The Place of Language in the Holy Quran as a Linguistic Heritage

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Abstract

According to Muslims, the Quran is the main religious text of Islam which was verbally revealed to Prophet Muhammad (Peace. Be. Upon. Him.) through Jibril. It is said the holy book is the richest source of Islamic heritage. One of the significant parts of the Quran is its linguistic heritage. This paper strives to report the importance of Language in the Quran. A content-based analysis approach is used as the main tool of data collection and analysis. To achieve this goal, complete text of the Quran has been studied to extract related verses (ayahs). Then, a detailed explanation is given to show the significance of Language based on the Islamic religious text. The results of the related verses (ayahs) show that: 1. Islamic linguistic heritage is not limited to just one language despite the fact that the Quran is written in Arabic, 2. God has promised to save His heritage, 3. Various languages can be regarded as resources and motives which encourage Muslims to know each other better, 4. Languages are the singes of God.

Keywords: Quran, Prophet Muhammad, Content Analysis, Linguistics, Language

INTRODUCTION

The essential components of human communities are said to be morality and law. According to religious books, religion is the only support of the mentioned components. Following the mentioned books one can say that since religion is supporting the structure of societies, it is one pillar amongst others in social life's system. Therefore, in many cases the religion determines patterns of each society as a collection of behavioral patterns based on some special world views. As far as religious studies are concerned, there are some religions in the world based on the world views people have. Among largest religions of the world are Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaismetc. According to Islamic texts, Islam as one of the major world religions has its own patterns to control its affiliated society. The main resource to know the so called pattern is the Book of Islam that is known as the Quran.

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The Quran is the sacred text of Islam, which Muslims believe to be a revelation from God to Muhammad (who is considered in Islam to be the greatest Messenger and Prophet). The Quran consists of 114 units, known as Suras or verses.

Based on historical reports collected during the times on the one hand, it can be argued that literature in general and poetry in particular were very important during the 7th century that the Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H). Therefore, based on both conditional facts of the mentioned period and what (SharafEldin 2014) says, linguistic and literary features of the Quran are among the most important criteria of Islam (SharafEldin 2014). On the other hand, one of the most important aspects of God's blessings is power of speech and language (Sura Balad, 8-9) and also the most important thing after the Creation of the human is his language (Surah Alrahman 3-4). Or the Quran (Sura Room 22) confirms that God has accepted variations in languages and furthermore variations in languages are one of the Signs of God.

The mentioned facts encouraged us to have a research on the importance of language in the Quran. Language which is shown in the Quran by words like, Lesan (explicitly), bayan, notg, mantegh and hadith (implicitly) occupies a curtail role in the Quran from different aspects including: 1. the importance of language as language itself in the Quran, 2. The importance of language as a sign of God, 3. The importance of language as an irreducible Gift from God and 4.The importance of language, because of its effective "orders of discourse".

Some examples are given from the Quran with its translations containing these words in the following part and more details will be given in the discussion section:

هَذَا بَيَانٌ لِلنَّاسِ وَهُدًى وَمَوْعِظَةٌ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿ آل عمران ١٣٨﴾

This is a declaration to the people, guidance and an admonition to the cautious (138) AL-E-IMRAN

عَلَّمَهُ الْبَيَانَ ﴿الرحمن ٤﴾

And taught him its pronunciation (4) AR-RAHMAN

وَلَقَدْ نَعْلَمُ أَنَّهُمْ يَقُولُونَ إِنَّمَا يُعَلِّمُهُ بَشَرٌ لِسَانُ الَّذِي يُلْحِدُونَ إِلَيْهِ أَعْجَمِيٌّ وَهَذَا لِسَانٌ عَرَبِيٌّ مُبِينٌ ﴿النحل ١٠٣﴾

We know very well that they say: 'A mortal teaches him. 'The tongue of him at whom they hint is a non-Arab; and this is a clear Arabic tongue. (103) AN-NAHL

بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُبِينٍ ﴿شورى ١٩٥﴾

In a clear, Arabic tongue (195) AL-SHUARA

To sum up, the primary focus of this paper is on the close reading of ayahs related to language (Lesan and some other implicitly related words) concerning the four mentioned aspects of importance of language in the Quran in an attempt to understand this religion as a world view.

