A Narrative-Based Approach to the Arabicity of the Quran's Language and Its Points of Similarity and Difference with Human Language

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Abstract

The religion of Islam is a universal religion, and consequently, the audience of the Quran includes all human beings from various ethnic backgrounds. However, from among the different languages, the divine will chose the Arabic language to convey the teachings of this holy book. Questions arise in this regard, such as 'Whether this selection is due to a special characteristic of the Arabic language or if it is merely rooted in being the same language as the Prophet's (PBUH) people?' 'If the Quran had been revealed in a non-Arabic language, could it have had a similar role and impact?' Furthermore,

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'Is the language of the Quran entirely subject to the rules and regulations governing human language, or does it have differences?' In response to these questions, the present study adopts a narrative-based approach to examine and analyze related hadiths. It concludes that the Arabic language, regarding its special capacities, is the exclusive language of revelation; therefore, the Holy Quran is established upon the Arabic language and is inseparable from it. There are also similarities and differences between the Arabic of the Quran and the conventional Arabic of the era of revelation. These similarities are manifested in the types of letters, word structures, grammatical rules, and expressive style. The differences lie in the semantic system, the textual continuum, and the levels of signification.

Keywords: Arabic Language, Language of the People, Language of the Quran, Quranic Arabic, Arabicity.

Introduction

The Holy Quran states that no messenger was sent except in the language of his people: "And We did not send any messenger except [speaking] in the language of his people." (Ibrāhīm: 4) In this context, regarding the revelation of the Quran in the language of the Prophet's (PBUH) people, it says: "And if We had made it a non-Arabic Qur'an, they would have said, 'Why are its verses not explained in detail? Is it a foreign [recitation] and an Arab [messenger]?'" (Fuṣṣilat: 44) The term *'A'jamīyy* refers to someone whose speech has ambiguity, whether that person is an Arab or non-Arab (Rāghib Iṣfahānī, n.d.: 549), and therefore *'A'jamīyy* means non-Arab or non-eloquent

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(Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 17, 399). Based on this explanation, if the language of the Quran were non-Arabic, the divine word would have been met with the objection of why its verses were not clearly explained, and why its language was non-Arabic while its bearer was an Arab. Therefore, the acceptance and reception of the Quran in the society of the revelation era required that the divine word be revealed in Arabic to be welcomed and not objected to.

It is narrated from Imam *Bāqir* (AS) regarding the revelation of the Quran in Arabic: "If this Quran were in a non-Arabic language, the people would have said, how we can learn it while our language is Arabic." (Qummī, 1984 AD/1404 AH: 2, 266) What can be inferred from the above verses and narrations is that if the Quran were not in Arabic, it would not have been accepted by the contemporaries of the revelation. But 'Does this mean that the reason for the Quran's Arabicity is that its initial audience was Arab-speaking?' 'Is it not possible that the Arabic language possesses a characteristic that makes the unique role of the Quran in the eternal guidance of humanity possible only through this language?' It is true that every prophet speaks in the language of his people, but if the Prophet (PBUH) had been sent among a people with another language and had brought a holy book in another language, 'Could that book have contained such sublime teachings and had a trans-temporal and trans-geographical impact like the Quran?' In other words, 'Is Arabicity essential to the Quran and an inseparable part of it, or is the Quran only in Arabic because the Prophet's (PBUH) people spoke Arabic?'

In view of the above issue, the present research seeks to investigate

the essential or accidental nature of the Arabic language for the Quran from a narrative perspective, and also to explore the aspects of similarity and difference between the language of the Quran and human language. In this regard, first, the different views on the expression "Language of the People" (*Lisān Qawm*) in verse 4 of Surah Ibrāhīm (AS) are examined, and after determining the chosen view, the relationship between the Arabic language and the Quran is determined. Finally, the article explores the extent of the Quran's common language with the people and clarifies the areas of similarity and difference between the two.

1. Background

Apart from numerous works that have generally addressed the subject of the essential and accidental in religion, several studies have specifically discussed the Arabicity of the Quran's language. Among them, in an article titled "A Look at the Topic of the Quran's Arabicity," the author, despite acknowledging the prominence of the Arabic language, believes that the purpose of the Quran's revelation in Arabic, as mentioned in the Quran itself, is not its revelation in the language of the Arab people, but rather the clarity, eloquence, and comprehensibility of the divine word (Noqreh, 2010 AD/1389 SH). In another article titled "An Introduction to the Secret of the Quran's Arabicity from the Perspective of the Quran," the author explores the reasons for the Quran's revelation in Arabic and presents factors such as the impact of the Quran's language on reason and reflection, the preservation and recording of divine knowledge, the sending of

messengers in the language of each people, and refuting accusations against the Prophet (PBUH) as reasons for the Quran's revelation in Arabic (Zakawi, 2013 AD/1392 SH). In contrast, the article "The Holy Quran and the Arabic Language" does not consider the revelation of the Holy Quran in Arabic to be due to an intrinsic virtue of this language, but rather evaluates the Arabicity of the Quran as stemming from wisdom and necessity, related to the place of revelation (Khoshmanesh, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 197-215).

