CONCEPTS OF ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE AND THE ENGLISH LEXICON: THE SCIENCE OF ISLAMIC TERMS AND THE QUESTION OF EQUIVALENCE WITH ENGLISH WORDS.

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ABSTRACT

This study is a qualitative research on the concepts of Islamic knowledge and how they relate to the English lexicon. The locus of the research paper is the epistemic context of the concepts of Islamic knowledge and linguistic context of the English lexicon. The specific themes at the centre of the study are Islamic terms and English words. The Islamic epistemological context overarches the theme of Islamic terms and the linguistic context overarches the theme of English words. The paper elucidates the sources of the concepts of Islamic knowledge that provide the crucial context of discussing the Islamic terms. The study discusses the Islamic terms that symbolize and convey the concepts of Islamic knowledge and their meanings within the context of the Islamic epistemological tradition. The paper proceeds from there to delineate the conceptual variable formulated in the research that explains the question of the equivalence of these Islamic terms with English

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words. This conceptual variable makes a significant distinction by clarifying that the translation is from Islamic terms into English words; not between two languages. Having defined and explained the corpus of Islamic terms, the selected Islamic terms are then juxtaposed with the definitions of the English words that are regarded and usually used as their equivalents. The research examines the meanings of the English words comparing them with meanings of Islamic terms. The study shows that the meanings expressed by the Islamic terms, because they symbolize and convey the concepts of Islamic spiritual knowledge, are not captured by the English words. The conceptual system of the meanings of the Islamic terms come from the spiritual knowledge of Islam whilst the English words, though having concise and precise definitions and meanings in their linguistic context, indicate a temporal axiological orientation.

INTRODUCTION

Islam is one of the major religions of the world and English is an international language, the most widely used language in the world today (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990). Islam in the world now is estimated to have over one billion adherents and the English language is estimated to have over one billion speakers; as a native tongue and as a second or foreign language. The centre of the universe of Islam as a way of life, belief and knowledge is monotheism and the major language that disseminates the knowledge of Islam is Arabic. The knowledge of Islam is contained in the Holy Qur'an whose place and role among Muslims is summed up by

Al-Azami (2008) with the following words: "Guidance, comfort and beauty. For the believing Muslim the Holy Qur'an is all this and much more: the heartbeat of faith, a remembrance in times of joy and anguish, a fountain of precise scientific reality and the most exquisite lyricism, a treasury of wisdom and supplications. Its very verses hang from the walls of shops and living rooms, lie etched in the minds of young and old, and reverberate through the night from minarets across the globe" (Al-Azami, 2008: 3). As an international language, English is spread all over the globe and used actively for many functions; one prominent function is to disseminate different disciplines of knowledge. Salmi (2009) identifies a facet of this function by saying that the "institutionalization dimension of improving an institution's global reputation is the extent to which national researchers have the linguistic competence to publish in English. One way in which institutions and academics advance their reputation is by their presence in scientific publications. Because citation indexes compile data primarily from journals published in English, the facility with which academics can disseminate research results in English becomes a critical factor in enhancing institutional reputation. Needless to say, institutions functioning in English are more likely to engender such success" (Salmi, 2009: 61-63). Increasingly, English is also becoming the language of Islamic discourse through the internet, mass media and print publications.

Islam and English have a robust and visible presence in the contemporary world.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

The Concepts of Islamic Knowledge

This paper in its underlying conceptual method to the study of the concepts of Islamic knowledge emanates from the intellectual orientation found in the book titled The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (al-Attas, 1999). The treatise by al-Attas offers crucial conceptual insights to this study because the author focuses on the concepts of knowledge and education in the context of Islam and within this context discusses the significance of language from the Islamic epistemological context. Al-Attas analyses the concepts of knowledge and education in Islam and the importance of definitions and applications of terms and words that convey these concepts. This paper uses this intellectual perspective but concentrates on selected concepts of Islamic knowledge that are central to the understanding of Islam; it discusses the significance of the Islamic terms that symbolize and convey these concepts; and then goes ahead to examine the meanings of the English words that are regarded as translation equivalents. The paper adopts aspects underlying the methodical orientation of al-Attas who focuses on the philosophy of education and in that context discusses aspects of the Arabic vocabulary within the Islamic epistemological tradition; but this paper focuses on the English vocabulary and thus introduces the ubiquitous English language into the discourse as well as another important dimension: the science of Islamic terms and the question of equivalence with English words that are used as their correlates. The

paper discusses the science of the Islamic terms because these terms symbolize and convey the concepts of knowledge of Islam and they guide to the sciences of Islam and the question of equivalence enquires into the nature of the meanings of the English words used to translate the Islamic terms.

