

# THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE AND LANGUAGE: AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW FROM MALAY STUDIES PERSPECTIVE<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstrak

Artikel ini mengemukakan satu pandangan alternatif kepada tradisi kesarjanaan Barat moden kini tentang teori ilmu dan bahasa. Ilmu dari sudut pandangan kajian saintifik Barat kini hanya terhenti kepada ilmu yang diperolehi melalui proses pembelajaran, penyelidikan dan juga pengalaman. Realiti ilmu sedemikian tidak memungkinkan adanya ilmu yang berbentuk intuitif dan wahyu, sedangkan banyak hasil ciptaan dan rekaan manusia kini sama ada dalam lapangan sains dan teknologi mahupun dalam lapangan seni dan kesusasteraan melibatkan satu macam ilmu yang bersifat intuitif dan langsung. Manakala bahasa pula dianggap sebagai hasil rekaan akal manusia yang bersifat kreatif, inovatif dan akumulatif, yang bermula dengan satu bentuk bahasa yang primitif yang berkembang secara akumulatif selari dengan perkembangan kelompok manusia itu.

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Kajian bahasa atau linguistik dari sudut pandangan yang sedemikian memfokuskan bentuk zahiriahnya semata-mata sama ada bentuk bunyi ataupun sistem tulisannya dan juga persekitaran sosial pertuturan atau wacananya, tanpa banyak mengambil kira apa sistem pemaknaan, pemikiran, pemahaman dan pengertian. Artikel ini akan cuba membandingkan di antara persepsi Barat dan Melayu, yang bertunjangkan ajaran Islam, tentang teori ilmu dan bahasa.

### **Introduction: Current Views on the Theory of Knowledge and Language**

This paper will present an alternative view to the currently accepted analysis and studies on knowledge and language. Knowledge is generally defined as the fact or condition of knowing, recognizing, apprehending, comprehending and being aware of something gained through experience, learning, research and training. Knowledge is also the sum of what is known or the body of truth, information and principles acquired by mankind. Some current definitions of knowledge are given below:

“Knowledge is the fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association; or the circumstances or condition of having apprehending truth or fact through reasoning.”<sup>3</sup>

“Knowledge in general sense, is the fact or condition of being instructed or of having information acquired by studies or research; or acquaintance with ascertained truth; or facts or principles or information acquired by studying, learning or erudition.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 10<sup>th</sup> Edition. Massachusetts: Merriam Webster, 1996, p. 64.

<sup>4</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Vol. VIII. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 517.

However, the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* gives a very brief and comprehensive definition of knowledge as follows: "knowledge is justified true belief."<sup>5</sup>

Knowledge seen from this perspective are acquired only through learning, studying, researching and sense-experiencing, and as such, exclude the possibility of knowledge gained through intuition and revelation which are spontaneous and direct in nature. John Hospers,<sup>6</sup> for example, rejected intuition, revelation, authority and faith as sources of knowledge, and argue that only sense-experience and logical reasoning can be the sources of true knowledge. Hospers asserted that:

"The word "intuition" is simply a cover-up term for our ignorance, revealing only that we do not know how we are able to do this [i.e. arriving at an answer or a solution]. [I]ntuition, as we have seen, would tell us nothing about the "validating procedure"... people's intuition are notoriously fallible."<sup>7</sup>

"Moreover, there are competing candidates for the position of true revelation: the Bible, the Qur'an, and numerous other works each makes this claim [of truth]. How are we to know which of these various claimants to accept? If the claims made are such that sense-experience or reason could substantiate them, then it is because of this, and not because the book says so, that we believe that the claims are true".<sup>8</sup>

Whereas in reality there are many discoveries and creative activities in the fields of science, technology and especially in art and literature, that are actually the product of intuition, beside from rigorous research and studies. This is not to say that all intuitions are true knowledge, because

<sup>5</sup> *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 4. New York: Macmillan Co., 1967, p. 345.

