THE QURAN AS AN INSTANCE OF TEXT (MATN) OR SPEECH

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Abstract: The language of The Quran is an important matter for understanding and exegesis of The Quran so that even the smallest matters and primary premises pertaining to The Quran depend on it. Generally, there are two theories about the spoken or written form of the language of the Quran; it means that considering certain indications like orthography, causes of revelation, etc… some scholars report on spoken form of the language of the Quran, while others considering the title of The Quran, endeavor to preserve and write down the Quran, etc…have passed judgment on its written form. The author first tries to give a definition of language and its forms and next to discuss and evaluate the theory of spoken form of the language of the Quran. Next he discusses the written form of it and finally gives a summary of discussions.

Keywords: Language of The Quran, spoken language, written language.

DISCUSSION PLAN

One of the old definitions of “language” reached us today is the very statement of Ibn Jinnī (d. 392). He has defined language as “fa innahā 'aswātun yu’baru bihā kullu qawmin 'aghrāḍihim” (Ibn Jinnī, n.d. 1/33); the sounds by which every people comprehend the intentions of others. The above-mentioned definition has discussed the fundamental basis of language and has not considered a specific construction; gradually some forms of languages including written and spoken languages have been developed. Written language is defined as “sounds that are pronounced through mouth and are comprehended by ears” and the written manifestation of language is in fact those words written on stationery and read by eyes (Baqeri, 1991: 19).

Following these classifications, The Quranic scholars have tried to find out what form is the language of The Quran. They tried to bring the language of The Quranin conformity with one of these two forms. Many people entered this field; every one moving toward a direction based on some indications. The scholars of the unity have no idea in this regard; some of them believe that the language of the Quranis spoken form; still others have passed judgment on the written form of language of the Quran.

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Evaluating the arguments of each group, the author of this article tries to answer the question as to whether the language of the Quran is spoken or written form.

**SPOKEN FORM OF THE LANGUAGE OF THE QURAN**

The spoken form of the language considers the situation of those audiences who are present when they are addressed and rhetorical axioms are mostly external. Therefore, the speaker can rely on indications known to the addresses without mentioning them. In contrast, the written form of the language relies only on the connected and existent indications (see Ma‘refat, 2008, 1/63-4). The adherents of this theory have noticed the objections to it and explained that:

“Some may object this theory arguing that the language of the Quran, because of its eternity, must have a written but not spoken form; since the eternity of the Quran necessitates that it does not rely on the circumstantial and indications of the time of revelation to communicate its intentions; otherwise, it would not be able to communicate its intentions over the time and by losing the circumstantial and indications, as a result it would be subjected to brevity or similarity (ambiguity) and would not be able to ideally guide the people.” But, this objection does not seem to be valid because of the following reasons:

First, similarity and brevity are not difficulties specifically limited to the spoken form of the language. The written language also encounters the same difficulty, but, this is mostly seen in spoken language. Thus, given that the language of the Quran has a written form and one cannot reject the existence of some ambiguous and short verses. Long time ago, Islamic scholars have noticed this difficulty and tried to remove it in their interpretations or monographs.

Second, if the Quran, which is consisted of the general Islamic law and teachings, must be in written form, then the Sunna which is consisted of the detailed Islamic law and teachings must be certainly in written form; while it is not the case and the Ṣahāba had not been provided with the Sunna in written form and it is only consisted of the very words, conducts, and the affirmations of the holy prophet (S.A) and Imams (A.S).

Third, the spoken form of the language of the Quran does not lead to the ambiguity and brevity of its verses; but, the rejection of this truth and thus neglecting the circumstantial and indications of the verses create such a difficulty. These indications have been preserved in the texts of the biography of the Prophet, exegesis of the Quran, and the causes of revelation and have been transmitted to the next generations and they can be used to remove the brevity and ambiguity of the verses of the Quran” (Nekoonam, 2000, 26).
Evidences of the spoken form of the language of the Quran

The adherents of the view of the spoken form of the language of the Quran have attempted to provide evidences for their claim including:

Causes of revelation

When we refer to the causes of revelation to state the denotation of the verse we implicitly acknowledge the truth that the Quranic verses are not sufficiently clear to explain themselves therefore we need to refer to the causes of revelation. We can understand, for example, the exact meaning of the Quran: 2: 158 “The Safa and the Marva are indeed of the symbols of Allah. Therefore whoever performs the Hajj of the House or performs ‘Umrah, there is then no blame upon him if he makes Tawaf between the two. And whoever does good spontaneously, then Allah is indeed the most Appreciating, all-Knowing.” only when we leave the atmosphere of the verses themselves and move into the matter of the causes of revelation.

