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THE QUR'ANIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE GROWTH OF YORUBA SEMANTICS

BY

S.A. SHITTU

Abstract

The Qur'an is a literal transcript of the word of God from a 'safely preserved tablet' in between revealed to Muhammad for the period of 23 years in Arabic; the Qur'an, an 'eye opener' an illuminating light and original source of branches of the knowledge. It is really in existence to withstand the test of time.

This paper aims at examining the impact of the Qur'an on the growth of Yoruba semantics. It firstly treats how the Qur'an was the compendium of branches of knowledge, its characteristic feature, its influence on the language in which it was revealed – Arabic – then on other languages. Such influence cuts across philosophical aspects of the language. It is the accurate and powerful descriptive language of the Qur'an that has led many researchers of different fields to have discovered new inventories described about fifteen hundred years ago with modern equipment.

The historical account of Yoruba contact with the Qur'an vis-à-vis Islam throws light on the period when the Yoruba had felt the impact of the Qur'an on their language. Semantics and its referents will be dealt with in application of the meaning of Quranic verses that contribute to the growth of Yoruba semantics. This focus would be the main study in which each word examined will be instanced with the Quranic verse.

This study will also reveal that not only in Arabic language that the Qur'an is believed to represent the highest linguistic and semantic achievement but also in Yoruba language if it is critically studied.

Introduction

The Qur'an is 'the word of God revealed to Muhammad (PBUH) through the Holy Spirit, and it is beyond human imagination to produce anything like it'.² It is an eye opener, an illuminating light and a greatest gift of God to humanity and its wisdom is of a unique kind. The purpose of the book is to guard the previous revelations and restore the eternal truth of God. Muhammad's contemporaries verse, by acclamation, the greatest masters of the Arabic language with most compelling motives to produce a rival text. But they could not produce anything like the Qur'an in content and style.³ The Qur'an which had been labeled by Muslims and non Muslims as wonderful revelation which many people expect that if

the book came from the desert, it should talk about the desert only. The Qur'an does talk about the desert. Some of its imagery describes the desert, but it also talks about the sea – what its like to be in a storm on the sea.⁴ Through this powerful and accurate description opened eyes of some researchers to ponder on the Qur'an directly or indirectly.

The Characteristic Feature of the Qur'an

Qur'anic wisdom as being of a special mature and characteristics, among is the following:

Dynamism: One of the major characteristics of the Qur'anic wisdom is that it is not the static or dry type. But it is a kind of dynamic wisdom that provokes the mind and quickens the heart. In this wisdom there is stirring dynamism and there is moving force attested by historical evidence as well as by the Qur'an itself, when Prophet Muhammad first launched the call of God, his only power and weapon was the Qur'an and his only wisdom was the Qur'anic wisdom. The penetrating dynamism of the Qur'an is tremendous and irresistible.

Practicability: The Qur'an does not indulge in wishful thinking. Nor does it teachings demand float on rosy streams of unattainable ideals. The Qur'an accepts man for what he is and exhorts him to become what he can be. It does not brand man as a helpless or hopeless creature, condemned from birth to death and drowned in sin from womb to womb, but it portrays him as a noble, honorable and dignified being. This practicability of the Qur'anic teachings is established by the examples of Muhammad and Muslim throughout the ages.

Moderation: Is a harmony between the Divine and human, the spiritual and the material, the individual and the collective. It pays due attention to all facts of life and all needs of man, and deals with them in such a way as to help man realize the noble objectives of his being. The Qur'anic wisdom functions in three principal dimensions inwardly, outwardly and upwardly. Inwardly it penetrates innermost recesses of the heart and reaches the farthest depths of the mind. This inward penetration is quite different from any other legal or ethical systems, because the Qur'an speaks in God's name and refers all matters to Him.

The outward function is the Qur'an embraces all walks of life and covers the principles of the entire of human affairs from the most personal matter to the complex international relations. The Qur'an reaches areas unknown to any secular system of law or code of ethics and inaccessible to any popular doctrine or religion.

