making in the Poetry of Al-Mu'tamid ibn Abbad*.” He invites us to listen closely to the verses of Al-Mu'tamid as he mourns the loss of his palaces after being taken prisoner. When we attune our ears to the sounds of the lines, we begin to sense that the long vowels echo like a muffled wailing—heavy with sorrow and filled with emotional intensity <sup>[18]</sup>.

Al-Mu'tamid leans on these elongated sounds as a way to release his wounded feelings, expressing a soul burning with grief and anguish over the fall of his kingdom and the loss of former glory. The extended duration of the long vowels in each verse mirrors the depth of his sorrow and the bitterness of his humiliation.

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Accordingly, the significance of sound is a tool that poets have not overlooked. They have harnessed it to infuse their verses with specific meanings that reveal hidden layers of their inner worlds. Sound helps transmit emotions and feelings, drawing on its unique qualities to convey these meanings—whether through repetition within a single verse or by choosing a particular rhyme at the end of their lines.

#### 4. The Role of Sound in Serving Meaning in the Poetry of Ibrāhīm Al-Khatīb

Ibrāhīm Al-Khatīb's poetry fluctuates between the traditional (vertical) and free verse forms. In both styles, he

did not overlook the potential of sound in serving meaning—whether across the line of verse, in its role as rhyme, or in its ability to harmonize its acoustic qualities with the content of the expression.

One example of the role of sound in serving meaning is found in what the poet Ibrāhīm Al-Khatīb says in his elegy for Izz al-Dīn al-Qassām <sup>[19]</sup>.

And how vast the difference between one who bends to sleep,

And one who bends to pour passion and death into arrows.

Peace to the wind as it whispers the secrets of the clouds,

Peace to the breeze that carried to the hearts of beasts the cooing of doves.

Peace to the hungry one whose flesh disappears each day, and whose bones alone are declared.

Peace until sitting becomes rising,

Peace until rising becomes resurrection.

Peace to a killer, haunted by his own soul

Neither awake is he, nor does he sleep.

[*Wa shattān bayna alladhī yanhnī li-yanām*

*Wa bayna alladhī yanhnī liyaṣubba al-hawā wa al-radā fī al-sihām*

*Salāmun 'ilā al-rīḥi wa hiya tabūḥu bi-sirri al-ghamām*

*Salāmun 'ilā nasmatin ḥamalat li-qulūbi al-ḍawārī hadīla al-ḥamām*

*Salāmun 'ilā jā'i 'in yakhtaft laḥmuhu kulla yawmin wa tu'linu 'anhu al-'izām*

*Salāmun 'ilā 'an yaṣīra al-qu'ūdu qiyāman*

*Salāmun 'ilā 'an yaṣīra al-qiyāmu qiyāmah*

*Salāmun 'ilā qātilin nafsuhu taqtafīhi*

*Fa-lā huwa yaṣḥū wa laysa yanām]*

It appears that the rhyme sound “**m**” used by the poet in the previous passage intertwines with the overall meaning of the excerpt, revealing a sense of pride mingled with sorrow. It is the pride in Izz al-Dīn al-Qassām, who departed as a true man, and the sorrow over the loss of manhood with his passing. We can sense the depth of the poet's grief over the departure of a symbol of sacrifice and resistance through the expressive power of the “**m**” sound—a voiced, nasal, labial sound—which carries connotations of mourning and lamentation. This sound recurs throughout the poetic lines (Salām(un), nasmah, laḥmuh, yawm, qiyāman, al-qiyāmah)

and its repetition, along with its role as the final rhyme in the verses, reinforces the emotional atmosphere. It's as if this rhyme and its repetition embrace the poem's overarching theme—a blend of pride and sorrow—within a closed emotional circle.

