

Pragmatic language in Understanding the Holy Qur'an

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زبان پراگماتیک در فهم قرآن کریم

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Abstract

The issue of language has been the subject of thought for philosophers since many years ago, but in the twentieth century it has become the most important philosophical issue. In the field of religious studies, an important issue is the issue of language too. In addition, the language of religion and the way of understanding religious texts have been importantly concerned by religious scholars. The issue of “the method by which God Almighty conveys His connotations and goals”, is one of the most important issues in religious language. In addition, “has the Holy Qur'an answered the fundamental question that provides the methodology for understanding the Qur'an, before answering other human needs that are essential to its transcendence?” In this research, the author tries to provide a positive answer to the above fundamental question, stating that the language of the Qur'an is a pragmatic language. In this regard, in order to defend the pragmatic language of the Qur'an, the author first states the characteristics of a language suitable for the Qur'an and then shows that pragmatic language has the characteristics of a language suitable for the Qur'an, being used in the Qur'an. In conclusion, the language of the Qur'an is an existential and innate language.

Keywords: Pragmatic Language, Religious Language, Philosophy of Religion, The Qur'an.

چکیده

از گذشته دور مساله زبان موضوع اندیشه برای فیلسوفان بوده است اما در قرن بیستم زبان به محوری‌ترین مساله فلسفی تبدیل شده است. در حوزه مطالعات دین‌پژوهی نیز یکی از موضوعات مهم ناظر به مساله زبان است و زبان دین و راه فهم متون دینی به دغدغه مهم برای دین‌پژوهان تبدیل شده است. این مساله که خداوند متعال برای انتقال معنا و مقصود از چه زبان و معیاری استفاده نموده یکی از مهم‌ترین موضوعات در زبان دین است. آیا قرآن کریم قبل از پاسخ به سایر نیازهای بشری که در تعالی او ضروری هستند به این پرسش بنیادین که متدولوژی فهم قرآن را فراهم می‌سازد پاسخ داده است؟ در این پژوهش، نویسنده تلاش می‌کند ضمن ارائه پاسخ مثبت به پرسش بنیادین مذکور، بیان خواهد کرد که زبان قرآن، زبان پراگماتیک است. نویسنده برای دفاع از زبان پراگماتیک قرآن، نخست ویژگی‌های زبان مناسب برای قرآن را بیان نموده، سپس نشان می‌دهد که زبان پراگماتیک، ویژگی‌های زبان مناسب برای قرآن را دارا است و در قرآن نیز بکار رفته است. نتیجه‌ای که پژوهش حاضر بدان می‌رسد این است که زبان قرآن، زبان وجودی و فطری است.

کلمات کلیدی: زبان پراگماتیک، زبان دین، فلسفه زبان، قرآن.

Introduction

Language as a means of transferring thought has been the subject of research by various thinkers up to the present. In recent decades, however, language has become an important topic for research and study, so that in philosophy, many philosophers from the twentieth century view the most important philosophical concerns in language (Blackstone, 1963: 1). Also, the distinction between west contemporary philosophy and the philosophy of the past centuries is related to this concern. In the past, the problem of language was discussed in various branches of philosophy, including metaphysics, logic, and epistemology. Of course, philosophy, when it comes to analysis, actually examines the problem of language (Alston, 2002: 7). Linguistic studies can be followed in two ways: First, areas of linguistic studies that examine a particular language, such as syntactic science. Another field is sciences that study language as a general category. These sciences methodologically are two types as well: a) sciences that consider the language as a scientific subject and study it in an empirical manner, such as linguistics, and those that regard language as a philosophical issue and consider it rationally. The philosophy of language is responsible for expressing the general aspects of language. These aspects do not relate to a particular language, but are true for any language.

Philosophy of language is one of the most important intellectual movement in analytic philosophy. One of the most important issues in the philosophy of language is theories on meaning with different theories.

Philosophical attention to the issue of language has also spread in the field of religious studies and the discussion

of the language of religion has become one of the important concerns in the philosophy of religion and for commentators and theologians. New studies in the philosophy of religion specifically focus on the function of language in religion. Although some of these discussions have existed with past religious scholars, including those of the Middle Age thinkers (Hick, 2000: 82), nevertheless, these discussions focus on the descriptive character of the language of religion when the language is used about God.

