

The Tools of Language, Used in Quran and Sunnah

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Abstract

Language is the most distinctive element among humans which separates them from animals. This gift of speech is his supreme quality. It is a divine gift and as all the divine books narrate the story of Adam (A.S), telling this, how the Allah Almighty thought him the names of different things to enable him to speak.

In this research article, the divine origin of language is discussed giving examples from the Holy Quran, how Allah Almighty employed different tools of language in the Holy Quran. Examples have been aptly chosen from different Surah's of the Holy Quran to prove that almost all the tools of language have been appropriately used in the Quran to convey the message of Allah Almighty in most natural and convincing way.

Keywords: *Language, Holy Quran, tools of language*

History of the Language:

"Language is the human capacity for acquiring and using complex systems of conversation, and a language is any specific example of such a system. The scientific study of language is known as linguistics."³

The evidence conclusively implies that humans were created with the unique ability to employ speech for communication.

Philip Lieberman says: "Speech is so essential to our concept of intelligence that its possession is virtually equated with being human. The animals, who can talk, are humans because what sets us apart from other animals is the gift of speech."⁴

In The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Human Evolution, editors Jones, Martin, and Pilbeam conceded that 'there are no non-human languages,' and then went on to observe that 'language is an adaptation unique to humans, and yet the nature of its uniqueness and its biological basis are notoriously difficult to define. ⁵

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³. Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language#Tool_for_communication. [cited on March 28, 2013]

⁴. W.W. Norton Lieberman, *Human Language and Human Evolution*, (New York, 1998) p.5

⁵. Jones, S., Martin, R. & Pilbeam, D. (eds), *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Human Evolution* (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1999) p.128

Language is so necessary that 'No community has ever been found without language'.⁶

The relationship between brain size and language is unclear. Possibly, increased social interaction combined with tactical deception gave the brain an initial impetus.

Better nourishment due to meat-eating may also have played a part. Then brain size and language possibly increased together.⁷

No known language in the whole of human history can be considered 'primitive' in any sense of the word.⁸

It is also notable that when language first appears on the scene, it already is fully developed and very complex. Even the peoples with least complex cultures have highly sophisticated languages, with complex grammar and large vocabularies, capable of naming and discussing anything that occurs in the sphere occupied by their speakers.

The most ancient language that may be recreated is already modern, advanced and perfect from an developmental point of view.⁹

Chomsky concluded that:

"Human language appears to be a unique phenomenon, without significant analogue in the animal world. There is no reason to suppose that the 'gaps' are bridgeable. There is no more of a basis for assuming an evolutionary development from breathing to walking."¹⁰

The terminology of language is concerned with four main problems: "the nature of meaning, language use, language cognition, and the relationship between language and reality. For continental philosophers, however, the philosophy of language tends to be dealt with, not as a separate topic, but as a part of logic."¹¹

The philosophy of language then became so pervasive that for a time, in analytic philosophy circles, philosophy as a whole was understood to be a matter of philosophy of language. In the 20th century, language became an even more central theme within the most diverse traditions of philosophy. The phrase the linguistic turn was used to describe the noteworthy emphasis that modern-day philosophers put upon language.¹²

⁶. Matthews, S., Comrie, B. and Polanski, *Atlas of Languages: The Origin and Development of Languages Throughout the World*, Facts on File, (New York, , 1996) P.7

⁷. Aitchison, P. 85

⁸. Available from: <http://www.trueorigin.org/language01.asp>. [Cited on March 31, 2013]

⁹. Simpson, G.G., *The biological nature of Man*, P. 477

¹⁰. Chomsky, N., *Language and the Mind*, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, (New York, 1972) P. 67-68

¹¹. Available from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philosophy_of_language. [cited on March 29, 2013]

¹². Bukhari, Muhammad Bin Ismaeel, *Al Jame Al-Sahih* (Dar-ul-fikir Labnon) Hadith No: 58

Quran and Hadith study tells us that Allah Almighty taught all the names to Adam. And Adam called every living creature with their particular name:

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا ۗ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ¹³

They replied, "Glory is to you. You alone are free from defect. We possess only that much knowledge which you have given us. Indeed you alone are All-Knowing and All-Wise."

