Communicating Islamic Values in A Globalized World: The Role of English as a Lingua Franca

Asif Raza
Lecturer in English, KUST Hangu Campus
Mohib Ullah
Lecturer in Islamic Studies, KUST Hangu Campus
Muhammad Aasim
Lecturer in English, KUST Hangu Campus/Corresponding Author at-aasim.ktk11@gmail.com

Abstract

The dominance of the English language in the modern globalized world has consequences for presentation of cultural and religious values including that of Islam. As the medium of expressing the Islamic values through has been set in English, this paper discusses the prospects and complexities of the said ideology in the global world. Through globalization, where English has become an international language for communication in social interaction, Muslims have been given an opportunity to pass on the knowledge of Islam to other people of the world. This linguistic link assists in the Muslim's ability to engage in interfaith dialogue as well as help the Non-Muslims to understand more about the Religion of Islam , which they would have otherwise not acknowledged for the mere reason that it goes against their conception of what is right. In this manner, Islamic scholars, educators and various other leaders can therefore effectively address the non-English speaking audiences, thus encouraging more understanding about people of other faiths and practices across the globe. Nevertheless, there is no denial that there are some issues with the use of English as well. There are inevitable pitfalls in the process of translating and interpreting religious terms from one language to another, especially by losing some of the nuance and meaning of terms in the original language. In this paper, several case studies are evaluated concerning the use of English that was incorporated in teaching Islamic values and the approaches used, and the result that was achieved. It also highlights about the instructional methods student in Islamic education use to embrace English with an intention of producing Muslims with capabilities of interacting within global forums. In addition, to understand the engagements of digital media and social media in enhancing Islamic voices in the English-speaking cultures, the availability and usage of digital media is also under consideration, along with the pros and cons of digital media. In conclusion, it is possible to note that though English as a lingua franca can indeed be an effective means for spreading Islamic values to the peoples of the world, the translation process must be considered as a rather delicate and meticulous one to avoid losing such valuable information as well as distorting it.

Keywords: Islamic Values, Globalization, English Language, Lingua Franca

Introduction

In 2010, Kofi Annan remarked, "Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope. It has become an essential part of the daily life of people in the modern society. It remains a valuable barrier against poverty and a foundation for development. This quote clearly highlights the role of language and literacy;

especially in the contemporary society whereby English is fast becoming the global language. In business, academic, media and interpersonal communication, English can be said to be a language that breaks barriers, thus helping in the spread of ideas and values across different regions. The fact that English is spoken in many countries and cultures makes it a useful tool for the sharing and assimilation of different cultures and religions, including Islam.

It is, thus, clear that cultural or religious interactions have been significantly influenced by the phenomenon of globalization. Scholte (2005) has defined globalization as heightened global interconnectedness that links together distant places in such a manner that events occurring in one locale have an impact on events happening in another locale that is many miles away and vice versa. This has fostered a cultural and religious dialogue that has encouraged cultural and religious tolerance and made the global community more knowledgeable. In the light of the internet and the Communication technologies the pace at which these exchanges are escalating means that different communities are now in closer touch than they have ever been (Giddens, 1990).

Against this backdrop of globalization, that is; the use of English as a lingua franca, this paper focuses on the communication of Islamic values. In particular, the paper seeks to demonstrate, how the ideas of Islam and its rules and regulations can be presented in English, in order to bring out the prospects and the issues related to this language. In this regard, through critical examination it will reveal how English plays a significant role in the spread of Islamic teachings, create a bridge for dialogue between the followers of the two religions and help in the enhancement of an accurate understanding of the religion in the contemporary world. This will be done using case histories, teaching strategies, and effects of new media, which will give a clear picture of this topic because it is a very sensitive and an all-encompassing issue.

The Rise of English as a Global Lingua Franca

The English language emerged as the global lingua franca in the post-colonial period following the expansion of the British Empire to different parts of the world. English had reached different parts of the world through the influence of the British Empire by the early 20th century including Asia, Africa, Americas (Crystal, 2003). The post-second world war eventuality also strengthened the place of English, as America firmed up as a global power. During the second half of the twentieth century, the political and economic power of the United States helped to enhance the importance

of the English language as an official language for diplomacy, commerce and science (P Phillipson, 1992).

