Language Acquisition In Al-Attas’ Epistemological Viewpoints

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Abstract

This article discusses language acquisition based on Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas’ epistemology where language, as part of ‘ilm (knowledge), is the major subject of the discussion. This aims to undergo preliminary study in language acquisition in non-western epistemology. The object of the study is Al-Attas’ epistemology which is confined to the rasm (description) of ‘ilm, the sources of ‘ilm, and the process of the arrival. This research is library research using a systematic literature review. The study revealed that language acquisition and language teaching concept which is grounded to Al-Attas’ Islamic epistemology can enrich recent paradigms and theories on language acquisition and language teaching.

Keywords: epistemology, al-Attas, language acquisition

Introduction

It is barely found discussions on Al-Attas as a linguist, or him as a person having an interest in language. Al-Attas is widely recognized as a contemporary Muslim thinker and philosopher. Indeed, many have discussed on Al-Attas’ epistemology and philosophy of science. For instance, many dissertations and articles confront Al-Attas’ thoughts with the thoughts of western philosophers and scholars or discuss his idea of the Islamization of knowledge (de westernization). However, only a few highlighted that starting from his epistemology to his de westernization project departs from and rests on Al-Attas’ attention to language. If we look deeper into the concept of al-Attas’ ‘ilm then apply it to the concept of language, the result will be quite similar to what was done by Chomsky who based his linguistic studies on Descartes’ epistemology. If Descartes’ “ex nihilo nihil fit” as inferred by Chomsky spawned the idea of innate grammar, then what about Al-Attas’ concept of The Day of Alastu (Ahmad, 2017)? Furthermore, Chomsky’s objection to the behaviourist view of human language that ignores the mental aspects of humans in acquiring and learning a language (Yaacob, 2016) and his ideas about the creative aspects of language use (Chomsky, 2009) have several similarities with Al-Attas’ epistemological concept of
‘ilm which allows acquisition of knowledge through sound sense and sound reason (Al-Attas, 2014). As one of the distinguished Muslim thinkers, the thoughts of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, especially in his epistemology and philosophy of science, have obtained not only certain objections and criticisms but also many compliments and campaigns for his authentic and distinctive concepts and ideas. His thought on an epistemology based on Islamic weltanschauung led him to the idea of Islamization of knowledge. Al-Attas criticized the domination of the western worldview and persuaded for the need for the Islamic world to explore, to elaborate and to promote the Islamic worldview which, according to him, is certainly more suitable to be embraced, to be believed and to be practised not only by Muslims but also by the entire world population since Islamic teachings were revealed for the sake of the good and mercy of the universes (rahmat li al- ‘alamin).

It could be argued, as proposed by Al-Attas, that the western worldview has dominated most of every aspect of today’s human life, not only the physical aspect but also the spiritual aspect (Naghipour & Pourmohammad, 2012). Paradigms, methodologies and almost all standards of life are forced to follow this weltanschauung; from the dead-end discussions in philosophy, the rigidity of the scientific method until the trivial issues on hobbies and lifestyles are inevitably impacted. That is to say, it not only infects the other worldviews but also undermines, dominates, and destructs them. However, the Islamic worldview or Islamy Nazariyat to Al-Maududi and al-Tasawwur al-Islamy to Syed Qutb (Zarkasyi, 2018a), even though some aspects of which are impacted and distorted, the foundation of which remains sturdy. It is believed that the Islamic epistemology has become the firewall in protecting and preserving the base, namely al-‘aqidah wa al-shari‘ah (Manurung, 2018).

The seriousness of the Muslim scholars in preparing and building Islamic epistemology can be found in various classical scientific literature, even the Sahihain, hadith books which are considered as the second sources of sharia after the Quran, contains a special discussion of knowledge called kitab al-‘ilm (In Sahih al-Bukhary the kitab al-‘ilm is the 3rd chapter while in Sahih al-Muslim is the 47th chapter). In addition, other Islamic literature such as Usul al-Fiqh, which is a study that discusses how to istinbat (derives and formulates) Islamic jurisprudence from The Quran and The Hadith (tradition of prophet Muhammad p.b.u.h), often presents a discussion of ‘ilm, the sources of ‘ilm, the process of acquiring ‘ilm to the chains of transferring it before presenting its main discussion. Those aspects of knowledge indeed are the discussion of epistemology.

