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Language, Reality and Civilisation
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Inroduction

What is the reality of human language? How does it relate to the essential being of man and the realization of his multifarious capabilities and potentials in the various domains of life and existence in this world? These are certain issues whose investigation has become more than ever relevant in our contemporary contexts. This paper is an attempt to search and shed light on some aspects of this matter, which I believe should be taken up in a much more comprehensive manner by more competent and knowledgeable persons. Prior to developing an Islamic discourse on the nature and reality of language, I think it would be worthwhile to dwell a bit upon the role and significance accorded to language in our contemporary world.

Fundamental limitation of the western methodology in linguistics

Contemporary debates on language revolve around many crucial issues even including the question on whether there exists anything called a language at all. This question has arisen in the scientific study of language called linguistics due to an important historical reason related to the emergence of modern science. The western scientific tradition has first experienced the separation of empirical science from philosophy and the consequent subjugation of philosophy to a role of interpreting the findings of the scientific 'discoveries'. This handicapped science, which feigned supremacy as man's highest and most trustworthy intellectual pursuit, with its strictly materialistic and empiricist methodology and goals accorded matter or physicality the absolute referential status of reality. The biological, chemical and other types of properties derived 'scientific' legitimacy from the 'fundamental' reality of matter. It is as if reality springs out from physical matter. The various dimensions of reality emerge out from the various levels of organization of matter. Thus even mind and language is described "the necessary result of a particular organization of matter". Thus the history of scientific progress and the concomitant proliferation into the multifarious disciplines and specialisations has totally imbibed to this spirit of the shadow of physical reality reflected in many other derivative dimensions. Thus the tradition of modern science instituted for a minor aspect of reality, i.e. matter, fundamental and foundational relevance and turned the process of intellectual enquiry upside down, that is, rather than from the source of divine guidance through derivative ideas into the minor details of existence including matter, to that from matter to other dimensions. Over riding this spirit of the upside down science is the Cartesian phantom of the separation of mind and matter.

Chomskian Linguistics

The prominent linguist, political activist and thinker, Noam Chomsky, represent one of the most noteworthy traditions in the field of contemporary linguistics. He argues for the phenomenon of language a linguistic-mentalistic reality of its own, which is defined in terms of the derivation mentioned above in the spirit of contemporary scientific naturalism. Chomsky has termed the approach that he was to develop for the study of language as internalistic-naturalistic. By being naturalistic, what is meant is the language is considered to be a natural biological object. Hence the methodology of natural sciences should be used for the study of languages. Here the characteristic, 'linguistic' is accorded as much legitimacy as any other natural characteristic like biological, chemical etc. and hence does not necessarily seek reductionistic theorization or interpretation strictly in terms of neural, physiological or chemical structure. That is, language as an entity has a dimension of its own even beyond the neuro-physiological or chemical basis according to which its mechanisms may be explained. But at the same time it arises as a property of the biological being, an outcome of its organization. This perspective does not discourage inquiries into the correlation between the linguistic and say, the electro-physiological behavior of the brain, but only states that the former cannot be totally subsumed under the latter. In fact, even the quest for unification of the perspectives provided by the various scientific disciplines dealing with various aspects of the world is encouraged. But it should not turn out to be a reductionistic enterprise as mentioned above. Chomsky seems to advocate the view that unification should lead to the alteration and extension of the current perspective on what actually constitutes matter and this should be based on the naturalistic inquiry in the various domains. Thus while claiming for linguistics an independent scientific and naturalistic status of its own the derivative materialistic dimension is still the reference point in defining language, language faculty of human beings and the science of linguistics. This takes our attention to an important fact that is neglected in discussions on the unification theories, which are the spin-offs of the current scientific tradition. Unification on what basis? - Is it by attributing overwhelming

dimensions to matter or should it be on any other foundation? - This is an important question that should be raised and followed from the Islamic perspective. Chomsky's naturalism stresses the utilization of the same investigative methods in the field of language as is used in the study of other natural objects. Thus it cannot do away with many of the historically accrued and ideological contents of the western 'Renaissance' tradition. Chomsky's naturalism stresses the following facts.

1. It negates the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter.
2. It opposes the reductionism of the linguistic into neuro-physiological or any other material dimension.
3. It differentiates natural languages from special purpose artificial languages and formal languages based on developments in computation theories and formal logic.
4. It states that the Science Forming Faculty (SFF) of man is a biological system like any other aspect of mind and hence has its own limitations. Thus these inherent limitations of SFF may make it impossible for it to gain what is called a 'scientific' understanding of many aspects of all phenomena including language. That is, they may remain 'mysteries' forever. This does not preclude a 'poetic' or 'philosophical' or any other type of understanding of them. Through this argument, I think he is lending ground to a view of essential separations between the various ways of perceptions.

This Chomskian conception of the SFF attempts to absolutize and to render a theoretical status to the division between science and philosophy, which is only a recent historical phenomenon and has axiomatic validity only in the western epistemological tradition. In fact it is this division that is among the prime reasons for the tragic failures of the modern intellectual achievements. The fundamental flaw of the concept of the Language Faculty is that it is also derived from such a Cartesian sensibility. Thus it cannot hope to overcome the inherent handicaps of the western tradition of intellectual and scientific inquiry.

The internalistic perspective is derived from the naturalistic viewpoint. Thus language is considered to be an innate faculty, a biological organ of each individual. Some parts of the brain and hence mind is dedicated to the knowledge and use of language. This system of language in the mind he calls the Language Faculty, a kind of language organ, which need not be specifically located at a particular region of the brain, but may be even spread out through the entire system of brain and mind of the human being. He says that this is unique to human beings. Nothing similar is found in any other species. An evolutionistic origin and development through different species cannot be traced in the case of the language faculty of mankind. This innate, genetically determined language faculty is the same for all human beings in its initial state at birth of an individual. Then it, just like any other organ of the child, grows naturally in different environments, through different 'language states'. The impact of environment on language growth is minimal as is the case with all other organs. The different language states correspond to different stages of the language development of an individual or to different dialects or even different languages. Thus for each person at any moment, he has a particular language state, the I-Language (I stands for internal, individual or intensional). One important implication of the internalist perspective is that all languages are like each other to an overwhelming extent despite the superficial diversities and differences among them. There are very slight differences between them. This fact is not much obvious since we assign complex systems of rules, namely grammar for each individual language, which is specific to each language since it concentrates on the need of descriptive adequacy, that is the grammar should be able to give an accurate and exhaustive account of all properties of the language. This stresses on emphasizing the difference of each language and its unique features. Chomsky says that the concept of 'explanatory adequacy' rather than 'descriptive adequacy', which asks for a 'theory of language, which explains that each particular language can be derived from a uniform initial state under the "boundary conditions" set by experience' can take the study of languages to deeper levels. This is the consequence of the internalist perspective. The theoretical approaches that he has developed has led to the consideration of traditional grammar as nothing more than 'taxonomic artifacts useful for the informal description perhaps but with no theoretical standing'.