Although other discussions of the language of religion were discussed by the ancestors, they have been redefined by analytical philosophy (Ibid: 83). The reason is clear; Religions, especially the divine ones that have divine books, are confronted with the following issue: If sacred texts in religions as divine words have transmitted God's purposes and guidance, necessary to human salvation by the prophets, then how the audience, whose hands are now short of revelation, can understand the divine text. For example, for a Muslim who wants to base his life on the Qur'an and the will of God, one of the most important issues and concerns is that he must first understand the word of God. It seems that the verses of the Holy Qur'an, which invite the audience to think and contemplate, address the same concern (the understanding of the Qur'an) too: "Have they not pondered the Word, or hath that come unto them which came not unto their fathers of old" (Mu'minūn: 68)¹

In other words, the Holy Qur'an was communicated to human beings as the charter of Muslim human life through

١. أَفَلَمْ يَدَّبَّرُوا الْقَوْلَ أَمْ جَاءَهُمْ مَا لَمْ يَأْتِ آبَاءَهُمُ الْأَوَّلِينَ.

divine revelation to the Holy Prophet, and its ultimate goal is human transcendence through the educational and value principles of the Qur'an. Since the application of the educational and value principles of the Qur'an require understanding it, and understanding the Qur'an requires having a certain criterion and degree, one cannot expect a true Muslim to apply the divine moral system and the will of God in life without understanding the contents of the Qur'an. The basic issue in this respect is to have a criterion in understanding and discerning the language of the Holy Qur'an. In other words, before understanding the Qur'an, it is necessary to determine the language of the Qur'an's understanding, and in order to determine the language of the Qur'an, a certain criterion should be found in this regard. Has God Almighty used a specific criterion or language in the Holy Qur'an to transfer His intentions to the audience? The purpose of this article is to address the question of whether the Qur'an, before responding to the human needs that are essential to his salvation, has responded to this fundamental issue that provides a methodology for understanding the Qur'an?

In this research, the author tries to respond positively to this fundamental question, saying that the Qur'anic language is pragmatic. In this regard, the author will argue why the Qur'an cannot miss a particular language. In order to defend the pragmatic language of the Qur'an, first, the necessary features of the language of the Qur'an are expressed, i.e. the pragmatic language has the necessary features for the language of the Qur'an, and in the Holy Qur'an, such a language has been widely used.

Regarding the question of the language of religion in Christian theology and in Islamic thought, numerous works have been developed that offer different theories. In our scientific community, the articles "the language of the Qur'an, an allegorical language, from the point of view of Sadr al-Mutallihin," by Dr. Gholamreza A'wani and Nasser Mohammadi (A'wani, 2008), as well as "the language of the Qur'an, structure and features" by Hamid Aryan (Aryan, 2000), "the language of the Qur'an" by Zamani (Zamani, 1996: 36) discussed the language of the Qur'an. But this research proposes a different theory regarding the language of the Qur'an.

Pragmatism in Summery

Before explaining the pragmatic language, it is necessary to provide a brief explanation as a preliminary discussion of pragmatism:

In the late nineteenth century, a philosophical method called pragmatism in the United States was first developed by Pierce, and then evolved by William James, and culminated with the publication of the works of Dewey, and it set his place among the philosophical, social, and educational schools. According to the followers of this philosophy, the goal of life is action rather than comment. As a result, the activity of reason is essentially in the origin of the practical effect, and the work of reason is that it facilitates life and livelihood and helps our various desires. Therefore, the value and credibility of science is its practical aspect, and the work of science is not that it recognizes the nature of objects, but that it provides means of influence and capture in them and adapts them to human needs.

Pierce, as the father of pragmatism, states that if the concept does not have an objective result then it is meaningless. Based on this viewpoint, a concept or term is defined by relying on its potential or actual effects.

James formulates the idea of a pragmatist in the form of a sentence as follows: To obtain the meaning of an idea, it is merely enough to show the kind of behavior that the thought implies and causes it (Barry, 1998: 64). Thus, in the case of James, pragmatism is also a theory of meaning, as well as a theory of truth.