In response to the problems echoed by Al-Attas, in 1977, a total of 330 participants attended the First Conference on Islamic Education in Mecca. In this conference, Islamic scholars and scientists discussed what concepts and methodologies are suitable to be applied in Islamic education. It is regarded to the domination of western’s concept in education applied significantly by Muslim’s educational world (Al-Attas, 1993), instead of reviving and redeveloping its legacy—in senses of being a counterweight, corrector and complement as well as being an alternative
to the western worldview. The issue is that western educational epistemology mostly is problematic regarding Islamic epistemology (Al-Attas, 1980). Among those scholars who attended the conference was Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas. In the conference, Al-Attas asserted that the Muslim world today is facing two major challenges; namely external and internal issues. The former is a religio-cultural and socio-political challenge from the western world while the latter encompasses three issues one of which is the confusion of knowledge (Ardiansyah, 2020).

Al-Attas believed that western epistemology, which absents itself from the metaphysical aspect as promoted by empiricism and rationalism is responsible for problematic and confusing knowledge. Al-Attas, then, analogized scholars and scientists who followed western epistemology as the thirsty travellers deceived by the pseudo-water of knowledge due to their preoccupation of pouring the salt of doubt to the water. Instead of slaking of their thirst, their oblivious mistaken belief led them to forget what is the true purpose of the water and its origin (Al-Attas, 2013). However, most Muslim scholars, researchers, academics, and educational practitioners adopt, emulate, teach and spread the thought for the lack of sight that Islam has provided its followers with- its epistemology of ‘ilm or they just ignored what Muslim intellectuals in the past did towards other civilization concepts and theories – assimilation (Zarkasyi, 2019). Hence, Al-Attas echoed the idea of Islamization of knowledge in terms of going back to Islamic guidance and thought but not of in terms of indigenization (Ahmed, 2018).

The interesting thing is that Al-Attas believed that one of the methods or tools to de westernise is through the Islamisation of language. To Al-Attas, language relates closely to worldview since it reflects the reason and thought of a person (Al-Attas, 1993). Hence, language has a significant role in Al-Attas’ Islamisation of Knowledge. In addition, Al-Attas’ epistemology and philosophy of science depart from the definition (hadd) of humans. Al-Attas cited the most considerable definition of human referred to by Muslims which distinct human as al-haywan (animal) al-natiq (speaking), speaking animal. Here is obvious that language has a significant role in Al-Attas’ thoughts. However, researchers interested in discussing it are quite a few. Many studied on and re-explained on Al-Attas’ established thought.

To illustrate the latter, a book written by Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud entitled The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, an Exposition of The Original Concept of Islamisation, for instance, discusses the Islamization of knowledge and Islamic educational world as initiated and applied by Al-Attas. However, this book is one of the important works providing information on Al-Attas’ ideas and thoughts on Islamic epistemology. In addition, Zarkasyi wrote an article entitled Knowledge and Knowing in Islam. The article provides a comparison of Al-Attas’ epistemology and philosophy of science and Nursi’s knowledge and knowing conception (Zarkasyi, 2018b).

Another scholar, Kania, compares Al-
Attas’ epistemology and thought to that of Schuon in her book titled *Pemikiran Epistemology Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas dan Frithjof Schuon*. This book emphasizes more on comparing the sources of knowledge and the process of its arrival to a human based on Al-Attas’ and Schuon’s epistemology. Furthermore, *Filsafat Pendidikan Islam Analisis Pemikiran Prof. Dr Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas* a book written by Badaruddin discusses reformulating the philosophical concept of Al-Attas’ pertaining to educational issues, Al-Attas’ ideas of education and its application. These types of sources, however, are cited in this article to construct a comprehensive understanding on Al-Attas’ epistemology bridging the understanding of language acquisition concept based on Al-Attas’ point of view.