In response to those who, based on verse 4 of Surah *Ibrāhīm* (AS), believe in the necessity of a common language between a prophet's (PBUH) holy book and the language of his people, the article "A Review and Critique of the Alleged Problems with the Arabicity of the Holy Quran's Language" denies this necessity. It states that the correspondence between the prophet's language and his people's language is different from the correspondence between the holy book's language and the people's language, claiming that some prophets of the Children of Israel read the Hebrew Torah to the people in Aramaic (Ayāzī, 2006 AD/1385 SH (b)). The author further considers the Arabic language to lack any special characteristic for revelation and, in his other work titled "Principles and Foundations of the Aesthetics of the Quran," discusses this topic more extensively, asserting that Arabicity is not the essence and constituent of the Quran and is an accidental aspect (Ayāzī, 2006 AD/1385 SH (a)).

The main difference of the present study with previous works lies in its narrative-based approach to the topic of the Quran's Arabicity, which attempts to answer the aforementioned questions based on the

hadiths of the impeccable Imams (AS). This research also examines the aspects of similarity between the language of the Quran and human language from the perspective of narrations, a topic that has not been addressed in previous studies.

2. Perspectives on "*Lisāni Qawm*" (The Language of the People)

Commentators and Quranic scholars have different opinions regarding the meaning of "Language of the People" in the verse "And We did not send any messenger except [speaking] in the language of his people." (Ibrāhīm: 4)

Some have proposed three possibilities for its meaning:

- The language that a people speaks, such as Persian, English, etc;

- The intellectual level and horizon of the people; thus, when it is said that the Prophet (PBUH) speaks in the language of his people, it means he respects their intellectual horizon and speaks in a way that is understandable to them;

- The same as the second possibility, with the difference that the Prophet (PBUH) speaking in the language of his people, according to this possibility, means that while considering the level of understanding of the people of his time, his expressions are such that they are not limited to that era and time and are not confined to that framework, but can communicate with other identities and diverse audiences (Ayāzī, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 81-82). The proponent of this view ultimately prefers the third possibility.

In contrast to this view, others believe that although the Quran must

respect the level of people's understanding and express sublime concepts and transcendent truths in a way that is comprehensible to them, the expression "Language of the People" in the holy verse does not imply more than the first meaning. The consideration of people's intellectual level can be inferred from other verses such as "And We have certainly made the Qur'an easy for remembrance." (al-Qamar: 17, 22, 32, 44) (Rostami, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 187-189)

Another Quranic scholar has considered "Language of the People" in the holy verse to mean "Being within the framework of the people's culture," basing this meaning on the fact that the language of any people is a mirror and manifestation of their culture, beliefs, theories, and worldview (Jalīlī, 1994 AD/1373 SH: 40). Another researcher in the same vein believes that the meaning of "Language of the People" is not only the language of the people, because language cannot be separated from cultural characteristics, but rather familiarity with the culture and language of the time, according to which the prophets preached in a way suitable for their understanding (Roshanzamir and Firuzi, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 37).

Despite the views that have considered "Language of the People" to be broader than the people's culture, most commentators believe that "Language of the People" means the language that people speak (Muqātil, 2002 AD/1423 AH: 2, 397; Ibn Abī Ḥātam, 1999 AD/1419 AH: 7, 2234; al-Samarqandī, 1996 AD/1416 AH: 2, 234; Abul Futūḥ Rāzī, 1988 AD/1408 AH: 12, 99). For example, *Shaykh Ṭūsī* says in his commentary on the holy verse: "God Almighty informs that in past times He did not send a messenger to a people except in the language

of his people, so that when he explained something to them, they would understand him and would not need someone to translate for him." (Ṭūsī, n.d.: 6, 273)

Ṭabrisī also interprets "Language of the People" similarly to *Shaykh Ṭūsī* (Ṭabrisī, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 6, 466). *'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī*, after interpreting *Lisān* in the said verse as language ("The *Lisān* is the language"), writes: "The meaning of sending the messenger in the language of his people is sending him in the language of the people among whom he lived, interacted, and associated." (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1971 AD/1390 AH: 12, 15)

