

## Role of Linguistics in 21st Century Muslim World

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The massive growth in telecommunication and information technology in recent years has revolutionized the world and has rightly attracted a great deal of attention from scholars of different disciplines including linguists. Since communication studies mainly revolve around language, linguistics has an inevitable role to play in twenty-first century world, in general, and Muslim world in particular. Muslims in the coming century can not but pay due attention to the field of linguistics and they need to explore the communication facilities to Islamize the whole system.

### (A) Linguistics and Islamic Studies

In recent years, Islamic scholars have become increasingly aware of linguistics as a discipline which seems to hold considerable promise in the area of Qur'anic interpretation. The need for linguistic explanation of the Qur'anic verses was realized quite early in the eighth century by Arab grammarians. Despite their theoretical diversity, that was epitomized in the schools of Kufa and Basra, Arab grammarians developed linguistic rules for the interpretation of the Qur'an and the Hadith. This discipline has become more effective in recent times for the Qur'anic interpretation where one is supposed to walk along the edge of meaning in an attempt to talk insight fully about spiritual realities.

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Regardless of a particular linguistic model, which, one wishes to employ as the basis for the interpretation of the Qur'an and the Hadith, one must recognize that linguistic analysis can explore ultra-communicative dimensions of the Qur'an and the Hadith. The Qur'anic verses have used many a word in a special sense apart from its lexical meaning at various places. For example, the Quranic expression *kufr* has a completely different meaning not only from its ordinary Arabic usage but also from its terminological connotation (Maulana Maududi, 1949). For a proper understanding and appreciation of the Qur'anic expressions, linguistics can make a major contribution especially in the field of Qur'anic semantics which has been revolutionized by the development of the notion of componential analysis. Concern for language as a part of the culture has also resulted in a greater emphasis upon the context of a word. A word is thus largely meaningless apart from its context and it is only within the various contexts that the semantic structure of a word can be defined.

**(A. 1.) Stylistic Exegesis**

The interpretive elements of linguistics may highlight the stylistic components of the Qur'anic verses. A linguistic analysis of the language of the Qur'an helps in drawing a distinction between tropes, which are stylistic effects created by choices in grammar and vocabulary, and schemes, which are segmental phonemic effects. The identification of the former may point out structural ambiguity of *mutashābihāt* verses of the Qur'an. The stylistic analysis will make it possible for one to describe the precise limit of the obscurity of the *mutashābihāt* verses. The latter, i.e., schemes, exhibit rhythmic pattering of the Qur'anic language. The sound patterns of the Qur'an have their own rhythm which can only be appreciated and described in a full stylistic study.

**(A.2.) Qur'anic Translation**

Linguistics can play a major role in the area of Qur'anic translation. It is obvious that Muslims can not rely upon the traditional views and attitude towards

the Quranic translation. They will move to utilize new techniques to understand the Quranic verses in a better way. In translating the Quranic idiomatic expressions, the translator is faced with many acute problems. No word of translation can be the exact equivalent of the word in the Qur'anic language, that is to say, all types of Quranic translations involve:

- I) loss of information
- II) addition of information
- III) skewing of information.

These problems can be amicably solved by using linguistic techniques which can go a long way in the scientific analysis of the Qur'anic language.

#### **B) Linguistics and Mass Communication**

The contemporary Muslim world is lagging far behind in the use of mass communication systems. The media aggression is considered a communicative weapon to gain power and supremacy over others in the Western world. In the modern Western media, the propaganda machineries are being blatantly used not simply for solidifying and harmonizing the society, but for portraying Islam and Muslims as aggressors, fanatics, terrorists, militants and the much publicized fundamentalists. It is impossible even to estimate the amount of money and effort that is being spent on propaganda machineries. The global population is under tremendous pressure of the ceaseless flow of manipulated messages. The persuasiveness of these messages assumes a predetermined outcome. One can not counter the effects of persuasive communicative systems of Western media unless one is aware of the psycho-linguistic aspects of communication management. Propaganda has message values which are influenced by the psychological states of the sender and the receiver of the message. The effect of such propaganda can easily be countered by analyzing the mental representation of the messages which have a number of different conceptualizations.

With the rise of commercialism in our society the role of advertisement has become vital. Today, advertising is not only confined to the print media but has



spread itself to films, radio, shopping bags, clothing, posters, banners, stickers, television and video. Advertising as a tool is used to reach a large number of people with totally controlled and planned messages.

In present day advertising, sex plays a dominant role in promoting different items and products. A product is made glamorous and highly attractive by promoting it through beautiful models. Recent researches in this area suggest that teenagers obtain a substantial amount of information about sex and sex related matters only through these advertisements. New media technologies such as cable television and satellite television have undoubtedly lead to much wider dissemination of sex based advertising messages. To meet the challenges of this cultural onslaught, copy writers should be encouraged to translate Islamic ideals into catchy, memorable and attractive advertisement messages in the best possible way. It can facilitate not only the advertisement of the products but also the propagation of Islamic ideals. A good advertising copy writer must have an idea about his socio-cultural responsibilities. The motivation of consumers is based on pure emotions. As such it is upto the copy writer to exploit the religious emotions of the consumers. An advertising copy based on religious sentiments as motivators should stress on comfort, enjoyment, coolness and peaceful way of living. Advertising can also be used as a tool to popularize Islamic messages among non believers. Rationalization can be used as an advertising strategy to popularize Islamic philosophy. It first emotionalizes and then rationalizes the campaign. An analysis of the message, medium and target group may help the copy writer in holding up a very effective advertising campaign.