Meanwhile, Ahmad published few studies on Al-Attas’ thoughts related to language. For instance, in the discussion about the role of language in the process of Islamization of knowledge, Al-Attas’ views on the relationship of language to the worldview, change and translation (Ahmad, 2019), and an article on Al-Attas’ epistemology and metaphysical thought which is indirectly related to language is her writing on *The Day of Alastu* (Ahmad, 2017). It is argued that these publications are necessary to be complemented by a more specific discussion of how Al-Attas’ epistemology and philosophy of science are applied to the theory of language and even language acquisition theory. Therefore, this article will present a discussion of this subject. It is argued that the discussion of language acquisition in terms of Islamic epistemology in general and Al-Attas’ epistemology in particular is still not wide and may not be studied at all. Therefore, this preliminary research will contribute to the academic world to start further research on how the concept of language and language acquisition in the perspective of Islamic philosophy will certainly complement the current conception of language and language acquisition which is mostly based on western philosophy.

**Method**

This study is library research employing systematic literature review. Hence, it allocates (George, 2008), identifies, assesses and interprets as many available references as possible providing discussions, critics, reviews and comments related to the research’s questions to find answers to the questions (Kitchenham, 2004). As the standard guideline for systematic literature review, this research was conducted through the planning, implementation and reporting stages of research results.

The primary sources of this research are books written by Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, namely *Prolegomena to The Metaphysic of Islam, The Concept of Education in Islam, The Concept of Religion and The Foundation of Ethics and Morality and Islam and Secularism;* In addition, the other sources discussing on Al-Attas’ thoughts such as *Epistemology Pemikiran Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas dan Frithjof Schuon* by Dinar Dewi Kania and Salina Ahmad’s articles are also as part of the main sources. Furthermore, several verses of The Quran and the interpretations were also referred to support the discussion of the results of this study. The exegesis used here are Al-Qurtuby’s *Tafsir al-Jami’ al-Ahkam al-
Quran, Ibn Mas’ud’s Tafsir al-Bagawy and Tafsir al-Tahir wa al-Tanwir by Ibn ‘Asur

The object of this research is Al-Attas’ epistemology and philosophy of science which focuses on his idea of ‘ilm and the process of its arrival into the human soul provided in his works. In addition, his concepts and thoughts about humans and language are also the objects of this study more specifically. Furthermore, since Al-Attas’ epistemology of ‘ilm is of course based on Islamic teachings, certain verses of the Qur’an related to this discussion have also been observed as the object of research.

Result and Discussion

Al-Attas’ and Few Other Islamic Scholars’ Epistemology

The Quran states that humans are the best creatures in all aspects ahsamtu taqwim. The word taqwim interpreted as al-ta’dil wa al-taswiya means that the creation of humans is not only proportional in all aspects but also super systematic, sophisticated and perfectly functional (Ibn ‘Asur, 1984). The physical organs of the human body such as the fingers, for instance, do not only taqwim aesthetically, such as the proportion and the balance of the body parts, but also in terms of their systems and functions. Let alone if it is investigated further down to the atomic aspects of the human fingers’ system. On the fingers, for instance, there is skin tissue which is one of the most important senses for humans, the sense of touch. From this sense of touch, humans can confirm some ideas in their minds that were previously completely abstract and only are through this sense they experienced some of those confirmations.

The second taqwim of a human is in his mental faculties, namely fitrah (the nature of the human), nafs (self), qalb (heart), ‘aql (intellect) and ruh (spirit). Humans are gifted with a spirit that Allah blows after the completion of the creation of the body (The Quran [15]: 28-19; [38]: 71-72). In addition, humans are also equipped with qalb and ‘aql by which humans have the privilege of gaining ‘ilm so that they become the only creatures of God who are worthy to carry out their duties as caliph – the manager, the maintainer and the one who creates peace and prosperity of the world (The Quran [2]: 30-34). Furthermore, humans are also equipped with the nafs which is the good and bad potentials they have (Shihhab, 2007). However, according to Shihhab, the tendency towards good things in humans is greater than their potential for badness as confirmed in other verses in the Quran such as in The Quran [2]: 286 and [82]: 6-7. Furthermore, this is confirmed by other mental aspects of a human, namely, fitrah which is characterised as hanif; leaning towards the good (The Quran [30]: 30).