<sup>6</sup> John Hospers (1967), *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*. London: Unwin Brothers, pp. 122-157.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

one's intuition on certain subject may contradict another's intuition on the same subject implying that either one of them is false. Moreover, to the Muslims including the Malays, the whole range of knowledge and truth as found in the Qur'an are revelation from God to an unlettered Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. and not the result of his studies and learning. The Malays majority being Muslims, have accepted and adopted knowledge expounded by the Qur'an and the Hadith as absolute truth. This knowledge also became the validating criterion for ascertaining the truth of all other forms of knowledge and learning. Anything that is not in accord with the truth expounded by the Qur'an and the Hadith is considered as false and unacceptable.

As for language, the current scientific view holds that it is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols (and writing) by means of which a social group cooperate. Language is considered as a creation of man in a social group as a result of his creative, innovative and accumulative mind. The classic definition of language, which is still very much in vogue, was given by Bernard Bloch and George L. Trager about 60 years ago, that is, "a language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates."<sup>9</sup>

*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, however, expanded the definition of language as follows:

"Language is audible, articulate, meaningful sounds as produced by the action of the vocal organs; a systematic mean of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalised signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings."<sup>10</sup>

Language of a community, it is theorized,<sup>11</sup> began in a primitive form as inaudible grunts and noises, in the form of intentional and unintentional outburst of emotion, and

<sup>9</sup> B. Bloch and G.L. Trager (1942), *Outline of Linguistic Analysis*. Baltimore: Linguistic Society of America.

<sup>10</sup> *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, p. 654.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. K. Malmkjaer (ed.) (1991), *The Linguistics Encyclopaedia*. London: Routledge, pp. 324-329.

or imitating the sounds of nature, and thus through trial error, it evolved into more audible conventional sounds as language. Through the passing of time and in line with the advancement and progress of that social group, language evolved further into a more complex and sophisticated form able to express and communicate more complex ideas and thought. However, many linguists refrained from making speculation on the origin of human language, because of lack of empirical evidence, as stated by R.H. Robins:<sup>12</sup>

“Linguists, however, tend to leave this sort of theorizing alone, not because of the lack of intrinsic interest, but because it lies beyond the reaches of legitimate scientific inference”.

Linguistic studies based on this viewpoint focus mainly on the physical aspect of language i.e. the phonological, morphological and syntactical forms and constructions, and also its social setting and discourses, without much emphasis on what is occurring in the mind and also in the metaphysical realm during a speech act. This paper will attempt to analysis and describe the cognitive structures involved in the mind during a speech act and also the metaphysical realm which is connected to faith and conviction within the heart. Language seen from this alternative viewpoint is a mental attribute of man given by God as the best of creation (*ashraf al-makhlūqāt*). A speech act is not merely a process of vocal articulation of speech sounds and organization of its construction, but also mental activities involving the organization of meaning of things within the general schematism of the mind that delimits the cognitive structures<sup>13</sup> and connected them to the spiritual organ of the heart, prior to its physical vocalization and symbolization in the phenomenal world.

<sup>12</sup> Robert H. Robins (1971), *General Linguistics: An Introductory Survey*. London: Longman, p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Noam Chomsky (1975), *Reflections on Language*. New York: Pantheon Books, p. 7, “The mind provides the means for analysis of data as experience and provides as well a general schematism that delimits the cognitive structures developed on the basis of experience.”