In his collection *"Sing to Me, My Tomorrow"* (**Ghanni Lī Ghadī**), the poet presents in his poem *"A Sail Once Meant for the Sea"* a theme of growing old and his inability to reclaim youthful playfulness and return to joy and love. He says <sup>[20]</sup>:

Is it a calling, or perhaps a prayer?  
A cry—or is it mockery laid bare?  
I've grown weary of the waves, and the sea  
Once held a blue journey for me.  
And now you ask me to return to your eyes  
To a sea whose waves in madness rise?  
O my heart, the nights of our youth have passed,  
And upon my head, a white crown now rests.  
Yet I long to solve a question  
That baffled the wise who came before me:  
How do bodies wither with time,  
While passions in the heart continue to grow?  
*[Da 'watun tilka am turāhā du 'ā'u*  
*Wa-nidā 'un 'am 'annahu 'istihzā'u*  
*Qad sa 'imtu al-'amwāja, wa-l-baḥru yawman*  
*Kāna lī fīhi riḥlatun zarqā'u*  
*Wa-turīdīna an a 'ūda li-'aynayki*  
*Li-baḥrin amwājuhu hawjā'u*  
*Yā fu 'ādī wallat layālī šibānā*  
*Wa 'alā al-ra'si ḥullatun bayḍā'u*  
*Ghayra 'annī 'urīdu ḥalla su 'ālin*  
*ḥāra fīhi min qablī al-ḥukamā'u*  
*Kayfa tadhwī ma'a al-zamāni jusūmun*  
*ḥīna tanmū bi-qalbiḥā al-'ahwā'u]*

These poetic verses convey a sense of longing and sorrow over the loss of youth, and the inability to respond to the calls of love and youthful playfulness. The sound structure rises to support this theme, offering acoustic beauty through the repetition of the glottal stop sound (**hamzah**)—a voiced, explosive glottal sound—throughout the verses (e.g., *am*, *nidā*, *annahu*, *si'imtu*, *al-amwāj*, *an*, *a'ūd*, *amwājuhu*, *fu'ādī*, *al-ra's*, *innī*, *urīd*, *su'āl*). In addition to its internal repetition, the poet also uses this sound as the rhyme of the lines. This particular sound requires full closure of the vocal

cords, not allowing air to pass through the glottis <sup>[21]</sup>, producing an effortful, choking articulation. This acoustic tension mirrors the poet's emotional suffocation, as if he's gasping for breath, overwhelmed by emotion. He thus channels the power of sound to serve the overall meaning of the lines: a deep lament over the passing of youth.

In his poem *"The Sea Has the Eyes of the Sailor"*, the poet heavily emphasizes the repetition of the letter (**Rā'**)—a voiced, alveolar, trilled sound—using it both frequently within the lines and as the poem's rhyme. He draws on the acoustic power of this sound and the emotional connotations it carries to express a sense of loss and wandering in the vast realm of the seas. Amidst his alienation and repeated voyages, the poet searches for a shore of safety, as though these travels are part of an unending, wearisome cycle with no comfort and no conclusion. The recurring **"r"** sound mirrors this ongoing motion, offering a sonic impression that perfectly aligns with the poem's central theme. Through its repetition and use as a rhyme, the sound reinforces the feeling of endless, restless journeying the poet seeks to convey. He writes <sup>[20]</sup>:

Scatter my exile as ashes of love,  
For some cover preserves my fire.  
Since the color of my saddle and sword was lost,  
I have remained a rider pacing in waiting.  
At dawn, my journey rose tinged  
With a light studded with tar.  
I am the night and the ruins' garment,  
Within me lie history and relics.  
Job was nothing but beautiful patience,  
When upon him my bitter endurance was cast.  
Yet I have been harsh, difficult to break—  
Ask the fire about the clarity of my gaze.  
My stumbles, my falls, and the thorns on my path  
Are lessons for the great before the small.  
The dawn indeed illuminates parts of the night,  
And the sea holds the eyes of the sailors.  
*[Daththirī ghrubātī ramādan min al-ḥubb*  
*Fa-ba 'du al-ghīṭā 'i yahfāzu nārī*  
*Mundhu an ḍā'a lawnu sarjī wa sayfī*  
*Lam 'azal rākkīban dabība intizārī*  
*Wa min al-ṭilli qāma fajrī mashūban*  
*Bi-ḍiyā'in murassa'in bi-l-qārī*  
*'anā li-l-layli wa al-kharā'ibi thawbun*

