

The Qur'anic Concept on Human Language: A Preliminary Study on Science-Religion Integration in Studying Sociolinguistics

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Abstract— This paper discusses human language based on the concept of al-Qur'an. Human language appears to be a unique phenomenon. The ability of human to communicate with one another in intelligent, symbolic, often abstract speech and writing is considered as a complete mystery to evolutionists. Even, they are unable to elucidate how language originated. Unfortunately, there is also insufficient theory which explains not only how human speech came about, but also why there are many different languages which have been developed in the world. In the paradigm of science-religion interconnection, such case can be connected to the exploration of verses of Qur'an which discusses human's language. Three concepts are discussed in the paper, namely the origins of human language, human brain and language, and ethics of speech in the view of al-Qur'an. These concepts are important in the study of sociolinguistics since it concerns on how language is used by human.

Keyword—sociolinguistics, science-religion interconnection, divine theory

I. INTRODUCTION

It is believed that the Qur'an can provide the general principles in scientific studies. The Qur'an is not a science textbook that has to expound upon cosmological or subjective matters [1]. As the Qur'an is revealed from Allah as the Creator, there can be no contradiction between it and the law in which Allah has placed in His creation [2]. Nevertheless, the Qur'an contains at least the principles of all branches of knowledge, either in summary or in detail, and not even one piece of this knowledge has ever been contradicted [1].

In fact, the Qur'an itself contains signals for science and technology that have the potential to be studied and developed by those understand and imply. Each verse has a particular meaning and connotation which should be explored, researched, and studied, because the Qur'an is the most important and significant source of knowledge [3]. As a source of knowledge, the Qur'anic verses are placed at a philosophical level, not at the level of scientific theory [4]. The function of guidance which is found by the Qur'an is also applied in the construction of science by providing the guidance for scientific principles, which are always associated with metaphysical and spiritual knowledge. That is, in the epistemology of Islam, the Qur'an can be used as a source of inspiration for the building of science. The Qur'an becomes the foundation not only for spiritual knowledge, but also for all types of knowledge.

As one of the branches of linguistics, sociolinguistics - the investigation of the relationship between language and society- has a particular relevance to be integrated with the Qur'anic moral values with certain rationalities. Firstly, this idea is reasonably supported by the fact of the substance of sociolinguistics itself. As one of the branches of linguistics, sociolinguistics concerns with the study of the effect of any and all aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations, and context, on the way language is used. The focus of sociolinguistics is the effect of the society on the language. Sociolinguistics refers to the study of the relationship between language and society, and how language is used in multilingual speech communities [5]. In this case, there is a clear affirmation of the relationship between language and various aspects of language users' life, including religion as a part of human life.

Since a religion becomes a part of human life, it has a close correlation of one's linguistic behavior and becomes marker of identity [6]. A person's language behavior reflects the religious affiliation he/she chooses. In fact, the differences in religious contexts and environ require the use of language specifically. In addition, the users of language are actually tied to the moral values on how language is used in the speech community. In brief, all linguistic practices can be evaluated meaningfully from a moral point of view. In fact, language itself enables its users to mark symbolically what is considered immoral or moral [7].

Secondly, the language phenomena are discussed in the verses of the Qur'an. As a sacred book that is believed as the guideline for human life, the Qur'an surely also contains verses on the language phenomena, both regarding the origin of human language, the diversity of human languages, and ethics of using language. The Qur'an invites people to study and respect the diversity of languages and declares it as an important sign of divine power at work in the organization of the universe. The Qur'an does not only recognize the existence of the diversity of languages as a manifestation of Allah's will, but also presents it as a challenge for research and understanding.

In the perspective of the Qur'an, the human ability to speak and the diversity of languages are the form of God's power and love. Language varieties, both geographical and temporal parameters, and changes, can be studied in terms of the existence of God. In addition, language is meant to be used as part of "worship" because it is a tool to earn God's graced and blessing. Therefore, humans must guide the

moral values outlined in the Qur'an in using both verbal and non-verbal language.