The physical aspect of a human with its sensory organs and human mental faculties are what led humans to ‘ilm. The human senses, as previously explained, become tools to confirm ideas in the human mind and make them an experience (empiric). In addition, the mental faculties humans have, namely fitrah, nafs, ‘aql, qalb and ruh enable them to transcend things that are sensory and empirical. Both physical devices and mental faculties support each other and can lead humans to reality.

The consideration of the physical and mental faculties in Islam as tools to
acquire knowledge is what makes Islamic epistemology different from western epistemology (Kartanegara, 2014). Al-Iṣfahānī defines ‘īlm as idrāk al-syāi bihaqiqatihi while according to Al-Gazālī is meant by ‘īlm is ma’rifat al-syāi ila ma huwa bihi. According to Syamsudin Arif, the choice of the word idrāk by Al-Iṣfahānī and Al-Gazālī’s ma’rifat has different implications. The word idrāk, according to Syamsuddin, indicates movement (of ideas) and something that enters from outside.

Meanwhile, the word ma’rifat only indicates recognition, which means the essence of something has already existed (Arif, 2011). So, according to Al-Iṣfahānī, knowledge is the transfer of something from just an assumption, opinion, or idea to its reality which enters from the outside whereas in Al-Gazālī’s terminology, ‘īlm can be interpreted as a form of affirmation of reality because the basic knowledge of reality is embedded in the human soul or in another word, it is innate in humans. Al-Attas prefers to use the words husul and wusul in describing ‘īlm as well as being more specific in meaning and soul. Hence, in his description (rasm) ‘īlm is the arrival (husul) of meaning into the soul where at the same time the soul arrives (wusul) to the meaning (Al-Attas, 1980).

From a brief description of humans concerning knowledge as described above, it can be concluded that knowledge in Islam will be closely related to humans as taqwim living beings and as a creation humans are closely related to their Creator. Therefore, the acquisition of knowledge in Islam does not only come from the senses (sensible) but also from the non-sensory (un-sensible / metaphysical). Hence, Al-Attas asserted that ‘īlm is the unity between ‘īlm of recognizing and ‘īlm of finding (knowing). The former is acquired through Allah’s revelation, both in the form of revelation to the prophets or the messengers and in the form of inspiration to ordinary people. Moreover, the process of recognition can also be attained through contemplation where the medium is qalb; and also through the work of ‘aql.

Meanwhile, the finding or knowing process involves only ratio and intellect (Al-Attas, 2001). The employment of the intellect is in the intelligible process which is the process of changing the perception of humans’ senses and God’s illumination to meaning and then conveying it to the human’s soul (Kania, 2018).

Thus, if we associate language as part of ‘īlm based on the epistemology of ‘īlm of Al-Attas, it can be said that the behaviourists’ views and treatment of language which are only based on discovery and scientific procedures and the fear of falling into the metaphysical realm (Yaacob, 2016), as was criticised by Chomsky, would contradict Al-Attas’ concept of man and human language. However, although it has similarities with Chomsky’s concept of acknowledging the mental aspect of man, it can be said that the definition of the mental aspect of Al-Attas is even richer. As previously elaborated, Al-Attas made it possible for knowledge to come to humans through the illumination of God and human contemplation. This can complement Chomsky’s argument about how a five-year-old child can produce hundreds of words or arguments about the human ability to form new statements as an expression of what is on his mind (Chomsky, 2009).
The Concept of Teaching ‘ilm in the Quran

In Arabic, teaching (la’lim) has three verb forms namely, perfective verb “have taught” (‘allama), the imperfective verb “be teaching” (yu’allimu) and imperative verb’s “teach” (‘allim) and are still one root word with “knowledge” (‘ilm). The word “to teach”, both in perfective and imperfective form, is found in 34 verses in The Quran. In the perfective form, usually, the subject is God, either explicitly or implicitly, while when the imperfective verb is employed, the doer becomes more diverse. It can be humans, jinn, angels as well as Allah.