Presently, the most widely used language in the global arena is English, today more than 3 billion people speak this language. It is spoken by over 1.5 billion people as the first language, by over 2.5 billion as the second language and by over 2.5 billion as the foreign language (British Council, 2020). It is an official language in 59 countries and is spoken secondarily in many other nations as well. English is widely used in education, business and diplomacy and its use is especially important in the countries with Muslim majority. For example, in Malaysia and United Arab Emirates, English is taught in schools and used as the medium of instruction in universities, and a necessity in business and tourism activities due to globalization as pointed out by Kirkpatrick (2007). In this regard, the English Proficiency Index (EPI) 2023 shows that some countries, including Malaysia and Indonesia, have a high level of English comprehension in nonnative speakers (EF Education First, 2023). Such trends indicate that it is not just the English language that is being used as a medium of communication, but also as a catalyst for cultural and economic interaction in the Muslim world. The dominant use of English promotes dialogue in various international forums and platforms, allowing the Muslim-majority countries to engage properly.

Islamic Values and Their Universal Appeal

The Islamic values are basically good moral standards like being kind, fair, generous and respecting other people's right which are well appreciated by everyone in the society not only the Muslims. Armstrong (1993) observes that compassion is among the most important virtues in Islamic ethic just as it is in most prominent religious systems with emphasis on Christianity and Buddhism. Using the two terms 'ar-Rahman' and 'ar-Rahim' meaning 'The Most Compassionate, The Most Merciful' as usual at the beginning of the Quran, it is possible to explain that the work also deals with the universal human value. In the same way, justice is one of the pillars of Islamic Shariah, which has a rather large following by anyone's standards. According to Sachedina (2001), these principles of justice and equality reflect the Quranic vision of the proper order of societies, and their similarity with the modern human rights discourse suggest a parallel between the Islamic and secular conceptions of justice.

Charity and respect for elders are other such norms which are widely accepted in every society across the world. In his analysis of the Islamic concept of Zakat, Benthall (1999) notes that

this one of the Five Pillars of the Islamic faith integrates a deep concern for social justice in the distribution of wealth, not unlike the principles of charity within other religions and systems of belief. This practice helps create the spirit of togetherness and shared responsibility for the needy, this is a principle known to everyone. Additionally, rights of other beings such as non-Muslims, women, and the environment are also respected in Islamic laws. Esposito (2002) has noted that respecting people and accepting the prophetic model of Quran and Hadiths are moral standards that are accepted in many societies globally. These shared values emphasize on the relevance of Islamic ethics in every society and culture which will increase the unity and interaction between people across different cultural and religious backgrounds.

Challenges in Communicating Islamic Values through English

This approach is faced with the following major concern, which is the difficulty of passing the Islamic values to the English audience without the likelihood of distorting their true meaning. Most of the Islamic concepts are in fact imbued with the spirit of the Arabic language and culture, and when the words are translated to English there is a loss of the real essence and spirit of the words. For example, the term 'Sharia' in the Western context is often used in a wrong context, with the meaning related to legalism or extremism while in the Islamic context 'Sharia' can be understood as the ethical and legal code of conduct (Esposito, 2011). This leads to the formation of negative stereotype and misconception that is not in harmony with the true and noble intent embedded in the teachings of Islam. Furthermore, not only is the language barrier a problem but also the cultural barrier since the English speaking people may not put themselves in a context to understand the Islamic values (Abdullah, 2009).

