

The Case for Qur'anic Arabic

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The present article is an attempt to present the case for learning Arabic from the point of view of Qur'anic Studies. Most languages, if they do not change with time, either become obsolete or extinct in terms of their usage. It appears as if their very survival depends on how these languages respond to the dynamic forces of change in their respective societies. This could make one wonder as to how the Qur'anic Arabic language has been preserved over so many centuries in its original form. The obvious connection between the Holy Qur'an and the language in which it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (SAW) explains the preservation of the Qur'anic Arabic. This is borne out by the following verses from the Qur'an:

We have, without doubt, sent down the Reminder (i.e., the Qur'an), and
We will assuredly guard it (from corruption). (Al Hijr 15:9)

We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an, in order that you may learn
wisdom. (Yusuf 12:2)

The Qur'anic Arabic belongs to the Semitic group of languages. By the third century C.E., Arabic had developed into a full-fledged language. In the present time most of the Semitic languages have disappeared. In addition to Arabic, the only living Semitic language are modern Hebrew, Amheric, and a dialect of Aramic. As for Arabic, it remains not only a fully living language but also enjoys a unique importance. It alone can serve as the source of knowledge for all Semitic languages. Whenever the grammarians of the languages are faced with intricate grammatical problems, they refer to or consult parallel grammatical rules in Qur'anic Arabic. These rules are exemplified in the Qur'an.

Besides grammar, enormous changes have taken place in the vocabulary of all Semitic languages. The present versions of these languages have little resemblance with their original forms. The only exception is the Qur'anic Arabic, the language of the Qur'an, which retains its original grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. Since the language of the Qur'an is Arabic, it is the main source of communication about Islam. Approximately one billion Muslims of the world recite the Qur'an in its original language. However, most of them cherish the desire to comprehend the Qur'an directly without having to read a translated version in their native language.

Furthermore, there are a large number of individuals around the globe who wish to learn Arabic because of its political importance. Arabic is the official language of the 21 member states of the Arab League. Gradually the need of knowing Arabic has also been enhanced because of the overwhelming importance of the Arabic-speaking countries in international commerce, finance, and sources of energy.

Methodology for Teaching Qur'anic Arabic

In North India, in the year 1942, Professor Abdus Salam Kidwai pioneered a method for teaching Qur'anic Arabic. His main idea was to make the Holy Qur'an the prime source of teaching Arabic. He compiled a book consisting of ten primary lessons for this purpose and it proved very useful in learning Arabic.

In 1984, an international survey was taken to determine which country has the best Qur'anic Arabic teaching methodology. This survey was sponsored by Rabita Alam Al-Islami of Saudi Arabia. It was found, to much surprise, that a school in a poor neighborhood of Northern India had the most well-versed graduating class in Qur'anic Arabic in the world. It was found that this school followed Professor Kidwai's curriculum. There, the Principal came to school everyday on a bicycle, and each month he would circulate a basket to raise enough money to pay the teachers. Even the teachers were so dedicated that they would wait for their salaries up to six months if there was no money in the school treasury.

There is a lesson to be learned from the above mentioned survey. Muslims and non-Muslims in most parts of the world are now very fortunate to have access to audio, video, computer aided instructions, and elaborate campus facilities, etc., *Alhamdulillah!* We can all learn Qur'anic Arabic, only if we set our minds to it. Learn it for nothing else, but to understand the Qur'an in the language it was revealed.

Qur'anic Arabic as a Second Language for all Muslims

For a Muslim, there is always a need to balance between the spiritual and material life. The material aspect of human life has to respond to the dynamic forces of change resulting from current research and development. Science and technology are constantly pushing the frontiers of physical knowledge. As a result, the contemporary languages have to evolve and adopt themselves in response to these forces. On the other hand, the message from Almighty Allah (SWT) to guide our spiritual life has always remained basically the same. Therefore, the acquisition of spiritual knowledge requires a stable language, so that we lead a balanced life. In this context, the static and stable quality of a language is a great asset, rather than a liability. There is no time dependency in defining the codes of conduct and moral imperatives for the benefit of human spirit.