Based on the foregoing, it seems that those who have considered "Language of the People" as extending beyond the language spoken by the people and including their culture have, in fact, incorporated the implications of the meaning into the concept of the word. In other words, the expression "Language of the People" in the holy verse, as renowned commentators have said, does not imply more than the language used by the people. However, since the effective use of any people's language requires awareness of their culture and the application of that language with attention to that culture, the aforementioned researchers have considered the concept of "Language of the People" to also include the "Culture of the People." This is while considering the category of culture to be part of the language of the people can have incorrect consequences, as some writers have considered the teachings of the prophets not only in the language of the people but completely in the framework of the people's culture, stating that "Not only the language of Islam but also its culture is

Arabic," (Soroush, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 11) or some have said, "The Quran is an Arabic descent of the truth, not the truth itself." (Rostami, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 271, quoting Farasatkhah)

Based on what has been said, the definite point that verse 4 of Surah *Ibrāhīm* (AS) indicates is the revelation of the Quran in the Arabic language. Now the question is what is the relationship between the Arabic language and the Quran?

3. The Relationship of the Arabic Language with the Quran

One religious scholar, in a discussion titled "The Essential and the Accidental in Religion," says: "It does not need much explanation that in relation to Islam, being Arabic is the same as being accidental... It would have been sufficient for the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) to be Iranian, Indian, or Roman for the language of his religion to become Persian, Sanskrit, or Latin." (Soroush, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 10) According to this view, Arabicity is not necessary for the language of revelation, and the Quran's Arabicity was due to the Prophet's (PBUH) people being Arab-speaking. Therefore, if the Prophet (PBUH) had been sent among another people with a non-Arabic language, his holy book would also have been in a non-Arabic language.

In contrast to this view, a narration from Imam *Bāqir* (AS) indicates that the Arabic language is the exclusive language of revelation. In this narration, he says: "God Almighty did not send down any book or any revelation except in Arabic, but it would reach the ears of the prophets in the language of their own people, and it would reach the ears of our Prophet (PBUH) in Arabic; when he spoke

to his people with it, he spoke to them in Arabic." (Ṣadūq, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 1, 126)

According to the above narration, two types of language are distinguished from each other: one is the language in which the divine revelation is composed, and the other is the language in which the prophets received the revelation. The language of the composition of revelation and all heavenly books was Arabic; but the language of the proclamation of revelation to the prophets was the language of their own people. The fact that they received revelation and heavenly books in the language of their own people is completely in line with the logic of popular acceptance and conforms to the divine tradition that verse 4 of Surah *Ibrāhīm* informs of.

A question that may arise here is who translated the divine revelation into the language of the prophets' people before it was proclaimed to them. At the end of the previous narration, something is stated that paves the way for attributing this matter to Gabriel. Imam *Bāqir* (AS) says: "None of us would address the Messenger of God (PBUH) in any language but that it would reach his ears in Arabic. All of this translation was done by Gabriel as an honor from God Almighty to him." (Ṣadūq, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 1, 126) This issue, that Gabriel had the power and permission to translate for the Prophet (PBUH), along with the fact that he was the angel of revelation and commissioned to deliver the divine word to the prophets, strengthens the possibility that the revelation composed in Arabic was, by divine will, translated by Gabriel into the language appropriate for each people and proclaimed to their prophet.

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Consequently, the Arabic language is essential for revelation and heavenly books, in the sense that the divine will has been set that no revelation or book from God is composed except in Arabic. Therefore, if in the stage of proclamation to the prophets, the divine revelation is translated into the language of their peoples, it is in fact those languages that are accidental.

3-1. The Superiority of the Arabic Language

The fact that God Almighty has chosen the Arabic language for the composition of revelation indicates a special feature of this language, a superiority that other narrations have also pointed to. It is narrated from Imam *Riḍā* (AS) that the "Speech of the people of Paradise is in Arabic." (Ṣadūq, 1999 AD/1378 AH: 1, 246) It is narrated that the language of Prophet Adam was initially Arabic, but after he disobeyed and ate from the forbidden tree, God took away His blessings from him, took the Arabic language from him, and replaced it with the Syriac language (Majlisī, 1983 AD/1403 AH: 11, 56). In a sermon from Imam Ali (AS), it is narrated that regarding the Arabic language, he addressed the Lord saying: "You have favored it over all other languages." (Majlisī, 1983 AD/1403 AH: 25, 29) This virtue and superiority of Arabic is because God Almighty has chosen this language to speak with His creation. As such, the Imams (AS) have advised people to learn Arabic. Imam *Ṣādiq* (AS) says: "Learn Arabic, for it is the word of God with which He spoke to His creation." (Ṣadūq, 1983 AD/1362 SH: 1, 258)