Thirdly, the contents of sociolinguistics are still dominantly influenced by the secularism which frees them from the influence of religion. There are no established linguistic theories that have paid the serious attention to the aspects of religion in the study of linguistics. Moreover, the secularism becomes more powerful and neglects the significant role of the religious values in studying linguistics, including sociolinguistics. As a result, the domination of secularism in linguistic encourages the birth of ideas of Islamization of linguistics. Islamization of linguistics is one of the most important aspects of the Islamization agenda in general [8]. Islamization of linguistics brings about the Islamization of thought and reason since they are interconnected closely to language [8]. In fact, the project of Islamization itself specifically is begun from the Islamization of language. The foundation of islamization of linguistics is based on the Islamic worldview which covers the Islamic concept of God, man, society, and cosmic order. The language usage must be tied to the moral values desired by God.

Studying sociolinguistics needs an understanding on the human language itself with its complexity. Unfortunately, there is also insufficient information which explains not only how human speech came about, but also why there are many different languages which have been developed in the world. In the paradigm of science-religion interconnection, such case can be connected to the exploration of verses of Qur'an which discusses human's language. Al-Quran discusses the fact of creation and has never explained the theories of science. It however elucidates and attracts the attention on the wonder of God's creations and reminds the existence of a Creator and gifts to human from God. Both are inter-related with the objectives of al-Quran which is to guide human being, as it contains the blessings for human being, and with the realization comes gratefulness, obedience and *taqarrub* (being familiar) towards God [9].

This paper explores some verses in Noble Qur'an that have a strong correlation to the issues of human language. Three concepts are discussed in the paper, namely the origins of human language, human brain and language, and ethics of speech in the view of al-Qur'an.

A. The Origins of Human Language

One of the theories that discusses about the origin of language is the divine source theory. This theory resulted from an interest in human origins and human nature. Since language appeared so uniquely human, it is believed that if humans know how, when, and where language arose, it leads them to know how, when, and where the human species arouse [10]. Thus, this theory recognizes the role of God in creating language and providing humans with language.

The belief in the divine origin of language has continued through the ages. Moreover, this theory is closely tied to the debate among the linguists. Some linguists provide a detailed defense of this theory, and others persevere to refuse it. The refusal on the theory appears since the information on the origin of language is just based on myths, customs, and superstitions that have no scientific dimension. This refusal

becomes a challenge for the proponents of this theory to explain the rationality of all statements in the scripts that contain information on the origin of language.

In Islamic teaching, Qur'an contains scientific indication in explaining the origin of human language. The term of scientific indication means that the statements of Qur'an contain the principle of non-contradiction. In this case, the verses of Qur'an emphasize the interconnectedness of the empirical and the transcendental. This principle becomes one of the requisites to categorize all statements or information as revealed in Qur'an as rational knowledge [11]. Moreover, Qur'an makes the revelation (*wahyu*) abundantly clear that is consists of verses (*ayat*) whose understanding is integrated with the process of thinking, contemplating, and reasoning as stated in the following verses: *Verily, in these things are signs for those who consider (Noble Qur'an, ar-Ra'd, 13:3); We detail our sings for people who know (Noble Qur'an, al-An'am,6:97).*

In the view of Qur'an, since language is one of the most important things for humans, it becomes the first thing which is taught by God to Adam as the first human. Qur'an states that the origin of spoken language is the instruction from God as said: (31). *And He taught Adam all the names (of everything), then He showed them to the angels and said, "Tell Me the names of these if you are truthful."* (32). *They (angels) said: "Glory is to You, we have no knowledge except what you have taught us. Verily, You are the Knower, the Wise."* (33). *He said: "O Adam! Inform them of their names," and when he had informed them of their names, He said: "Did I not tell you that I know the Ghayb (unseen) in the heavens and the earth, and I know what you reveal and what you have been concealing" (Noble Qur'an, al-Baqarah,2:31-33).* According to Ibnu Abbas that God taught Adam all the names that people use, such as human, animal, sky, earth, land, sea, horse, donkey, and so forth, including the names of the other species.