The ayah narrates the first human's story who had to talk to angels. We can say that was first communication between human and another creature that was the first human who communicated his ideas and feelings with the angels. This proves that divine source provides human with language. And after it:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا وَبَثَّ مِنْهُمَا

رِجَالًا كَثِيرًا وَنِسَاءً ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ الَّذِي تَسَاءَلُونَ بِهِ وَالْأَرْحَامَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلَيْكُمْ

رَقِيبًا-¹⁴

"O men! Fear your Lord Who created you from a single being and out of it created its mate; and out of the two spread many men and women. Fear Allah in Whose name you plead for rights, and heed the ties of kinship. Surely, Allah is ever watchful over you."

It was natural that the whole human race spread with its forefather's language. With the passage of time language improved itself. It can be said the basic languages are divine.

Functions/Uses of language in Quran and Sunnah

Language has multiple functions like phonetic, directive, informative, interrogative, expressive, evocative and performing. Quran is a great message of God for human being. All the tools of language are used in it to fulfill all purposes of language, like: Demonstration, speech, writing and body language

1- Demonstration

We can find many examples of demonstration in Quran; like examples of Hazrat Abraham, when he broke all the idols into pieces, except the biggest of them, so that they might turn to it.

¹³. *Al-Baqarah*:32

¹⁴. *Al-Nisa*:1

"قَالُوا أَأَنْتَ فَعَلْتَ هَذَا بِآلِهَتِنَا يَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ ۚ قَالَ بَلْ فَعَلَهُ كَبِيرُهُمْ هَذَا فَاسْأَلُوهُمْ إِنْ كَانُوا يَنْطِقُونَ ۚ فَرَجَعُوا إِلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ فَقَالُوا إِنَّكُمْ أَنْتُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ" ¹⁵

“On Abraham's arrival, they said: Abraham, are you he who has done this to our gods? He answered: Rather it was this supreme one who has done it. So ask them, if they can speak.”

In this way he wanted to communicate the oneness of God to his nation. The second example of Hazrat Uzair (A.S)

"أَوَ كَالَّذِي مَرَّ عَلَىٰ قَرْيَةٍ وَهِيَ خَاوِيَةٌ عَلَىٰ عُرُوشِهَا قَالَ أَنَّىٰ يُحْيِي هَذِهِ اللَّهُ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا فَأَمَاتَهُ اللَّهُ مِائَةَ عَامٍ ثُمَّ بَعَثَهُ قَالَ كَمْ لَبِثْتَ يَوْمًا أَوْ بَعْضَ يَوْمٍ قَالَ بَلْ لَبِثْتُ مِائَةَ عَامٍ فَانظُرْ إِلَىٰ طَعَامِكَ وَشَرَابِكَ لَمْ يَتَسَنَّهْ ۖ وَانظُرْ إِلَىٰ حِمَارِكَ وَلِنَجْعَلَكَ آيَةً لِّلنَّاسِ وَانظُرْ إِلَىٰ الْعِظَامِ كَيْفَ نُنشِزُهَا ثُمَّ نَكْسُوهَا لَحْمًا ۖ فَلَمَّا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُ قَالَ أَعْلَمُ أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ" ¹⁶

“Or take the case of the one who passed by a township that had fallen down upon its roofs. He exclaimed: How shall Allah bring back to life this township that has become dead? At this Allah caused him to die and he lay dead for a hundred years. Then Allah brought him back to life and asked him, how long have you lain here? He answered. I might have lain here for a day or a few hours. Allah said: Nay, you have been lying here in this state for a hundred years: now, just have a look at your food and your drink; they have not become spoiled in the least. Then have a look at your ass, (and see that his very bones have become rotten) and We have done this in order to make you a Sign for the people. Look, how We raise up the skeleton and set the bones (of the ass) and cover them with flesh and (put breath of life into them). And when the Reality became manifest to him, he said: I know that Allah has power over everything.”

