Our world seems to comprise a pandemonium of forces: there are forces exerted and forces resisted, forces obstructed and forces released. Force adds direction to what otherwise would appear truly chaotic; things move in a particular direction because force is involved. Or the opposite; things are brought to a standstill or they resist and remain in position. Either way, force appears as a fundamental kinetic phenomenon involving at least two entities displaying a tendency to either action or rest, a tendency that inevitably results in a balance of strength in which one entity turns out weaker or stronger than the other. Sometimes we experience such forceful interactions from a safe distance, and sometimes we are actively, even fatally, involved in them.

Though all this may give the reader the impression of an enthusiastic introduction to the world of physics, in our case it pertains ultimately to the world of language and cognition, more specifically, cognitive semantics. Even more specifically, it pertains to the unique semantic world of the Qur’ân—Islam’s sacred scripture par excellence. Given that we include cognition in our semantic stipulation it follows that we approach the Qur’ân from the perspective of an elementary human condition, being a messy condition of brains, bodies, and environments. From this almost crude claim, a somewhat grand hypothesis emerges: that the ubiquity of physical, causal, kinetic forces—being our phenomenological experience of such forces—interact with and give rise to certain basic pre-verbal conceptual schemas in our conceptual systems (basically our brains), which then impose themselves on our linguistic endeavours in grammar, syntax, and semantics (and where metaphors and metaphorical expressions hold a particular important role). In other words: the schematic pre-verbalised notions of force are inaugurated as dynamic linguistic expressions of force. In short: as force dynamic expressions. Such expressions are wide-spread to degree of ubiquity: from syntactical from everyday expressions like,
for instance, ‘I can’t stand it’ or ‘I was moved to tears’ to the highly imaginative and intricate specimen of literature like, for instance, Dylan Thomas’ famous first stanza of “The force that through the green fuse drives the flower”:

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees
Is my destroyer.
And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
My youth is bent by the same wintry fever.¹

The overarching intellectual framework supporting our initial grand hypothesis is cognitive linguistics, an emerging and cross-disciplinary enterprise of cognitive science and linguistics. Cognitive science could be described as the interdisciplinary study of mind and intelligence, utilizing insights from philosophy, psychology, artificial intelligence, neuroscience, linguistics, and anthropology. According to a sensus communis, cognitive linguistics could be characterized as an enterprise that

approaches language as an integrated part of human cognition which operates in interaction with and on the basis of the same principles as other cognitive faculties. C[ognitive] L[inguistics] is therefore defined as a linguistic theory which analyzes language in its relation to other cognitive domains and faculties such as bodily and mental experiences, image-schemas, perception, attention, memory, viewing frames, categorization, abstract thought, emotion, reasoning, inferencing, etc.²

The theoretical and methodological import from the cognitive sciences as well as cognitive linguistics has been noteworthy in religious studies, especially within the fields of ritual studies, psychology of religion and what could be termed ‘evolution and religion’-studies. Also worth mentioning is the rise of cognitive trends in Biblical studies, a trend Qur’ānic studies should be wise not to ignore according to the present author.³

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³ Notice the recent boom in cognitive orientation in Biblical studies, e.g. K. Fayearts (ed.), Metaphors and God-Talk (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999); K. Fayearts (ed.), The Bible