## The Theory of Knowledge from a Perspective of the Malays and Malay Studies

From the point of view of the majority of the Malays, whose lives are intrinsically connected to the religion of Islam from the cradle to the grave, knowledge is regarded as an attribute of man given by God; a small fragment of the infinite knowledge of God whose attribute is the Most Knowledgeable (*al-'Alīm*), as mentioned in the Qur'an: "Your God knows everything what is in the heavens and on earth".<sup>14</sup>

Man's knowledge whether as a result of his learning or from his intuition or from God's revelation, are all from God, as mentioned in the Qur'an:

"God taught man what he knew not"<sup>15</sup>

"They (the angels) said "Glory to Thee (God); of knowledge we have none, save what Thou has taught us; in truth it is Thou who are Most Knowledgeable and Most Wise"<sup>16</sup>

The Malays imbued by Islam, believe that their knowledge whether acquired through research and studies (*'ilmu 'aqlī/ḥuṣūlī*)<sup>17</sup> and more so the intuitive and revealed knowledge (*'ilmu naqlī/ḥudūrī*), are in reality from God, because it is God who guides man's inclination and striving towards goodness and truth and who wills its fulfilment ultimately, as mentioned in the Qur'an:

"Verily We (God) take upon Us to guide. And verily unto Us (belong) the end and the beginning (of all affairs)"<sup>18</sup>

"And verily Allah guides whom He will to a path that is straight, true"<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Al-Isrā'*, 17: 55.

<sup>15</sup> *Al-'Alaq*, 96: 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Al-Baqarah*, 2: 32.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Osman Bakar, "Beberapa Aspek Falsafah Ilmu: Konsep, Definisi, Pengelasan dan Penggunaan", *Kesturi: Jurnal Akademi Sains Islam Malaysia*, Jil. 5, Bil. 2, Disember 1995, h. 18.

<sup>18</sup> *Al-Layl*, 92: 12-13.

<sup>19</sup> *Al-Baqarah*, 2: 213.

Knowledge, to the Muslims, from the functional point of view, are of two kinds; namely 1) knowledge of the individual obligation (*fardhu 'ain*) which is incumbent upon each individual to acquire and practice them, e.g. knowledge of all the obligatory devotional and religious acts and practices, and 2) knowledge of the collective obligation (*fardhu kifayah*) which fulfils the collective need of the community and which is incumbent upon a section of them especially those with talent and interest, to acquire them, e.g. knowledge of the congregational prayers, prayers for the dead, knowledge of medicines, technology, manufacturing, artisan, trades, commerce, industries, banking, construction, defence and security, etc.

The Malays were taught, ever since the teaching and the translation of 'Umar Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī's *'Aqā'id al-Nasafī* was introduced into the Malay world in 1590,<sup>20</sup> that knowledge is acquired through the channels of the sound senses (*pancaindera yang lima*), true reports based on authority (*khobar ṣādiq*), sound reasons (*akal yang waras*) and intuition (*Ilham*). Professor Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas has made detailed elaboration on Islamic epistemology in his *Islam and the Philosophy of Science*,<sup>21</sup> and concluded that:

“In contrast to modern philosophy and science with regard to the sources and methods of knowledge, we maintain that knowledge comes from God and is acquired through the channels of the sound senses, true reports based on authority, sound reason, and intuition.”

However, knowledge according to one view, as seen from the hierarchy of its acquisition and cognition, objects, mental paradigms, methods and validation perspectives, may be classified into three or four kinds. Dr. Ahmad

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1988), *The Oldest Known Malay Manuscript: a 16<sup>th</sup> Century Malay Translation of the 'Aqā'id al-Nasafī*. Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Universiti Malaya, p. 9.

<sup>21</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1999), *Islam and the Philosophy of Science*. Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, p. 9.

Tafsir<sup>22</sup> classified it into three kinds, namely scientific, philosophical and mystical, while Hashim Hj. Musa,<sup>23</sup> added one more kind to the three namely impressionistic knowledge, making it a total of four kinds<sup>24</sup>.