Another example is when Abraham (A.S.) said to Allah to show how you like to the dead. In Hadith :

¹⁵. Al-Anbiya:62-63

¹⁶. Al-Baqarah:259

"وَنِكَاحُ الرَّابِعِ يَجْتَمِعُ النَّاسُ الْكَثِيرُ فَيَدْخُلُونَ عَلَى الْمَرْأَةِ لَا تَمْتَنِعُ مِمَّنْ جَاءَهَا وَهِنَّ الْبَغَايَا كُنَّ يَنْصِبْنَ عَلَى أَبْوَابِهِنَّ رَايَاتٍ تَكُونُ عَلَمًا فَمَنْ أَرَادَهُنَّ دَخَلَ عَلَيْهِنَّ فَإِذَا حَمَلَتْ إِحْدَاهُنَّ وَوَضَعَتْ حَمْلَهَا جُمِعُوا لَهَا وَدَعَوْا لَهُمُ الْقَافَةَ ثُمَّ أَحَقُّوا وَلَدَهَا بِالَّذِي يَرَوْنَ فَالْتَأَطَّ بِهِ وَدُعِيَ ابْنُهُ لَا يَمْتَنِعُ مِنْ ذَلِكَ فَلَمَّا بُعِثَ مُحَمَّدٌ ﷺ بِالْحَقِّ هَدَمَ نِكَاحَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ كُلَّهُ إِلَّا نِكَاحَ النَّاسِ الْيَوْمِ."¹⁷

"The fourth type of marriage was that many people would enter upon a lady as she would never refuse anyone who came to her. Those were the prostitutes who used to fix flags at their doors as signs, and he who wished, could have sexual intercourse with them. If anyone of them got pregnant and delivered a child, then all those men would be gathered for her and they would call the Qaifs (persons skilled in recognizing the likeness of a child to his father) to them and would let her child follow the man (whom they recognized as his father) and she would let him adhere to him and be called his son. The man could not refuse all that."

2 Speech

A big source of communication is speech. We can say: "The language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication." Quran had so many examples like a dialogue between Abraham and Nimrod:

"أَلَمْ تَرَ إِلَى الَّذِي حَاجَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ فِي رَبِّهِ أَنْ آتَاهُ اللَّهُ الْمُلْكَ إِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ رَبِّيَ الَّذِي يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ قَالَ أَنَا أُحْيِي وَأُمِيتُ ۖ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْتِي بِالشَّمْسِ مِنَ الْمَشْرِقِ فَأْتِ بِهَا مِنَ الْمَغْرِبِ فَبُهِتَ الَّذِي كَفَرَ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ."¹⁸

"Have you not considered the case of the person who had an argument with Abraham as to 'Whom Abraham acknowledged as his Lord?' The dispute arose because Allah had given him the kingship, (which had made him arrogant). When Abraham said: My Lord is He Who gives life and causes death, he answered, I give life and cause death. Then Abraham said, 'Well, Allah brings the sun from the east: just bring it from the west. At this the disbeliever was confounded: (yet he did not believe), for Allah does not show guidance to unjust people."

¹⁷. Bukhari, *Al Jameaa Alsaheeh*, Hadith No: 58

¹⁸. *Al-Baqarah*: 258

A dialogue between Ibraheem and his Father in Surah Maryam:

"إِذْ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ يَا أَبَتِ لِمَ تَعْبُدُ مَا لَا يَسْمَعُ وَلَا يُبْصِرُ وَلَا يُغْنِي عَنْكَ شَيْئًا يَا أَبَتِ إِنِّي قَدْ جَاءَنِي مِنَ الْعِلْمِ مَا لَمْ يَأْتِكَ فَاتَّبِعْنِي أَهْدِكَ صِرَاطًا سَوِيًّا يَا أَبَتِ لَا تَعْبُدِ الشَّيْطَانَ إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ كَانَ لِلرَّحْمَنِ عَصِيًّا يَا أَبَتِ إِنِّي أَخَافُ أَنْ يَمَسَّكَ عَذَابٌ مِنَ الرَّحْمَنِ فَتَكُونَ لِلشَّيْطَانِ وَلِيًّا قَالَ أَرَأَيْتَ أَنْتَ عَنْ آلِهَتِي يَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ لَئِن لَّمْ تَنْتَهِ لَأَرْجُمَنَّكَ وَاهْجُرْنِي مَلِيًّا."¹⁹