In this way, the truth is conceived as contradicting what the conventional philosophers thought about. In James's view, pragmatism is the best means and solution for solving the dominant challenges in philosophy (Ayer, 1982: 7). Some twentieth-century schools of thought have reacted to any kind of rationalism as a reaction to past philosophies. Philosophy is the best guideline, but not in abstract concepts rather in living, effort and decision making. The pragmatists laid their view on action and practice. Indeed, pragmatism is a kind of objectification of philosophy; that is, in the process of recognizing the occurrence of objective changes, it is based on action and in some way sees the practice and experience as the principle of opinion. All these pragmatists perceive thought as function of action. They reject the idealistic conceptions of the world and consider them abstract and conceptualizations. The image that pragmatists offer regarding the world is also apart from other philosophies, for when instead of focusing on the universal concepts we mind to what is shown in practice, then, we have come to a different world than the other philosophies (Naqibzadeh, 2005: 109).

According to pragmatism, the purpose of rational activities is an attempt to solve problems that are occurring during our attempts to examine experience. Many conventional philosophical theories to solve life problems and solve the problems that human beings face in experience, are of little value or worthless. Pragmatism, first, is a method and then a theory about the meaning of truth. From James's point of view, a belief is true if, when applied, the results are satisfactory and tangible. According to the principle of pragmatism, in order to develop a mental concept, we only need to determine how that concept is used to create behavior, and that behavior is the meaning of that mental concept. So in order to get more clarity in our thoughts on a subject, we must look and pay attention to what the subject matter contains, what the expected practical results are, what effects we can expect from it, and what kind of reaction we should prepare. From the point of view of the school of pragmatism, it is a useful rationality if it solves practical problems; In other words, this school values the human intellect where it leads to human desires and aims and limits the value of knowledge to the practical aspect; Therefore, the truth of a proposition must be defined by the criterion of practical usefulness. Since our beliefs are so closely related to action, we must take risks in our beliefs and become aware of their truth.

The Nature of Pragmatic Language

Before articulating the pragmatic language of the Qur'an, it is necessary to express its characteristic. If a belief or any action on the basis of particular belief does not leave any positive effect on this universe, why should it be

considered valid? It seems that no one is allowed to interact with anyone, whether God Almighty or His Prophets. He who wants to interact with human beings, in fact, has forgotten the innate nature of mankind. Allah Almighty who, in the work of the universe, has established a marvelous order in such a way that even claiming its complete understanding will be a futile claim to have interacted with humans in religious texts, including in the Holy Qur'an, and has addressed them in order to convey the true way of salvation to them. Now, such a creator must have used other rules in addressing humans through the use of language, regardless of grammatical or syntactic rules, that may be seen as the underlying basis for any language. A proper understanding of human nature shows that one cannot interact with human beings on the basis of nothing. Therefore, if someone, especially God, wants to invite man to an interaction or transaction and use language that does not pay attention to the effects of this world of concepts, beliefs or behaviors, in fact, he has chosen an incomprehensible language to convey his desires, which is a kind of violation of purpose. As, God really wants human beings to understand the Holy Qur'an and practice it. Now, using any language that does not conform to this desire is a kind of contradiction and violation of purpose. God has communicated with humans in heavenly books, including the Holy Qur'an. In the Islamic religion, the Qur'an as a great miracle of God on humans, a language must be used in order to adhere to the rules of the anthropological and spatial rules in the use of language while following the rule of syntax. The logical and ethical condition of this communication is that

God uses a language that is understandable to all human beings. Of course, the language should match the existential and psychological nature of the human being.