The four hierarchical kinds of knowledge can be shown graphically in a chart as follows:

### HIERARCHY OF KNOWLEDGE

TYPES IN HIERARCHY	OBJECTS	THOUGHT PARADIGMS	METHODS	ORGANS & VALIDATION
(lowest) Impressionistic	Empirical	Perception	Sense-experience	Senses impression
Scientific	Empirical	Positivism	Scientific experiment	Senses & mind. Empirical & logical truth
Philosophical	Abstract & logical	Logic	Reflection & reasoning. Rational & logical argument	Mind, logical & rational truth
(highest) Mystic	Abstract, transcendental	Mystical, supra-logical	Physical & spiritual capacity. Intuition & revelation	Heart or intellect. Faith, belief and rational truth

<sup>22</sup> Ahmad Tafsir (2000), *Filsafat Umum*. Bandung: Penerbit Rosdakarya, p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> Hashim Hj Musa (2001), *Falsafah, Logik, Teori Nilai dan Etika Melayu*. Kuala Lumpur: Akademi Pengajian Melayu, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> This paper is not an exhaustive survey or analysis on the concept of knowledge in Malay studies; it is merely a point view for the purpose of refuting the concept of knowledge and language as expounded by Western secular scholarship. For other analysis and exposition on the concept knowledge by other Malay writers please refer to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1991), *The Concept of Education in Islam*. Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC; Osman Bakar (1992), *Classification of Knowledge in Islam: A Study in Islamic Philosophy*. Kuala Lumpur: Institute Policy Research; Wan Mohd Noor Wan Daud (1989), *The Concept of Knowledge in Islam*. London & New York: Mansell and Muhammad Dawillah al-Edrus (1993) *Epistemologi Islam: Teori Ilmu dalam Islam*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Impressionistic knowledge is the lowest in hierarchy, acquired by means of our senses when they perceive our environment through sense-experience. Its nature and truth is still temporary, unstable, "fleeting" and bound to change due to the fleeting nature of human senses constantly influenced by his emotions. For instance a man under duress of extreme thirst, a mirage of refreshing water in a desert may be falsely perceived as truth by his senses.

Scientific knowledge is obtained through scientific experiment on empirical objects of the phenomenon world fragmented into various fields of disciplines, and its truth is validated empirically and logically. However such knowledge is only limited to empirical objects in the phenomenon world and excludes all those objects and existent which transcend the phenomenal world of time and space.

Philosophical knowledge is acquired through reflective and logical reasoning on empirical, abstract and logical objects in the world of existence, seen holistically as unified whole, and its truth is validated by means of logical and rational arguments. Such knowledge is also limited to things and objects that are within the reaches of the mind, and thus excludes all those objects and existent that are beyond the reaches of the human mind, such as the knowledge of the Hereafter.

Mystical knowledge which is the highest form of knowledge is received by means of our intellect or spiritual heart, of objects and existent which are abstract and transcendental in nature, arrived at either through intuition or revelation from God Almighty. Its truth, which is ultimate, is validated in the form of faith and belief and also affirmed by rational and logical arguments. The first three types in the hierarchies of knowledge are not free from fallibility and limitation and they are validated, accepted or otherwise rejected, according to the truth of the fourth kind namely the mystical knowledge thus making it the highest form of knowledge.

Based on such classification, knowledge to the Malays, to my mind, was aptly summarised by Syeikh Abdul Şamad

al-Falembānī (1704-1789) the famous Muslim scholar and writer from Palembang, Sumatra, who described beneficial knowledge in his popular work *Hidāyat al-Sālikīn* written in 1192 Hijrah (1778 C. E.), adapted from Imam al-Ghazālī's *Bidāyat al-Hidāyah*, as follows:

“Bermula ilmu yang memberi manfaat itu iaitu (1) barang yang manambahkan takutmu akan Allāh Ta’ālā, dan (2) menambah pula dalam penglihatan hatimu tentang kecelaan dirimu, dan (3) menambah pula dalam pengenalanmu akan ibadat kepada Tuhanmu yang Maha Mulia dan Maha Tinggi, dan (4) mengurangkan kegemaranmu kepada dunia dan menambahkan kegemaranmu kepada Akhirat, dan (5) membukakan mata hatimu dengan [mengenali] apa yang membinasakan ilmu yang dengan itu kamu memeliharanya daripada [kebinasaan], dan (6) mengawas atasnya [iaitu ilmu itu] daripada tipu daya Syaitan”.