It is narrated that Prophet Solomon was knowledgeable in all

languages, but nevertheless, he would commune with God in the altar of worship in Arabic. In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is stated: "Solomon son of David was given, along with his knowledge, the knowledge of the speech of every tongue, and knowledge of languages, and the speech of birds, beasts, and predators. When he witnessed wars, he spoke in Persian. When he sat with his officials, soldiers, and the people of his kingdom, he spoke in Roman. When he was alone with his wives, he spoke in Syriac and Nabataean. When he stood in his prayer niche to commune with his Lord, he spoke in Arabic, and when he sat for delegations and adversaries, he spoke in Hebrew." (Qummī, 1984 AD/1404 AH: 2, 129)

Here, the question comes to mind as to what special feature exists in the Arabic language that has led to its selection as the language of revelation. *'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī* says that the reason for this choice is that the Arabic language reveals mental meanings and intentions in the best way and at the highest level (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1971 AD/1390 AH: 4, 160), and if the Quran were in another language, some of its secrets would remain hidden from the people (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1971 AD/1390 AH: 11, 75). This point is also inferred from a narration that the late *al-Kulaynī* quotes from one of *Ṣādiqayns* the (AS) under the verse "In a clear Arabic tongue," (al-Shu'arā': 195) where he said about the eloquent Quranic Arabic: "It clarifies all tongues, and no tongue clarifies it." (Kulaynī, 1987 AD/1407 AH: 2, 632) Since any language can to some extent clarify the content expressed in another language, it becomes clear that what the said narration means by the content of eloquent Arabic not being clarified by other languages is that it is not

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possible to fully convey the details and subtleties of eloquent Arabic speech through other languages (Bi Azar Shirazi, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 72). By the same token, the meaning of the content of other languages being clarified by eloquent Arabic is the possibility of fully conveying their content through this language. It is on this basis that Arabic has been considered one of the most expressive, powerful, and extensive languages in the world (Makarim Shirazi, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 9, 300; 13, 311; 21, 8).

3-2. Linguistic Analysis

One researcher, acknowledging the essential nature of the Arabic language for the Quran and for the religion of Islam in general (Qa'iminiya, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 588), proves this point by relying on the relationship between language and worldview, his view is explained below.

In modern linguistics, extensive discussions about the relationship between language and worldview have been presented, mainly within the context of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. Sapir and Whorf are the names of two linguists who believed that the language a person speaks influences their way of thinking. By studying Native American languages, they concluded that the grammatical structures of these languages affect the way concepts are formed. Therefore, they claimed that the worldview encoded in a particular language determines how speakers of that language perceive and understand the world. Their hypothesis has been formulated in various forms, the three main ones being:

1) **Extreme version:** "Every language contains a worldview that is in no way accessible in another language."

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2) **Moderate version:** "Every language contains a worldview that is not fully accessible in another language."

3) **Cognitive version:** "The ability of languages to express thoughts varies; the relationship of thoughts to different languages is different."

The extreme version has been seriously criticized because it implies absolute untranslatability and the impossibility of any understanding and communication between languages. However, the moderate and cognitive versions are considered plausible, and therefore, each can be used as a premise for arguing for the essential nature of the Quran's language. Based on the moderate version and considering that the Holy Quran has presented the divine worldview in the Arabic language, it is concluded that the divine worldview could only have been fully presented through the Arabic language. Also, based on the cognitive version and considering the presentation of the divine worldview in the Arabic language, it can be concluded that the easiest language to express the divine worldview was Arabic. Therefore, no language had the ability to present the Quran's worldview like the Arabic language, and for this reason, the Arabic language is essential to the Quran (for more information, cf. Qa'iminiya, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 588).

Furthermore, based on the stated argument, the reason why God Almighty chose Arabic in general as the language for composing revelation and heavenly books can be explained. The ease of the Arabic language in fully presenting the divine worldview was the reason, or one of the factors, that caused all divine revelations and

heavenly books to be composed in this language. Although the linguistic differences of the prophets' peoples necessitated that, in order to comply with the logic of popular acceptance, the divine revelation be proclaimed to them in a language appropriate for each people. An objection that may be raised here is that in this case, the divine worldview, although fully transmitted at the level of composition, was not presented fully and with an easy expression at the level of proclamation. In response to this objection, it can be said that the mentioned shortcoming was remediable with the explanations of the divine prophets, just as God, in the continuation of verse 4 of Surah *Ibrāhīm* (AS), points to the explanatory status of the prophets and says: "And We did not send any messenger except [speaking] in the language of his people to state clearly for them." Therefore, with the supplementary and explanatory clarifications that the prophets (PBUH) were obliged to provide, the possibility of fully transmitting the divine worldview was available.