The question now is: "What language does have this feature?" The pragmatic language has such a characteristic. As stated, pragmatism determines the validity of everything based on its objective and concrete outcome. If we look at it, it turns out that such an approach actually reflects the everyday character of human beings that dominate their behavior in their practical life as a rule. One of the characteristics that humans display in their behavior irrespective of the culture and traditions of the communities in which they live, is the same computational characteristic that derives from human nature. Intuitively, humans tend to observe the value of everything in practice, in the sense that if something does not have any effect in practice, they will be skeptical about its validity. How can one accept that it does not effect in practice if it is something of requirements of human life? Human beings, regardless of color, race or gender, the general law that is subject to it in their communications, is the intrinsic tendency of evaluating one thing by relying on its practical effect. This is a universal desire; hence the pragmatic language is a universal language. The universality of pragmatic has its origin in man's creation and this desire is set in him by creation. If we look at it, it becomes clear that this desire is to calculate affairs by relying on practical results. In other words, the meaning of such desire is to avoid anything that is not objective in human life. Such an attribute is an intrinsic or innate tendency. This inherent desire of man

provides a general and universal law in shaping the mind and behavior of man. This desire as a general rule can govern all languages as well. The language used in religious texts can be any language, Arabic or Farsi. These languages are dialects. But what's the dominant rule for them as a general rule?

Linguistic scholars have raised many issues in this regard. A language may have a specific syntax and structure, but the question is that when it is used and someone uses it to express his wishes in a unilateral or bilateral dialogue, it certainly adheres to the syntactic rules, for, otherwise, the meaning of the text provided in this dialogue may be challenged by the non-observance of language rules. But apart from adhering to the syntactic structure, when a language is used, the text made by such communication is meaningful in term of grammatical and syntax. Still, the problem that matters is that in this context "how can such text be understood?" Are only morphological and syntactic rules used? Although the observance of morphological and syntactic rules guarantees the meaning of the text, this can be another issue, apart from morphological and syntactic rules that do not have a specific origin. What is the role of existential rules and their role in making the text comprehensible? Language does not require only to be meaningful. In addition to meaning, language needs to be understood. The literal and syntactical rules provide meaningful language conditions, but what is the context for language comprehension? According to the author, the comprehensibility of the language is influenced by anthropology. To understand the conditions necessary to comprehensibility of language one

must consider human nature. If human being has intrinsic tendencies, can it be said that observing the rules of language about the text makes it meaningful? The author's answer is negative. What is effective in understanding the text of is following the role of the inherent characteristics of man. One of these features is the computational desire of man, which certainly dominates the use of language as a general rule for all languages. If the literal and syntactic rules, in the sense of the text are necessary, how can one accept that the inherent tendencies in man in the comprehensibility of the text lack the role?

Pragmatic language means a language that ensures the comprehensibility of the text. For the pragmatic language has an anthropological origin. The willingness of humans to follow the practical impact of all that they encounter cannot be ignored in communication-based texts. God Almighty in the Qur'an, in the form of a textual dialog with humans, should not ignore this anthropological factor.¹ Therefore, the validity of the pragmatism should be seen in its similarity to the inherent nature of mankind. Man is inherently result oriented being and the pursuit of any action by human beings essentially searches for an objective result.

Another factor that emphasizes the validity and value of pragmatic criteria is seen in its problem solving character. The pragmatic language derived from the pragmatism theory is a good way to solve many deadlocks that man always

1. In the next section it will be stated that the Qur'an is a pragmatic language and in this language the Qur'an refers to this anthropological factor of direct attention.

faces with in his life. The pragmatic value is that instead of turning to skepticism on the one hand, which perceives knowledge as impossible, or instead of converting it into purely explicit methods. On the other hand, one leads to a more natural way of life and instead of perceiving the world in isolation, it would perceive it from the window of action with tangible results. In any case, pragmatic language cannot be ignored in dialogues because it is related to an anthropological character and in accordance with the intrinsic desire of humans. Therefore, we can say that pragmatic language is "an existential language," because it originates from the nature of human beings. Therefore, in spite of the difference between humans in color and gender, they share in this perspective a universal language. The pragmatic language due to being an existential language is a universal language and in all understandable text-based communication is a necessary precondition.