The last century has witnessed important breakthroughs in the study of language and mind. These cannot be disassociated from the advancements in the fields of formal logic, discrete mathematics, computation theories etc. It became possible to give the age-long perception about language as ' a finite means with a limited number of characters and rules capable of generating an infinite number of meaningful expressions' clear articulation in terms of the computational principles that have been developed in the above-mentioned fields. Many other advancements in the field structural linguistics and findings of the earlier philological tradition investigating the evolution and classification of languages has also merged into produce the paradigm of generative- transformational grammar. Chomsky says that the traditional grammars and conventions in the linguistic studies proved inadequate in the light of the new findings, in the process of unearthing the inherent,

elementary properties and simple structural features through which the intricate and complex superficial aspects and diversities of various languages can be explained. The method of generative grammar in its initial stages had relied to a large extent on traditional grammar. This perception led to further breakthroughs in linguistics.

These implications derived from the internalist perspective and generative grammar has led to the development of two other paradigms in linguistics, which are initiated by Chomsky. One is the theory of 'Principles and Parameters' articulated in the work, " Knowledge of Language" (1986). The other is the 'Minimalist Program', which was published as a book with the same name in 1995. The first approach says that the innate language faculty of human beings irrespective of all differences in languages and individuals has certain common properties or Principles and certain slight options of variation called Parameters, whose variations are determined by the environment and experience. These slight parametric variations create all the diversities among languages. This approach entrenches the conception of the fundamental unity of all languages and does away with traditional grammar as mere 'taxonomic artifacts' without any other relevance or reality in determining the structure of language. " We can think of the initial state of the faculty of language as a fixed network connected to a switch box, the network is constituted of the principles of the language, while switches are the options to be determined by experience. When the switches are set in one way, we have Bantu, when they are set another way, we have Japanese. Each particular human language is identified as a particular setting of switches..." (Chomsky 1997, Part I, P. 6)

I think this programme has gone forward in a direction that views human mind and brain as a modularized system in which the language subsystem interacts with many other subsystems of the mind through 'interfaces' and that the 'optimal design' of a language is predominantly dependent on the 'legibility conditions' at the 'interfaces' with the other subsystems such that the language faculty can communicate with them through its linguistic expressions, the 'instructions' for thought and action. This is the approach of Minimalism or the Minimalist Program. The minimalist program puts emphasis on two aspects of language, namely, sound and meaning. It seeks to demonstrate that the universal properties of languages are explicable in terms of principles of optimum design, that are defined in terms of the requirement of legibility at the 'interfaces': the most important interfaces referred to here are that between the language faculty and the sensori-motor (coordinating perception and action) and the conceptual-intentional (coordinating thought and action) systems of human mind/brain. The first among these two read and interpret the phonetic representations of the expressions generated by the language and have in themselves a specific design that enables them to interpret only certain particular phonetic properties. The latter one requires that the expressions generated by the language should have only particular types of semantic representations. These two legibility conditions are paramount in the inbuilt design of a language.

According to Chomsky, the association between the most elementary aspects of sound and meaning is understood to be arbitrary. There are properties of sound and meaning called phonetic features and semantic features respectively, which are interpreted at the respective interface levels with the other subsystems of mind/brain. These features are assembled into lexical items from which expressions can be constructed. The language faculty of all human beings has an identical and invariant computational system (with very minute variations), which can generate lexical items from the above-mentioned features. The same computational system generates expressions from the lexical items. The diversities among human languages is not due to the computational system but due to what is called the lexicon, which is another part of the internal language system. The lexicon is the list of the lexical items and certain basic inflectional properties of language. The items of the lexicon are acquired from exposure to the environment and experience. The lexical items contain the semantic features and phonetic features, which can be interpreted at the semantic interface and phonetic interface respectively as mentioned above and the uninterpretable features which are not interpreted at either interface. These uninterpretable features are a special property of human languages distinguishing them even from artificial languages and are thought to be dictated by the legibility conditions imposed upon human language by the architecture of human mind/brain.

Other trends in the contemporary western thought on language

Contemporary studies on human language is called linguistics and is differentiated from the earlier tradition of philology in important manners. Philology concentrated more on the historical development of languages and relationship between various languages. Contemporary linguistics is more interested in analyzing the structure of all languages, which is more or less understood to be the same for all languages. Thus linguistics

has succeeded in bringing the study of languages closer to the tradition of the existing 'hard' sciences and mathematical disciplines.   It is emerging as a very important scientific discipline with tremendous relevance in the domains of science and technology. It is worthwhile to look into the other perspectives also that have emerged in the western tradition of the study and thought on language. Ferdinand de Saussure (CE. 1857-1913) who is understood to be the forerunner of   Structuralism has said that meanings are given to words in a purely arbitrary manner. That is concepts and sounds have only arbitrary links. This is the negation of any innate relation between a word and what it signifies. The implications of this separation are phenomenal and ultimately lead to the negation of the fundamental ability of a language to represent and signify reality. This makes even scripturalist religion impossible and appropriates language as the new domain of colonialism after it has taken hold and debased the domains of nature and the human existence. This conception of 'arbitrariness' can be traced back to Plato. Thus language is viewed as not reflecting the world and experience, but as a sign system, which stands on its own. Saussure's mode of studying language also coincided with the end of the earlier historical philological approach. He can be said to have even pioneered the emergence of modern linguistics, which views language as a system with a structure of its own. He said that the meaning of words are relational in the sense that the meaning of each word is fixed by the position of that word in a syntagmatic chain, which is a chain of words related in function and meaning, such that any of them could be substituted for any other in any sentence or expression; e.g. hovel, shed, hut, house, mansion, palace. The alteration or removal of any word from the chain will alter the meaning of any of the remaining words. "In a language there are only differences, without fixed terms". Meaning is thus the creation of how we perceive the world and is not an absolute truth that dwells beyond the domain of language. Meaning is constructed and expressed within language itself. He used the term 'langue' to represent the overall structure or system of language and the term 'parole' to denote a particular expression or utterance that attains meaning in relation to the larger structure, that is langue. Thus our perception itself is shaped by language and not by any external realities. These arguments were more forcefully articulated by Structuralism proper, which became dominant in the 1950's, pioneered in by Claude Levi-Strauss. Structuralism stressed the importance of language as a whole structure and said that meaning is not inherent to any word, but is attributed to it by human beings.