Table 1. List of verses in The Quran using perfective form ‘allama (have taught).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Surah and Verse</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Verb Form</th>
<th>Direct Object</th>
<th>Indirect Object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al-Shuara [2] 22</td>
<td>Allah</td>
<td>Perfective</td>
<td>Unknown thing</td>
<td>Human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Shuara [2] 282</td>
<td>Allah</td>
<td>Perfective</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Mu’minun [33] 34</td>
<td>Allah</td>
<td>Perfective</td>
<td>‘Ilm</td>
<td>Human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Mu’minun [33] 110</td>
<td>Allah</td>
<td>Perfective</td>
<td>‘Ilm</td>
<td>Jesus as.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Din [6] 91</td>
<td>Allah</td>
<td>Perfective</td>
<td>Unknown thing</td>
<td>Human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuad [22] 68</td>
<td>Allah</td>
<td>Perfective</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Jacob as.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fuad [22] 101</td>
<td>Allah</td>
<td>Perfective</td>
<td>Interpreting a dream</td>
<td>Joseph as.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Kahfi [39] 56</td>
<td>Allah</td>
<td>Perfective</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>All-Mohamed as.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Kahfi [39] 56</td>
<td>Allah</td>
<td>Perfective</td>
<td>True knowledge</td>
<td>All-Mohamed as.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tawbah [29] 71</td>
<td>All-Mohamed [51] 80</td>
<td>Perfective</td>
<td>Magic</td>
<td>Humans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Masih [20] 49</td>
<td>All-Mohamed</td>
<td>Perfective</td>
<td>Magic</td>
<td>Humans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Mu’minun [33] 1</td>
<td>Allah</td>
<td>Perfective</td>
<td>The Quran</td>
<td>Muhammad as.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Mu’minun [33] 2</td>
<td>Allah</td>
<td>Perfective</td>
<td>The Quran</td>
<td>Muhammad as.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Mu’minun [33] 3</td>
<td>Allah</td>
<td>Perfective</td>
<td>All-Mohamed as.</td>
<td>Humans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Mu’minun [33] 4</td>
<td>Allah</td>
<td>Perfective</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Mu’minun [33] 5</td>
<td>Allah</td>
<td>Perfective</td>
<td>Unknown thing</td>
<td>Humans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows that there are 24 verses from 15 Surah in The Quran, uses the word ‘allama as a verb which indicates the process of conveying knowledge. Of the 25 verses, only three verses are subject to other than Allah, namely in verse 71 of Surah Taha [20], verse 49 of Surah Al-Shu’ara [26] and in Surah al-Najm [53] verse 5. The subjects were Moses, Moses, and Gabriel, respectively.

The word ‘allama is f’il madi (perfective verb) which follows the fa’ala pattern and is muta’addi (transferring) with two objects. This transferring verb indicates the process of transferring or moving a direct object from a subject to an indirect object. Therefore, the word ‘allama implies the transfer of knowledge as a direct object from the subject to the indirect object. The following is a structure which illustrates from Surah Al-Baqara [2] verse 31.

Table 2. Example of the Structure using word ‘allama in The Quran

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Allah)</th>
<th>‘allama</th>
<th>adam</th>
<th>al-asma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Transferive verb</td>
<td>Indirect Object</td>
<td>Direct Object</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allah</td>
<td>has taught</td>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>as</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Al-Asma is a direct object which is transferred by Allah as a subject (teacher) through activities showing with a verb “has taught” to the indirect object, Adam.

Allah, in these verses (Table 1), teaches general knowledge, skills such as language skills and hunting skills, dream interpretation, and the unknown/unseen thing. As for when the subject (teacher) is other than Allah, what is taught only includes knowledge and magic but does not include something that is not or not yet known.