Al-Attas in the book refers to the fact that in accordance with Islamic tradition definition is of two kinds: one kind is that of a precise or concise specification of the distinctive characteristic of a thing; and another kind is that of a description of the nature of a thing. This distinction reveals that there are things that can be defined specifically to their precise, distinctive characteristic and for this category he gives the example of the definition of man; and there are things which cannot be so defined but can be defined only by describing its nature. He asserts that knowledge comes under this latter category. He continues to say that there are many definitions describing the nature of knowledge, but what is of relevance to his book is the epistemological definition, and adds it is important to understand what the Islamic epistemological context involves and implies. The illustrious Islamic scholar and philosopher states: "Perhaps its greatest implication lies in its effect upon our vision of reality and truth and our methodology of research, our intellectual scope, practical application in planning for what is called "development", which all bear upon our understanding of education" (al-Attas 1999: 16). The researcher infers from this epistemological definition and context of Islam that it also implies concepts of Islamic knowledge that have the semantic capacity to illuminate the intellect for it to attain to that unifying vision of reality and truth. This inference is founded on the

principle that authentic knowledge invariably implies the right vision of reality and truth.

The concepts of Islamic knowledge are found in the traditional and theological Islamic sciences and are symbolized and manifested through what al-Attas calls Arabic-Islamic terms and words. The terms and words that symbolize them were formulated, developed and have disseminated Islamic knowledge since the beginning of Islam through the Holy Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet. The Islamic terms and words are Arabic but imbued with conceptual structures that manifest Islamic meanings from the revealed texts of Islam. This short paper builds on this underlying philosophical thesis and selects a few terms from the corpus of the central theological concepts of Islam and examines them from the comparative perspective with the English words usually used to translate them.

The English Lexicon

English belongs to the Indo-European family of languages. This is a vast group of many European languages forming many branches according to their genealogical relationships. The words used in English are derived from a wide range of sources, mostly within this family of languages, spanning different periods over the fifteen centuries of the English language history as illustrated by the brief survey in the preliminary pages of The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English and the more detailed Denning, Kessler & Leben (2007). In their focused and detailed study of the English vocabulary, Denning et al. (2007) observe important aspects of the development of the English vocabulary.

The authors write that English is extraordinarily well endowed with words of native Germanic origin and borrowed words from the European classical languages like Latin and Greek and the later European languages like French. It is through the richness of this vast vocabulary that English is connected to the epistemological foundations of Western civilization.

The English language is heir to the European epistemological tradition through centuries of accumulated knowledge as the English lexicon clearly manifests. Denning et al. (2007) give the example that during the Renaissance period, along with many new words from French and Latin, Greek words began to make their greatest impact. They add that the scholarly disciplines owe much of their vocabulary to classical Latin and Greek; and English continues the tradition of the Renaissance in its heavy reliance on Latin and Greek. According to the authors this means the systematic study of scientific and other special vocabulary can concentrate on these two languages out of the many that English has drawn from in its history a fact they clearly demonstrate in their own analysis of English vocabulary throughout the book. They observe that because the Latin of ancient Rome itself borrowed words from Greek, many Greek words entered English indirectly through Latin. The authors point out that in the Modern English period (1500-present C.E.), English experienced heavy influx of scientific vocabulary including many neologisms based on elements from Latin and Greek (Denning et al., 2007). The structure and meaning of English words developed through this intellectual and cultural history.

The English lexicon also contains words that cover definitions and descriptions of religious and spiritual aspects of human experience. Denning et al. (2007) observe that it was during the Prehistoric English period (400-700 C.E.) that England was converted to Christianity and Latin, the official language of the church, provided ecclesiastical vocabulary which were added to the stock of Latin words that earlier had passed into Germanic during the period of the Roman empire. Nevertheless, even before England being converted, the ancestor of English, Old English, had its own previous set of words to denote conceptions of the supernatural realm e.g., the Old English words *god*, *heofon* (heaven) and *hell* antedated Christianity but were transferred and given new meanings to accord with the doctrine of the new religion (Mellinkoff, 1963). Another language linked to religion mentioned by Denning is Sanskrit "which functions as the ecclesiastical language of Hinduism, much as Latin did in Roman Catholicism" (Denning et al., 189-190).

From the extensive English lexicon, for the purposes of this short paper, we will select only a few words that have a bearing to the study and usually used to translate the selected terms from Islam. But first, the next section elucidates sources of Islamic concepts and terms.

SOURCES OF ISLAMIC CONCEPTS AND TERMS

In his book on the themes and style of the Qur'an, Abdel Haleem (2011) gives a brief background to the revelation of the Noble Qur'an in the following words: "Read in the name of your Lord". These were the first words of the Noble Qur'an revealed to Prophet Muhammad. The

first verses of the Qur'an to be revealed have the concepts of 'reading', 'learning/knowing' and 'the pen'. Al-Azami (2008:59) quotes the same verse with more of its words: "Read! In the name of your Lord and Cherisher, Who created." Abdul Haleem (2011) continues to say that the word qur'an lexically means 'reading' and came to refer to 'the text which is read'. The Muslim scripture often calls itself 'kitab:' lexically this means 'writing' and came to refer to 'the written book'. Al-Azami (2008:71) on the same point writes: "Though revealed verbally, the Qur'an consistently refers to itself as kitab…, as something written, indicating that it must be placed into written form." Thus the significance of uttering and writing the revealed scripture is emphasized from the beginning of Islam, and is locked in the very nouns that designate the Qur'an (Abdul Haleem, 2011). Through this emphasis, the Qur'an, which is the first source of the knowledge of Islam, directly addresses and demonstrates the value of reading, learning, teaching, writing and seeking knowledge. Indeed, it is significant that the first word of the Qur'an to be revealed is an imperative verb linked to seeking and acquisition of knowledge: the word 'read'. Thus the simultaneity of Islam and knowledge was firmly established from the very beginning. Azami (2008), after quoting the Qur'anic verse above, comments:

> There are no indications that the prophet ever studied the art of the pen, and it is generally believed that he remained unlettered throughout his life. The above verse, then, the very start of revelation, provides a clue- not about *his* own literacy, but about the importance of establishing a robust educational policy for the masses that were to come. Indeed, he employed every possible

measure to spread the spirit of education, describing the merits and rewards for learning as well as the punishment for withholding knowledge. (Al-Azami, 2008: 59; emphasis in original)

According to Al-Azami (2008) before the advent of Islam, sources do not record the existence of any Arabic books in the Peninsula. The first book in Arabic was in fact the Qur'an. With its first revealed word iqra' (read), the pursuit of knowledge became an obligation: to memorize at least a few suras by heart, regardless of whether one was Arab or otherwise, so as to perform the daily prayers. Upon reaching Madinah the Prophet hastened to accommodate this need, arranging for schools and ordering that anyone with even a minimal amount of knowledge should pass it to others. The sixty scribes that were in his service are a tribute to this burgeoning literacy. Abdel Haleem (2011) also asserts that the collected written text of the Qur'an was the first book in the Arabic language.

In his thoroughly well-researched book, Al-Azami (2008) gives a well-reasoned account of the history of the text of the Qur'an. He provides incontrovertible and valuable evidence throughout the book about the authenticity and integrity of the Qur'anic text. He discusses how the pious companions of the Prophet took great care to make sure that the Holy Qur'an remain pure and preserved in written form just like the original speech that was revealed to the Prophet. They memorized the verses of the Holy Qur'an and meticulously wrote them down. The Qur'an was written down in its entirety during the Prophet's lifetime but

had not been compiled into a book. The present structure of the Qur'an in terms of its suras and verses was established during the time of the Prophet; later it was eventually compiled into one book. The companions used a very careful method of establishing proofs before writing down the verses of the Qur'an and in this way they preserved both the purity of revelation and its Arabic form. The careful and painstaking method ranged from the minutest phonemic and morphemic details to the syntactic and semantic structures. A-Azami (2008) goes even further to illustrate with examples of folios and fragments of the surviving manuscripts found in different libraries of the world to prove the authenticity of the present text as the same originating from the formative period of Islam.

In a passing remark, in the context of discussing the sources of language standards, Denning et al. (2007) note that some standard languages are based on a variety used in religious scripture and gives the example of Arabic found in the Qur'an.

The first source for a sound and thorough knowledge of Arabic is the Noble Qur'an and the second is the Hadith of the Prophet; according to al-Attas (1999): "It was further established among the Arabs themselves that the highest authority relating to all aspects of the Arabic language, with the exception of its prosody, is the Holy Qur'an, and next after that the Hadith of the Holy Prophet, upon whom be peace" (al-Attas 1999:3). It is through these two sources that both the knowledge of Islam and the best of the Arabic language are preserved and safeguarded. These two sources are the criteria and standard bearers for Islam and Arabic. In the translation of al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Idris al-Shafi'i's al-Risala fi Usul

al-Fiqh, translated into English by Majid Khadduri (1961), we find the following:

> Shafi'i said: [The reason] I began to explain why the Qur'an was communicated in the Arab tongue rather than in another, is that no one who understands clearly the total meanings of the [legal] knowledge of the Book of God would be ignorant of the extensiveness of that tongue and of the various meanings [of the words] to be found [just as] there are various words for a certain meaning. Doubts which occur to one who is ignorant of [the Arab tongue] will disappear from him who knows it.
>
> Calling the attention of the public to the fact that the Qur'an was communicated in the Arab tongue in particular is [a sincere piece of] advice to [all] Muslims. This advice is a duty imposed upon them which must not be put aside and is the attainment of a supererogatory act of goodness, which no one will neglect except him who makes himself foolish and who abandons the field of good fortune. Included in faithfulness is that the truth shall be explained to them. Both the fulfilment of what is right and faithfulness to Muslims are [embodied in our obligation of] obedience to God. And obedience to God embraces all good. (Majid Khadduri 1961: 93-94; square brackets in original)

The Arabic language is thus the carrier of the knowledge of Islam. According to al-Attas (1999) the Arabic of the Qur'an, its interpretation in the Prophetic Tradition, and its authentic and authoritative usage throughout the ages establishes the validity of the language to a degree of eminence in serving to describe reality and truth. In the introduction to

his English translation of the Qur'an, Abdel Haleem (2004) aptly points out: "The Qur'an was the starting point for all the Islamic sciences: Arabic grammar was developed to serve the Qur'an, the study of Arabic phonetics was pursued in order to determine the exact pronunciation of Qur'anic words, the science of Arabic rhetoric was developed in order to describe the features of the inimitable style of the Qur'an, the art of Arabic calligraphy was cultivated through writing down the Qur'an, the Qur'an is the basis of Islamic law and theology; indeed, as the celebrated fifteenth-century scholar and author Suyuti said, 'Everything is based on the Qur'an'" (Abdel Haleem, 2004: ix). Al-Attas adds:

> When we speak of methodology and the correct application of linguistic symbols, our first consideration is to understand the scientific nature of the Arabic language, which is the language of Islam, and upon which the Islamic sciences are based, and by which its vision of reality and truth is projected. By 'scientific' I mean the definitive aspect that characterizes science, for science is definition- both in the sense of *hadd* (حد) and *rasm* (رسم) - *of reality* (حقيقة). The scientific structure of Arabic is attested to by the mere fact that it is the language in which the Holy Qur'an is revealed. When God, Glorious and Most Exalted, says that the Qur'an in Arabic contains no 'crookedness' (قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا غَيْرَ ذِي عِوَجٍ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ), what is implied with reference to the language is that since the Holy Qur'an is the Fountain of true knowledge, the linguistic form through which that knowledge flows and by which it is made to flow, must also be of such a nature that it too is not susceptible of 'crookedness' (عوج)- that is of deviations from

the 'straight' (قيم) course, from the right meanings that convey truth directly, without swerving elsewhere, without distortions. Languages are susceptible of semantic change brought about by the vicissitudes of history and society; and of relative and subjective interpretations in their linguistic symbols. As such language presents no guarantee of scientific precision with respect to meaning; particularly to meanings that convey *absolute* and *objective* truth. With respect to Arabic language, however, we say that it does not belong to the same category as other languages insofar as its semantic structure is concerned. This is due to the fact that (1) its linguistic structure is established upon a firm system of 'roots'; and that (2) its semantic structure is governed by a clearly defined system of semantic 'fields' that determine the conceptual structures inherent in its vocabulary; and that is also fixed permanently by (1) above; and that (3) its words, meanings, grammar and prosody have been scientifically recorded and established so as to maintain semantic permanence. From the earliest periods of Islam, Muslim lexicologists have been extraordinarily aware of the scientific character of the Arabic language, and the Arabs were, to my knowledge, perhaps the first people we know in the history of mankind to seriously compile lexicons pertaining to their language (al-Attas, 1999: 2; emphasis in original).

This long quotation, in conjunction with the translated version of Imam al-Shafi'i's words and Abdel Haleem's point, demonstrates clearly the intricate relationship between the knowledge of Islam and the Arabic

language. On the issue of Arabic as a language, Robins (1980) remarks that "Arabic is particularly marked as a language by its large number of what are traditionally called 'trilateral roots', roots represented by a sequence of three consonants, from which different paradigm forms of variable words are made by the addition of one or more morphemes, represented discontinuously by prefixes, infixes, and suffixes, to the roots" (Robins 1980: 161). Al-Faruqi & al-Faruqi (1986) reinforce this observation by pointing out the same structural phenomenon in the Semitic languages in general:

> Semitic languages share in the linguistic characteristic of triliterality, that is, their words consist of roots of three consonants each and of the derivatives from these roots. This is peculiar to the members of this family; no other language or linguistic family has such a feature. The list of stems or root-words may vary from one language to another, some roots having been dropped from use and others added in loan from other languages as life and history had made necessary. However, the Semitic languages have managed to continue to have the majority of their root-words in common with one another. From these tri-consonantal roots, words are formed through a process called "conjugation" or "foliation," consisting of changing the vocalization of the three consonants according to rule, or of adding one or more consonants as prefix, suffix, or infix and changing its vocalization as well. This process of conjugation of consonantal roots is the heart and core of the language and the mirror of consciousness of its speakers. It gives the language a

formal structure: each conjugated form connotes a modality of the meaning of the consonantal root, which is one and the same with all other roots (al-Faruqi & a-Faruqi, 1986: 23).

Furthermore, Arabic is the language of the Islamic heritage; a heritage built by great scholars and thinkers of the Ummah. Although some of the scholars were not Arabs and did not have Arabic as their first language or native tongue, through their excellent command of the Arabic language they wrote books, excelled in thought and explained the principles and tenets of Islam in the books they wrote about the teachings of Islam. This relationship between Islam and Arabic language is further attested to by al-Attas who states:

> The field of meaning within which is described the conceptual structure symbolized by a central word or term is what we have called a 'semantic field'; and a semantic field usually overlaps other such fields, so that the inherent conceptual structure is interrelated with other such structures as projected in the Islamic vocabulary which is governed by the Quranic worldview and reflected in the Hadith and the Sunnah. By 'Islamic vocabulary' is not meant all the Arabic words arranged in alphabetical order as in a dictionary; it is meant rather to signify all the Arabic terms that are interrelated in meaningful pattern, projecting a worldview that is distinctly Quranic. The Islamic vocabulary comprises a large number of Arabic terms, and among them are a relatively small number of 'key' terms which comprise the Islamic *basic* vocabulary. It is this basic vocabulary that projects a distinctly

Islamic worldview in the Muslim mind (al-Attas 1999: 7-8; emphasis in original).