Relation between the oral and written aspects of language

Along with the dichotomy and arbitrary relation between external reality and experience, the western tradition also theorizes the division between the oral and the written. The spoken and the written are not considered to be at par and representing two aspects of the same reality of language. A sort of hierarchical difference is assumed between them. The oral is thought to have historically preceded the written and the written is considered to have a dependent and derivative relation to the oral. Aristotle has said: " Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words". Saussure has said that, "language and writing are two distinct systems of signs, the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first". " The linguistic object is not defined by the combination of the written word and the spoken word: the spoken alone constitutes the object". (Cours de linguistique générale, P; 46). He gave primacy to the spoken and proposed the semiological terms of signifier and signified in the context of the spoken word (vox). The dichotomy between the spoken and the written are further extended and kept they are kept at opposing poles by the western linguistic thought. This attitude has a long history and can be traced back to the times of Plato himself (BCE 4th and 5th centuries). This was the era in which it is said that that oral tradition of the Greeks had almost wholly given way to the literary tradition. Plato in his works like 'Phaedrus' and 'Seventh Letter' criticizes writing "as a mechanical, inhuman way of processing knowledge, unresponsive to question and destructive of memory..." Paradoxically Plato himself operated within the literary tradition and he is said to have criticized the oral poets also. This dichotomy and hostility between the written and the spoken is yet to be bridged in the western tradition. Many like Rousseau and Saussure have dwelled on the 'tyranny of writing' over speech. These are all parts of the specific experiences of the west, which has segregated and polarized integral aspects of many entities into incompatible poles like soul/body, science/ religion, subject/object, mind/matter, orality/literacy etc and imposed the tyranny or hegemony of the one over the other, resulting in severe backlashes every now and then. This particular problem of orality Vs literacy has to do with a misconception that writing has no other function than recording the spoken and thus doing away with the need for memorizing things. But history proves the fact that things were preserved much better in the oral tradition than in the written tradition. Investigations have proved that the orally preserved material, whether it be the Homeric poems, Vedic Hymns or any of the oral traditions throughout the world are found to have an inherent formulaic, metric structure which facilitates the easy memorization and transmission of

these things and thus the preservation of their languages and ideas through thousands of years. Thus written has not originated for just preserving these. There was no historical urgency for this. This was taken care of in a much better manner by the oral tradition itself. In the history of Islam also the Arabic script has not originated and developed for this purpose. Even with the written text of Al-Qur'an intact, the oral tradition of memorizing and reciting Qur'an has only grown stronger as time passed by. The Qur'an itself is said to have a rhythm, melody and harmony which cannot be described in terms of any metrical or prosodic structure identified or defined technically by humans, but only in terms of the rhythm and harmony that we can perceive the grand divine scheme of the nature of the created things of Allah. The Qur'anic conception of Tartil refers to a primordial tradition of chanting the verses of God taught to man by Him. The written in actuality does not attempt to substitute nor should it attempt to substitute any of the functions of the oral mode. It has its own importance and role in the scheme of transmission and growth of knowledge.

Jacques Derrida criticizes the view that the written word is a derivative of the spoken word. But he does so by saying that written is a quite different performance on its own. He criticizes 'Logo centrism', that is, taking the spoken word or logos   as primary and written word as derivative of it. But he moves even beyond it to negate the representational relation between the written and the spoken on the one hand and between both of these with the 'extra mental' ideas on the other hand. Thus it implies that language cannot refer to anything beyond it. The post-Structuralist perspectives, which followed structuralism further emphasizes the negation of the moorings of linguistic expressions in the realities and truths in the domains beyond language. Two of the most important figures associated with this movement are Roland Barthes (who moved on beyond structuralism to post-Structuralism) and Jacques Derrida. Barthes is associated with the famous pronounce-ment, ' the death of the author', which is also the name of an essay published by him in 1968. In that essay he says that a literary text upon its composition becomes totally independent of any notions or intentions that the author has 'crafted' into the work as the unifying factor of the text. Thus all the limitations of context and intent set by the author are removed. Thus the author is as if he is dead in the text and a reader is born who has the freedom to read and play freely in the in the meanings generated by the text without any bounds of textual authority. The text is produced by the reader. It is said that post-Structuralism though anarchistic in the beginning by expounding textual permissiveness to revel and play in the floating meanings of the text became much more disciplined in the latter days by exhorting to dismantle all sources of textual power implicit in the work.

Jacques Derrida's perspectives, which have emerged in the late 1960's, are grounded in the concept of decentering the intellectual universe of modern times. It has to do with the significant upheavals, collapses and disillusionment associated with Renaissance, Enlightenment and Western civilisational progress, witnessed in the twentieth century of the C. E. Europe was ousted from the role of the standard bearer of civilisation against which all 'others' could be measured. Absolute notions of time and space were destroyed by the theory of Relativity. The illusion of the steady material progress in the western civilisational paradigm was shattered, thus the intellectual world lost all its norms, moorings and centres and thus became decentered. There are no fixed, absolute reference points. This has led to the emergence of a new world of 'free play', which is devoid of all sources of authority and in which there are no facts but only interpretations. Thus he introduced deconstruction as the method of decentering a text. That is demonstrating that the text is fragmented, self-divided, self-contradictory and centerless despite its presumption that it is a unified artifact. " There is nothing outside the text" is a famous phrase associated with Derrida.