4. The Extent of the Quran's Common Language with the People

The Holy Quran was revealed to the Arab people and in the Arabic language, but 'Does this common language mean that the language of the Quran is completely subject to the rules and regulations governing human language in general and the Arabic language in particular?' If the answer to this question is negative, 'In which areas should one believe in the existence of similarity and in which areas in its absence?'

In response to the first question, it must be said that although according to the divine tradition that verse 4 of Surah *Ibrāhīm* (AS)

unveils, every prophet is sent in the language of his people and his holy book is in their language, some narrations of the impeccable Imams (AS) negate the similarity between the divine word and human speech. These narrations must be interpreted as the absence of complete similarity, considering the mentioned divine tradition. In a report from Imam Ṣādiq (AS), it is stated: "The speech of the Creator, may He be glorified, does not resemble the speech of the creation, just as His actions do not resemble their actions." (Ḥurr ʿĀmilī, 1989 AD/1409 AH: 27, 200) The Imam's statement shows that one cannot rule in favor of a complete similarity between divine speech and human speech. In another narration, Imam Ali (AS), addressing a person who had doubts about the Quran, says in his response to the doubts: "Do not make His speech like the speech of humans." (Ṣadūq, 1978 AD/1398 AH: 267) This statement of the Commander of the Faithful (AS) also indicates the absence of complete similarity between the word of God and the speech of humans.

Based on these narrations, as well as the famous prophetic hadith which says: "The superiority of the Quran over all other speech is like the superiority of God over His creation," (Shuaeiri, n.d.: 40) it is concluded that the Quran, despite its similarity to human language, also has differences with this language. To better understand the divine word, it is necessary to distinguish the areas of similarity from the areas of difference.

4-1. Areas of Similarity

The impeccable Imams (AS) in their sayings and speeches have explicitly or implicitly stated cases of similarity between the language

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of the Quran and the Arabic language, which are mentioned below:

4-1-1. Similarity in the Alphabet

In a narration from Imam *Riḍā* (AS), it is stated that the Imam says: "God Almighty revealed the Quran with the same letters that all Arab speakers had access to and were common among them," and then He said in the Holy Quran: "Say, "If mankind and the jinn were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like of it, even if they were to each other assistants." (al-Isrā': 88) (Ṣadūq, 1978 AD/1398 AH: 234) In another narration from Imam *Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī* (AS), it is narrated that he said: "The Quraysh and the Jews denied the Quran and said that it was clear magic." So God Almighty said: "*Alif, Lām, Mīm*. This is the Book," (al-Baqarah: 1-2) meaning, O! Muhammad, this book that We have revealed to you is the same disjointed letters, among which are the letters *Alif, Lām,* and *Mīm*. The Quran is in your language and from your alphabet, so bring something like it if you are truthful (Ṣadūq, 1983 AD/1403 AH: 24). Based on these narrations, one of the areas of similarity between the language of the Quran and the Arabic language, which is also the lowest level of similarity, is the similarity in the alphabet.

4-1-2. Similarity in Vocabulary

In the previous narration from Imam *Ḥasan ʿAskarī* (AS), it was quoted that he said about the Quran: "It is in your language." The same expression is narrated from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), where he, in confrontation with the polytheists, stated: "I have brought you a clear sign, this Quran, which you and all other Arabs are

incapable of challenging, while it is in your language." (Ṭabrisī, 1983 AD/1403 AH: 1, 37). The fact that the impeccable Imams (AS) consider the language of the Quran to be in the Arabic tongue implies more than just similarity in letters. For there are not a few languages that, despite similarity in letters, are considered completely separate languages, such that users of one of those languages do not understand the expressions of the other language that only has alphabetical similarity to their language. For example, the Arabic and Persian languages, despite the similarity in the alphabet, are two completely different languages. Therefore, the implication of the expression "it is in your language" is higher than similarity in letters, and the definite meaning that can be considered for it is lexical similarity. That is, the Quran has used the same vocabulary that was common in the Arabic language.

4-1-3. Similarity in Grammatical Rules

It is narrated that a group came to the Prophet (PBUH) and asked about the verse "Indeed, you [disbelievers] and what you worship other than Allah are the firewood of Hell. You will be coming to it." (al-Anbīyā': 98) They asked if, according to this verse, the deities of the polytheists are also in Hell, then Jesus is among these deities, and therefore he should also be in Hell. The Messenger of God (PBUH), in response to this objection, said: "God revealed the Quran to me in the language of the Arabs and according to what is conventional in their language." He then stated that among these conventions is that the word *Mā* is used for the non-rational, the word *man* is for the rational,

and *Alladhī* is used for both rational and non-rational. So if you are an Arab, you would know this. God Almighty, in this verse, by the expression *Mā Ta'budūn* ("What you worship"), intended the idols that the polytheists worshipped, and they are non-rational beings; but Christ is not included among them because he is rational, and only if God had said *Man Ta'budūn* ("Who you worship") would Christ also have been included in Hell. After hearing the Prophet's (PBUH) explanation, that group affirmed and confirmed him (Karājakī, 1990 AD/1410 AH: 2, 186-187).