This study is aimed to consider the mentioned significant part of the Quran to report some unique linguistic features of a religious text to shed more light on human world views.

This study aims to answer the following research questions: What is linguistic heritage of the Quran? Is linguistic heritage in the Quran an Arab centric one? How does the Quran shape the Muslim's view about linguistics, languages and the language of the Arabs? Is language of holy or religious important?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of literature shows that language of the Quran has been discovered from different points of view as Al Hawarat et al (2015), Veysi and Ouraki (2015), Khorami (2014), Harb (2014), Khoshmanesh (2014), Khoshmanesh (2013), Khajehei and Shakarami (2012), Blackledge et al (2008), Al-Husseini (2007), El-Alwa (2006), Alkhateeb (2005), Zammit (2001), Nasr (1994) and Belhabib (1994) mentioned among others.

Al Hawarat et al (2015) as an interesting study proposing different analytical techniques for Quranic textual study focuses on statistical text mining. This study also uses these methods to present researchers with interesting linguistic information about Quranic text, such as word clouds and high term usage frequencies. All statistical experiments have been done with both Term Frequency (TF) and Term Frequency-Inverse Document Frequency (TF-IDF) methods. The findings of this study show that term frequencies have a strong relation with the way the text has been categorized for the analysis and that each of the TF and TF-IDF are suitable for word clustering and topic modeling, respectively.

Additionally, Veysi and Ouraki (2015) studied metaphor in the Quran. This study shows that Quranic metaphors go beyond simple literary and linguistic metaphors because they affect ways of religious thinking seriously. It also tries to show that language of the Quran is a mixture of different orders of discourse using different linguistic aspects like science, literature, morality etc. The most important finding of this study is that language of the Quran cannot be compared with other standard human languages.

Furthermore, Khorami (2014) has studied the issue of repetition in the Quran and how it has helped deepen its textual depth as a case study. This study proves that repetition is usually regarded as a weakness in linguistics and cognitive semantics but in the case of the Qur'an, repetition has been used extensively and has in fact strengthened the text.

Moreover, Harb (2014) is a study of inter-textuality in the Quran and Bible and how religious discourses influence the interpretation and meanings of these holy texts. By comparing specific word meanings in three different types of sources (in dictionaries, in Biblical and Qur'anic interpretations and in their respective true applications) the author has concluded that the considered words have different meanings in each source and that understanding these words should imply considering them in all of these

different sources of meaning, thus this paper recommends an inter-textual approach to studying the Bible and the Quran.

Further, Khoshmanesh (2014) says that language of the Qur'an is consistent with human nature because teachings of Islam are matched with humanity. According to his study, language of the Quran addresses human beings as equals and calls them to the unity because it is the language of nature. This aspect of the Quran should be the main focus of a number of studies because it will help the whole world to be united.

In a similar study, Khoshmanesh (2013) commented on the importance of reviewing the language of the Quran in contemporary contexts. This study confirms that today the language in general becomes as one of the most significant parts of civilization and Islam as a famous and followed religion owns an incredible capability of effectiveness on world culture and civilization based on its language i.e., language of the Quran. This language can be connected with all understandings all over the world and is not limited to geographical boundaries. Khoshmanesh (2013) adds that language of the Quran can contain the massage of world peace because of its universality.

In a recent study, Khajehei and Shakarami (2012) say that we can divide the Suras of the Qur'an into passages. This study shows that each passage has its own paragraph markers that are the indicator of subject change. These passages are developed through the Suras to construct some plausible concepts. According to this study, communicators in the Suras are relevant to understand the text. Also, the contribution of items of the Suras affects the understanding of the relevant concepts. Of course, this way of analyzing the Suras is proposed by Tabataba'i (1996).

Blackledge et al (2008) is a study in applied linguistics which investigates the relation between linguistics and heritage. Based on this study, people of different cultural and ethnic heritages negotiate with alien and foreign heritage by the way they apply linguistics. The results of this study point out to the fact that linguistics can be used to deny or assume a specific heritage in many creative and sophisticated ways. The researchers have also acknowledged that the relation between heritage and linguistics is in no way a simple relationship and is very complex.