*Wa fiyya al-tārīkhu wa al- 'āthāru*  
*Laysa 'Ayyūbu ghayra ṣabrin jamīlin*  
*Ḥīna 'ulqiya 'alayhi murru 'iṣṭibārī*  
*Ghayra 'annī qasawtu yaṣ'ubu kasrī*  
*Is'alī al-nāra 'an ṣafā'i naḍārī*  
*'Athratī, kabwatī, wa ashwāku darbī*  
*'Ibarun li-l-kibāri qabla al-ṣighārī*  
*'inna li-l-fajrī mā yuḍī'u min al-layli*  
*Wa li-l-baḥrī a 'yunu al-baḥḥārī]*

The sound repetition in the previous poetic passage cannot be mere coincidence; rather, the poet deliberately relied on using words containing the “r” sound to convey his experience of loss and the surrounding instability.

The poet uses the “r” sound, benefiting from its qualities that suggest meanings of random continuity lacking stability and steadiness. He thus paints an artistic picture in his poem “*The Language of the Rooster*”—a sonic tableau in which we almost hear the crowing of the rooster, glimpse the roaring winds, and perceive the continuous unrest and turbulence without stability. He says in it<sup>[22]</sup>:

The rooster is eloquent... the rooster crows,  
 By instinct, it knows that the path of life  
 Begins with a peck.  
 It knows that the span between darkness and light  
 Is no more than a shell's thin layer,  
 And life is white around that hollow.  
 It understands that the wind is the messenger of the  
 wind—

The idea has reached it.  
 The world begins with a peck,  
 The rain upon your cheeks,  
 The breeze in your ears,  
 The sip upon your lips.  
 And so the sun pecks at dawn  
 The shells of the night.  
*[ 'al-dīku faṣīḥun... al-dīku yaṣīḥu*  
*Bi-l-fiṭratī 'adraka 'anna ṭarīqa al-dunyā*  
*Tabda'u min naqrah*  
*'adraka 'anna al-muddata bayna al-ḥulmatī wa al-*  
*daw'i*

*Tusāwī qishrah*  
*Wa al-dunyā baydā'u ḥawālī tilka al-ḥufrāh*  
*'adraka 'anna al-rīḥa barīdu al-rīḥ*  
*Waṣalat-hu al-fikrah*

*Al- 'ālamu yabda'u min naqrah*  
*Al-maṭaru 'alā khaddayk*  
*Al-nasmatu fī 'udhnayki*  
*Al-rashfah fī shafatayki*  
*Al-shamsu ka-dhālika tanquru fī al-fajrī*  
*Qushūra al-layl]*

We also notice—similar to the repetition of the “r” sound in the poetic phrases—the presence of the “r” sound in the rhyme (naqrah, ḥufrāh, fikrah, qishrah).

In his poem titled “*Its Distance*” [Bu'duhā], the poet pours out his sorrow over the loss of love slipping through his hands. He offers a confession to his beloved that he has fulfilled his duty in love, having been her faithful lover. However, fate did not allow this love to be crowned with an ending that would satisfy them both; it was a losing bet. He pleads his sorrow, drawing on the power of the “n” sound—a voiced, alveolar nasal consonant—that conveys a sense of moaning and grief. He deliberately emphasizes this sound through its repetition within the poetic phrases and by using it as the rhyme throughout the poem. He says<sup>[22]</sup>:

God is my witness, O companion of my sorrow,  
 That in your love, I have fulfilled my duty.  
 From a gamble in which I lost my time,  
 And what remained of you and me still lingers.  
 You will remain between my palm and my heart,  
 And my eyes are a whirlpool of longing,  
 Ask my captive heart beside your cheeks.  
 A captive of my ribs, it asks about me  
 What wall protects you after my arms,  
 Or what bed do you sleep in like my eyelids?  
*[Yashhadu Allāhu yā raḥīm qata ḥuznī*  
*'anna-nī fī ḥawākī waḥḥaytu daynī*  
*Min rihānin ḍayya 'tu fīhi zamānī*  
*Wa alladhī ḥalla fiyya minki wa minnī*  
*Wa sata-bqīna bayna kaffayya wa qalbī*  
*Wa 'uyūnī dawwāmatun min tamannī*  
*Sā'ilī qalbiyya al-asīra bijanbayki*  
*Rahīna al-ḥulū'i yas'alu 'annī*  
*'ayyu sūrin yaḥmīki ba'da dhirā'ī*  
*'aw sarīrin taghfīna fīhi kajafnī]*

The poet repeatedly uses the “n” sound in words such as (annī, rihān, minki, satabqīn, 'uyūnī, zamānī, min, bijanbayk, rahīn, taghfīn), in addition to employing the “n” sound as the rhyme throughout the poem (ḥuznī, dīnī, minnī, tamannī,

*'annī, kajaḥnī*). This sound serves as a breath through which the poet exhales his sorrows over the loss of this love.