The Prophet (PBUH) in this narration introduces the Quran as being revealed based on the conventions of the Arabic language, and the example he himself uses for reasoning is a grammatical issue. Based on this, the definite meaning of these conventions can be considered grammatical rules, and one can rule for the similarity of the language of the Quran and the Arabic language in grammatical rules.

4-1-4. Similarity in Expressive Style

An examination of the narrations shows that in numerous cases, the Imams (AS), in explaining the meaning of the verses, have referred to the expressive techniques of the Arabs and have explained the purposes of the verses based on the metaphors, metonymies, and allegories common in the Arabic language. The Commander of the Faithful (AS), in explaining the meaning of "The Lord not looking" in the verse "He will not look at them on the Day of Resurrection," (Āli 'Imrān: 77) based on the expressive style of the Arabs, has interpreted it as deprivation of good and says: "The Arabs may say, "By God,

so-and-so does not look at us," and they only mean by that that we receive no good from him. So that look here is from God Almighty towards His creation." (Ṣadūq, 1978 AD/1398 AH: 265)

In another narration, the Imam interprets the forgetfulness attributed to God in the verses "They forgot Allah, so He forgot them" (al-Tawbah: 67) and "So this Day We will forget them as they forgot the meeting of this Day of theirs" (al-Aʿrāf: 51) as deprivation from reward and good, and for this purpose, he refers to the expressive style of the Arabs, saying: "The Arabs may say in the context of forgetfulness, "So-and-so has forgotten us and does not remember us,"meaning he does not command any good for us and does not remember us with it." (Ṣadūq, 1978 AD/1398 AH: 259) In another example, Imam *Sajjād* (AS), in response to the objection of why in verses such as verse 91 of Surah *al-Baqarah*, the Jews of the Prophet's (PBUH) time are rebuked for the misdeeds of their ancestors while the Quran itself says "And no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another," (Fāṭir: 18) states: "The Quran was revealed in the language of the Arabs, and in it, He addresses the people of the language in their own language." Then the Imam refers to the expressive style of the Arabs and says: When an Arab's tribe is victorious over another tribe, he attributes this honor and victory to himself, even though he was not directly present in that war, or he is blamed by others for the killing and looting of his tribe members, despite not having directly participated in that act. For this reason, the Quran also rebukes the Jews of the Prophet's (PBUH) time for their contentment with the actions of their ancestors and attributes the actions of the ancestors to

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them (Ṭabrisī, 1983 AD/1403 AH: 2, 312-313).

The mentioned narrations show that the Quran, in expressing its purposes, has used the expressive techniques and styles common in the Arabic language. Therefore, one of the areas of similarity between the language of the Quran and the Arabic language is the similarity in expressive style.

4-2. Areas of Difference

As mentioned before, the narrations of the impeccable Imams (AS) indicate that despite the Quran's common language with the people, there is no complete similarity between the language of the Quran and the Arabic language. This lack of similarity creates differences that are pointed out below.

4-2-1. Lack of Similarity in the Semantic System

Researchers believe that the Quran, relying on the lexical system of Arabic, transferred words such as *Ṣalāh* (prayer), *Sujūd* (prostration), *Ṣīyām* (fasting), *Ḥajj* (pilgrimage), *Zakāh* (alms), etc., to new meanings and expanded the scope of some terms such as *Kufr* (disbelief), *Fisq* (immorality), *Nifāq* (hypocrisy), etc. Also, words like *Qaḍā'* (divine decree), *Qadar* (divine destiny), *Tafaqqah* (deep understanding), *Khushū'* (humility), *Tasbīḥ* (glorification), *Barzakh* (isthmus), *Sā'ah* (the Hour), *Khulūd* (eternity), etc., had a meaning in the Arabic language, but in the culture of the Quran, they found a different meaning (Sa'idi Roshan, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 167-168). For example, *Ḥajj* in the culture of the Quran is a ritual act related to the worship of God Almighty, which is one of the pillars of the religion,