Language on its capacity as the formulation of concept provide the possibility for humans to learn all conceptions of their thought through the method of symbolism. In philosophy, the term of name is used sometimes to describe any word or phrase that can refer and sometimes in the more restricted sense of a word that uniquely identifies an individual [12]. Moreover, learning the names of all things refer to learning the sentences that describe conceptions or meanings as whole. When humans use a name of "horse" for a group of certain animals, they indeed use a symbol of language which indicates a concept or a whole meaning which are appropriate with others horse. Thus, the verse which states that God taught Adam the names of all things can be understood that He taught him a language which is used to name all things. Briefly, He taught Adam all names which describe the existing concept.

Furthermore, learning a name of thing will describe certain concepts that contain knowledge about distinctive attribute and characteristic found in all entities of such concepts. When humans learn about how to use the word of horse for indicating all kinds of horse, it means that they have known all kinds of horses with their certain characteristic. For this reason, in teaching Adam about the name of all things, God also taught their characteristics, distinctive attributes, and behavior [13].

The learning process which are experienced by Adam as a father of all humans, also experienced by all humans. Since their childhood, humans have identified that some objects are similar to certain characteristics, and different to others. It is impossible for humans to comprehend all things and respond them as an independent entity. On the contrary, humans need to simplify their process of understanding towards various objects through grouping certain objects which have same characteristics, and creating a certain concept for them. Simply, the concept of an object is the mental representation of a given object. That is, the concept is what the mind can comprehend about the object. The comprehension of an object, or its conceptualization, means that one has been able to identify the constituting components encompassing intrinsic and extrinsic component [11].

After creating a concept which describes certain objects or things, humans need to create names which illustrate the concepts appropriately. Humans' ability in learning language plays to create quickly the concepts and their use in the process of thinking and learning new information and fact. By using certain concepts in the process of thinking and using sentences for such concepts, humans can learn all objects and a thing in their mind through the method of symbolism.

In relation to language production, it is without doubt that speech requires a complex activity. This activity needs the manipulation of the tongue, lips, vocal cords, lungs, velum, and all parts that are called the vocal tract [14]. Physiologically, it requires such complex integration of nerves and muscles. When humans are speaking, the tongue is in constant motions, and its position in relation to other elements of the vocal tract is essential to the production of appropriate sounds. In producing speech, the brain conceives the notion to say something and sets in motion a series of electrical impulses to all the muscles of the vocal tract. These muscles, in turn, set up a complex sound wave, and the result is that something what spoken language is.

Formally, it is believed that a language consisted of a series of habits, skills and aptitudes, and is acquired by exercises, repetitions, generalizations and associations. Nevertheless, humans do the activity of language production unconsciously and they do not know how it can occur. In this case, Qur'an states that God taught humans to speak as stated in the following verse: *The most Merciful (God) has taught this Qur'an. He it is Who created man and taught him speech (Noble Qur'an, ar-Rahman, 55:1-4)*. This verse states that God taught humans to be able to communicate by means of spoken language [15]. It means that God bestows the potential for humans to be able to think and express meanings through sounds and written form. Scientifically, the verse signs that God creates humans with the potential biologically to acquire a language.

According to Chomsky, humans have capacity to acquire language since they are born with minds that contain innate knowledge concerning a number of different areas. One such area or faculty of the mind concerns language [16]. Chomsky states that such faculties of the mind are relatively independent of one another. Thus, language acquisition is independent of intelligence and logic. He refers to the set of innate language ideas that comprise the language faculty as

the Universal Grammar (or the UG). This Universal Grammar underlies the specific grammars of all languages. Human being is born with UG which is used to acquire any particular grammatical in the world. Thus, the UG is not a grammar of any certain language, but it contains the essentials with any particular grammar can be acquired. In short, language acquisition is determined by humans' abstract cognitive ability since God equips them with special abilities how to discover the regularities of language.