" The writer writes in a language and in a logic whose proper system, laws and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely. He uses them by only letting himself, after a fashion and up to a point, be governed by the system. And the reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the pattern of the language that he uses. This relationship is not a certain quantitative distribution of shadow and light, of weakness or of force but a signifying structure that critical reading should produce".   (Derrida, Of Grammatology, P. 158)

" Reading... cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it... or toward a signified outside the text whose content could take place, could have taken place, outside of language, that is to say, in the sense that we give here to that word, outside of writing in general. That is why the methodological considerations that we risk applying here to an example are closely dependent on general propositions that we have elaborated above; as regards the absence of the referent or the transcendental signified. There is nothing outside of the text.   (Derrida, Of Grammatology, P. 158)

Thus language as a system that we inherit does not help us to express ourselves other than an aspect of that system of language itself. Thus there can be no reading or interpretation, which can reconstruct a pre-existing, non-textual reality. It disappears forever. With the reconstruction of it being impossible, only deconstruction of all authorities, consistencies etc. are possible. Deconstruction is defined also as revealing the unconscious dimension of the text. The inner contradictions, inconsistencies, ambiguities, hitherto uncovered implications of words etymologically revealed in relation to other words etc. are all brought to the forefront through such a reading. It is said that by revealing the parallels, echoes, balances, symmetries, contrasts, repetitions etc, structuralism tries to show the unity and coherence of a text, while post-Structuralism unearths the disunity and inconsistency of a text. Structuralism assumes a positive, rigorous, scientific attitude closely related to modern linguistics, while post-Structuralism adopts an opposite skeptical, philosophical attitude. Structuralism while arguing that there is no access to reality other than through the medium of language puts trust in the coherence and order of the linguistic medium. Post-Structuralism goes even beyond that to assert that reality is only textual and that language is not a medium on which we have control and that signs float freely and chaotically in that anarchic medium. There is no hope of planting meaning in such a medium.

Here like anywhere else, we can see the extreme skepticism towards the relation between language and reality as arising from the disillusionment of West about its own civilizational projects, Enlightenment and Renaissance Reason. Abuse of language along with the already understood abuse of man and nature has brought about such a state of affairs. This is not to claim that this tradition and experience has not made any important contributions to our knowledge. But we should be wary of falling into the trap of giving absolute value and relevance to the relative reactions and experiences of the west to its own self-abuse. This has happened earlier when were forced to accept the secularist reaction of the intellectual west to the anti-human, smothering religion of the Middle Ages as our own modality. This was only a relative experience that did not have any parallels elsewhere in that particular sense and hence did not by itself compel any one else to take such a posture. Yet this was colonially imposed upon us and disseminated among us as part of the colonial educational and administrative paradigm. This remains even now as hegemony upon our soul and spirit and reaps it bitter fruits, much to the satisfaction of the new exploitative classes of the world that have emerged after Renaissance. This teaches us the important lesson that we should not swallow the theories and conclusions in a barren form, but things should be understood in an ambiance of the actual contexts dictating them. We have to understand the fact that there is no inevitability to the experience of fragmentation, mistrust, internal contradictions, loss of reality etc. in our existence and language other than the western botheration in the sense of their own post-Structuralist, deconstructive analyses of their disillusionment and failures with their own civilisational experiments, experiences, missions, perceptions and aspirations. We have to leave the obsolescent civilisational entity of the so-called West and its advocates with their own experiences and disillusionments to fend their own way. We will never partake of their tragic hopes and vision. We will seek to enrich ourselves only through their experience, which is the common heritage of the global humanity.

Jacques Lacan (C. E. 1901 – 1981), a French Psychoanalyst of the Freudian tradition has attempted to link the Structuralist and post-Structuralist perspectives with Psychoanalysis. Ha says that, "what the Psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious is the whole structure of language". Thus he says that Freudian Psychiatry is an entirely verbal science, since the unconscious is an ordered entity with the complex structure of language and also that in investigating the unconscious, the analyst is always both using and examining language. He argues like Saussure that meaning in language arises from contrasts between words and not from external reality. Meaning is thus a network of differences between words. The language is a detached, independent entity. He says that language theory has many parallels in the psychiatric mechanism. He says that the Freudian conception of Condensation, that is, compressing several things into one symbol corresponds to the linguistic technique of metaphor. Also Displacement (Representation of a thing or a person by a different element in a dream) corresponds to metonymy, which is the linguistic technique of representing one thing by another by means of the part standing for the whole.

Post-modernism talks of the loss of the distinction between the real and the illusory in our contemporary culture and media. Thus any sign is not an index of a reality, but of other signs. Thus signs signify other signs only and not any reality. This whole system of signs detached from any external reality constitutes what is called a Simulacrum. Thus there is no representation, but only simulation. Contemporary Semiology does not see any significatory relevance in natural phenomena but only in human cultural artifacts and endeavors and that to with reference to the humanly created sign system or simulacrum.

The influence of all these traditions has given birth to many other fringe perspectives from many other groups of the society. The feminists, gays, lesbians etc. have their own perspectives on language, which derive

theoretical material from the above-mentioned perceptions. For example, a typically feminist perspective put forth by Julian Kristeva sees two aspects to language – the symbolic and the semiotic – which can be identified as the conscious and the unconscious of the language as well. These two also correspond to the male and female aspects of the language respectively. Extending it further, the symbolic corresponds to the orderly, Structuralist viewpoint of the language and the semiotic to the post-Structural viewpoint of language as a chaotic, mass of floating signifiers. The feminist possibilities in language and literature are materialized by evoking the semiotic unconscious of language.