(Beneficial knowledge consist of that (1) which will enhance your reverential fear of Allah Almighty, (2) heighten your realization of your own shortcomings, (3) increase in your realization of worshipping God the Most Sublime and Most High, (4) appease your desire for the world and increase your desire for the Hereafter, (5) open your eyes with regard to things that will destroy your knowledge and against them you become vigilant, and (6) protect your knowledge against the deception of Satan).<sup>25</sup>

Ibn Arabī in his voluminous work *Futūḥāt al-Makiyyah*, described knowledge as follows:

“By knowledge I mean knowledge of God, of the next world, and of that which is appropriate for this world, in relationship to that for which this world was created and established. Then, man’s affair will be upon true insight (*baṣīrah*) wherever he is, and he

<sup>25</sup> Abdul Ṣamad al-Falembānī (1935)), *Hidāyah al-Sālikīn*. Pulau Pinang: Maṭba’ah Dār al-Ma’ārif, p. 5.

will be ignorant of nothing in himself and in his activities."<sup>26</sup>

From the two statements above, we can perhaps categorise knowledge holistically into three kinds:

- 1) knowledge of God as the Creator and Lord of the entire universe and the Originator of revealed knowledge, rules and regulation for the benefit of man
- 2) knowledge of the world which is appropriate to be known so as to fulfil its purpose of its creation for the benefit of man during his sojourn in this world in preparation for his eternal life in the Hereafter when he dies,
- 3) knowledge of the Hereafter as the ultimate and final destiny of man's life, which will be determined by his deed and action during his life in this world whether in accordance with what is revealed by God or otherwise.

Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, defined knowledge more comprehensively as follows:

"Knowledge, as referring to meaning, consists of the recognition of the proper places of things in the order of creation, such that it leads to the recognition of the proper place of God in the order of being and existence."<sup>27</sup>

Though more comprehensive and precise, the above definition also contains the three categories of knowledge, namely: (1) knowledge of God as the Creator and Lord of the entire universe and existence, (2) knowledge of this world with recognition and affirmation of the proper places of all things in it and their respective functions, and (3) knowledge of the Hereafter as the ultimate and final destiny of man which will be determined by his ability to

<sup>26</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt al-Makiyyah*, William Chittick (trans. & ed.), *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*. Albany: State University of New York Press, (1989), p. 148.

<sup>27</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1991), *The Concept of Education in Islam*. Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, p. 19.

recognize, affirm, treat and act upon all things in this worldly life accordingly.

The three categories of knowledge, to my mind, became the basis of the formation of the Malay's worldview. The concept of worldview was defined in a very comprehensive manner by the late Dr. Albert Schweitzer about 60 years ago, as follows:

“Worldview is the sum total of thoughts which the community or the individual think about the nature and purpose of the universe and about the place and destiny of mankind within this world.”<sup>28</sup>

Syed M. Naquib al-Attas defined the worldview of Islam, as below:

“The worldview of Islam encompasses both *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhirat*, in which the *dunyā* - aspect must be related in a profound and inseparable way to the *ākhirat* - aspect, and in which the *ākhirat* - aspect has the ultimate and final significance... Worldview, according to the perspective Islam, is then the vision of reality and truth that appears before our mind's eye revealing what existence is all about, for it is the world of existence in totality that Islam is projecting.”<sup>29</sup>

In his monumental work *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*,<sup>30</sup> Prof al-Attas has listed and described nine key terms that represent the most salient elements of the worldview of Islam, namely: the nature of God, His revelation (i.e. the Qur'an), His creation, man and the psychology of human soul, knowledge, religion, freedom, values and virtues, and happiness.