The poet may not rely on the repetition of a single sound; rather, he blends a group of sounds to create a sonic tableau that reveals emotional elements almost visible to the eye or audible to the ear. He expresses this in his poem “*Summer Whispers*”<sup>[20]</sup>:

This exhale is for you,  
And at the tip of the tongue, smoke and dust begin.  
And these lips are the first echo  
And the last roar.  
This exhale does not stir the rhymes  
Nor color the lines.  
And when the ash swallows what you poured out of  
ash,  
Silence becomes the master of place and time.  
And tears may come and go through the gate of sorrow.  
The earth has been leveled over the light,  
And the story of the universe has ended.  
*[Hādhā al-zafīru lak*  
*Wa 'inda 'ākhiri al-lisān yabda'u al-dukhān wa al-*  
*ghubār*  
*Wa hādhihi al-shifāhu 'ulā al-ṣadā*  
*Wa 'ākhiru al-hadīr*  
*Hādhā al-zafīru lā yuharriku al-qawāfī*  
*Wa lā yulawwinu al-suṭūr*  
*Wa ḥinama yabtali'u al-ramādu mā safaḥta min ramād*  
*Fa-al-ṣamtu sayyidu al-makān wa al-zamān*  
*Wa li-l-dumū'i an tarūḥa 'aw tajī'a min bawwābati*  
*al-'asā*  
*Qad suwwiya al-turābu fawqa al-ḍaw'i*  
*Wa 'intahat ḥikāyatu al-falak]*

We notice the sonic blend among the sounds: the “**d**” (voiced dental alveolar plosive), the “**r**” (voiced alveolar trill), the “**n**” (voiced alveolar nasal), and the “**m**” (voiced bilabial nasal). All these sounds share the feature of **voicing** and blend together to create visual and auditory images that the reader imagines and feels alongside the poet’s melancholia. These images—of the exhale, smoke, ash, and tears—reflect the harshness of place and time.

The poet Ibrāhīm Al-Khatīb elegizes the famous caricature artist Najī al-Ali (Nājī Salīm Ḥusayn al-‘Alī (1937 – August 29, 1987): A Palestinian cartoonist known for his sharp political and social criticism, which contributed to rais-

ing political and social awareness through his caricatures. He is considered one of the most important Palestinian artists who pioneered political change through art as a form of expression. He produced around 40,000 caricatures. He was assassinated by an unknown person in London in 1987)<sup>[23]</sup>. The poem conveys deep feelings of sorrow and anger over Najī al-Ali’s passing. To achieve this, the poet deliberately repeats the “**j**” **sound**—which, through its phonetic qualities, evokes a sense of anger. Similar to this repetition, we observe the harmony created by using the “**j**” **sound** as the rhyme, which reinforces the connection between the sound’s meaning and the poem’s theme. He says<sup>[24]</sup>:

No elegy nor celebration for Najī ,  
Which living soul among the afflicted is Najī ?  
Wherever you were, there’s no escape from death,  
Even if you were behind an ivory tower.  
A bird was driven by departure to Jerusalem,  
And a thorn pierced it in the fence.  
It’s no secret that I lit my brow,  
Revealing in the lands the secret of my joy.  
The death of the free is in face and color,  
And the life of the coward is in duplicity.  
We are a regiment of victims to this,  
I do not weep for the crowds jostling,  
All this blood is my flame and my blaze,  
I do not mourn the extinguishing of a lamp.  
*[Lā rithā'a wa lā 'ihṭifā'a bi-Nājī*  
*'ayyu ḥayyin mina al-mulammātī Nājī?*  
*'aynamā kunta lā mafarra mina al-mawti*  
*Wa law kunta khalf burjīn 'ājī*  
*Ṭā'irun hājahu al-raḥīlu 'ilā al-Quds*  
*Fa-'admath-hu shawkatun fī al-siyājī*  
*Laysa sirran 'annī 'aḍa'tu jabīnī*  
*Fāḍiḥan fī al-bilādi sirra ibtihājī*  
*Mītat al-ḥurri dhātu wajhin wa lawnin*  
*Wa ḥayātu al-jabānī fī al-'izdijāj*  
*Naḥnu fawjun mina al-ḍaḥāyā li-hādhā*  
*Lastu 'abkī tazāḥuma al-'afwāj*  
*Kullu hādhihi al-dimā'i wahjī wa nahjī*  
*Lastu 'āsā 'alā 'inṭifā'i sirājī]*