Further, Al-Husseini (2007) said that all of the prophets need a miracle in order to prove that they come from God. For example, "Miracle rod" of Moses and "Resurrection the dead" by Jesus. So, Prophet Mohammed (P.B.U.H.) also needed a miracle. He had some miracles (such as "Splitting of the moon"), but the most important of his miracles was the Quran. Al-Husseini (2007) sees Miracle of the Quran in his eloquence, and its immortality.

Having applied sophisticated linguistic theory in the understanding of the Quran, El-Alwa (2006) brings forth a new approach in reading the Quran. She explains how the Quranic structure of the Suras should be seen within a process of human verbal communication. Her works try to explain the Quranic structure of the long Suras in cases which there is no evident common context in the passages. She recommends an approach which doesn't try to understand verses in necessarily one thematic unity.

Afterwards, Alkhateeb (2005) tries to examine the textual depth of the Quran by three case studies focusing on different examples of the Quran's linguistic and textual delicacies and features. These studies cover two specific issues in the Quran. The first is the Quran's use of number and gender. The second issue is related to how "ellipsis" in the Quran is used. This work concludes that the Quran's approach to these linguistic and grammatical issues has enriched and deepened its text.

Moreover, Zammit (2001) presented an in-depth and comparative study of the lexical roots of the Quran and it's relation to other and older languages. Qurānic Arabic has lexical relations with the Akkadian, Ugaritic, Aramaic, Syriac, Hebrew, Phoenician, Epigraphic South Arabian and Ge'ez languages. These lexical relations can also point to cultural similarities according to this study.

Nasr (1994) is a general and introductory guide to the Islamic religion and Islamic worldview. In one of the chapters of this book, Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1994) has claimed that Islamic literature and art are highly influenced by the Quran's linguistic features. He then further goes on explaining how the Quran's written and oral form (word based content) has become the basis of Islamic art. In fact, the "word based" form is in essence more appropriate for the deep and multilayer content of Islamic beliefs than other forms (like visualization), even in art. This is the reason why the Quran, as a pivotal linguistic heritage, has been deeply influential in the Islamic art.

Belhabib (1994) said that one of the reasons of miracle of the Holy Quran is his great arrangement and using the most eloquent and the most correct words. This study has also mentioned another reason for miracle of the Quran including Tahhadi and Accurate information about the future.

METHODOLOGY

A content-based analysis approach is used as the main tool of data collection and analysis.

Corpus

The Quran is the main corpus of the current study.

Procedure

Complete text of the Quran has been studied to extract related verses (ayahs) as an initial step. Then, a detailed explanation is given to show the significance of the Language based on the Islamic religious text.

RESULTS

The ayahs related to the language in the Quran are presented in the following part with their English translations. Each ayah is studied and explained. Totally, 21 ayahs of the Quran include language (Lesan) that shows explicitly the linguistics heritage of the Quran.

وَمِنْ قَبْلِهِ كِتَابُ مُوسَى إِمَامًا وَرَحْمَةً وَهَذَا كِتَابٌ مُصَدِّقٌ لِسَانًا عَرَبِيًّا لِيُنْذِرَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا وَبُشْرَى لِلْمُحْسِنِينَ (الاحقاف ١٢)

And those who disbelieve say of those who believe, "If it had [truly] been good, they would not have preceded us to it." And when they are not guided by it, they will say, "This is an ancient falsehood." (12) Al-Ahqaf

فَإِنَّمَا يَسَّرْنَاهُ بِلِسَانِكَ لِتُبَشِّرَ بِهِ الْمُتَّقِينَ وَتُنْذِرَ بِهِ قَوْمًا لُدًّا (مريم ٩٧)

So, [O Muhammad], we have only made Qur'an easy in the Arabic language that you may give good tidings thereby to the righteous and warn thereby a hostile people (97) MARYAM

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ (يوسف ٢)

We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an, in order that ye may learn wisdom (2) YUSUF