Al Attas continues to state that although the words used in the Holy Qur'an are the same as those used in pre-Islamic times, the concepts they project and the roles they play in the framework of the semantic vocabulary did not evolve from that pre-Islamic worldview. "The islamization of Arabic consisted *in the Quranic reorganization and reformulation of the conceptual structures, semantic fields, vocabulary and basic vocabulary* that once served the pre-Islamic vision of the world and of life and human existence. The effect of this islamization of the language was reflected in the Hadith and the Sunnah; and the resultant usage was recorded with such diligent and penetrating scholarly zeal by learned Muslims gifted with wisdom and insight and discernment. The Islamic basic vocabulary is composed of key terms and concepts related to one another meaningfully and altogether determining the conceptual structure of reality and existence projected by them" (Al-Attas 1999: 9-10; emphasis in original).

THE SCIENCE OF THE SELECTED ISLAMIC TERMS

One definition of the lexeme 'science', according to *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, is: "an organized body of knowledge on a subject (*the science of philology*)." This study uses this sense of the term when discussing the science of Islamic terms.

From the above al-Attas statement that the "Islamic basic vocabulary is composed of key terms and concepts related to one another meaningfully and altogether determining the conceptual structure of

reality and existence projected by them", we therefore proceed to select five major Islamic terms, discuss them briefly as Islamic epistemological concepts, and then examine them in relation to the English lexicon from the semantic perspective. The selected Islamic terms are **Islam**, *Tawhiid (توحيد)*, *Imaan (إيمان)*, *Ihsaan (إحسان)*, *Ikhlaas (إخلاص)*.

The term *Tawhiid (توحيد)* in the present study serves to illuminate the other four. The epistemological and theological meanings and implications of the five terms are not elaborated because it is beyond the scope of the present study. We confine ourselves to the limits of their semantic significance to the underlying conceptual thesis of this paper. The epistemology and theology of Islam is only touched upon when defining the Islamic terms because it is the source of the terms and overarches this theme in the paper.

The term 'Islam' is found in the English lexicon. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* defines the word **Islam** as 'the religion of the Muslims, a monotheistic faith regarded as revealed through Muhammad as the Prophet of Allah'. This is a fairly concise and precise rendition of the meaning of the term as the dictionary gives the etymology of the word as being derived from Arabic '*islam*' 'submission' (to God) from *aslama* 'resign oneself'. Since the word has been carried from its Islamic context it contains precise aspects that satisfy the criteria of semantic adequacy. But we need to mention that there are other important facets of the term when considered as an Islamic epistemological concept because in the context of the theological principles of Islam the description includes the belief and practice of the five articles (tenets, pillars) of Islam known as *arkan al-Islam* namely:

Shahadah, *Salat*, *Zakat*, Ramadhan, and Hajj. Each of these terms in Islam become full branches of knowledge and in turn give rise to other terms that symbolize and convey further concepts of Islam. Therefore, the inherent notions in the term **Islam** imply spiritual knowledge with implications on thought and practice.

Other notable words that share the same genealogy with the term **Islam** found in the English dictionary *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* are **inshallah**, **halal, fatwa, ulema, imam, hakim, Hajj, Ramadhan, sharia, sura, mufti** and **jihad** among a handful others. These words came into English as loan words because of their widespread modern usage and centrifugally from their social and theological usage in Islam. These Islamic terms borrowed by English have precise meanings in Islam. The dynamism of English as the most widely used international language in the world absorbed them to serve important semantic functions within its linguistic system.

The other remaining selected Islamic terms are not found in the English lexicon unlike the cited examples above which means in order to talk about them through the English language they would have to be either translated using English words or be explained through English words in order to arrive at the notions that are intrinsic to the concepts. All the selected terms in their Islamic epistemological context are conceptually related to the state of submission to the will of God as the definition of the term 'Islam' shows in its Islamic definition and usage.

The term *Imaan (إيمان)* refers to the state of the heart that accepts and submits to the truths as set down by Islam and is the state of belief and conviction in the Oneness of the All-Knowing Almighty God, *Tawhiid*

(توحيد). The definition of the concept in Islamic theology denotes a believer's faith in the theological principles of Islam. The description of this Islamic term also includes the belief in the six articles (tenets) of faith, known as *arkan al-Imaan*, which are: to believe and testify to the Oneness of God; to believe in the prophets of God; to believe in the angels of God; to believe and accept the revealed books from God; to accept *qadr* which is another major term denoting the concept of human destiny and fate, temporal and ultimate; and to believe and affirm the reality of the last day, the day of judgement. The concept and the spiritual realities and notions that are referred to by the term have been well developed and elucidated in the Glorious Qur'an and the famous Hadith of the Prophet where Archangel Gabriel (Jibriil) descended to teach the meaning and implications of the concept to the companions of the Prophet. Through works of exegesis, this major term and concept of Islam has been elaborated and explained by experts of the knowledge of Islam throughout the history of Islam and scholarship in Islamic theology; and instructed and imparted by the knowledgeable masters of the Islamic spiritual sciences.