<sup>28</sup> Albert Schweitzer (1955), *Civilization and Ethics*. London: Adam & Charles Black, p. vi.

<sup>29</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1995), *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: an Exposition to the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam*. Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, pp. 1-2.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5-36.

Hashim Hj Musa<sup>31</sup> has listed six elements of the Malay worldview, as follows:

1. Firstly, the view on the nature of the universe, which is regarded as the creation of God, and comprising the spiritual world (*'ālam arwāḥ*), the present physical world (*'ālam dunyā*) and also the world of the Hereafter (*'ālam ākhirat*). The Hereafter is man's final destiny which forms the final outcome of his lifelong endeavour in this world. His success in this worldly life is measured by his ability to believe, obey and submit to the revealed law and Divinity of Allah as the Creator and the Lord of the universe, while success in the Hereafter is his final salvation in paradise. This world and all its contents are a trust from God to be used for the benefit of mankind *per se*, and not as man's absolute right of ownership and disposal. All forms of trust will be made accountable in the Hereafter as to whether they are used in accordance with the revealed law of God or according to one's whim and fancy. This Malay's view of the universe is in complete contrast to the outlook of secularism which regards the only universe is this physical world and man's only existence and destiny is in this-worldly life.
2. Islam as the true religion is the guidance from God, consisting of rules to regulate all activities of man whether for an individual or for the society at large, for the purpose of achieving ultimate success in this worldly life as well as in the Hereafter. Hence, acquisition of knowledge of Islam is obligatory for each and every individual Muslim so that he can practice Islam fully and thus be able to elevate himself from the status of an ordinary Muslim to the status of a true believer (*Mu'min*) and even higher to the status of a pious, virtuous and godly person (*Muḥsin*). The religion of Islam encompasses all the

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<sup>31</sup> Hashim Haji Musa (2001), *Merekonstruksi Tamadun Melayu Islam*. Kuala Lumpur: Akademi Pengajian Melayu, pp. 48-49.

dimensions of life namely faith (*īmān*), worship (*ibādah*), ethics and morality (*akhlāq*), social interaction (*mu'āsharah*), cultural, political and economic interaction (*mu'āmalah*), crimes and punishment (*hudūd*), marriage, divorce and family life (*munākahah*) and the inner realm of sincerity and purity of intention (*ikhlas*).

3. Total conviction in the existence and reliance in the power of Allah as the Lord of the Universe who will give reward for all the good deeds one has done in this world, and *vice versa* punishment for the transgression that one has committed. Reward in this world is a blessed life living in complete accord with the requisite of God's revealed law, and reward of the life of the hereafter is admission into Paradise. Whatever calamities or difficulties that befall a Muslim in this world are regarded as means of forgiveness from God for sins committed, or for the purpose of elevating one's status through forbearance.
4. Islamic jurisprudence is the pivot of all vision, mission, objective, intention, action and operation in all fields of activities and endeavour of all Muslims. It is to be followed and adhered to without compromise, manipulation and rejection at all levels of its injunction namely the obligatory (*wajib*), the praiseworthy (*sunat*), the permissible (*harus*), the highly discouraged (*makruh*), and the forbidden (*haram*). The obligatory and the forbidden acts are both very distinct. The Malay maxim clearly reflects this position, i.e. social norms are affixed to the law, and the law are affixed to the Islamic jurisprudence, and the jurisprudence is affixed upon the Qur'an (*Adat bersendikan hukum, hukum bersendikan Kitab Allah*)
5. Value of the highest order is related to anything or everything that assist a Muslim to perform good deeds, acquiring admirable moral and ethical conduct which benefit himself and others. "The most perfect faith of a Muslim is one who is most

admirable in his conduct" (the Prophet's tradition). A Muslim also is to honour another human being because each individual has the potential to achieve perfection. This positive attitude will have the effect of instilling humility and respect towards others and avoid the negative attitude of pride, vainglory, haughtiness and discrimination towards others based on race, lineage, status, wealth and the like.