Various themes of the Suras

It is well known that when the author of a text choose a subject for a chapter of his book, the tone remains constant from the beginning to the end, but it is not the case for speech and sermon in which the author shifts the tone of his speech and continues with other subjects. The suratal-Baqarah(The Cow), for example, first speaks of the different groups of human beings, next different subjects including worship of Allah (2: 20), the challenge of the Quran (Tahaddi) (2: 23), the story of Adam and his situation (2: 30-8), the children of Israel are mentioned in a number of verses and the title of The Cow covers only a small part of it.

It should not be neglected that these seemingly scattered subjects are not the result of disturbance, rather it shows the rhetoric style of the book and all of them are in line with the major objective of this book, i.e. guidance.

Orthography of the Quran

Based on a principle, every intact text which is without any change and modification should be completely in harmony with the pronunciation of the words. But, the Uthmani Mushafs do not observe this principle and the orthography of many alphabets do not comply with their pronunciation (Zarqani, n.d., 1/362). If the Quran had a written style, then there would be no reason for that and also no reason for the great differences of readings.

This is one of the reasons that the verses of the Quran are partially in written style, since the orthography of all of the verses does not comply with their pronunciation.
**Illiteracy of the nation of the prophet of Allah**

According to the historical reports there were a few literate people at the time of the prophet. In addition, God has called the nation of the prophet “illiterate” in the Quran (Quran: 2/62). So it seems reasonable that a spoken form of the language has been used for them (Nekoonam, idem, 31-2).

**Illiteracy of the prophet of Allah**

In this regard the author writes that “The holy Quran has put emphasis on illiteracy of the prophet (S.A) in a number of verses. The Quran clearly states that the prophet of Allah (S.A) himself neither could read and write nor has dealt with literate people. He has been referred to in the Quran: 29/48, “And thou wast not (able) to recite a Book before this Book came), nor are thou (able) to transcribe it with thy right hand: In that case, indeed, would the talkers of vanities have doubted.” Rejecting the relation of the prophet with the people of the book, another verse reads, “We know indeed that they say, “It is a man that teaches him.” The tongue of him they wickedly point to is notably foreign, while this is Arabic, pure and clear” (Quran: 16/103).

He adds a further explanation for his claim that, yes; the language of the Quran has a spoken style (Nekoonam, idem, 32-3).

**Evaluation of evidences of the spoken form of the language of the Quran**

It seems that the characteristics and consequences mentioned for the spoken language cannot be applied to the Quran as a whole and understanding of all verses of the Quran does not depend on circumstantial indications. Some researchers believe that only 15% of the verses of the Quran have specific causes of revelation for understanding of which the exegete need to know the historical conditions of the revelation (Shakerin, idem, 20). Therefore, Quranic teachings are divided into two groups:

1. A group of Quranic teachings have specific addresses of which the language of the Quran relies on circumstantial indications. The addresses of the time of revelation- who were at the presence of the prophet- are the main target of his words and some of the verses revealed specifically for them.

2. Another group of Quranic teachings have a wide range of addresses which include all human beings. Of course the first group of teachings conveys some massages to all the people, as some of the massages of ancient historical narrations which have been related in the Quran (Shakerin, idem, 20).
3. According to this classification, only some of the verses of the Quran need circumstantial and indications and it is possible to understand other parts of the verses without any need to these instruments and without any challenge. It is possible for the reader to understand, for example, a great part of the Surah al-Ḥadid (The Iron) without any need to the aforementioned reasons and without being confused.

On the other hand, accepting this theory requires that the Quran has been revealed specifically for the time and the people of the prophet, while the Quran is eternal and belongs to all times and peoples and has been revealed to guide all men from all times to what they should believe, act and be characterized, since theoretical teachings of the Quran does not belong to a specific time and circumstance. What the Quran calls virtue is virtue for all human ages and what it calls vice is always vicious and immoral and whatever practical law that has been legislated belongs neither to the time of revelation nor the people of that time, but it is a general, universal, and eternal legislation (Tabātabāie, 2011, 1/42). Rejecting such beliefs, Imam Bāqir (A.S) has stated that, “If a verse which was revealed about some people were lost after their death, then nothing would have remained from the Quran, while the Quran is the same from the beginning to the end and as long as the heaven and the earth exists and it is a verse for every people who recite it, whether it informs them of their good or bad” (Qommi, 1990, 1/21; ‘Ayāshi, 2001, 1/10; Bahrānī, 1994, 1/49).