Summary on the western tradition

To put it briefly, there are many controversies raging in the contemporary scholarship on language. Basic to this modern discipline of linguistics is the perception of language as a faculty or phenomenon arising from the biological constitution of human beings addressing the social need of communication. There are altercations on how much language is determined by the innate nature of human beings and how much is determined by the environment. The relationships between sound, meaning and external realities are considered to be arbitrary. Similar is the relation between the written and the spoken language. Language is accorded an independent entity of its own as a system with a particular structure. Studies in formal logic and computational mathematics have also influenced language studies to a large extent. Thus the generation of linguistic expressions is considered to be the result of a computational procedure, which is part of the language faculty itself in relation with a lexicon of phonetic and semantic features and inflectional features that are also considered to be part of the language system. The optimal design of the language is considered to be determined by the legibility conditions imposed on this computation by the other systems, which are part of human mind/brain. While some argue about the idea of the common origin of languages in the sense of their social and environmental evolution (more in tune with the tradition of Philology) others stress the internalist growth of language in each human being through various language states, from a single initial state common to all human beings. The dichotomy between science and philosophy, characteristic of the western intellectual tradition remains unbridgeable and even attains a theoretical status in the study of linguistics. This may prove to be a major obstacle for more fundamental searches into the domain of language. In the search for more 'fundamental' units of the structure of language and expressions related to the sound and meaning generation processes of the biological organism of man, traditional grammar is relegated from the prominence it had been accorded in earlier times for many thousands of years. Though it is becoming clearer that there is a fundamental difference between formal, artificial languages and natural languages, the computational view of language has a major influence in this search for the new computational grammar. It should also be remembered here that the earlier grammar in all traditions stressed the fundamental, essential nature root words upon which a whole lot of transformations can be applied to create what can be aptly expressed as the generation of the infinite variety of meanings through the 'finite means' of the language. The former tradition whether it be the Indian tradition (which is believed to be at least 2500 years old and reached its culmination in the studies of Panini) or the Islamic tradition gave fundamental significance to the concept of the root words and the essential meanings innate to such words. This is the fundamental characteristic of any religious approach to the study of language, which is prompted by the presence of a guiding scripture and its original language intending to address the entire mankind through generations. Contrary to this, contemporary linguistics advocates an arbitrary relation between words and external realities. Through severing this tie between language and reality, meaning is viewed as arising within the system or structure of language. This 'structuralist' view has important implications. One is that language can be understood as to be free from any sacred or divine determination. Also, meaning can be thought to have being generated within the system of language itself. Language itself can be viewed as a biological system. The viewpoint of the American Structuralist and Linguist, Leonard Bloomfield is that meaning is just the relationship between a stimulus and a verbal response. Here the concept of meaning itself is disemboweled of its meaning to fit the 'Behaviorist' perspective. Once when language is understood to be as nothing more than a biological system or an outcome of it, then meaning itself becomes a biological product. The view point that thought and perception are shaped and patterned to a large extent by language as put forth by certain persons is not free from this framework of understanding of language and meaning. This perception was raised to counter the earlier Positivist claim that natural language is imperfect and primitive compared to the scientific and mathematical languages that man could create. It argued in defense of the natural language that it is the matrix of all thought. They said that artificial and mathematical languages are only derivatives of the natural languages. The neo-Positivist thinker, Ludwig Wittgenstein advocated this 'philosophy of ordinary language' and argued that this is not understood because very little is

understood of the workings of human language. From the 1950's onwards, since the advent of the transforma-tional-generative grammar and the like, investigations have concentrated on unraveling the underlying powerful system and grammar of natural languages. In fact it is now understood that formal scientific languages lack many of the amazing properties of natural languages, whose understanding itself may be never attained by modern science.

The institution of meaning and reference within the 'perceptual apparatus' of human mind and the conception of arbitrary, free generation of meaning have led to the view point that language encodes the perceptions, desires, hegemonic practices etc. of mankind. Language once when it is understood to be an independent system with a structure enabling free and arbitrary generation of meaning and expressions and as having deep relations with the human psyche can be easily visualized to be an ideal medium for the free play of the individual and collective desires and practices of human beings. This leads to the loss of faith in language. Language deserves faith in it only when it has a transcendental nature, which is not determined by any materialistic or biological factors. This is a basic prerequisite of religion. That is why; religion stresses the divine origin of languages. Anyway, the overbearing hegemony and exploitation of the western civilization over the entire world was experienced to an overwhelming extent through the language of the colonizers. The absurdity of the false 'Enlightenment', 'civilizing mission' and dreams of progress of modernity was revealed to the western people in an explosive manner in the domain of language as narratives and discourses. Modern man confronted his own civilisational absurdities and foolish pretensions through language, which he naively believed to be subject to him and as devoid of a fundamental nature. Like the human body and the nature, he attributed the Cartesian mechanistic sense to language also. But he was overawed by the natural mechanisms of language, tearing to shreds all his pretensions. Thus he had to unwittingly admit that language has its own system, laws and life which he cannot dominate completely, which will write and signify and declare in the loudest manner all his attempts of abuse, frailties and godlessness. Thus deconstruction in a paradoxical manner points to the deeper reality that if the monstrosities and absurdities of man, if they cannot be hidden or effaced from the domains of nature and human existence upon their imposition in these domains, similarly his unnatural and immoral designs and assumptions cannot be hidden or clothed in language completely. Those will be exhibited in revealing colours and multiple dimensions. The domain of language will no doubt inflict its retributionary nemesis as according to the natural laws determined for it by God. The hegemonic project of contemporary enlightenment and modernity which has tried to defile and undermine the fundamen-tal, divinely ordained nature of man, cosmos and language will no doubt experience overwhelming setbacks in all these domains. Since language is in itself part of the essence or Khilafah of man, it is through language that colonialism tried to penetrate into the inner being of man. The consequence was that when man put so much trust and confidence in the anthropocentric and secular humanism of the modern age, this led to even his losing trust and faith in reality. The discursive nature of the monstrous colonial practices and the grandiose claims in the names of civilization, modernity, progress and development have in turn led him declare his loss of faith in reality by stating that reality itself is textual. This should not be misconstrued as modern man's 'unrelenting' quest for the real moorings and grounds of reality taking him beyond the material world into a metaphysical domain of language, where he finds infinite meanings and powers generated every moment in time and even beyond time and space. It only means that for him language, an important part of his divinely bestowed essence had become just like anything else a playground for meaningless and purposeless games and pastimes   (Laghw). But at the same time he is not aware of the tremendous moral and civilisational consequences and miseries resulting from this indulgence.