"When he said to his father: Father! Why do you worship that which neither sees nor hears, and which can be of no avail to you? Father, a knowledge that has not reached you has come to me. So follow me that I may guide you to a Straight Way. Father, do not serve Satan, for Satan has indeed been a persistent rebel against the Most Compassionate Lord. Father, I fear that a punishment from the Most Compassionate Lord might strike you and you may end up as one of Satan's companions? The father said: Abraham, have you turned away from my gods? If you do not give this up, I shall stone you to death. Now begin from me forever."

In SuratHod, Nuh (A.S), Hud (A.S), Saleh (A.S) Ibraheem (A.S), Lut (A.S), Shoab (A.S) made dialogue with their nation ²⁰

In Surah Yousaf many examples we find like dialogue between Yaqub and his sons, Yousaf and Wife of al Aziz, (Zolakha), Yousaf and Yaqub, Yousaf and his companions of the prison,

"وَرَأَوْتُهُ الَّتِي هُوَ فِي بَيْتِهَا عَنْ نَفْسِهِ وَعَلَّقَتِ الْأَبْوَابَ وَقَالَتْ هَيْتَ لَكَ قَالَ مَعَاذَ اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ رَبِّي أَحْسَنَ مَثْوَايَ إِنَّهُ لَا يُفْلِحُ الظَّالِمُونَ."²¹

"And it so happened that the lady in whose house Joseph was living, sought to tempt him to herself, and one day bolting the doors she said: Come on now! Joseph answered: May Allah grant me refuge! My Lord has provided an honorable abode for me (so how can I do something so evil)? Such wrongdoers never prosper."

On another place:

¹⁹. *Maryam*:42-46

²⁰. See *Hood*:25, 50, 61, 69, 77, 84

²¹. *Yousuf*:23

"إِذْ قَالَ يُوسُفُ لِأَبِيهِ يَا أَبَتِ إِنِّي رَأَيْتُ أَحَدَ عَشَرَ كَوْكَبًا وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ رَأَيْتُهُمْ لِي سَاجِدِينَ ۝ قَالَ يَا بُنَيَّ لَا تَقْصُصْ رُؤْيَاكَ عَلَىٰ إِخْوَتِكَ فَيَكِيدُوا لَكَ كَيْدًا إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ."²²

"His father said: My son! Do not relate your dream to your brothers lest they hatch a plot to harm you. Indeed Satan is man's open enemy."

(As you have seen in the dream), so will your Lord choose you (for His task) and will impart to you the comprehension of the deeper meaning of things and will bestow the full measure of His favor upon you and upon the house of Jacob even as He earlier bestowed it in full measure upon your forefathers, Abraham and Isaac. Surely your Lord is All- Knowing, All-Wise.

"يَا صَاحِبِي السِّجْنِ أَأَرْبَابٌ مُتَفَرِّقُونَ خَيْرٌ أَمِ اللَّهُ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ ۝ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِهِ إِلَّا أَسْمَاءَ سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنْتُمْ وَأَبَاؤُكُمْ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ بِهَا مِن سُلْطَانٍ إِنِ الْحُكْمُ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ أَمَرَ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا إِيَّاهُ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ."²³

"Fellow-prisoners! Is it better that there be diverse lords, or just Allah, the One, the Irresistible? Those whom you serve beside Him are merely idle names that you and your fathers have fabricated, without Allah sending down any sanction for them. All authority to govern rests only with Allah. He has commanded that you serve none but Him. This is the Right Way of life, though most people are altogether unaware."

3. Writing skills of language:

In spite of speech writing is another strong source of conveying message to one another, Allah also conveyed in written form.

"إِنَّا أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ كَمَا أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ نُوحٍ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ مِن بَعْدِهِ وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَعِيسَىٰ وَأَيُّوبَ وَيُونُسَ وَهَارُونَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ وَآتَيْنَا دَاوُدَ زَبُورًا."²⁴

"(O Muhammad!) We have revealed to you as We revealed to Noah and the Prophets after him, and We revealed to Abraham, Ismael, Isaac, Jacob and the offspring of Jacob, and Jesus and Job, and Jonah, and Aaron and Solomon, and We gave to David Psalms."