The “**j**” sound is repeated in words such as (*burj, hājah, jabīnī, wajh, al-jabān, fawj, wahjī, nahjī*), and it also appears as the rhyme in words like (*Nājī, Nājī, 'ājī, al-siyājī, ibtihājī, al-izdiwāj, al-afwāj, sirājī*). This clear focus on the “**j**” sound



indicates that the poet is aware of the power of sounds to reveal hidden depths; he deliberately employs them to express meanings of sorrow and anger over the assassination of Najī al-Ali.

The poet depicts the suffering of the Palestinian people during displacement and food scarcity, as he tries to alleviate the hunger of the children by appealing to aid agencies distributing supplies to the displaced Palestinians. Ibrāhīm Al-Khatīb describes this scene, highlighting the role of the rhyme sound “**h**”, through which the poet conveys his gloomy breaths. He says<sup>[24]</sup>:

Hanzala,  
Oh my standing at the agency's thresholds,  
A ration card,  
A bag of flour,  
A tin of sardines,  
And the memory of Palestine,  
And Amen... Amen... Amen.  
And how, and where will our coming days land?  
Hanzala!  
What could I possibly not know?  
Fleeing from knowledge and awareness,  
Fleeing from doubt,  
From the sting of light,  
From the awakening of poetry,  
And questions!  
What hell matches my ambitions?  
And carries me before I carry it?  
How vast was yesterday, O Hanzala!  
And how narrow is the whisper, O witness to this farce  
of time!

How stingy is life, and how long it is!  
And how near is death, and how easy it is!  
And how deadlily is humanity!  
How deadlily he is!

[*Ḥanzalah*

*Yā wuqūfī 'alā 'atatāti al-wikālah*

*Biṭāqatu tamwīnin*

*Wa kīsu ṭaḥīnin*

*Wa 'ulbat sardīnin*

*Wa dhikrā Filasṭīn*

*Wa 'āmīn... 'āmīn... 'āmīn*

*Wa kayfa, wa 'ayna takūnu ḥiṭṭatu 'ayyāminā al-muqbilah?*

*Ḥanzalah!*

*Mā alladhī yumkinu 'an 'ajhalah?*

*Hurūban mina al-'ilmi wa al-ma'rifah*

*Hurūban mina al-shakk*

*Min las 'at al-daw'*

*Min yaqṣat al-shi'r*

*Wa al-as'ilah!*

*Fa 'ayy jahīmin yuwāzī jumūhī?*

*Wa yaḥmilunī qabla 'an 'aḥmilah*

*Famā 'awsa 'a al-'amsa yā Ḥanzalah!*

*Wa mā 'aḍyaqa al-hamsa yā shāhida al-zamani al-mahzalah!*

*Wa mā 'abkhala al-'umra, mā 'aṭwalah!*

*Wa mā 'agraba al-mawta, mā 'as-halah!*

*Wa mā 'aqtala al-'insa!*

*Mā 'aqtalah!]*

The rhyme sound “**h**”—a voiceless glottal fricative—expresses the depth of sorrow the poet describes regarding the situation imposed on the Palestinian people, who are deprived of their basic rights to life. At times, the poet expresses wonder and, at other times, questions the length of this life's obscurity and hardship, and the ease of death within it. The “**h**” sound becomes the poet's breath of relief, releasing all these questions as if they were endless sighs.