and its acts and rites have specific times and places. This is while in the pre-Islamic Jahiliyyah culture, *Ḥajj* did not include such components at all. Also, the word *Ṣiyām* in the Jahiliyyah culture initially meant stillness and stability and was then used to mean abstention from marital relations, eating, and drinking; but with the advent of Islam, in the light of the Quran's teachings, its concept changed and it became a specific term for one of the pillars of Islam (for more information, cf. Abū ʿAwdah, 1985: 175-251). Therefore, the Quran, by changing the pre-existing semantic relationships, established a new semantic system that formed the foundation of the Islamic worldview (Rakaʿi and Nusrati, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 88 and 92). Researchers also believe that the Arabicity of the Quran does not require that all its words and combinations were used in pre-Islamic poetry and literature with the same Quranic meanings. Therefore, the Quran's use of words in places other than their conventional usage, the invention of words consistent with the spirit of the Arabic language, the use of unprecedented combinations, and the intention of new meanings from pre-existing words, not only did not lead to the Quran's departure from the scope of the Arabic language but also helped to enrich it (Yazdi, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 171-181).

Apart from the research conducted in this area (cf. Yazdi, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 172-181), the narrations of the impeccable Imams (AS) also confirm the semantic changes in the words of the Quran. It is narrated from Imam *Kāẓim* (AS) that he said: "God, may He be blessed and exalted, named those who did not follow His Messenger regarding the guardianship of his successor as hypocrites, and...

revealed a Quranic verse about it, saying, "O! Muhammad, when the hypocrites come to you..." (al-Munāfiqūn: 1) (Kulaynī, 1987 AD/1407 AH: 1, 432) In the same narration, the Imam identifies the meaning of the deniers in the verse "And leave Me with the deniers "(al-Muzzammil: 11) as the deniers of the Prophet's (PBUH) successor and considered this meaning not as an interpretation (*Ta'wīl*) of the verse but as its literal revelation (*Tanzīl*) (Kulaynī, 1987 AD/1407 AH: 1, 434). Also, regarding the verse "And they did not wrong Us, but they were wronging themselves," (al-Baqarah: 57) he said: "God is more glorious and exalted than to be wronged, but He has made the oppression of us, the Ahl al-Bayt (AS), as oppression to Himself, and He revealed the said verse with this meaning, and this meaning is the literal revelation (*Tanzīl*) of the verse." (Kulaynī, 1987 AD/1407 AH: 1, 435) The same meaning is narrated from the Commander of the Faithful (AS) regarding the holy verse (Ṭabrisī, 1983 AD/1403 AH: 1, 254). In another narration, Ali (AS), regarding the meaning of the word "Faith" in the verse "...Never would Allah have caused you to lose your faith," (al-Baqarah: 143) says: "God Almighty has named the prayer here as faith, and this is a clear proof that the speech of the Creator, may He be glorified, does not resemble the speech of the creation." (Majlisī, 1983 AD/1403 AH: 90, 9)

Consequently, one of the aspects of the lack of similarity between the language of the Quran and the Arabic language is the different semantic system that exists in the Quran. Of course, this does not mean that all the words of the Quran are used in a meaning different from their previous meanings, but rather it means that the semantic

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changes in the words of the Quran have created new semantic relationships whose outcome is a different semantic system.

4-2-2. Lack of Similarity in Thematic Cohesion

One of the prominent features of the Quran is the constant change of subject and the lack of complete cohesion between its contents. Anyone who studies the Quran easily notices the discontinuity of its expressions and observes how various topics such as theological beliefs, legal rulings, stories and parables, admonitions and guidance, glad tidings and warnings, etc., are expressed in an intermingled and blended manner in the Quran (Maʿrifat, 2002 AD/1423 AH: 421; Shakir, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 124). Due to this expressive style, some Quranic scholars have considered the divine word to be "Anthology-like," (Behjatpur, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 121) some have named its method "Thematic Blending," (Zamānī, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 329) and some others "Dispersion." (Yazdi, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 144)

This is while in human language, cohesion between expressions and the existence of a logical connection between the parts of speech are among the necessities of any linguistic communication. Therefore, the lack of cohesion of expressions is one of the aspects of difference between the language of the Quran and human language.