Something or thing which is not known can be interpreted as a metaphysical object. Therefore, knowledge of the unknown thing can only be taught by Allah, that is, through the way of revelation, inspiration. Indication of this is also shown by only a perfective form
where the object of teaching is something/thing that is not known, not an imperfective form. In the Arabic tradition, the imperfective form has the meaning of continuity and recurrence. Meanwhile, the perfective form has two implicit meanings. Firstly, if the event took place in the past it means that it was already done; Secondly, if the event has not occurred yet but what is used in the sentence is the perfective form, it means a certainty. This can be meant that The One Who can teach the unknown thing about ‘a$-lam al-gayh (metaphysical world) is only Allah SWT. and the process of which is not continuous but depends on His will and to the creatures that Allah SWT. wishes to do it.

Table 3. List of verses in The Quran that use the word $yu'allim$ (imperfective form)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Surah and Verse</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Verb Form</th>
<th>Direct Object</th>
<th>Indirect Object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Al-Baqara [2]: 102</td>
<td>Sattm.</td>
<td>Imperfective</td>
<td>Magic</td>
<td>Humans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Baqara [2]: 129</td>
<td>Muqta'</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Baqara [2]: 131</td>
<td>The Messenger</td>
<td>Imperfective</td>
<td>The book, wisdom</td>
<td>Humans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Baqara [2]: 131</td>
<td>The Messenger</td>
<td>Imperfective</td>
<td>The book, wisdom</td>
<td>Humans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Baqara [2]: 131</td>
<td>The Prophet</td>
<td>Imperfective</td>
<td>The book, wisdom</td>
<td>Humans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Baqara [2]: 131</td>
<td>The Messenger</td>
<td>Imperfective</td>
<td>The book, wisdom</td>
<td>Humans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Baqara [2]: 131</td>
<td>Msk.</td>
<td>Imperfective</td>
<td>The book, wisdom</td>
<td>Humans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Baqara [2]: 131</td>
<td>Allah</td>
<td>Imperfective</td>
<td>The book, wisdom</td>
<td>Humans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Baqara [2]: 131</td>
<td>Humans</td>
<td>Imperfective</td>
<td>The book, wisdom</td>
<td>Humans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Concept of Language in the Quran

Words that refer to “language" in the Quran are mostly in the form of a particular language, namely Arabic (‘araby) and languages other than Arabic (‘ajamy), see The Quran, [12]: 2, [13]: 37, [16]: 103, [20]: 113, [26]: 7, 195, [39]: 28, [41]: 3, 44, [43]: 3, [46]: 12. In addition, the words lisan (The Quran, [14]: 4, [26]: 15, [16]: 103, [19]: 97, [30]: 22, [44]: 58, [46]: 12) and mantiq (The Quran, [27]: 16) are used consecutively to show the function of language as a medium for conveying messages and knowledge, referring to its diversity, and as speech that can be understood.

Apart from the aforementioned words, which lexically means language, there are several words in the Quran which only through the interpretation of scholars, both classical and contemporary, are interpreted as language. For instance, the exegesis of $al-Asma$ from surah Al-Baqara [2]: 31, and the interpretation of $al-Bayan$ from surah al-Rahman [55]: 4. Al-Qurtubi, writer of Tafsir Al-Jami ‘Al-Ahkam Al-Quran, when interpreted, the meaning of $al-Asma$ explained that the Quran testified that Allah taught Adam a.s $al-Asma$, where language is part of that $al-Asma$. Therefore, the first person to speak the entire language was Adam. He also quoted Ibn ‘Khuwaiz who said that this verse [(12]: 31) shows that Allah taught Adam languages in full and in detail, and the methods Allah used in teaching the language to Adam a.s. is tauqifi method (Al-Qurtubi, 2006). Almost in line with this opinion, Al-Bagawy said that what is meant by $al-Bayan$ in The Quran [55]: 4 is the whole language. Therefore Al-Bagawy argues that Adam a.s spoke 700,000 languages (Al-Bagawy, 1988). Meanwhile, Ibn ‘Asur argues that the word $al-Bayan$ here is $al-Nutq$ (speech) which is the distinctive aspect of humans compared to other living things and is the greatest blessing given by Allah to humans (Ibn ‘Asur, 1984).

This finding shows that language, in the view of the interpretation of the Quran, is the greatest gift from God that makes humans distinguished and privileged from other divine creatures. If so, this divinity refers to all humans, not only for Adam a.s
who is believed to be the first human. Hence, this could be an indication that God has made human language skills innate.

Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas on Language

It could be argued that the works and thoughts of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas were compiled and perfected in his book entitled Prolegomena to The Metaphysic of Islam. Al-Attas’ ideas, which were previously delivered in several books, monographs and lectures were retained and compiled more systematically in this book. For instance, the concept of humans and knowledge (‘ilm), the concept of Islamization of science to the concept of language and the worldview found in several of his works are restated in this book. However, for those who want to know how Al-Attas’ line of thought was formed, enjoying Al-Attas’ works before prolegomena is necessary.

Al-Attas was very popular with the idea of Islamization of knowledge. Although other Muslim scholars introduced and popularized this idea, Al-Attas can be considered as the first initiator of this idea. The call for Islamization is inseparable from Al-Attas’ concern over the western philosophy of science which is uprooted from metaphysical aspects. It is based solely on physical-material aspects. The philosophy adopted and spread by western society eventually began to be emulated and practised by the world community, including Muslims, consciously and unconsciously. This is what concerned Al-Attas because Muslims have their worldview, a viewpoint that is considered more comprehensive (recognizing physical and metaphysical aspects). One thing that is considered by the media for the spread of the western worldview is the use of scientific language terms.

Al-Attas viewed that language is a distinctive aspect of humans. In terms of Islamic literature, to explain something usually takes two methods, namely through depiction (rasm) and differentiation (hadd). Through the former, a thing will be explained in general while by the latter a thing will be distinguished from others. In Al-Attas’ view, language becomes a factor that exists in the second method, the differentiation. In general, a human is a creature, the microcosm which is part of the cosmos, whereas a human in more specific term is a rational living being. It is this “rational” attribute that makes humans the most special creatures even when compared to angels. This rational living being is usually called in Arabic as “al-haywan al-natiq”.

The word al-haywan is usually translated as an animal, but actually when it is referred to the root, the word haywan is from the root word hayyin which means “life”. Meanwhile, the word mut’q lexically means “speech”. This speech aspect is what distinguishes humans from other living beings (the hadd). It is said that a human is a speaking living being while “speech” signifies the ability to formulate meaning (idh mu’tiq) and the process of which involves other abilities namely judgement, discrimination, and clarification. It is the so-called rationalisation (Al-Attas, 2014). Hence, the word al-haywan al-natiq can be interpreted as a rational living being. Furthermore, the ability to formulate meaning into linguistic symbols indicates
an inner and invisible reality which is commonly referred to as the intellect (al-’aqîl). In Arabic, the word ‘aqîl itself means binding or withholding so that in this term it shows that humans have the innate ability and capacity to bind, link and convey objects of knowledge or formulate meaning in words.

In summary, it can be argued that language has an important position and role in Al-Attas’ thoughts. Unfortunately, Al-Attas himself did not discuss language more specifically based on his epistemology and philosophy of science, whereas the discussion of the philosophy of language from the perspective of Al-Attas can be a complement, alternative and balance for the currently employed philosophy of language. Furthermore, this will have implications for the theory of acquisition and language learning theory as well as the teaching methods. Al-Attas asserted that knowledge can be obtained through: a). the sound senses, namely perception and sensory observation; true report from people who have authority about it; b). the sound reason, namely the sense of intellect and intuition. Hence, language as part of knowledge can be obtained through these methods too. In fact, the current theories are only based on sound senses.

**Conclusion**

The theories of language and its acquisitions that have been used by scholars refer to western epistemology and philosophy of science which are absent from the metaphysical aspect. The findings of this study indicate that the Islamic epistemology represented by Al-Attas’ epistemology and philosophy of science can be developed to complement, criticize and even to correct the theories of language acquisition adopted and applied by scholars and practitioners nowadays. Hence, the findings of this study have opened up opportunities for subsequent studies on the theory of language acquisition, language learning and language teaching based on Al-Attas’ Islamic epistemology. Research that can be done as a continuation of this study is the comparison of existing language theories with language theories taken and derived from Al-Attas’ epistemology and philosophy of science, its acquisition theories, its learning and teaching theories.

**References**


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