In his poem (*Intifāḍah*), Ibrāhīm Al-Khatīb describes the Stone Intifāḍah, the determination of the Palestinians, and the children's uprising in response to what was taken from them. He deliberately repeats the sound “**h**” — the voiceless pharyngeal fricative — which imitates the sound of the wind, the voice of life, and the hope to survive. This is reinforced by the rhyme sound “**q**” — the voiced emphatic alveolar plosive — which evokes the depth of Palestinian strength through its sonorous grandeur. It is followed by a silent “**h**” indicating that this strength is firm and unshakable. He says, describing a Palestinian boy no older than ten confronting the ruthless enemy:

He carried the fire to inoculate in them

The barrenness of a dream they deliberately aborted.

A ten-year-old boy who interrogates the stones in  
Jerusalem

And defends its gardens with his arms.

Around him, some die of the cold

And deny the assumptions of war.

A ten-year-old boy, and there is no path to glory

Impossible for you unless he has fought it.  
 A ten-year-old boy who owns nothing but  
 A stone from which he ignited the Intifāḍah.  
*[Ḥamala al-nāra kay yulaqqiḥa fīhim*  
*‘uqma ḥulmin ta ‘ammadū ‘ijhāḍah*  
*‘ibnu ‘ashrin yastanṭiqu al-ṣakhra fī al-Quds*  
*Wa yaḥmī bīsā ‘idayhi ḥiyāḍah*  
*Wa ḥawlāyhi man yamūtu mina al-bardi*  
*Wa yulghī mina al-ḥurūbi ‘iftirāḍah*  
*‘ibnu ‘ashrin wa laysa lil-majdi darbun*  
*Mustaḥlun ‘alayka ‘illā wa khāḍah*  
*‘ibnu ‘ashrin wa laysa yamliku ‘illā*  
*ḥajaran minhu fajjara al-‘intifāḍah]*

The poet laments the state to which the Arab countries have fallen, highlighting the extent of cultural, literary, and societal decline, and declares that the supreme interest above all else is the interest of the homeland. In his poem “*The Homeland First*,” he blends the sound “**r**” — the voiced alveolar trill — with the sound “**d**” — the voiced dental/alveolar plosive — to convey feelings of ongoing loss. The repeated “**r**” sound expresses continuity and recurrence, evoking the sense of repeated loss, while the rhyme “**d**” sound emphasizes the firmness of this loss. He says<sup>[25]</sup>:

To what extent do jest and seriousness meet,  
 And upon which sins is the limit placed?  
 And what safety, O my shores, where  
 The wind, the ebb, and the tide rage?  
 And what land is that, O my exile, where  
 The free and the slave reconcile in its markets?  
 I carried the burdens of poetry; my childhood  
 Was like the old age of one counting his final days.  
 Poetry is the pulse of the heart—how can we count it?  
 But the sick of poetry must be counted.  
 And I bore in my heart a coal it cannot endure,  
 Yet when my heart chants it, it is like a spark.  
*[‘Alā ‘ayyi ḥaddin yaltaqī al-hazlu wa al-jaddu*  
*Wa ‘ayyu dhunūbin fawqahā yuḍa ‘u al-ḥaddu*  
*Wa ‘ayyu ‘amānin yā shawāṭī ‘i allatī*  
*Tu ‘arribdu fīhā al-rīḥu wa al-jazru wa al-maddu*  
*Wa ‘ayyu bilādin tilka yā ghrubātī allatī*  
*Taṣālaḥa fī aswāqihā al-ḥurru wa al-‘abdu*  
*Ḥamaltu humūma al-shi ‘ri, kānat ṭufūlatī*  
*Kuhūlata man fī ‘ākhirī al-‘umri ya ‘tiddu*  
*Huwa al-shi ‘ru nabḍu al-qalbi kayfa na ‘udduh*

*Wa lākin bimarḍā al-shi ‘r yalzamahu al-‘addu*  
*Wa ḥammaltu qalbī jamratan lā yuṭīquhā*  
*Wa lākinna qalbī ḥīna unshiduhu zindū]*

In the poem “*It Begins with Longing*,” the poet reveals the hidden emotions and concealed feelings within his heart. He employs the repetition of two sounds — “**s**” and “**ṣ**” — throughout the verses; these two hissing sounds imitate the whispering of the conscience and the intimate dialogue of the soul. Additionally, the poet chooses the **s** sound — the voiceless alveolar fricative — as the poem’s rhyme. He says<sup>[26]</sup>:

It begins with longing and ends in obsession,  
 And dreams fade away in my despair.  
 My eye rests on my palm — a cloud  
 Driven like a shadow beneath the sun.  
 I had no concern with this separation,  
 Those were the days when I guarded myself.  
 So how did my eyelid’s step move?  
 Which of the two did my intuition strike?  
 Our journey fluttered and whispered,  
 Like a finger’s whisper in a touch,  
 Or a fleeting sip within my mouth,  
 Or a fingerprint on the edge of the cup.  
*[Tabda ‘u shawqan tantahī ḥājisan*  
*Wa tanṭaḥī al-‘aḥlām fī ya ‘sī*  
*‘Aynī ‘alā kaḥḥī ‘an ḡhaymatan*  
*Masūqatan ka-l-ṣilli fī al-shamsī*  
*Mā kāna lī sha ‘nun biḥādhā al-nawā*  
*‘ayyāma kānat ḥārisī naḥsī*  
*Fa-kayfa kānat khuṭwatī muḡlatī*  
*Man minhumā ‘aṣābahu ḥadsī?*  
*Riḥlatunā khaḥqatun waswasat*  
*Kahamsati al-‘iṣba ‘i fī al-lamsī*  
*‘aw rashḥatin ‘ābiratin fī famī*  
*‘aw baṣmatin fī ḥāmishi al-ka ‘sī]*

The poet expresses his anger towards the gossip that has affected his personal life, deliberately repeating the sound of the letter “**Qaf**” in the verses and making it the rhyme of the poem, to convey meanings of rebuke and deterrence to those people. This is because the sound of “**Qaf**” — the voiceless uvular plosive — carries an echo of strength that mimics the sternness of a reprimand. He says<sup>[26]</sup>:

I grew weary, and with my distress they too were confined,

And so when I whispered, they awakened.  
 I am not Shamshon for my feelings to be cut,  
 The truth is bitter and unbearable.  
 We never agreed on love,  
 Divorce was inevitable.  
 The intention was to cut my tongue,  
 My luck is that the barber made a mistake.  
 If the hands were cut, my wrist would sprout again,  
 And the branches and leaves would return.  
*[Diqtu dhar'an wa hum bi-ḏīqī ḏāqū*  
*Wa li-hādhā lammā hamastu 'afāqū*  
*Lastu Shamshūna kay tuqaṣṣa shu 'ūrī*  
*'innahu al-ḥaqqu, murruhu lā yuṭāqu*  
*Naḥnu lam nattaḥiq 'ala al-ḥubbi yawman*  
*Kāna lā budda an yakūna al-ṭalāqu*  
*Kāna fī al-qaṣḍi 'an yuqassa lisānī*  
*Ḥusnu ḥazzī 'anna 'akhṭa'a al-ḥallāqu*  
*Law tuqaṣṣu al-yadāni tūriqu zindī*  
*Wa ta 'ūdu al-furū'u wa al-'awraqū]*

The poet repeatedly uses the letter “‘ayn” sound – a voiced pharyngeal fricative – throughout the following verses, making it the rhyme of the poem. It is noticeable that the “‘ayn” sound involves effort and difficulty in pronunciation, which the poet exploits to express his sorrows and pains. He says in his poem “**Thirst**”<sup>[26]</sup>:

Excuses are driven to your eyes from me,  
 And I know that I am inevitably falling.  
 I wept through the ages; no season remains  
 On its branch without tears have watered it.  
 And I know that in the end I am nothing but a sigh,  
 When the storms settle between the ribs.  
 My companions know me as stubborn and rebellious,  
 But between your hands, I am obedient.  
 I know there is a step between you and me,  
 Yet the distance between hearts is vast.  
 My postal to you is awind  
 My heart is a letter, signed by thunder  
 And Lightning is the stamp  
 heart a message carried by the to you,  
 So this departure from you is within you,  
 And Before I return to me, I will return to your eyes.  
*[Tusāqu 'ilā 'aynayka minnī al-dharā'i'u*