Furthermore, it is assumed that humans have used language since about 45,000 years B.C. The total of language in the world is approximately about 6000 languages [4]. In Indonesia, there are about 370 clients and almost all of them have their own language. In the view of Qur'an, the diversity of human language becomes one of the signs of God's power as stated in the following verse: *And among the sign of His power is the creation of the heavens and the earth and diverse language and skin color. Surely, in that situation actually there are signs for people who know (Noble Qur'an, ar-Rum, 30:22)*. This verse indicates that the language that is used by humans in the world is a creation of God. Thus, the diversity of language is the characteristic of the earth.

The humans' activity in the process of oral communication continues to writing skill. Writing allows the preservation of communication over space and through time, and its great importance in human history and in complex societies would be hard to overestimate. Through writing humans can transfer knowledge from generation to generation. Since writing is important for human civilization, God did take an Oath by a Pen as stated in the following verse: *Nuun. By the Pen and what they (humans) inscribe (Noble Qur'an, al Qolam, 68:1)*. The contemporary exegesis of Qur'an (the interpretation of Qur'an) states that the term of pen as mentioned in this verse may refer to the pen that people use. This God's oath indicates is extremely powerful because it writes down idea, history, theory, identity, plan for human civilization. It also writes down what people think, feel, experience and much more. For this reason, if the pen of humans is meant, then '*wa maa yas turuun*' – *and what they inscribe* – means that human history which men write out.

Humans could hardly have survived, if their ability to produce speech is derived from the beginning of their days. The Quran's statement that the first human being was taught to speak is very important in this context. God equips humans with the mental capacity, with an ear ready to receive what he hears, and a mouth and tongue to express their intentions. Coincidences cannot account for the perfect and complex creation of our ear, mouth and tongue. It is eminently reasonable to conclude that God's gift of language to humans could be accepted in faith and praise to Him.

B. Human Brain and Language

Qur'an contains amazing statements on the brain mostly about the area of frontal lobe. The frontal lobe is the part of the brain that controls important cognitive skills in humans, such as emotional expression, problem solving, memory, language, judgment, and sexual behavior. It is, in essence, the control panel of humans' personality and ability to communicate. As its name indicates, the frontal lobe is at the front of the brain. The right hemisphere of the frontal lobe controls the left part of the body, and vice versa. The frontal

lobe is also the most common place for brain injury to occur. Damage to the frontal lobe can create changes in personality, limited facial expressions, and difficulty in interpreting one's environment, such as not being able to adequately assess risk and danger.

According to [17], Qur'an has described the relationship between the frontal lobes of the brain, and the ethical behavior of human beings, as in the following verse: *"Do you see who forbids a servant of Ours (God) when he (turns) to pray? Do you see if he who prays follows the guidance and enjoins righteousness? Do you see if he who obstructs rejects (Truth) and turns away? Does he not know that God sees? Let him beware! If he desists not, We (God) will punish him upon his forehead - a lying, sinful forehead! (Noble Quran, al 'Alaq, 96:9-16). The Almighty also says: There is no living creature that moves on the earth, but he (God) holds its forehead completely (Noble Quran, Hud, 11:56).*

The word used in the last two verses above is *an-Nasiyah*, which means "the forehead". The forehead in this statement obviously refers to the frontal lobes of the brain which lie behind of posterior to the frontal bone in the forehead. In the context of language use, this area is responsible for telling lies and the truth.

The speech of lying is initiated by the mental activities which occur in the frontal lobes. The instruction of the frontal lobes is then carried out by the speech organs during the act of lying. Similarly, sins are planned in the frontal lobes before they are carried out by the eyes, hands, sexual organs, etc.

Perhaps for the above mentioned reasons, God orders us to perform *sujood*, (place our foreheads on the ground), as stated in the continuation of the Qur'anic verses above: *Then let him call his associates. We will call on the angels of punishment. Then follow not him, but prostrate yourself and draw nearer to Us (God). (Noble Quran, al 'Alaq, 96: 17-19).* This order to perform *sujood* means that people should place the center of the will and decision making upon the ground to show the absolute submission to God.