In a narration, Imam *Ṣādiq* (AS), after stating that the complete understanding of the Quran is far beyond the level of human intellect with the expression "There is nothing farther from the minds of men than the interpretation of the Quran," points to the thematic diversity in Quranic expressions and says: "Indeed, the beginning of a verse

may be about one thing, and its end about another, and (at the same time) it is a connected speech that can be applied in various ways." (Barqī, 1992 AD/1371 AH: 2, 300) An example of this is verse 3 of Surah *al-Mā'idah*, whose beginning and end parts are related to some forbidden foods, and in between, the issue of the completion of religion and the successorship of Imam Ali (AS) is mentioned. Another example is verse 33 of Surah *al-Aḥzāb*, whose beginning addresses the wives of the Prophet (PBUH) and forbids them from displaying their adornments, and its continuation, which refers to the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) of the Prophet (PBUH) and their purification from all impurity. The fact that a verse, despite the thematic difference of its beginning and end, is a connected speech in the Imam's (AS) statement, considering his previous statement that the complete understanding of the Quran is beyond human intellect, indicates the fact that Quranic expressions contain logical connections in their internal context, but not all these connections are necessarily discernible to ordinary people. In addition, the applicability of Quranic expressions to multiple aspects while maintaining the connection of the speech indicates that there are multiple connections between these expressions, the knowledge of which, of course, lies with the true interpreters of the Quran. The result is that the frequent change of topics in the Quran has affected the cohesion of its expressions in the general view and has caused the text of the Quran to be considered disjointed compared to human texts.

4-2-3. Lack of Similarity in Layers of Signification

The Quran has layers of signification (*Dalālī*), which are referred to in

narrations as the exoteric (*Ẓahr*) and the esoteric (*Baṭn*). It is narrated from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that he said: "There is no verse in the Quran but that it has an exoteric (*Ẓahr*) and an esoteric (*Baṭn*) aspect." (Ṣaffār, 1984 AD/1404 AH: 1, 196) It is also narrated from Imam *Bāqir* (AS) that in response to *Jābir ibn Yazīd al-Ju'fī*'s question about different interpretations for one verse, he said: "Indeed, the Quran has an esoteric aspect, and that esoteric aspect has an esoteric aspect, and it has an exoteric aspect, and that exoteric aspect has an exoteric aspect. O! *Jābir*, there is nothing more inaccessible to the minds of men than the interpretation of the Quran." (Barqī, 1992 AD/1371 AH: 2, 300)

Based on such narrations, the Holy Quran has multiple layers of signification and, accordingly, multiple levels of meaning (for various narrations about the esoteric aspect and the opinions of Shia and Sunni commentators, cf. Baba'i, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 7-16). A part of the meanings is obtained from the apparent words and expressions of the Quran, which are called the exoteric of the Quran (Misbah Yazdi, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 2, 132), and another part consists of meanings and instances whose signification and application of the verses to them are not apparent, which are called the esoteric of the Quran (Baba'i, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 2, 20). Some of the esoteric and interpretative (*Ta'wīlī*) significations of the Quran are only understandable to the impeccable Imams (AS), and others can only access those meanings through their explanations. Therefore, in the field of Quranic significations, it can be said that the common ground between the language of the Quran and the Arabic language is the semantic relations that are known to

common usage; but a part of the esoteric interpretative (*Ta'wīlī*) significations stated in narrations, which are only comprehensible to the impeccable Imams (AS), are the exclusive significations of the Quran, which distinguish the language of the Quran from human language in general and the Arabic language in particular.

It is narrated from Imam Ali (AS) that he said: "Perhaps a literal revelation (*Tanzīl*) of the Quran resembles human speech while it is the word of God, but its esoteric interpretation (*Ta'wīl*) does not resemble human speech." (Ṣadūq, 1978 AD/1398 AH: 264) The literal revelation of the Quran is the same as the apparent and conventional significations of the verses that the contemporaries of the revelation clearly understood, and the esoteric interpretation of the Quran is the esoteric significations whose semantic relations are not clear to common usage without explanation. In the continuation of the said narration, the Imam again said: "Perhaps there is something from the Book of God whose esoteric interpretation is different from its literal revelation and does not resemble human speech". (Ṣadūq, 1978 AD/1398 AH: 266) This statement of the Imam (AS) also clearly emphasizes the difference between the language of the Quran and the Arabic language in the field of esoteric interpretative significations.

Conclusion

1. The meaning of "Language of the People" in verse 4 of Surah *Ibrāhīm* (AS) is the language that the people of each nation spoke, and it does not include their culture, beliefs, and intellectual level. In fact, these matters are not the meaning of *Lisāni Qawm* but its implications.

2. Based on narrations, the divine revelation was composed for the prophets in the Arabic language. The reason for this is the superiority of Arabic over other languages in effectively conveying meanings and purposes. Therefore, Arabic is essential to the Quran, meaning that this language had the highest capacity and ability to convey the sublime teachings of the Quran.

3. Based on narrations, the divine word is not completely similar to human speech but has differences with it. The Holy Quran is similar to the Arabic language in its letters of the alphabet, type of vocabulary, application of grammatical rules, and expressive style. However, it has distinct features in its semantic system, thematic continuum, and levels of signification.

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