Language, meaning and civilisational power

Power and meaning is encoded by God in the domain of language. There is a correspondence between the domain of language and that of the material existence. The human predicaments and plights are all mirrored in language also. We have mentioned above about the negative civilisational connotations of the language that are experienced by the coloniser and the victim. And we also hinted that it is the consequence of the abuse of language by the 'Enlightenment' man. Negative civilisatonal consciousness bears important negative implica-tions for language also. The parable of the tower of Babel mentioned in the chapter, Genesis of Bible is illuminating in this respect. According to this parable, all people of earth joined together to build a city and a tower in that city, which may reach up to the heaven. God had intended to diversify and spread human beings throughout the surface of earth. And human beings intended to counter this divine plan by building a city and tower, which will keep them together, make their language common and will thus help them concentrate themselves on a particular tract of land. But God intended otherwise. So He confounded their language so that

they did not understand each other. This parable tells us that the Divine Will for man is that they should spread throughout the earth and take up the responsibility of Vicegerency upon earth in accordance with His Will. Diversities in human race and language are essential for taking up this mission on earth in the right manner, as is mentioned in Qur'an. And the human rebellion to God may materialize in the form of a civilization, which attempts to join up the entire world community into a common civilisational enterprise (a global village or a global Babel), attempting to counteract the will of God. Linguistic diversity and the encoding of the various vernacular traditions of living and culture in the different languages are essential for the sustenance and growth of this civilisational paradigm according to the Hidaya of Allah and the Khilafah of man, which emphasizes unity in diversity, and accords all creatures of the world, their divinely bestowed rights. Modern man has lost the spirit of this harmony of unity and diversity. Now he stands for either unity or for diversity, rejecting or underrating the other, without ever attempting to find the foundations on which the true growth and interests of all human beings can ever be harmoniously synthesized. The rebellious civilisation of man thus leads to the leveling out of all diversities, whether it is in lifestyles, cultures, species, languages or any other aspects of existence. This civilization in itself becomes a violence or Fasad on earth. It can only march forward by making more and more good things extinct and by corrupting earth and by shedding blood as is the concern raised by the Angels about man in Surah Al-Baqarah.

Experience of Muslims

Islam, from the beginning of the prophetic mission of Muhammad (SAW) has given prime importance to language. The divine guidance of Allah for the entire mankind is in the Arabic language. And there is no hope of ever translating Al-Qur'an, completely in its spirit and content from Arabic to any other language. Thus the preservation of the idiom of the Qur'anic language till the end of the world is a responsibility that Muslim scholars have taken to be their most important responsibility. The classical Arabic that we have even now is the result of these painstaking efforts throughout the ages. Allah, Himself has promised us that he will preserve Al-Qur'an in its pure form for the guidance of mankind. The care taken in the compilatory efforts of the Arabic lexicographers, who have indulged in collecting the meanings and nuances of the various Arabic words, idioms etc. is at par with that of the Hadith scholars in collecting, verifying and reporting traditions of the Prophet. No civilisational or cultural invasion of any period had ever succeeded in upsetting the role of the language of Qur'an as the ideal model of the Arabic language. The first few centuries of the Muslim civilisation were a period of large-scale contacts and interactions with many civilizations and peoples throughout the world. Prominent among these were the Greek, Persian and the Indian civilizations. Specifically the influence of Greece posed many important challenges. It is said that some of the Arab-Muslim thinkers, inspired by the Greek logic started disparaging Arabic grammar. They thought that the semantic sytem of Arabic language was insufficient for expressing important ideas having universal relevance. And they claimed that this is can be done only by logic. Al-Kindi's student, Ahmad ibn al-Tayyib al-Sarakhsî considered logic to be universal grammar and as superior to any particular grammar including that of Arabic. This was contrary to the view point of the Sahabah and the Tabiun, who had placed utmost significance to the capability of Arabic language to express any idea or meaning. Also, these logicians by what they called the logic or universal logic only meant the Greek logic. Also they lacked any significant background in language and grammar related studies. Thus the Arab grammarians of that period was able to overcome and refute their claims easily and to reinstate to grammar the prominent position it had earlier occupied. The claim of these logicians had very serious implications. They separated logic and meaning from language and its grammar. Their claim that Arabic language even with the support of Holy Qur'an cannot signify all ideas and meanings, which are essential for differentiating truth from falsehood had the necessary implication that Reason is of prime importance in the understanding of the verity and reality of things than revelation. Thus questioning the semantic capability of the language was tantamount to questioning the capability of the Divine Book in providing guidance in the administration of all affairs of mankind. Another basic issue that was involved here was the separation of the syntactic and semantic structures that a language may encode. That is the scope available for syntactic variations are not enough for representing all the meanings that human beings may come across. Abû Sa'îd al-Sîrâfî was a prominent grammarian who played a pivotal role in this debate for retrieving the status for Arabic grammar. The later generation logicians like al-Farabi, Yahya ibn 'Adi etc. gave more importance to language and thus the historical conclusion of this debate culminated in the understanding and reassertion of the integral and indivisible unity of syntax and semantics in the Islamic epistemological tradition, which is embodied in the perfect manner by Qur'an.

Towards an Islamic Perspective on Language

The case of Arabic language further illuminates the fact that a language has a fundamental fitrah or nature and inherent laws of its own, which gives it the capability to overthrow any alien ideological invasions upon it contrary to the spirit of its true Deen, that is Islam. The inherent mechanisms of language growth and derivation of the Arabic language has helped it accommodate all additions of meaning and usage due to contacts with other civilizations and ideologies, without its fundamental characteristics as demarcated in the Bayan of Qur'an ever getting violated. It is said that the innate mechanisms of the Arabic language like Ishtiqaq (Derivation of new terms from existing roots), naht(Compound constructions), al- Majaz(Expanding meaning of existing terms), al-Ta'rib(Arabicization) , addition of the -iyyah suffix have proved more than enough in the process of keeping intact the original idiom even in the face of major upheavals while at the same time ensuring the growth of the language. This is the case with the encounter of the Arab-Muslim world with the western colonialism of the recent centuries. Linguistic resistance was a palpable movement in the Arab lands. Colonialism has also failed in secularising the Arabic language. I feel that the measure of resistance that a language can have against any other ideology other than the true Deen of languages, that is Islam, is proportional to the unity or identity of the syntactic and semantic structures of that language. This identity has important implications. One is that, the minutest morphemic, phonemic, syllabic, alphabetic or even more elementary units of speech and word have meanings associated with them. This is because; meaning cannot be dissociated from the linguistic structure at any level. The reality of the most microscopic units of language becomes blurred or even imperceptible to the human mind due to its inherent limitations as is witnessed with its attempt to understand the microcosmic aspects of material reality also. Even the slightest utterance signifies a lot of meaning. Al-Qur'an testifies to this fact. Prophet (SAW) has taught us that the slightest utterance of even a single alphabet or letter from Al-Qur'an has important implications in our lives. It will spiritually elevate us and bears much reward from Allah. The symbolism of the Huruf Muqatta'ath (the abbreviated letters with which some Surahs of Al-Qur'an begin) also point to this. Meaning and signification is not a humanly defined, arbitrary overlay on any existing thing or structure. From the basic constituents of man, cosmos, language etc. Allah has Fashioned and Elucidated his great Ayats for the benefit of mankind. Thus all elementary constituents of language and world are in themselves semantemes. There is a natural meaning associated with each of them. There is a natural meaning or Ayat emerging from the any configuration of any of these at any level. Language is a dimension of reality by virtue of which the configuration or structure of reality signify an idea. It is the medium through which the eternal ideas of God are expressed in the world of creation.