Pragmatic Language in Holy Qur'an

The main feature of any dialectic language is that the user of the given language intends to transfer thought and desire by using it. The heavenly texts, including the Holy Qur'an, reflects a kind of linguistic relationship between man and God. Although this connection seems to be unilateral and God expresses His demands, necessities and requirements of human salvation and guidance, something as underlying assumption is sent to understand and perceive such seemingly unilateral communication. Logically and morally, when someone wants to transfer something to someone in the form of a text or oral then has a particular expectation of their audience, it is necessary for the individual to use the text or dialect to use a suitable and

comprehensible language. Accordingly, some interpret the language of the Qur'an as a codename. For example, Ishmaeli sect believe in the codification of the language of the Qur'an (Nasser Khosrov, 1970: 180). If the language of the Qur'an is considered to be a codification, this logical and moral condition is certainly not met. For the use of the codification language for a text whose purpose is to transfer the necessary desires and teachings to the audience's salvation is inappropriate and contradictory, and is considered a violation of the will. Emotional theory also cannot be a proper language because, although in an emotional language the audience become aware of the interests and wishes of the owner of the text, the religious educational (to use Arabic term: تعليمي) role mentioned in the Qur'an is explicitly neglected.

According to the Muslims, the Holy Qur'an not only is one of the miracles of the Holy Prophet, but also his great miracle. It is also a common belief in all Islamic groups that miraculous aspect of the Holy Qur'an is a multi-layered and has several dimensions (Rezaei Isfahani, 2003: 88). Among the miraculous aspects of the Qur'an, is its magic content. The Qur'an has put forward all the demands necessary for human salvation:

And We have sent down to you the Book making everything clear, as a guidance, and mercy, and glad tidings to those who submit: "And We reveal the Scripture unto thee as an exposition of all things, and a guidance and a mercy and good tidings for those who have surrendered (to Allah)." (Nahl: 89)¹

There are different perspectives on the comprehensiveness of the Holy Qur'an, but at least the above

١. ... وَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بَيِّنَاتٍ لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً وَبُشْرَىٰ لِلْمُسْلِمِينَ.

mentioned passage of this verse can imply that the Holy Qur'an expresses what is necessary for human guidance and excellence. Mohammad Hossein Tabataba'i – a great contemporary interpreter and Muslim philosopher – believes that the Qur'anic expression "*li koll-i shay'in*" indicates to what is necessary for human guidance and salvation (Tabataba'i, 1981: 14/325).

It should now be considered that this great miracle about how to communicate with humans, regardless of their color, race, and gender, have addressed them. In this case, before expressing the requirements of human guidance and salvation, the Holy Qur'an must express what kind of language it uses. As stated, the general belief of Muslims is that the Qur'an is a magic of content and has a kind of comprehensiveness. There is no controversy about the Qur'an's comprehensiveness about guiding humankind. In this case, its comprehensiveness should include the way of understanding and language used in the Qur'an. If this fundamental issue does not express, it may harm the original purpose of the owner of the text, i.e. human understanding and guidance. God certainly demands the understanding of the Qur'an from man, because God's intention is targeted at guidance and human salvation. How man can achieve salvation without understanding the divine word!? Of course, the logical condition for understanding the divine word is to determine what language God used in the Qur'an. In other words, through what general rule is governed the language given in the Qur'an.

What is important in this regard is that using a proper language – in the sense of understandable - is a moral and rational condition. But we must try

to identify the features of a proper language. The author believes that the proper language for the communication of the text-oriented, which is designated to address all people, must at least have an important feature, that is, the language must be general too, since the audience of the Qur'an is all humankind. According to this, the language used by God should be a language that is accessible to everyone, and everyone can use it easily. Therefore, the proper language, is a general language, and a general language should be in common with all human being. In this regard, the most important feature is that the language used in the Holy Qur'an should be a language that originated from the existential nature of humans, and that gender or race, color, and features such as it does not have a role to play. Because only those things can be universally public that are not within a limited realm. In other words, God has to behave in such a way that the race, gender or color of human beings are not based. Therefore, the proper language of the Qur'an should be derived from a character that rooted in human nature and used as the language of dialogue. According to the explanation given in the previous section, the author believes that the pragmatic language has such a feature because the pragmatic language is "existential language." Pragmatic language is an existential language because it originated from the existence and nature of human beings, therefore, despite the difference in the color of the human beings, etc., they share all a common universal language. Pragmatic language due to its existential character is a universal language, a character set it suit to address all in a text – communication-based like Holy

Qur'an.¹ Therefore, it is believed that the language of the Qur'an is an innate language. The Qur'an does not only have innate content, but the language used in the Qur'an is an innate language as well. It is a pragmatic language, a language in which a person evaluates the validity of anything in its practical and concrete result in practice.