Qur'an has described the role of the forehead, or more specifically the function of the frontal lobes of the brain, in making decisions, and in the control and direction of human behavior, including how humans to speak pragmatically. Moreover, the function of the forehead has been recognized by modern comparative anatomy.

3. The Qur'anic Ethics of Speech

Ethics is about people and how they relate to each other. Ethics is often equated with decision of high moral magnitude and associated with weighty concepts of right and wrong [18]. In this context, humans need to know and apply the ethics of speech as a set of moral principles that determine how to communicate appropriately.

Qur'an gives a deep attention on the ethics of speech. There are six ethics in communication as explained in Qur'an. These ethics as follows:

1) *Qaulan Syadida (truth speech).*

God says: Let those (disposing of an estate) have the same fear in their minds as They would have for their own if They had left a helpless family behind: let them fear Allah, and speak words of appropriate. (Noble Qur'an, An-Nisa,4:

9). *Qaulan Syadida* means the truth speech, honest, right, no lie, and no circumvent. *Qaulan Syadida* in the context of the verse implies that advice for children must be expressed in the words of gentleness.

2) *Qaulan Ma'rufa (accepted speech).*

This kind of speech is stated in Quran as follows: To those weak of understanding make not over your property, which Allah hath made a means of support for you, but feed and clothe them therewith, and speak to them words of kindness and justice (Noble Qur'an, An-Nisa,4: 5). The meaning of *ma'rufa* refers to kind, well, and received by values prevailing in society. A good speech is speech that is accepted as something good in view of the speakers. In other words, *qaulan ma'rufa* implies a respectful in accordance with rules, laws and logic. 3. *Qaulan Baligha (Eloquent Speech).* Qur'an states: those men, -(Allah) knows what is In their hearts; so keep Clear of them, but admonish them, and speak to them a word to reach their very souls (Noble Qur'an, An-Nisa,4: 63). *Qaulan baligha* interpreted as an eloquent speech or the right speech which has a bright meaning. It reveals exactly a speaker's intention and can be interpreted as an effective speech.

3) *Qaulan Maysura (simple or easy speech).*

God says: And Even if Thou hast to turn away from them In pursuit of the Mercy from Thy Lord which Thou dost expect, yet speak to them a word of easy kindness (Noble Qur'an, al-Isra,17: 28). *Qaulan maysura* means an easy word. It can also refer to understandable words and provides a sense of optimism for people to talk to.

4) *Qaulan Layyina (gentle speech).*

God says: *But speak to Him mildly; Perchance He may take warning or fear before God (Noble Qur'an, Thaha,20: 44)* According to al-Maraghi, *Qaulan layyinan* means gently speech which touch the heart and pull to receive religious proselytizing. With gentleness, that there will be a communication that will impact the contents absorbed by people saying they're talking to so that it will happen not only information but nevertheless arrival will change the views, attitudes and behaviors of people who talk to.

5) *Qaulan Karima (Noble Speech).*

A noble word is a word which gives respect and honor to the person who we talk to. In this case, God states: Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but him, and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age In Thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them In terms of honor (Noble Qur'an, Al-Isra,17: 23). In this case, Islam prohibits Muslims to say "ah" to their parents, and even to say the words or treated them more harshly than that.

All verses indicate that Qur'an contains the principles of ethics in human communication. Briefly, these principles also become the miracle of Qur'an, especially on human language.

II. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The facts about human language in Qur'an can be explained scientifically. These facts provide clear evidence that the Qur'an is not the word of man. Thus, Qur'an is the

word of the Almighty God, the Creator of human, the Originator of everything and the One Who encompasses everything with His knowledge. These facts also strengthens that there is the interconnection between science and religion-Islam- in studying linguistics, especially about the theory of origins of human language.

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