"His Command, when he Intends a thing, is to Say to it 'Be' and it is. So Glory be to Him, in whose Hands is the dominion of everything and unto whom you shall be returned." (Yasin: 82, 83)

Reality is written and spoken as much as it is created or realised in the material form. This written and spoken aspect of reality is extra-temporal and extra-spatial. Man has been given the faculty of language through which he can express (Bayan) as well as read (Qira'ath) the semantic contents or meaning or ideas implicit in reality. Allah mentions in Al-Qur'an that all the abilities related to language are taught to man by Himself. Just like human sight and hearing, the human faculty of language can also attune itself to a negligible portion of the infinite spectrum or Kalam of Allah.

" The Most gracious! It is He who has Taught the Qur'an. He has Created man. He has Taught him Bayan." (Ar-Rahman)

The word Bayan here has a comprehensive sense. It means the ability to understand the relations between things clearly and to express clearly. It is the ability to express what is in one's mind. Such an articulation, whether it be through the voice or through the pen is accompanied by the entire gamut of all the special faculties and potential that Allah has Bestowed upon man as well as the sense of moral responsibility or Al-Amanah. This power and consciousness is necessary for reading and benefiting from the Divine Guidance of Al-Qur'an. Allah also Says that " Not a word does he (man) utter but there is a vigilant guardian (recording it)." (Qaf: 19)

The moral consequences of the usage of language in this world (Dunya) and the hereafter (Akhirah) are tremendous. May Allah Bless us. Thus Islam asks man to consider language as a sacred trust.

" Read in the Name of your Lord, who Created. Created man out of leech-like clot. Read! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful. He, Who Taught (the use of) the pen, taught man that which he knew not" (Al-'Alaq: 1..5)

The Islamic sense of reading transcends all modern conceptions of literacy. It is said that Prophet (SAW) was an 'illiterate' person. When he was asked by Jibril to read, he replied that he does not know to read. Still Allah through Jibril insisted upon him to read. This tells us that the Islamic exhortation to read is not confined in the sense of understanding the alphabetic patterns that we have written or scraped on any surface. To go beyond it to the realms of the hitherto unknown is a necessary quest of reading. Thus reading must "…legitimately transgress the text towards something" beyond it. If our reading is confined to the letters, then our condition is like of those whose life is bound completely (they think it is so) within the Dunya. They create mythical and illusory names and are deluded by their conjectures.

" Verily, those who believe not in the Hereafter, name the Angels with female names. But they have no knowledge thereof. They follow but a guess, and verily, guess is no substitute for the truth (Al-Haqq). Therefore, withdraw from him who turns away from our Reminder (The Qur'an) and desire nothing but the life of Dunya. That is the bound of their knowledge. Verily your Lord, it is He who Knows best him who goes astray from His Path, and He Knows best him who receives guidance ". (An-Najm: 27..30)

This is true illiteracy and ignorance (Jahalah). The Islamic conception of Bayan and Qira'ath represent two importants responsibilities of mankind. And these have been mentioned in Al-Qur'an in relation to the faculty of language that Allah has Taught man. Allah has mentioned the skill of speech and writing in Al-Qur'an in relation to the creation of man. The limited freedom and power that man has been given in the domain of language has to be seen in the same way as the limited freedom and powers that he has been given in the domain of the material created world. Beyond his abilities and capacities, language has a divinely determined system of its own through which the Divine determinatives or Sunnah of Allah may be imposed upon man in the linguistic domain of existence. Language may overwhelm and even defeat him. That is, man is a being, which can experience a linguistic crisis that can shake his life from the roots.

There is an absolute linguistic domain, which existed even before the humans were endowed with the skill of language and what is beyond human artifacts and the material world. It may be even said to have existed prior to the coming into being of the world and is an attribute of God. Muslim philosophers have agreed on the viewpoint that Qur'an is not a creation of Allah, but is His Kalam or Speech. It is absurd to argue that language is a human artifact because it has material manifestations in the form of vocalizations and writing. It is similar to the argument that man is totally a biological, material being without any transcendent essence because he has a body. If language is a human creation how can Qur'an ever be 'encoded' in such a language? Also the conscious attempts by human beings to build artificial languages have succeeded only in building pathetic systems of logic, which are absolutely deficient in all senses compared to natural languages. Suffice it to say that language in its essence is beyond time and space, an attribute of God from which, by virtue of His Great mercy He has Gifted man a minute amount, a modicum commensurate with the abilities of man to accept from God. The realities of everything that can ever happen exist as the Kalimât of Allah. The Kalimât of Allah represent the unalterable laws of Allah as well as His infinite Wisdom (Hikmah) and Power (Qadr). Changes happen in the world according to the Kalimât of Allah. This fact is mentioned many times in Al-Qur'an. His Kalimât that he has Taught mankind, once abided to it gives man the opportunity for tremendous growth. The concocted Kalimat or discourse of man in rebellion to God are baseless and are all doomed to fail or get uprooted in the nearest instance itself. . The parable of the Goodly and evil world mentioned in Surah Ibrahim of Al-Qur'an testifies to this fact. Muslims scholars have also concurred on the fact that language is originated by God and that its evolution, growth, extinction etc are all predominantly determined by God (Tawfiqiyy) and every body reject the argument that it is a human artifact or technical creation (Istilahiyy). Even in the case of human influences in the determination, evolution and diversification of languages, they have said that it is Allah's determination experienced through the human agencies, which is the cause of all these. Allah mentions linguistic diversity as among His important Ayats.