In its upward function, the Qur'an focuses on the one supreme God. Man is regarded as trustee in the vast domain of God and sole purpose of his creation is to worship God. The Qur'an opens before man new horizons of thought, and acquaints him with the eternal; source of peace and goodness. Realizing God alone as the ultimate goal of man, it is a revolution against the popular trends in emancipates the conscience from subjugation.

The Influence of the Qur'an on Arabic Language

The Qur'an was revealed in Arabic language, it has immensely contributed to the growth of the Arabic language in many aspects; namely Arabic spoken language, sentence components and semantics. The paper's focus would be on semantics.

Semantics: Many Arabic existing words has new connotations with the arrival of the Qur'an e.g. the word *zakat* as the Qur'an says:

"Khudh min' amwalihim sadaqatan tutahirhum watuzakki him biha"

"Of their good take alms so that you might purify and sanctify them"⁵

The Qur'an developed its meaning to become a means whereby wealth is distributed and spread wide a circle as possible and as a result of fulfilling this obligation, the giver is purified by reducing his attachment to material possessions or wealth. *Salat* is another word, its original meaning is supplication (Du'a) but the Qur'an developed its meaning to mean the devotional worship which begins with *takbiratul-Ihram* saying of the first *Allahu Akbar* and terminates with *Taslim: As-Salam 'allaykum ...*

The historical account of Yoruba contact with the Qur'an vis-à-vis Islam scholars held different opinions on how Yoruba had a contact with Islam vis-à-vis Qur'an.

Rahman Doi, says in his own version.⁶ Ahmad Baba of Timbuktu died 1610 confirmed in his work that Islam was already introduced in Yorubaland in the early seventeenth century in whatever syncretic form or however scanty in its following.⁷

Shaykh Adam al-Ilori⁸ suggests even earlier date of the introduction of Islam in Yoruba country. He claims that it was during the period of Alhaj Mansa Musa of Mali (d. 1337) that Islam spread to most parts of Nigeria including Yorubaland. Muslims in Yorubaland are called *Imale* which al-Ilori presents as a reference to the religion of Mali (or from Mali).

Peter Morton – Williams also supports the view that Yoruba Muslims are called “*Imale*” means “person of Mali” the first contact may have been either with merchants from old Mali empire.⁹

Samuel Johnson and Geoferry Parinder suggest Islam spread in Yorubaland in the later half of 18th century it seems that very have drawn this conclusion from the popular theory that Islam spread to Yorubaland as a result of the Fulani Jihad in the 18th century. They therefore claim the word “*Imale*” has in connection with Mali.¹⁰ But interpret the word as *Imo-lile* knowledge by force or knowledge imported in a forceful manner. One could infer from this interpretation of the word *Jihad* as well as among those who believe that Islam has spread in Yorubaland due to the *jihad*. It is true that Fulani Jihad gave a boost to the spread of Islam in Yorubaland but the spread of Islam had already become a factor in the (Yoruba) land before the Jihad of 1804. This could be evidenced from the claim of R.I. Doi on Baba-Kewu (a learned Shaykh father of Arabic) was popularly known among Old-Oyo Empire he must have been engaged in teaching Arabic, the Qur’an and the Hadith. As Yoruba consider their Oba to be divine but Baba-Kewu made Alaafin Ajiboyede to publicly ask pardon for his unjust acts. This shows the powerful moral influence of the Muslim leader on the ruler.¹¹

The penetration of Islam into Yorubaland commenced the study of the Qur’an. It means the influence of the Qur’an on the language started as long as many centuries.¹²

Contribution of the Qur’an of Yoruba Semantics

As the Qur’an serves as an eye opener to the scientists and linguistics, it also developed many languages syntactically and semantically. Yoruba as defined by Fadipe, a tonal language belongs to the Sudanic family of languages, the vocabulary of which is built up largely of monosyllabic elements.¹³

Therefore the paper look at elucidating the notion of structural semantics in both metaphorical and non metaphorical operational terms in the Qur’anic verses on the development of the theory of reference which means extension or denotation and the theory of meaning which means intention and sense. Then arrive on the contribution of the Qur’an on the language would be examined as follows:

	Arabic	Yoruba Translation	Pre-Qur'anic Semantic	Post Qur'anic Semantic
1.	<i>Al-basa</i> ¹⁴	Alubosa	An ingredient that useful for human consumption either to prepare food, soup or for health care.	Ingredient as known before. Also to interrupt or to implicate or to expatiate e.g. o ja alubosa si means O se sun-un re or ogbeekale bi o ti le ye yekeke.
2.	<i>Al-Rahman</i> ¹⁵	(Olohun) Ajoke Aiye	<i>Ajoke</i> is an appellation name given to a female gender among Yoruba.	Ajoke aiye means He who showers His blessings on the believers and non believers.
3.	<i>Al-Rahim Salam</i> ¹⁶	Asake alafia	<i>Asake</i> is an appellation attributed given to a female gender among Yoruba.	<i>Asake</i> is one of the attribute of Allah the Lord who will specifically bless those righteous ones in the thereafter.
4.	<i>Salam</i> :		The meaning is an Arabic word which took its root from 'Āfiya. "E nle oni le onile" is the former greeting of Yoruba. <i>Formal</i>	Alafia, Ola, peace unto you which Yorubas have loaned from Arabic into their greetings "alafia fun onile yi" is a semantic development which connotes peace and blessings unto you. It also means Ola – success. The meaning is among new Yoruba vocabularies developed by the Qur'an.
5.	<i>Dikhr</i> ¹⁷	Isini leti	Imoran, Ishi ni niye	<i>Nashia, Waasti, Isinletiti</i> . The first two words which are commonly and freely used among Yoruba were loaned from Arabic which denotes admonition, advice with word of God, prophetic sayings and otherwise sayings this also add to Yoruba vocabulary.
6.	<i>Al-Rizqu</i> ¹⁸	Arisiki	<i>Dukia and ahumooni</i>	<i>Ipese, ijije</i> ati mimu arisiki, ohun Isemi, ile aye, ike which means: bounties blessings, livelihood, etc. The word has been loaned to Yoruba language less the burden of interpretation.
7.	<i>Al-Farju</i> ¹⁹	Oju-ara, amu-ara abe	Female organ, Male organ also known as: nkan obinrin nkan okunrin obo oko	"Abe" which literally means "under" but the Qur'anic alleviated its semantics interpretation to private parts as a referential semantics

8.	<i>Waliyy</i> ²⁰	Alatilehin	Ore, aayo only means for the beloved wife	Aayo, Ayanfe, wali Olohun the first two words relate with feminism only in Pre-Islamic semantics but has been expanded for both sexes while the word has also been Yorubized.
9.	<i>Al-Jannat</i> ²¹	Ogba idera	Orun-rere	Ogba idera literary means amusement park but due to the enjoyment in it denotes paradise. The word <i>Firdaws</i> is also an Arabic word which is Paradise but due to Linguistic interference in the sound production letter "f" is pronounced as "p".
10.	<i>Al-Nar</i> ²²	Ina	Orun-apaadi, Apaadi is a piece of a pot made from the clay burnt in the fire, also had suffered from fire while using the pot and even when broken into pieces it will be used to collect fire and to support pot on the fire. This means form fire to fire.	Ina, means ordinary fire but the Qur'an raised its meaning to be hellfire which is the abode of non-believers in the hereafter, the word "wo" instead of "jo" needs to be added in order to differentiate it from ordinary fire. The two interpretations share the same notion of everlasting in the fire.
11.	<i>Shaytan</i> ²³	Esu	Esu is a devilish deity which Yoruba believe demands sacrifice	The Qur'an denounce the act of infidelity by regarding a deity – The Qur'an gives different interpretation to the word a) Evil spirit which leads to temptation Emi Esu b) "Awon anjonu ti won nise" the ghost who were servitude to order of Prophet Sulayman "Devilish people" or "Ghost" Evil people" or "Ghost" Evil doers. The Qur'an discarded the idea that devil is a spirit only but any attempt of wrong doer to do wrong thing is the handwork of devil which the glorification and remembrance of God can drive away. The word is not only of Arabic origin it is of Greek also known as "Setani".
12.	<i>Riba</i> ²⁴	Owo-ele	Owo-ele	Owo-ele. <i>Riba</i> , Abetele, Owo-kuduru, bribery and usury. The word had been Yorubanized.