²². *Yousuf*:4,5

²³. *Yousuf*:39,40

"نَزَّلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَأَنْزَلَ التَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ" ²⁵

"He has revealed this Book to you, setting forth the truth and confirming the earlier Books, and earlier He revealed the Torah and Gospel."

4 Body language

Another method to convey one's message is body language. Someone can show his feelings, expectations and emotions through his body language. Quran show that Zechariah said:

قَالَ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ لِي آيَةً ۗ قَالَ آيَتُكَ أَلَّا تُكَلِّمَ النَّاسَ ثَلَاثَةَ أَيَّامٍ إِلَّا رَمْرًا ۗ وَادْكُرْ رَبَّكَ كَثِيرًا وَسَبِّحْ

بِالْعَشِيِّ وَالْإِبْكَارِ ²⁶

"O my Lord! Appoint a sign for me.' The angel said: 'The sign for you shall be that you shall not speak to men for three days except by gesture. Remember your Lord and extol His glory by night and by day."

Moreover,

وَأَمْرَأَتُهُ قَائِمَةٌ فَضَحِكَتْ فَابْتَسَرْنَاَهَا بِإِسْحَاقَ وَمِنْ وَرَاءِ إِسْحَاقَ يَعْقُوبَ ۗ قَالَتْ يَا وَيْلَتَى أَأَلِدُ وَأَنَا

عَجُوزٌ وَهَذَا بَعْلِي شَيْخًا إِنَّ هَذَا لَشَيْءٌ عَجِيبٌ . ²⁷

"And Abraham's wife was standing by and on hearing this she laughed. And We gave her the good news of (the birth of) Isaac, and after Isaac, of Jacob. She said: 'Woe is me! Shall I bear a child now that I am an old woman and my husband is well advanced in years? This is indeed strange!"

قَالَ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ لِي آيَةً ۗ قَالَ آيَتُكَ أَلَّا تُكَلِّمَ النَّاسَ ثَلَاثَ لَيَالٍ سَوِيًّا ۗ فَخَرَجَ عَلَى قَوْمِهِ مِنَ الْمِحْرَابِ

فَأَوْحَى إِلَيْهِمْ أَنْ سَبِّحُوا بُكْرَةً وَعَشِيًّا. ²⁸

"Zechariah said: "Lord, grant me a Sign. Said He: Your Sign is that you shall not be able to speak to people for three nights, though you will be otherwise sound. Thereupon Zechariah came out from the sanctuary and directed his people by gestures to extol His glory by day and by night."

²⁴ . *Al-Nisa*: 163

²⁵ . *Aal-i-Imran*:23

²⁶ *Aal-i-Imran*:41

²⁷ . *Hood*:71,72

²⁸ . *Maryam*:10,11

On hearing this:

فَأَقْبَلَتْ امْرَأَتُهُ فِي صَرَّةٍ فَصَكَّتْ وَجْهَهَا وَقَالَتْ عَجُوزٌ عَقِيمٌ.²⁹

“So hearing his wife went forth shouting. She struck her face and exclaimed:
A barren old woman am I.”

إِنَّهُ فَكَّرَ وَقَدَّرَ ۖ فَقُتِلَ كَيْفَ قَدَّرَ ۚ ثُمَّ قَدَّرَ ۖ ثُمَّ قُتِلَ كَيْفَ قَدَّرَ ۚ ثُمَّ نَظَرَ ۚ ثُمَّ عَبَسَ ۚ وَبَسَرَ ۚ ثُمَّ أَدْبَرَ ۚ وَاسْتَكْبَرَ.³⁰

“He reflected and then hatched a scheme. Ruin seize him, how did he hatch a scheme? Again, ruin seize him, how did he hatch a scheme? He looked (at others); then frowned and scowled; then he retreated and waxed proud.”

²⁹. *Al-Dhariyat*:29

³⁰. *Al-Muddassar*: 18,23