" And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the differences of your languages and colours. Verily in that are indeed signs for men of knowledge". (Ar-Rum: 22)

Allah mentions about the diversities in languages in the same sense that He mentions about all other natural diversities among mankind in terms of race or colour. All these signify a fundamental characteristic of human existence on earth and are essential according to Islam for the development of the Global Khilafah of mankind, which is built on Truth (Haqq) and Justice (Adl). The diversification, emergence, extinction and transformation of different languages are considered natural only as long as there is no issue of injustice, exploitation or oppression involved. To take an example from the context of Kerala itself, this state witnessed the invasion of the upper caste Brahminic classes from the 7th century of the C. E. onwards. This had an important impact on the sociology, culture and language of the Keralites. The strong influence of Brahminic Sanskritisation is felt in the Malayalam language even to this date. This growing hegemony accompanied the extinction of the lifestyles, traditions and indigenous modalities of the common people of the lower classes. This contest was fought in the domain of language also. The formation of the Malayalam language itself experienced the gradual elimination of the idiom strongly flavoured by Tamil language, which had organic relations to the life and representations of the subaltern sections and the appropriation of language by the higher class Sanskrit idiom. It is said that the Muslim presence here mediated through the language and culture of the Mappilah Muslims was the a prominent historical factor, which had offered resistance to this Brahminic hegemony and has preserved at least the vestiges of the older literary, linguistic and cultural traditions of the downtrodden. Just like the innumerable variety in racial and individual characteristics, which can all be traced to a common essence of humanness all language may also have a common linguistic base, whose possible variations are represented by the different languages. In fact we can even think of a proto-language revealed and taught to the first man on earth, Adam (AS). This language might have carried all the essential characteristics of human language and from it might have proceeded forth the entire diversity of the progeny of languages, which continue to emerge even now, according to the Will of Allah. Thus we cannot disparage any language. Languages are born and die according to the Sunnah of Allah, like the birth and death of human beings. Each language serves an important purpose in its own age. It can be seen that the existence and mission of man on earth cannot be fulfilled without the means of language. Al-Qur'an teaches us that, both Ilm and Hidayah are conveyed to man through the medium of language. And both of these are indispensable for the realization of the human mission of Khilafah on earth. We should take linguistic diversity to be as much natural as any other natural phenomena. But at the same time we should not forget that the domain of language at any time reflects the conditions and plights of human beings. As mentioned above, class struggles, hegemonies, resistances etc. may have their dialectal parallels in the domain of languages. Just like the sociological forces playing the role of shaping and evolving the society, these dialectal forces may be crucial in the development of new language varieties and all other transformations happening in the world of languages. A language may even enact a civilisational or colonial hegemony in the domain of languages thus paralleling the role of its representative social class. The colonizing presence of English language is something that is palpably felt throughout the world. Just like a colonizing force, it assimilates linguistic 'raw materials' from subjugated cultures and societies, manufacture new coinages in its civilisational mould that have the marking characteristics of the colonizing civilization and also accomplishes the large-scale supply of such manufactured terms and words into the languages of the colonized people. This is the colonial, commercial-industrial-mercantilist system simulated in the domain of language. Though natural interactions between languages are essential for the growth of all languages as well as life, unjust hegemonies should be resisted in the domain of language also. This is because, what may be at the stake is not just the loss of an indigenous language only but also a way of life that may be essential for the independence and self-sufficiency of a people, which the colonisers may be seeking to undermine. We should not forget that language is a container as well as transmitter of the sense of life with all its many details for a people.

Such a sense of the language as representative of important historical forces that have fundamental relevance to human life and civilization is indicated by many Qur'anic verses. In Surah At-Taubah the victory or dominance of Islam is mentioned as the Idhar or dominance of the Kalimat of Allah. (At-Taubah: 40)

"…And Allah Blots out falsehood (Al-Batil) and Proves or Realises the truth (Al-Haqq) by His Kalimat…" (AsShura: 24)

" If you help him (Muhamad SAW) not (it does not matter), for Allah did indeed help him when the disbelievers drove him out… Then Allah Sent down His Sakinah upon him and strengthened him with forces you saw not, and made the Kalimat of those who disbelieved the lowermost while the Kalimat of Allah that became the uppermost and Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise. " (At-Taubah: 40)

Islam aims at enriching the linguistic abilities of mankind. It does not intend to efface the linguistic diversities. Due to the influence of Islam, various dialects have emerged worldwide. Islam and its Global language, Arabic has made immense contributions to the development of languages and knowledge throughout the world during its heydays. Languages like Hebrew can even claim of retrieving its linguistic tradition and all the ancient books written in that language only because of the contributions made by the Arab linguists and grammarians. Islam aims at placing Arabic as the Global language of mankind. Unfortunately, even the Arabs do not recognize this fact in the proper sense. The hegemony of the western civilization has produced an important debate in the Arab lands about the Arabic language. The debate has primarily focused on two important themes. One is related to the influx of the technical terminologies of the western scientific and intellectual tradition into the Arabic language. The other is about the ways of bridging the gap between the diverse varieties of 'Amiyyah (spoken language) and the Fusha (the common written language throughout the Arab world). The written language is more or less in the same idiom as dictated by Al-Qur'an. Diverse perspectives and initiatives have emerged as a consequence of these debates. But unfortunately, these are not imbibed with the spirit of the true role accorded to Arabic language by Islam as the language of the Hidayah of Allah to the entire mankind and views Arabic language in a parochial nationalistic and cultural perspective. The spirit of the debate seems to be thus not in the interests of raising the Arabic language as the global medium of communication and knowledge of mankind. A comprehensive discussion on the characteristics of Arabic language, which makes it apt as the true candidate for the role of the global language, is beyond the scope of this essay. But a passing mention we can make about the viewpoint of many philologists and linguists that the earliest language of mankind should be a Semitic language without vowels. And Arabic language is beyond doubt the language with which can claim to have inherited almost all of the characteristics of the parent Semitic language. The etymological depth and semantic expanse of the Arabic root words and meaning generation capabilities of the grammatical rules of Arabic are unsurpassed by any other language. The only language that can never be a coloniser of the world in an exploitive manner is Arabic. This is because; Arabic is integrally related to Qur'an. The greatest source of ideas in Arabic at all times is Al-Qur'an itself. Thus the characteristics of Islam, Truth (Al-Haqq) and Justice (Al-Adl) will be disseminated throughout the world in the linguistic domain by the acceptance of Arabic as the true global language of mankind.

" The Kalimat of your Lord is complete in Truth and Justice, None can change His Kalimât. And He is the All-Hearer, All-Knower." (Al-An'am: 115)

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