Based on these three ayahs and according to Tabataba'i (1996), one of the ways for protecting His Book (as a cultural heritage) is revelation of this holy book in the language of a specific ethnic group. This does not mean that this book is limited to one region or one ethnic. In other words, this "Arabic Quran" has accepted the book of Moses or Jesus in their languages. It can be argued that if the language of Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) and people of Hejaz was another language, take English for instance, it is certain that the Quran has been revealed in that specific language. According to Tabataba'i (1996), revelation of the Quran in Arabic does not mean that Arabic is better than other languages. As it is seen in Maryam (97), the Quran is simplified in the language of the receiver of the Quran (Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H)). It shows that the recipient's language, that is Arabic here, is the language of the Quran.

According to these two ayahs, we can proclaim that the Quran puts an emphasis on saving cultural heritage in general and saving linguistic heritage in particular.

وَلِسَانًا وَشَفَتَيْنِ (البلد ٩)

And a tongue and two lips (9) Al-Balad

About this ayah, Tabataba'i (1996) explains this specific verse in the context of the first twenty verses of Balad. In his view, the Quran is pointing to the constant difficulties of human beings throughout their lives and their inability to change this reality of life.Tabataba'i (1996) explains that in the forthcoming verses, the Quran is suggesting that people should be patient in the face of their difficulties and focus more on being righteous and spreading good deeds with all they have (instead of avoiding the trials and difficulties of life). Therefore, according to the reason used by Tabataba'i (1996), we can conclude that communication tools like our "lips and tongue" (language) are therefore our tools for spreading God's message and "Rahmah" (blessings). Language is meant to be used as part of "Ibadah" (worship) because it is a tool to earn God's grace and blessing. Also, the innateness of language can be proven according to this ayah.

وَأَخِي هَارُونُ هُوَ أَفْصَحُ مِنِّي لِسَانًا فَأَرْسِلْهُ مَعِيَ رِدْءًا يُصَدِّقُنِي إِنِّي أَخَافُ أَنْ يُكَذِّبُونِ (قصص ٣٤)

"And my brother Aaron - He is more eloquent in speech than I: so send him with me as a helper, to confirm (and strengthen) me: for I fear that they may accuse me of falsehood." (34)AL- QASAS

وَيَضِيقُ صَدْرِي وَلَا يَنْطَلِقُ لِسَانِي فَأَرْسِلْ إِلَى هَارُونَ (الشورى ١٣)

"My breast will be straightened. And my speech may not go (smoothly): so send unto Aaron (13)

AL-SHUARA

وَاحْلُلْ عُقْدَةً مِنْ لِسَانِي (طه ٢٧)

And remove the impediment from my speech (27) TA-HA

These three ayahs talk about a historical event that shows how Moses uses his or his brother's language. Maybe, the point about the significance of language is that Moses asks God to permit him take his brother (Aaron) with himself when he approaches Pharaoh.

فَإِنَّمَا يَسَّرْنَاهُ بِلِسَانِكَ لِتُبَشِّرَ بِهِ الْمُتَّقِينَ وَتُنْذِرَ بِهِ قَوْمًا لُدًّا (مريم ٩٧)

We have made it easy in your own tongue in order that you proclaim the glad tidings to the cautious and give warning to a stubborn nation (97) MARYAM

In ayah of Mary, 97, it is necessary to explain about the word "يَسَّرْنَاهُ". This word means ''we (God) have simplified the language by your tongue (prophet tongue)''. That means the language should be easy to state and communicate with others. Especially the language of the prophet should be simpler in his prophetic mission to be understood by people. Therefore, the language of religious teaching should be understandable and apprehensible for common people. The language of the Quran is fluent and frank to state facts to guide people and to prohibit them to live in peace and security.