The term *Ihsaan* (إحسان) as an Islamic concept has two meanings: the first means human goodness in relation to Almighty God; the second means goodness in relation to God's creation.   The first part of the definition of the term refers to the state of the heart that completely trusts the truth of Islam and is in the state of intention to do good from such a state for the sake of the All-Knowing Almighty God. *Ihsaan* is the spiritual striving to obtain perfection or excellence in the worship of God as if a Muslim sees Him, and although a person cannot see Him one has

no doubt that he is constantly watching over them and sees what is in their hearts. The second part of the definition of the term refers to the state of the heart that completely trusts the truth of Islam and is in the state of intention to do good to mankind and the rest of creation. Therefore it implies to live with goodness and compassion towards other creatures. Both the definitions have great implications to human intentions, actions and practice. Through works of exegesis, this major term and concept of Islam has been elaborated and explained by experts of the knowledge of Islam throughout the history of Islam and scholarship in Islamic theology; and imparted by the knowledgeable masters of the Islamic spiritual sciences.

The term *Ikhlaas* (إخلاص) refers to the state of the heart that is sincere to the truth of Islam and experiences the state of sincerity and full loyalty to the Almighty God. *Ikhlaas* means to have the sincere intention of only pleasing God in all intentions and acts of obedience. The intention must sincerely be for the aim of the proximity and pleasure of God. The intention must not involve personal mundane motives. Since this definition involves the Islamic ontological quality of being and doing it has great implications to human intentions, actions and practice. Through works of exegesis, this major term and concept of Islam has been elaborated and explained by experts of the knowledge of Islam throughout the history of Islam and the scholarship in Islamic theology; and imparted by the knowledgeable masters of the Islamic spiritual sciences.

THE CONCEPTUAL VARIABLE

The Question of Equivalence

The study uses the concept of the question of equivalence as a conceptual variable. This conceptual variable is used to clarify an important distinction made in the study. The distinction made is that the translation discussed in the paper is not between two languages, Arabic and English, but rather between Islamic terms that embody concepts of the knowledge of Islam expressed through the Arabic language and the words of English that are meant to denote them. Thus through this conceptual variable this paper examines the concepts symbolized by the selected Islamic terms and the meanings symbolized by the English words used to translate them. The Islamic terms identified and discussed above are conceptualized as **conceptual implicates** in this study because they imply and involve other Islamic terms which in their turn symbolize and convey other concepts of Islamic knowledge. To illustrate this idea through an analogy with a term from the science of medicine; for example, the term **cardiology** defined in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* as "the branch of medicine concerned with diseases and abnormalities of the heart." The term is a combined form of **cardio-** from the Greek word *kardia* meaning 'heart' and **–logy** explained in the same dictionary as forming nouns denoting " a subject of study or interest", " characteristic of speech or language", "discourse" from Greek *logia* meaning 'word, reason'. The term 'cardiology' as a specialized branch of medical science implies and involves other related terms which in turn carry and convey other concepts related to this field of scientific

study. Although it is a different epistemological context from the focus of this study, but this analogy serves to give a conceptual clue and help clarify how the Islamic terms operate in the field of Islamic knowledge.

The English language has not experienced the transformation Arabic went through from the latter's encounter with Islam as explicated by al-Attas. In the case of English, only a handful of words are directly borrowed from the world of Islam and have now become part of English vocabulary as noted in the section above of this study. The epistemological formations of English vocabulary remain firmly Eurocentric mainly determined by the Latin and Greek sources as explained by Denning *et al*. The transformation of Arabic by Islam and the formations of English vocabulary by Latin and Greek refer to two completely different processes with contrasting ramifications on the science of language. The transformation of Arabic by Islam meant drastic change to the semantic capacities of the Arabic words which produced Islamic terms that carry and convey the Islamic sciences and gnosis. The meanings of the Islamic terms expressing the sciences and gnosis of Islam manifest their primordial essence which precedes Arab historicism. The Holy Qur'an altered the conceptual structures of the pre-Islamic Arabic key terms in such a radical manner as to effect alterations in entire semantic fields in the pre-Islamic Arabic vocabulary and its previous conceptual and semantic network was dissolved to pave way for an Islamic worldview (al-Attas, 1999).

THE ISLAMIC TERMS AND ENGLISH WORDS

This section examines and compares the Islamic terms with the corresponding English words used to denote their meanings. Speaking of words, the late Sierra Leonean poet, Abioseh Nicol, wrote a poem entitled 'Words of Wisdom and Love' written in the context of his experience as an African intellectual and poet and inspired by the love and wisdom of what the African continent represented and symbolized for him. The sensibility underlying the poem emerges from the African ethos. The words of the first four stanzas of the poem, (the full poem is reproduced below), ring true in any context because of their truly universal appeal and import. Albeit written within the African context and experience, the poem foregrounds the value of words and their special symbolic qualities.

Words of Wisdom and Love- Abioseh Nicol

Words are like oyster shells

Many see only their outer hardness

But the wise hold and open them

And sometimes find within hidden pearls.

Words are like lightening strokes

Many see only frightening flashes

But the wise pause and wait

And hear the echo of their great thunder.

Words are like moonflowers by day

Many see only their bunched leafy fists

But the wise linger till twilight

And watch them open spilling out their sweet fragrance.