Another challenge is the fact that most of the ideas being imparted through the medium of English are western in nature, and this goes a long way in contradicting many Islamic beliefs. English, being the language of the people of the predominantly western societies has inbuilt certain cultural beliefs and attitudes that contradict the teachings of Islam. For instance, both individualism and secularism which are found in the western societies may be perceived to have a conflict with the collectivism and religion that is found in the Islamic culture (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). This contradiction in cultural values can prove to be a problem for communication, as Islamic values might be seen as alien or incongruous to the Western context. Concerning the second factor, there is a large Muslim population with different levels of English proficiency across the globe, which would cause a fluctuation in the manner in which Islamic values are

transmitted and received, thus affecting the communication process (Crystal, 2003). To overcome these obstacles, one has to employ the strategies that will take into account the language aspect as well as the cultural aspect of communication.

Strategies for Effective Communication

In the context of translating and interpreting the English language to convey the Islamic values, one must ensure that the following approach is used. It goes beyond mere word translation to cultural and religious implications of Islamic teachings that are being passed on to the new generation. For example, when analyzing such phenomenon as "Jihad", it is always important to mention that this word has a much broader meaning than the military identification of it, where it refers to the struggle for making the world and oneself a better place (Abdul-Rauf, 2001). It is important to elaborate on the contextual interpretations in order to eliminate misconceptions and increase the appreciation of Islamic cultures. Furthermore, using comparative examples and parables from the western world would go down well with the English speaking audience since they would be able to easily grasp and accept these values (Larson, 1998).

Another effective approach is the use of digital media and online platforms for the promotion of Islamic values. Social media in particular are very versatile in terms of reach and allows for targeted messages to be sent out. For instance, social media campaigns, blogging, and YouTube channels are some of the ways through which stories, lectures, and discussions can be conducted based on Islamic principles such as compassion, justice, and charitable giving as practiced in daily life (Eickelman & Anderson, 2003). These platforms enable one to share information with the public in a more personalized manner as it enables the public to ask questions and engage in discussions thus making information sharing a two way process. In addition, it is also essential to employ other media such as videos, infographics, podcasts, amongst other media because young generations who are the main consumers of the content are more familiar with multimedia sources than any other medium (Bunt, 2009). With these considerations, the Islamic values could be conveyed in the appropriate modern means that would have the intended impact.

Success Stories and Case Studies

A good example of success in the use of English to impart Islamic values is the works of Sheikh Hamza Yusuf, a popular Islamic scholar in the United States. Yusuf has been especially helpful in the endeavor to explain the true teachings of Islam to Western society. His lectures and his books,

which are given mostly in English, are based on the compassion, justice and self-improvement, which the Islamic tradition teaches. For example, his translation and commentary on the traditional Islamic book, titled "Purification of the Heart" has found a lot of acceptance among the readers both Muslim and non-Muslim (Yusuf, 2012). Ably applying the principles of contextualization to explain Islamic teachings in relation to modern issues, and using readily understandable language, Yusuf has come quite close to achieving his goal of raising the awareness of Anglophone world about the real Islam.

The other example is the growth of an organization such as Bayyinah Institute which was started by Nouman Ali Khan. Thus, Bayyinah Institute is an organization aimed at translating Quranic Arabic and other subjects of Islamic studies for English-speaking Muslims. Here, it is noteworthy to mention that the institute has been active in teaching thousands of students from all over the world and it offers online courses, live seminars and actively shares its information through social media accounts. Khan has managed to provide the audience with elements of traditional Islamic knowledge in combination with modern approaches, thus making the ideas as easy to grasp as they are engaging. His series on the Quran, translated into simple, eloquent English are particularly informative in creating the awareness of the right Islamic beliefs among young Muslims (Khan, 2015). The growth and development of Bayyinah Institute show that there is a place for any educational process that is aimed at delivering knowledge through online tools.