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا بِلِسَانِ قَوْمِهِ لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمْ فَيُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ (ابراهيم ٤)

We sent not a messenger except (to teach) in the language of his (own) people, in order to make (things) clear to them. Now Allah leaves as straying those whom He pleases and guides whom He pleases: and He is exalted in power, full of Wisdom (4) ABRAHAM

In Tafsir al-Mizan (Tabataba'i 1996) the importance of preserving the language has been mentioned. The form of words of Arabic and its important role is important to maintain the recording of revelation verses. In Sura ABRAHAM, 4, God said to Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H); if these verses have not been converting to readable and understandable language and had not sent in Arabic language, your ethnic (who are Arabs) could not understand the secrets of verses and you just understand it. In other words, two factors are involved to save the Quran: first; revelation is a formal revelation that is the Quran was revealed by means of a language. Second, this form is in Arabic language which was the language of its recipients. And if it was not revealed in the

Arabic language, some parts of it were remained hidden for people / ethnic groups, since they were not English for example, but Arabs.

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافُ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَأَلْوَانِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِلْعَالِمِينَ (روم ٢٢)

And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colors: verily in that are Signs for those who know (22) AL-ROOM

According to his ayah, God sent the Prophet based on the language of the target ethnic groups to guide and teach them the religious teachings and propositions. If the Quran remained with God as it was, and it was not revealed in an understandable Arabic language, people could not understand it. Therefore, God sent the Quran in the current language to warm people about bad deeds and to encourage people to do good deeds; by means of a language that is understandable for the recipient ethnic group. As far as linguistic and cultural studies are concerned, language of each society is one of the main foundations of society`s cultural heritage. Simplicity of language makes issues understandable for people and it makes the concepts and contents in minds of people to be more stable and this stability can preserve the language of that ethnic group. To put it other way, according this ayah one of the factors which can preserve the cultural heritage is preserving the linguistic heritage of that society approved by the Quran. Based on these verses, each language has its own role and place and despite many differences among all ethnic groups and languages, all peoples are recognized and respected from the viewpoint of the Quran. Therefore, ethnic and linguistic differences cannot be a symbol of power for the man and Faith in God is the point of departure among men and women.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Regarding the presented and discussed ayahs, we can conclude that language occupies not an important but a fundamental role in the Quran as the main text of Islam. Different ayahs of the Quran show that this doctrine emphasizes on preserving Arabic as the language of the Quran and all languages as the signs of God. It also puts an emphasis on preserving culture of society as well as its linguistic heritage on the one hand and preserving ethnic in general. Some other linguistic view points of the Qur'an are that it confirms the innateness of language since innateness creation is the manifestation of God's word according to the Text. Sometimes the Quran guides people to preserve religious heritages by means of their language. There are some sociolinguistic applications that are obtained from the discussed ayahs as: 1: People are not allowed to scoff at others. 2. People are advised to know each other by means of their language. A point could be paraphrased here; the Quran advises people to know each other that will result in a correct interaction. In a case the cognition of people is not true, and then their interaction will cause some untrue things like discrimination.

Some other applications of the discussed ayahs are about language and policy and language death as: since one language death leads to the death of one part of world

heritage, you are not allowed to kill any other minor language. This finding proves that globalization should not lead to the disappearing of the minority languages. According to the Quran, no major language is allowed to eat up other miner languages (which are signs of God). It also can be argued that since language is a sign of God according to the Quran, and the Quran proclaims that linguistic differences which are a sign of God for the people who are wise but a tool to ridicule and discriminate over others for unwise. In other words, the Qur'an seriously emphasizes on knowing each other and not discriminates over others.

The other point is about preserving religious heritage in the Quran. The discussed ayahs show that Language is a tool to earn God's grace and blessing, and also language is a part of "Ibadah". In other words, language is a tool to safeguard the Quran as a linguistic heritage.

Another point is the emergence of linguistic sciences specifically syntax and morphology soon after revelation of the Quran (Mohajerani, 1995) that shows the overall importance of language and Quranic language specifically. This finding also confirms the importance of concerning and preserving linguistic heritage from the view point of the Quran. The Quran also has a dialectical relation with linguistic and cultural heritage.

To conclude, it can be said that the Quran embraces linguistics differences and commands to respect all languages as an essential element of any culture and no one is permitted to scoff at others. To save a culture, we are advised to save its language that is one of the elements of each culture. Therefore, the Quran as a linguistic heritage is not inclined to one specific language even Arabic.

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