Words are like high towering waves

Many see only the hurl of their long angry curl

But the wise stand waiting by the white sand

And feel the gentle soothing trickle of their spent force.

So, Africa, when you say to me

In quiet urgency you love me

(Oh you are a torn confused and ravaged land

Your strange uncertain love like shifting tides)

That I must stay and serve your needs

I pause and ponder

I stop and wonder.

Perhaps you hold within you

Some hidden gleaming pearl

Some future majesty

Some strange sweet fragrance of moonlit nights

I walk along your foam-flecked shores

Your words hold promise

And are not empty

I have gained wisdom and shall wait.

Aesthetics, at its authentic best, is an insightful and versatile branch of knowledge. The imagery employed in the poem to depict the value of words is apt. The allusions to the inherent symbolic capacity of words to hold intellectual and imaginative possibilities to be sought and discovered by the human mind are instructive. The oscillation of pathos and abiding hope for the African continent captured in the last two stanzas through the poetic device of personification is telling. The theme and style of the poem is a celebration of the poem's persona's awareness of the profound and sapiential qualities of words. This aesthetic foregrounding the value of words dovetails well with and illustrates one main strand of the conceptual themes of this paper.

Let us now turn to some of the English words used sometimes to translate the Islamic terms and examine their meanings if they satisfy the criteria of equivalence of meaning. Riemer (2010) remarks that: "The concept of a word's meaning is closely linked to the concept of **definition**, which was first made explicit in Greek philosophy by Aristotle." (Riemer 2010: 46). Riemer (2010) later adds that the concept of definition as discussed by Aristotle has two interpretations "… a definition (*horismos*) has two quite different interpretations: 'in defining; says Aristotle, 'one exhibits either what the object is or what its name means'(Tredennick 1960: II.7.92b). A definition can therefore be

considered either as a summation of the essence or inherent nature of a thing (**real definition**; Latin *res* 'thing'), or as a description of the meaning of the *word* which denotes this thing (**nominal definition**; Latin *nomen* 'name, noun')" (Riemer 2010: 62-63).

As stated above, the word 'Islam' is in the English dictionary and its meaning and etymology comes from the world of Islam through the Arabic language. The other four terms are not part of the English lexicon; they are usually translated using English words that are conceived as having the same or closest denotation to the Arabic words.

The term *Imaan (إيمان)* is translated as 'faith' or 'belief' in English. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* defines the noun 'faith' as follows:

1. Complete trust or confidence

2. Firm belief, esp. without logical proof

3. (a) a system of religious belief (b) belief in religious doctrines (c) spiritual apprehension of divine truth apart from proof (d) things believed or to be believed

4. Duty or commitment to fulfil a trust, promise etc.; obligation, allegiance

The etymon of the word is the Latin *fides* meaning 'faith'. These are concise and precise definitions of the word 'faith' as an English word.

The noun 'belief' according to the same dictionary is defined as:

1. (a) a person's religion; religious conviction (b) a firm opinion (c) an acceptance (of a thing, fact, statement, etc.) (belief in the afterlife).

2. Trust or confidence

The origin of the word is from Old English. These are concise and precise definitions of the word 'belief' as an English word.

All these definitions are concise and precise for the English meanings of the words but can only account for the general denotative significations and meanings of the Arabic word at the linguistic level as translated and rendered in English and as used generally; but as an Islamic epistemological concept the term *Imaan (إيمان)* implies and involves other Islamic terms which in their turn symbolize and convey other concepts of Islamic knowledge. This signification of the term as the conceptual implicate of other terms is absent from the English words and the Islamic term would need to be expanded using other words and other levels of conceptual structures in order to be understood in its Islamic context. Therefore the meanings of the term and concept as found and realized in Islam cannot be transferred and translated at only this lexical level into English because the Islamic epistemological definition of the concept has theological implications on the way the term is studied and interpreted in Islam which includes all these definitions but conceptually connects them to the knowledge of the spiritual reality and truth of the Oneness of God embodied in the major term *Tawhiid (توحيد)*. Therefore the English words 'faith' and 'belief' are not actual correlates of the term *Imaan (إيمان)* in its Islamic epistemological definition and sense.

The term Ihsaan (إحسان) is translated as 'goodness' and 'favour' in English. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* defines the noun 'goodness' as:

1. Virtue, excellence, especially moral

2. Kindness, generosity

3. What is good or beneficial in a thing

The origin of the word is from Old English. These are concise and precise definitions of the English word.

The noun 'favour' according to the same dictionary is defined as:

1. An act of kindness beyond what is due or usual

2. Esteem, liking, approval, goodwill; friendly regard

3. Partiality; too lenient or generous treatment

4. Aid, support

The etymon of the word is the Latin word *favere* which has the meaning 'show kindness to'. These are quite concise and precise definitions provided for the English word.