Future Directions

Looking ahead, there are several areas that suggest how it is possible to convey Islamic values in English successfully. One such area concerns the establishment of systematic intercultural communication programme that aims at preparing Islamic scholars and educators for understanding the cultural dynamics of the English language and the West. They may include the kind of programs, which aims at preparing Muslim leaders in order to express the teachings of Islam in the correct way and also in a way that would be understood by English-speaking population. This way, by improving their language skills and cultural sensitivity, these leaders will be able to better navigate the realm of interfaith relations and public speaking. Besides, with reference to contemporary communication theories and practices, it is possible to work on the development of the subsequent messages which will be more successful in appealing to the different audiences (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2012).Strengthening the availability of digital and multimedia materials should also be viewed as an important avenue for development in

Islamic education. Regular web development which involves creation of quality interesting and enjoyable website, mobile applications, and podcasts and YouTube channels can go a long way in expanding the circle of influence of Islamic teachings. For example, creating educational platforms that provide courses in the history of Islam, Islamic law, and moral teachings in English will cover an international audience interested in the subject of Islam. Additionally, promoting the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning to offer customized solutions can also help to increase the usefulness of these learning aids (Anderson, Rainie, & Luchsinger, 2018). Technology can be harnessed by Islamic scholars and educators to develop engaging and effective learning platforms which millennials are capable of responding to.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the broadcasting of Islamic values in a world that has gone global through the use of English language is both a chance and a risk. With the coming of English as the global medium of communication people are getting opportunities to know about Islam and this is helping in eliminating prejudice. For instance, the scholars such as Sheikh Hamza Yusuf and various organizations like the Bayyinah Institute have provided effective approaches to ensure that cultural barriers are avoided and the understanding of the Islamic teachings is embraced by all. But this process must be done sensitively so as not to reduce the meaningfulness of Islamic values into a one-dimensional frame of reference making it easy to misinterpret. Moreover, the following actions should be further promoted in the future: intercultural communication education and training for all participants; development of digital and multimedia materials. The result is that through acquisition of modern language and culture, as well as application of modern technology, the dissemination of the Islamic values as espoused by the scholars and educators can be enhanced and spread over a wide region. Employing these strategies will not only aid in the delivery of the core message of the Islamic religion and teachings, but will also assist in the general cultivation of a tolerant and accepting society on an international level. Globally, the societies are becoming more open and therefore effective communication across the cultural and linguistic barriers will be important in enhancing positive inter cultural relations.

Reference

Abdullah, S. M. (2009). *The Challenges of Translating Islamic Texts*. Journal of Islamic Studies, 20(2), 180-199.
Abdul-Rauf, M. (2001). *Islam: Faith and Practice*. Islamic Educational Center.

Anderson, J. Q., Rainie, L., & Luchsinger, A. (2018). The Future of Well-Being in a Tech-Saturated World. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from pewresearch.org

Annan, K. (2010). "Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope.

Armstrong, K. (1993). *A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. Ballantine Books.

Benthall, J. (1999). *The Charitable Crescent: Politics of Aid in the Muslim World*. I.B. Tauris.

British Council. (2020). *The English Effect: The impact of English, what it's worth to the UK and why it matters to the world*. Retrieved from British Council.

Bunt, G. R. (2009). *iMuslims: Rewiring the House of Islam*. University of North Carolina Press.

Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a Global Language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Eickelman, D. F., & Anderson, J. W. (2003). *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere*. Indiana University Press.

Esposito, J. L. (2002). *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam*. Oxford University Press.

Esposito, J. L. (2011). *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam*. Oxford University Press.

Giddens, A. (1990). *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford University Press.

Inglehart, R., & Baker, W. E. (2000). Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values. *American Sociological Review*, 65(1), 19-51.

Khan, N. A. (2015). *Divine Speech: Exploring the Quran as Literature*. Bayyinah Institute.

Kirkpatrick, A. (2007). *World Englishes: Implications for International Communication and English Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.

Larson, M. L. (1998). *Meaning-Based Translation: A Guide to Cross-Language Equivalence* (2nd ed.). University Press of America.

Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford University Press.

Sachedina, A. (2001). *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*. Oxford University Press.

Samovar, L. A., Porter, R. E., & McDaniel, E. R. (2012). *Intercultural Communication: A Reader* (13th ed.). Wadsworth Publishing.

Scholte, J. A. (2005). *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.

Yusuf, H. (2012). *Purification of the Heart: Signs, Symptoms and Cures of the Spiritual Diseases of the Heart*. Sandala.