*Wa 'a'rifu 'annī lā maḥālah wāqi'u*  
*Bakaytu ṣunūfa al-dahri lam yabqa mawsimun*  
*'Alā far'ihī 'illā saqat-hu al-madāmi'*  
*Wa 'a'rifu 'annī fī al-nihāyah zaḥrah*  
*Matā sakanat bayna al-ḏulū'i al-zawābi'*  
*Wa ya'rifunī ṣaḥbī 'aṣiyyan mushākisan*  
*Wa lākinnanī mā bayna kaffayki ṭāyi'*  
*Wa 'a'rifu mā baynī wa baynaki khuṭwatun*  
*Wa lākin bu'da al-qalbi wa al-qalbu shāsi'*  
*Barīdī 'ilayka al-rīḥu, qalbī risālāh*  
*Muwagga'atun bi-l-ra'di, wa al-barqu ṭābi'*  
*Fa-hādhā raḥīlī 'anki fīki wa 'innanī*  
*Qubayla rujū'ī lī, li-'aynayki rāji']*

Another example of the repetition of the letter “‘ayn” sound, both within the verses and in the rhyme, is found in the poet’s words in his poem “**Farewell to One I Do Not Love**”<sup>[26]</sup>:

It’s not a farewell, so I do not say goodbye,  
 The sun disappears only to return as a ray.  
 It is fate — such is the departure around me,  
 I crossed the lands hand over hand.  
 Among people who spread and people who lost their way,  
 I see that all I have reached is severance.  
 And Palestine gave me a passport,  
 The color has faded since it became common.  
 Here among you, I lost my time,  
 And my place narrowed and my chest narrowed.  
*[Mā firāqan fa-lā aqūlu wadā'an*  
*Takhtaḥī al-shamsu kay ta'ūda shu'a'an*  
*Qadarun hakadhā raḥīlun ḥawlayya*  
*Qata'tu al-bilāda bā'an fa-bā'ā*  
*Bayna ahlin shā'ū wa ahlin 'aḏā'ū*  
*Mā 'arānī waṣaltu illā 'inqiṭā'an*  
*Wa Filasṭīnu ḥammaltnī jawāzan*  
*Bāhita al-lawni mundhu ṣārat mushā'ā*  
*Hā hunā baynakum 'aḏa'tu zamānī*  
*Wa makānī wa ḏāqa ṣadrī 'ittisā'ā]*

The repetition of the “‘ayn” sound clearly conveys the poet’s suffering and longing to return to Palestine. The “‘ayn” sound, which is difficult to pronounce, reflects the sorrows that get stuck in the poet’s throat, just as the sound itself is gutturally constrained.

## 5. Conclusions

In light of the foregoing, it becomes clear that the poet Ibrahim Al-Khatib is fully aware of the semantic significance conveyed by Arabic sounds. Each sound in Arabic carries a distinct meaning that sets it apart from other sounds, and each possesses an expressive power that it contributes to the text — as evidenced, for example, in the repetition of the letters *rā'* (*r*), *jīm* (*j*), and *qāf* (*g*). He seeks to utilize these phonetic energies, which are inherent characteristics of the Arabic language and its letters, to express hidden inner depths. The poet succeeds in creating sonic expressions with deep semantic implications by repeatedly using certain sounds throughout the poetic verses or as rhyme sounds at the end of verses in both classical and free verse poetry.

## Author Contributions

For research articles with several authors, a short paragraph specifying their individual contributions must be provided. The following statements should be used “Conceptualization, M.T.A.A. and A.A.A.-R.; methodology, M.T.A.A. and A.A.A.-R.; software, M.T.A.A. and A.A.A.-R.; validation, M.T.A.A. and A.A.A.-R.; formal analysis, M.T.A.A. and A.A.A.-R.; investigation, M.T.A.A. and A.A.A.-R.; resources, M.T.A.A. and A.A.A.-R.; data curation, M.T.A.A. and A.A.A.-R.; writing—original draft preparation, A.A.A.-R.; writing—review and editing, M.M.; visualization, M.T.A.A. and A.A.A.-R.; supervision, A.A.A.-R.; project administration, A.A.A.-R.. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.” Authorship must be limited to those who have contributed substantially to the work reported.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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