

## **ETHICS OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION FROM THE ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE**

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### **Abstract**

The present study addresses the importance of employing the language of etiquette and politeness as a means of consolidating peaceful coexistence in human society from the Islamic perspective. Since communication is one of the most important components that constitute human relations in the society, any attempt to disallow language to fulfill its social function will definitely affect human relations because language is perhaps the most pertinent tool of human communication. Language is a double edged weapon being a sound expression consolidates human interactions and creates atmosphere for a peaceful co-existence. In contrast, violent and destructive words according to Islamic teachings may lead to misunderstanding, conflict and indeed war. Hence, there will be no room for a peaceful co-existence. The negative effects of those aggressive words and expressions on human relations and society at large are addressed. Using descriptive analysis approach, some destructive types of communication from Islam views are addressed. The findings of the study suggest that aggressive use of language hinders the integration of the society. Every individual is required to practice communication ethics in order to consolidate human relations.

**Keywords:** Language, Islam, Interpersonal communication, peaceful co-existence, conflict

### **Introduction**

Regardless of the social setting, the authority invoked for good conduct is the rules and regulations of the divine Religion. When the directives of the divine religion are the authority, obedience to the divine commandments in scriptural texts becomes the accepted standard of conduct. Islam is aware that as long as people live together in groups, the moral regulation of behavior is necessary to the group's well-being.

Nowadays, many people regard Islam as a religion that promotes violence and terrorism; misconception but this is in contrast to the teachings of Islam. Peace as an Islamic philosophy can be explicitly inferred from the meaning of the word Islam itself. The word Islam which is derived from the root *silm*, refers to "making peace, being in a mutually peaceful environment, greetings, rescue, safety, being secured, finding peace, reaching salvation and well being or being far from danger, attaining goodness, comfort and favor, keeping away from troubles and disasters, submitting oneself and obeying, respect, being far from wrong."<sup>1</sup>

Islam is in fact a religion that promotes peace and understanding among people of all faiths in all fields of human relationship. Islam is aware that human society is formed of some cohesive and integrated components among which language stands as fundamental. Therefore, it strongly prohibits all forms of violence and language of aggression against all people regardless of their faith or race for the purpose of peaceful coexistence and the stability of human society.

### **Concept and Status of Language in Human Relationship**

The role of language, both as a means of communication and as an expression of identity cannot be underestimated in any interpersonal relationship in the human society. Indeed, language may serve to exacerbate or mitigate violence. Generally speaking, the future of people living in any society depends largely on their ability to communicate effectively with maximum degree of politeness.<sup>2</sup> Language is the primary vehicle of communication; it reflects both the personality of the individual and the culture of the society. It makes possible the growth and transmission of culture, and the continuity of societies, and the effective functioning and control of social group.

At the global level, the adoption of aggressive language is obvious in both political and religious platforms; no society is exclusive. The exploitation of words such as terrorists, Islamists, and indeed Islamic militants has become means of winning public minds against the opposition parties. Admittedly, the world has experienced a terrifying increase in the number of terrorist attacks which has many innocent lives. As an example, consider the ongoing media hype surrounding terrorist strikes by the Boko Haram organization, mostly operating in Nigeria. However, international media coverage of terrorist incidents is sometimes misleading. Words such as Boko-Haram, in Nigeria, has become mechanism wrongly used by some elites in the society, usually intended to influence and cause fear among people. It has become a destructive mechanism for those pushing for political goals or promoting a religion agenda.

For a society to be peaceful and harmonious, politeness in the language of communication is vital. Language creates society; no human society without language as a means of interaction and there is nothing worthy to be identified as a means of human interaction without the existence of language. Language is obviously a vital tool. Not only is it a means of communicating thoughts and ideas, but it forges friendships, cultural ties, and economic relationships. Throughout history, many have reflected on the

importance of language. Language shapes thoughts and emotions, determines one's perception of reality and also serves as also the light of the mind.

### **Islamic Perspective of Inter-Personal Communication**

Of many ways in which Islam promotes peace, harmony and peaceful co-existence, language is fundamental. In this regard, Muslims are governed by the rules that the relationship among human beings should be based on mutual respect for others, cooperation, and polite communication. The Quran is very explicit about the position of language in human society as a means of consolidating peaceful coexistence and human relations when God states thus:

See you not how Allah sets forth a parable? A goodly word is a goodly tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches (reach) to the sky (i.e. very high). Giving its fruit at all times, by the Leave of its Lord, and Allah sets forth parables for mankind in order that they may remember. And the parable of an evil word is that of an evil tree uprooted from the surface of earth, having no stability".<sup>3</sup>

Society as a body of individuals outlined by the bounds of functional interdependence cannot be established until the necessary linguistic signs for communication and interactions are created and society cannot be created until a group of people has some values in common, the values that require a language to embed and articulate them. Indeed, it is language that brings people together and keeps them together.

It helps in establishing peaceful and harmonious relationship which is inevitable for biological survival since human beings are all interdependent. In the absence of respect and politeness in interpersonal communication all human relations will be destabilized.<sup>4</sup> Supporting the notion, Abu Bakr al-Razi emphasizes on the need for cooperation and coexistence among members of the community. He considers that peaceful interaction is the reason that led us to live interdependently and to maintain cooperation for the betterment of the individuals.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, Someone's words and symbolic actions might sometimes cause pain. Pain is an active response to its causes, not simply a passive effect. For example, Islamist, an advocate or supporter of a political movement that favors reordering government and society in accordance with laws prescribed by Islam is not a synonym for, militants, extremists or radicals as been employed by some people nowadays.<sup>6</sup> The meanings of words affect feelings and lead to positive or aggressive reactions. Indeed, the violence of blows and the violence of symbolic acts are not so easily separated.<sup>7</sup>

The Qur'an does not turn a blind eye to the human weakness of quarrel, dispute and even war. Accordingly, it exhorts Muslims to make peace and harmony among hostile

individual or group.<sup>8</sup> Of special note in this content is the Qur'anic injunction on the use of polite words and condemnation of aggressive language.