These concise and precise meanings are closely related to the Arabic word at the linguistic level; but as an Islamic epistemological concept the term *Ihsaan* (إحسان*)* means much more because it is related to the Muslims' striving to obtain perfection or excellence in the worship of God as if they see Him, and although they cannot see Him they have no doubt that he is constantly watching over them and sees what is in their hearts. Therefore this elevated semantic sense invoked in the notion of conscious awareness of an individual believer in relation to the Creator is part of the semantic qualities of the term in Islam and the concept as found and realized in Islam includes this referential and inferential notion. This is not found at this English lexical level because the Islamic epistemological definition of the term is used in this elevated way in the

Islamic spiritual and theological sciences and therefore has implications on the way the term is studied and interpreted in Islam which includes the definition of the Arabic word but conceptually imbues it with the knowledge of the spiritual reality and truth embodied in the major term *Tawhiid (توحيد)*. Therefore the English words 'goodness' and 'favour' do not carry the signification the term *Ihsaan (إحسان)* has in its Islamic epistemological definition and sense.

The term *Ikhlaas (إخلاص)* normally is translated as "sincerity" in English. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* defines 'sincere', the adjective form of the noun 'sincerity', as:

1. Free from pretence or deceit; the same in reality as in appearance
2. Genuine, honest, frank

The etymon of the word is Latin *sincerus* which is rendered into English as 'clean', 'pure'. These are quite concise and precise definitions provided for the English word.

These concise definitions are closely related to the Arabic word at the linguistic level; but as an Islamic epistemological concept the term *Ikhlaas (إخلاص)* acquires further meaning referring to the state of the heart that is sincere to the truth of Islam and experiences sincerity to the Almighty God. Therefore the denotation and sense of the term as found and realized in Islam is not found at this English lexical level because the Islamic epistemological definition of the term is used in this elevated way in the Islamic spiritual and theological sciences and therefore has implications on the way the term is studied and interpreted in Islam which includes the definition of the Arabic word but conceptually imbues it with the knowledge of spiritual reality and truth embodied in the major term *Tawhiid (توحيد)*. Therefore the English word 'sincere' carries only

aspects of the signification of the term *Ikhlaas* (إخلاص) at the linguistic level only without the spiritual sense and state invoked within the term as understood in the epistemology of Islam.

The descriptive definitions of the Islamic terms above clearly mark them as conceptual implicates because they imply other Islamic terms and concepts. Denning *et al.*, (2007) comment that the incompleteness in representation of meaning is the rule rather than the exception because words are only symbols, not complete linguistic representations of the physical or conceptual world. As we see above, apart from the word 'Islam' which is part of the English lexicon, the other Islamic terms mentioned and discussed in this paper do not have exact and concise correlates in the English lexicon that would satisfy the criteria of true semantic adequacy and equivalence of meaning. This is because the selected terms from Islam are part of the vocabulary al-Attas refers to as forming the conceptual structures of the Qur'an which projects the Islamic vision of reality and truth. They are therefore based upon established knowledge of the 'fields' of meaning as couched in the Arabic language as organized and applied in the Holy Qur'an and reflected in the *Hadith* and the Sunnah (al Attas, 1999). The words chosen from the English vocabulary to express meanings of the selected Islamic terms have concise and precise definitions within the linguistic context of the English language but also indicate temporal orientation and perspective in these definitions since they do not originate or share the semantic precision and the conceptual system of Islam as manifested by the Islamic terms that are connected to the intellectual and spiritual knowledge of Islam.

CONCLUSION

This research paper has dealt with the subject of Islam and English. It has outlined and touched on the epistemological contexts of Islamic concepts as couched in Islamic terms and the English lexicon that has provided the words regarded as translation equivalents. The paper has attempted to confine itself within the scope and boundaries of the focus of the research which is the underlying conceptual theme of Islamic terms and English words. The sources of the conceptual structures of Islam and the way they are manifested through Islamic terms are completely different from the way language is studied on its own as a field of inquiry without reference to the higher purposes of the pursuit of the science of language in its Islamic epistemological context which includes the purpose of language to define, refine and purify the state of human intentions and notions as well as the processes of how these intentions and notions manifest themselves as human thoughts and actions.

The study used the concept of the question of equivalence as a conceptual variable. This conceptual variable has proven useful to clarify an important distinction made in the study; the distinction that the translation is between Islamic terms that embody concepts of knowledge of Islam and the words of English that are meant to denote them, i.e., between an epistemic context and a linguistic context Thus through this conceptual variable the paper has examined the concepts symbolized by the selected Islamic terms and the meanings symbolized by the English words used to translate them. The Islamic terms identified and discussed are conceptualized as conceptual implicates since they imply and involve other Islamic terms which in their turn symbolize and convey other

concepts of Islamic knowledge. Another distinction made in the foregoing study is that the English language has not experienced the transformation Arabic went through from the latter's encounter with Islam. The epistemological formations of English vocabulary remain firmly Eurocentric. The transformation of Arabic by Islam and the formations of English vocabulary by European languages as seen in the study refer to two completely different processes with contrasting ramifications on the science of language. The transformation of Arabic by Islam meant drastic change to the semantic capacities of the Arabic words which produced Islamic terms that carry and convey the Islamic sciences and gnosis. The meanings of the Islamic terms expressing the sciences and gnosis of Islam manifest the unifying Islamic vision of reality and truth while the English words orientate towards temporal axiology.

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