1. To explain and interpret the Quran using external indications does not prove that it is spoken, since there are many written texts for the explanation of their interpretations one should refer to the sources outside that book. On the other side, those who have turned to the method of Quran-to-Quran exegesis have responded to such an idea with their own interpretation. The transmissions also have given further strong answer to this idea; Inna Kitāba Allahi layuṣṣaddiqa baʾdūhū baʾdan (Sadūq, 1977, 255); Yanṭiqu baʾdūhū baʿḍīn wa yashḥadu baʾdūhū ʿalā baʿḍīn (Nahjoi Bilagha, 192).

2. It is said that the people of the prophet were all illiterate (Ummi), but this is not a reason to prove that the Quran has a written style, because they became gradually engaged with literacy and the prophet also became so engaged with it that he manumitted the captives of war in return for teaching the children and the illiterate people (Ibn Saʿd, 1989, 2/16). On the other hand, the written style of the verses is not a reason for understanding of them as for a number of companions who were unable to understand the meaning of some words (see Shātibī, n.d., 9/87). Therefore there is no concomitance between the speech and understanding of the revealed verses.
3. It seems by no means justifiable to put emphasis on this point that because the prophet was illiterate (Ummi) then the Quran must be in spoken form and there is no relation between them, since after the revelation of a verse some people wrote it down and the names of many of them are registered in the history (see Ibn Sa’d, 1989, 271-288).

EVIDENCES OF THE WRITTEN FORM OF THE LANGUAGE OF THE QURAN

Written style requires harmony and coherence among sentences and phrases as well as the unity of subject matter and style of the text, so that the text has a specific subject and the author does not deviate from one subject to another. In contrast, in spoken style many cases are found in which the speaker moves from one topic to another and changes the tone of his speech. This style is written for all the people who want to know about the topic of discussion, whether those who are present or those who will come later (see Ma’refat, 2008, 1/63-4).

The author has counted out a number of reasons that show that the Quran is in written style, including:

**The title of the “Quran”**

The Quran was the commonest and the most applicable titles revealed to the Prophet. When we study we find out that this name was not designated by the prophet and his Companions (Rāmyār, 2010, 12). This word appears 68 times (in different syntactic structures) in the Quran of which two times have been applied allegorically for prayer (Salāt) (idem, 13). Quran is an infinitive and one can render it. This seemingly simple meaning indicates that those who have considered the Quran to be only in spoken form have not paid attention to this important matter.

**Writting down the Quran in the time of Prophet**

A major strong idea about gathering the Quran is the time of the prophet Mohammad himself. The author of this article also has a propensity toward this idea (See Khoie, 2009, 92-7). Referring to these argumentations we find out that the prophet and his companions have noticed the Quran from the very beginning of its revelation and immediately after the revelation of any verse it was written down so there was no opportunity for the Quran to remain in speech form and it was immediately converted to a textual form.

**Toqīfī order of the Quranic verses**

A great number of scholars, based on strong evidences, have tended toward this matter that the order of the verses of the Quran was Toqīfī; it means that no one has any role in setting out the order of the verses except the Divine Will (see Qommi Neyshābūrī, 1995, 1/28; Zarkeshī, 1989, 1/353; Ālūsī, 1994, 1/23).
If the Quran is absolutely in speech form, then there is no need for the prophet to be so sensitive about the exact order of any verse.

Memorization the whole Quran

If we consider that the Quran is absolutely in speech form we should accept that in spoken form of the language the addresses do not pay attention to all the sentences the speaker says, but they only pay attention to his objective and because the addressees do not consider the exact words part of the discussion may be forgotten, while we have no strong evidence that even a single word of the Divine Word is lost. This indicates that the whole of the Quran, even the alphabets, have been considered which shows that the Quran is in written style.

Analyzing the written perspective of the language of the Quran

1. There are many verses in the Quran with speech style. More than 300 verses order the prophets to discuss the people. In which group do the adherents of the written style of the Quran categorize these verses?

2. When you are going to give a judgment you should know that the judgment should cover most of its subcategories. As we have seen before, every single rule has so many exceptions and contrary examples that automatically are discarded from being principle rule.

CONCLUSION

1. The language of the Quran is a new subject about the Quran which have been divided into two forms: spoken and written.

2. The adherents of the spoken style of the language of the Quran rely on several arguments to prove their claim, including illiteracy of the Prophet, orthography of the Quran, etc. As we have seen before their rule cannot be generalized to the Quran as a whole.

To prove the theory of written style of the language of the Quran one can adhere to some arguments, including the title of the “Quran”, memorization of the whole Quran, Toqifi order of the verses of the Quran, and the writing down of the Quran at time of the prophet. But this is not the difficulty of all the verses of the Quran and it gives no answer to the verses that are manifested in speech form.

1. Considering the criticism of each argument, as well as the existence of other evidences we can find a moderate solution: to give judgment on both the spoken and written styles of the language of the Quran.
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