Islam as religion of peace facilitates intercultural understanding, respect, conflict resolution, social cohesion, religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence. No human society can hope to establish lasting conditions for peace and tolerance unless individual interact with others with language of respect and politeness. The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) ho said:

Let him who believes in Allah and the Last Day speak good, or keep silent; and let him who believes in Allah and the Last Day be generous to his neighbor; and let him who believes in Allah and the Last Day be generous to his guest".<sup>9</sup>

Allah being man's Creator knows best what might damage cordial relations as a result of weakness in human nature. He, through the teachings of Islam warns against the use of aggressive language such as derision, mockery, and ridiculous expressions when addressing others, thus Allah warns:

Believers, no one group of men should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them; no one group of women should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them; do not speak ill of one another; do not use offensive nicknames for one another. How bad it is to be called a mischief-maker after accepting faith! Those who do not repent of this behavior are evildoers.<sup>10</sup>

In the verse mentioned above, Islam has provided the ethical concepts that describe the various aspects of the fundamental attitude of man towards his environment. In other words, the ethical concepts, those refer to the principles and rule of conduct regulating the ethical relations among individuals who belong to and live within the community regardless of religious or racial differences. It is language of communication that brings people together and keeps them united. Meanwhile, to be very selective while communicating with another is highly required because an aggressive word is sharply destructive; it hinders human relations and societal integration at large.

According to the teachings of Islam, members of a society need to work toward peace and tolerance rather than towards violence. Social, economic, and political systems have to be oriented towards peace and tolerance. Inclusively, the ideas of peaceful co-existence and religious tolerance must shape man's way of life. Islam explicitly forbids destructive norms like mocking, offensive nicknaming, and slandering others since they amount to attacking their honor and prestige, it is bound to strain social relations. The victim too might even resort to revenge. As a result, the social fabric is damaged, giving rise to many more evils. Islam then strikes at the root of the common human failing of interpersonal communication etiquettes.

Indeed, the establishment of abode of peace on earth means the establish peace in everyday lives, at all levels. This includes but not restricted to personal, social, state and international levels. Language, a multifaceted endowment sometimes transcends its realm and affects the external world; words are powerful and indeed words create reality.<sup>11</sup>

Words mirror someone's life. Hence, the saying: "Tell me what words you use and I will tell you who you are"<sup>12</sup>. It is not really that simple, but there is a lot of truth in this statement. As soon as one opens his mouth, he reveals many things about himself, such as where and how he grew up, and which values he cherishes. Indeed, the language becomes an important part of a man; criticism of this language can easily be taken as criticism of the person as well as his or her social background.

Careful consideration of language of communications in discussions leads to peaceful coexistence and real solutions to conflicts. Islam promotes a cordial and peaceful coexistence, loving and caring, mutual understanding, good neighborliness; and respect other people's religious beliefs. According to Islam, equality and mutual benefit, competition without war, mutual dialogue are ideal. Tolerance for ethnic diversity and tolerate among one another must be upheld.

### **Conclusion**

Islam as a religion of peace promotes peace a peaceful existence in all human relations. Islam is aware of the destructive impacts of aggressive use of language to human relations and therefore strongly warns against this. Peacemakers are agents of good and those who breach it are agents of violence. It is observed that peace and peacemaking are seen in the Islamic tradition as part and parcel of human development. Therefore, Islamic encourages that one should be very selective when communicating with others because an aggressive word is destructive; it hinders both human relations and societal integration at large and consequently tends to produce destructive results. Islam promotes climate for caring and mutual understanding that respect the unique needs and characteristics of individuals. Every individual is required to practice etiquettes of communication in order to consolidate human relations in the society. One had to realize the strong effect and impact words have one another. Words can either lift us up or drag us down. Indeed, words penetrate human soul. It is widely accepted that physical attack is damaging, however emotional abuse are far penetrating and much more damaging Verbal attacks can manifest in a variety of ways including *comparing*, criticizing, *teasing*, *name-calling*, *insulting*, *rejecting* and the *devaluating* someone behavior. An insulting word and the way it is directed hurt the human soul forever.

## Endnotes

1. "Islam is a Religion of Love and Peace", <http://www.peaceandislam.com/>, retrieved on 11/07/2016
2. Svetlana Ter-Minasyova, War and Peace of Languages and Cultures?, *Intercultural Communication Studies* XVII: 2 2008, p52
3. See: Qur'an 14:24-26.
4. Hasan, Vazeer, *The Study of the Qur'an by Non-Muslim Indian Scholars*, New Delhi, Adam Publishers & Distributors, 2005, p.119.
5. Abubakar Muhammad bin Zakariyah Arrazi, Al-tiib al-Rawhaani, Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahdah al-Misriyah, 1978, pp.17-18.
6. See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamism>
7. J.L. Lmcke, "Violence and Language: The signs that hurt", <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/21stC/issue-1.2/Language.htm>, retrieved on 14/07/2016
8. Abdul-Raheem Kidwa, *The Qur'an: Essential Teachings*, Markfield: Islamic Foundation, 2011, Pp.167-168.
9. See: Hadith 15 of 40 Hadith of Nawawi
10. See: Qur'an 49:11.
11. Julne, Diamond, *Status and power in verbal interaction*, Amstadam, John Benjamin Publishing Co.1996, p.139.
12. Andersson, Lars-Gunnar, *Bad language*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1990, p.194.

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