Muslims do not lack in financial or intellectual resources to counter the media aggression. What is needed is a planned programme to exploit the modern communication network. All this requires sound linguistic policies which may counter the effect of western media. In order to frame such linguistic policies, Muslim scholars will have to keep themselves updated in the latest linguistic techniques.

### **C) Language Planning and the Muslim World**

Language planning involves the formulation and implementation of policies about the languages and linguistic varieties of a country. The Muslim world in the 21st century requires definite language policies and systematic planning depending on the geo-politico -cultural setting of different Muslim countries. These policies should provide due position to the local languages, Arabic and English. In support of the observation made by Sayyid Muhammad Syeed ( 1989) in his article, “Islamization of Linguistics”, we propose that languages of the Muslim world should be listed, categorized and analyzed through a proper standardization process.

Given the religio- cultural significance of Arabic language, its position can be elevated to that of a link language in the Muslim world. The role of Arabic as a link language will facilitate:

- a) a pan Islamic communicative network. This may open up a global Islamic channel between the Muslim countries. Exchange of views between citizens of different Muslims countries in such a link language will enhance a common religio-cultural proximity among these countries as well as their citizens. Moreover, the local languages of the Muslim world can borrow more words from Arabic to coin technical technology for scientific studies, educational technologies and mass communication.
- b) a gateway to Islamic knowledge and resources particularly to the citizens of non- Arab countries. Knowing Arabic will open the door for Muslims to grasp clearly the vast range of meaning in the Qur’an and the Hadith.

Since culture is regarded as an integrated whole with language as its fundamental component; changes in several departments of culture can not be regarded as distinct and unrelated. Therefore, change in the language aspect of culture must sooner or later result in change in other aspects of culture. Seeing the interrelationship of language and culture, the usage and role of Arabic becomes manifold in the Muslims world.

To cater the needs of Muslims to learn Arabic, the linguists of the Muslims

world should give prime importance to the Arabic language teaching programmes. They should themselves achieve command over Arabic language for pedagogical purposes.

Moreover, it needs to be spelt out that to cope with the developments in the contemporary world, especially the West, the role and status of English and other international languages should not be undermined. In fact, a total command over English is a pre-requisite to survive in accordance with the present world order.

One of the most important ways in which a country's language policy manifests itself is the kind of provisions it makes for the linguistic education and proficiency of children. It must take care as to which language and language varieties are to be taught in schools, from what age and for how long?

The only solution to this problem is maintaining an equal balance between the languages. From the primary school level, the student should be taught his or her mother tongue. English should be introduced in order to make the students competent in the Western education and compulsory Arabic should be incorporated at least at the junior school level which will serve as a student's gateway to Islamic knowledge.

The Muslim linguists, in this century, can exploit the blessings of the high-tech scientific equipments like computers. Formulation of pro-Islamic software programmes, with linguistics regulating its language, will contribute immensely to upgrade the Muslims.

#### **D) Linguistics and Islamic Literature for Children**

Popularization of Islam through juvenile literature may be very effective in order to teach our future generations the correct path of Islam. While teaching alphabets, instead of 'A' for 'Apple', 'B' for 'Bat' linguists can propose lessons like 'A' for 'Allah', 'B' for 'Bismillah', etc.

Comics depicting stories of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and his companions as well as history of Islam can be introduced. Islamic literature through computers will also enable children to learn Islam in accordance with the modern scientific



development. Linguists can grade the language of Islamic literature for children. The gradation of the language will help the writer to write in a language that may easily be grasped by children without taxing their mind.

### **Conclusion**

In the backdrop of the above deliberations, it follows that linguistics provides exact tools of analysis based on the dynamic function of language and it is to these that one ought to look for significant developments of Islamic philosophy in future. The interrelationship of linguistic science and Islamic philosophy may be covered under the term "Islamic Theo-linguistics".

Muslim linguists should initiate in opening more linguistic institutions to make comprehensive linguistic studies in Islamic perspective. The Muslim world may think of forming an international linguistic centre which may have regional centres in different Muslim countries. A pan-Islamic linguistic society will definitely add a new fragrance to the field of linguistics.

Finally, we would like to draw the attention of theologians as well as linguists to think deeply into the notions highlighted in this paper. We do not hesitate to make our humble submission that we are neither Islamic scholars nor authorities in linguistics. But our allegiance to our discipline and deep feelings to Islam have motivated us to dream of a bridge which would link up linguistics with Islam. The Muslim scholars of the coming century need to establish new fields of thought and Islamic theo-linguistics may prove to be a potentially dominant sub-discipline in the lingua- spiritual twenty first century Muslim civilization.

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