13.	<i>Sadaqta</i> ²⁵	O so Otito		Sadankata, akika. The two words are of Arabic origin loaned by Yoruba. It denotes somebody that is truthful but also advanced to praise as an affirmative word for a true statement.
14.	<i>Ibadah</i> ²⁶	Ijosin, erusin	Okunkundun	Ibaada, Pataki, okunkundun i.e. to take serious, therefore the word had been loaned form Arabic again.
15.	<i>Malaikah</i>	Malaika	Emi mimo	Malaeka – awon iranse Olohun – emi mimo denote holy spirit angel. Yoruba regards angel as ghost but holy ones while Qur'an made the clarification that Ghost are also creature which will be punished for evil and the angels were created to serve human being they commit no wrong because the act with the order their Lord.
16.	<i>Ad-Du'a</i> ²⁸	Ipe	Nearly equivalent semantics (aajo or etutu)	Adua, Ike-pe Olohun, Iraworase Ifaragbole, when we glance at the meaning of the words the Qur'an really developed words that connotes supplication even it has been Yorubanized.

The above studied words could be categorically divided into two. Some existing words in Yoruba which bring new semantic connotations through Qur'anic influence e.g. *Ajoke, Asake, Orun-rere, Orun-apaadi*, etc. The second category is the words which took its morphological process or origin form Arabic. It is the Qur'an who brought the words which later became loan words from Arabic. The meaning of these words serves as an eye opener to some semantic development in Yoruba language. *Sadankata, Akika, Shariah, Alafia*, etc. under this category there are some words which although used in Yoruba due to its sharing of semantic components e.g. *Ibadah*; means an act of worship in Arabic while Yoruba interprets it in their usage as *Okunkundun* i.e. taking something serious. The semantic relationship between the two interpretations is that an act of worship in the source language is an obligatory act. Because man is created purposely to worship God, his act of obedience is viewed with all seriousness while his disobedience will attract great punishment from the creator. This invention definitely came form the earlier Muslim scholars who kindled the light of Islam in Yorubaland.

The Qur'an also modified some semantic connotations of some words e.g. "al-Shaytan the devil". The word has been Yorubanized as well with the same meaning for instance *Ise Setani ni* "that is the devil's work". Although the two languages share semantic component but, the Qur'an drawn attention of Yoruba to new additional definitions of devil; it is believed that devil *Esu* could be appeased by giving sacrifice as the unctio because the deity is the most dangerous deity among Yoruba deities. But the Qur'an then expatiates that *Esu* in its real sense was of accursed spirit by God for his disobedience but the word *Shaytan* also means ghost who served with the Prophet Sulayman. Lust of should is the camel of the *Shaytan* which leads to temptation and the only sacrifice that can lead *Shaytan* form our society or individual soul is perseverance and suppressing of anger, remembrance of Allah and glorification can only cleanse man form its rope and instruments. And funny enough, the word *Setani* is also of Greek *Riba* is a word which has the same semantic connotation in the two languages Usury=excessive charges by lenders which led some families to eternal slavery those days. But with the arrival of the Qur'an the word was loaned for bribery gratification and usury.

The paper humbly treated the Qur'an and its characteristics features. The influence of the Qur'an was not only felt on other languages only but started from the language in which the scripture was revealed. It's philological and semantics influences really assert the authenticity of the Qur'an as the word of God. Other fields' geologist, etc. regard the Qur'an as the great reference for their inventories with modern equipment. Historical account on how Yoruba had its contact with the Qur'an vis-à-vis Islam shown how long the words examined had been in existence in the Yoruba folds. The contributions of the Qur'an on the growth of Yoruba semantics has been examined and further research could be made on other spheres of the language which the Qur'an might have contributed.

In conclusion, I hope this study has probably proved the Qur'an not only in Arabic language that represents the highest linguistic and semantic achievement but also in Yoruba language.

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- 3) Qur'an 24: 23
- 4) Qur'an 24: 40
- 5) Qur'an 9: 103
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