Examples of pragmatic language in the Holy Qur'an

It has been argued that pragmatist theory can provide a language that is suitable for understanding the Qur'an. In short, the pragmatism theory provides a kind of language called pragmatic language, which is an existential language. Following that, the language of the Qur'an can be characterized. The text-based communication in the Holy Qur'an will be understood through relying on such a language, namely the pragmatic language. It was therefore concluded that the Qur'anic language is a pragmatic language in the sense of an existential language. A language that is compatible with the nature of human existence. Now, the question can be put forward that how pragmatic language is being used in the Qur'an?

Reflection in the verses of the Holy Qur'an disclose that this prevailing existential rule has been used in many verses on various subjects. The pragmatic language of the Qur'an was

1. Scientific language, for example, or philosophical language also lacks this feature, because these languages are not universal, although they have the ability for everyone to understand them. Although they are potentially universal, they are not actually universal, the language of properties or professional language which needs to become a common language.

presented at three levels of education, judgment and conceptualization. In other words, some verses may be shown that they use the pragmatic language in the stage of giving teachings and judgment and encouraging people towards them. Conceptually, pragmatic language can also be found in the Qur'an. The use of such concepts as loss, benefit, and the like, denotes to the pragmatic language. For example, the Holy Qur'an tries to encourage and justify the tradition of marriage as Islamic value on the basis of its function ('A'rāf: 189; Rūm: 21)

In the field of worship, the Qur'anic language is a pragmatic language in such a way that God tries to encourage people towards them on the basis of its function in a person's life. For example, God in order to make people committed to divine commemorate and praying, encourages them on the basis of their function, that is, the peace as the result of praying and worship ('Ankabūt: 45; Ra'd: 28).

In all of these instances, the pragmatic language is used, i.e. the existential language, a language that is consistent with the human's existential structure.

Conclusion

The issue of language, although have been existed long ago, has become a central concern for philosophers in the twentieth century. Philosophers' concern for language causes the issue of language to become one of the most important issues in the philosophy of religion. For God has communicated with human beings in religions, especially in monotheistic religions, including Islam, through the revelation of texts by the prophets, and has expressed the requirements of their

guidance and transcendence in this way. Since the principles of human guidance and excellence are stated in this book, it is necessary to understand it as an introduction. According to Islam, The Qur'an contains all things that men need for their guidance and perfection. This shows that God has not only asked human beings to understand this book, but He must also have expressed the language of understanding of the book. The result of reflection in this book must include the answer to this important question. In this regard, it was showed that God in the Qur'an must use the proper language. The suitability of the language for a revealed book such as the Qur'an is based on its universality and anthropological root. For firstly the audience of the Qur'an is universal, and secondly, the only language which can be used must be universal and rooted in human existential structure. It is proved that such a language can be identified from the theory of pragmatism, that is pragmatic language. Pragmatic language has such a feature, for such a language arises from the innate desire of human beings, according to which human beings seek the objective and tangible result and effect on everything. If this is the innate desire of human beings, then God has observed it in His dialogue with human beings, even when He uses language and text. It is important to observe this inherent feature in dialogue. As a result, in understanding such a text, in addition to understanding the morphological and syntactic rules, it is important to consider this existential and human nature rule. In addition, the observance of morphological and syntactic rules make the language used in a text and dialogue meaningful, but understanding the existential and anthropological rule (human innate desire to seek the objective result of anything) makes the text and dialogue understandable. Hence, the language of the Qur'an is a pragmatic language, an existential

language. Many examples in the Holy Qur'an show that the pragmatic language or the existential language has been used there. Moreover, paying attention to this language is an effective aid in understanding the verses of the Holy Qur'an. Accordingly, the language of the Qur'an is not a symbolic or allegorical language. The language of the Qur'an is a language derived from an anthropological feature.

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