It is hard to conceive how a single language can satisfy both the stable and dynamic needs from the moral and material viewpoints. Even in the 21 Arabic speaking countries, the natives still need to refer to the Arabic exegeses of Qur'an, such as those by Ibn Katheer, Al Tabari, etc., to fully comprehend the message of the Qur'an. They will readily admit that their colloquial Arabic has changed so much over the years that, for example, a Syrian speaking his native Arabic may not be able to fully comprehend Moroccan Arabic.

This may be of some consolation to those Muslims who belong to the non-Arabic speaking countries. It is a myth that the residents of Arabic-speaking countries know the message of Arabic Qur'an by default, by virtue of the fact that they speak native Arabic. No one is therefore exempt from putting in an extra effort to learn the Qur'anic Arabic, if they are to succeed here and in the Hereafter. So for a Muslim living in any part of the world, his/her second language after the native language should always be Qur'anic Arabic.

Standardization of Qur'anic Arabic Script and Pronunciation

As discussed above, Qur'anic Arabic as a second language becomes a common denominator for all Muslims. However, the preservation of Qur'anic Arabic means more than the language, the grammar, and the vocabulary. The standardized script and pronunciation should also be maintained in order to facilitate the full comprehension of Qur'an, *Hadith*, and other scholarly writings by the past, present, and future scholars of Islam.

This is a monumental task. However, with the advent of modern technology such as satellites, communication superhighway, networking, electronic mail, bulletin boards, etc.,

the task of international standardization of Qur'anic Arabic, script, and pronunciation should become easier.

Qur'anic Arabic in High Schools, Colleges, and Universities

As a taxpayer, Muslims living in U.S.A., Canada, Europe, or anywhere else in the non-Muslim world have the right to demand equal treatment for their revered language, Qur'anic Arabic. If Spanish, Latin, German, French, Italian, Hebrew, Russian, etc., are taught as a second language in public institutions of learning, then why not Qur'anic Arabic?

This may be easier said than done. In order to introduce Qur'anic Arabic in public schools, colleges, and universities, it will require a coordinated effort between many organizations. One of the organizations that can help in this cause is the Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies (IAIS) in Acton, California, in collaboration with As-Sunnah Foundation of America (ASFA). The Islamic education curriculum proposed by IAIS was well received at the Islamic Unity Conference held in August 1996, at Los Angeles, California. This curriculum is based on *Al-Kitab* (Qur'an), *Al-Hikmah*, and *Al-Tazkiah*. Some other organizations that can help IAIS and ASFA in this cause include

1. Council on Islamic Education (CIE), Fountain Valley, CA
2. Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), Los Angeles, CA
3. American Muslim Council (AMC), Washington D.C
4. United Muslims of America (UMA), Sunnyvale, CA
5. Multimedia Vera International (MVI), Los Angeles, CA
6. Institute of Islamic and Arabic Sciences in America (IIASA), Fairfax, VA
7. International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), Reston, VA
8. International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations (IIFSO), Washington, D.C.
9. Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), Plainfield, IN
10. Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), Chicago, IL
11. Islamic Assembly of North America (IANA), Chicago, IL
12. National Council on Islamic Affairs (NCIA), New York, NY
13. Sound Vision, Chicago, IL
14. Iqra Foundation, Chicago, IL
15. The Institute of Islamic Information and Education (IIIE), Chicago, IL
16. The Islamic Foundation, Leicester, U.K.
17. Islamic Propagation Center International (IPCI), Durban (South Africa) & New York
18. Muslim World League, Makkah (Saudi Arabia)
19. Rabita Alam Al-Islami, Riyadh (Saudi Arabia)

As a start, a representative from each of the above organizations could meet at a central location on a yearly basis. In a period of three to five years, a short-term and a long-range plan could be established for the implementation of Qur'anic Arabic as a second language in all public institutions of learning in the non-Arabic speaking countries.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it may be noted that Malaysia has been very successful in implementing Qur'anic Arabic as a second language after Malay. When you visit Malaysia, you can easily get by even if you do not know the Malay language, as long as you know some Arabic. The Malaysian model would be an excellent one to emulate for other countries, including Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Turkey, Bosnia, Somalia, etc.