6. The middle path or the moderate way of life and a balance between the physical, the intellectual and the spiritual, is the mode of living of Muslims. The infra-structure, science, technology, knowledge and information are all know-how, tools and instruments that must be acquired as a collective obligation (*fardhu kifayah*) to serve the need of individuals and the society at large but for the ultimate purpose of augmenting them to become practising Muslims (*Muslim*), true believers (*Mu'min*) and ultimately to achieve the status of a virtuous, pious and godly person (*Muhsin*).

By actualizing the above-mentioned worldview, the Malays have evolved through time to form three basic and fundamental characteristics unique to them, namely:

1. The concept of Malay as a cultural entity neither ethnic nor racial, but one that is able to encompass multiple ethnic groups and various races (Indians, Arabs, Chinese, Africans, Chams, Japanese, Bataks, Melanaus, Meranaus, Bugis, Banjars etc. and even Caucasians) so long as they are all assimilated and manifested in the three core Malay elements, namely (a) speaking the Malay language, (b) embracing the Islamic faith, and (c) practising the Malay social norms and cultural traits of politeness in speech and behaviour, giving top priority to social acts and services for the benefit of the majority, honouring the elders and guests, being moderate, not extreme, neither harsh nor aggressive nor subscribing to militarism and terrorism. These characteristics and attributes make the Malays, especially at the height

of their civilization, generally very open, sociable with global outlook.<sup>32</sup>

2. Dynamism of the Malay culture which was clearly proven by the historical events of the development of their civilization which flourished at the meeting point between the East and the West. For more than a thousand years its culture was always open and proactive to positive foreign elements, enabling it to absorb and adapt elements of other cultures and civilizations such as those from India, China, Middle East, Thailand and the West. This openness has triggered development and reinforcement in various aspects of Malay culture and civilization such as in education, epistemological system, beliefs, values, ethics, technology and tools, transforming the Malays in the past into global citizens of maritime traders with cosmopolitan outlook.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Simon Elegant, in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 10, 1995, p. 45, "Five Centuries ago Malacca hosted 2,000 ships each day, as many as the crowd in modern day Singapore, which boasted of being one of the worlds three busiest ports. Cargoes of mace, nutmeg, cloves, sandalwood, tea, porcelains and silks passed through Malacca on their way to spice-hungry Europe. And from the West, mostly carried by traders from South Asia and the Middle East, came cotton, weapons, incense, opium, dyes, silver and medicinal drugs, as well as occasional bands of adventurous Portuguese. It was a place where Gujeratis, Tamils and Bengalis from India lived and traded in secure harmony with the Malays, Chinese and Arabs; a city of 100,000 where 84 languages could be heard in the markets."

<sup>33</sup> Hasan Junus (1988), *Raja Ali Haji: Budayawan di Gerbang Abad XX*. Pekanbaru: Universitas Islam Riau, "Masa pemerintahannya [Raja Haji] merupakan puncak ketenaran dan kemakmuran Riau. Dari segala macam jenis alat pengangkutan laut yang berkumpul di pelabuhan dapatlah diketahui berapa ramainya perdagangan (sic) di situ. Catatan penduduk yang bersandarkan sumber yang terpercaya menyatakan bahawa jumlah penduduk negeri itu sebanyak 90,000 jiwa. (pp. 8-9). Maka datanglah beberapa buah perahu dagangan dari jauh, datanglah kapal-kapal dan kici-kici dari Bengala berpuluh-puluh buah, dan dari China datang pula waking-wakang kepala hijau dan kepala merah berpuluh-puluh buah, datang pula tob-tob dari Siam membawa beras dan lainnya, dan perahu Jawa demikian juga, apa lagi dari Bugis dan apa lagi perahu-perahu dari rantau-rantau, bercocok ikanlah di dalam Sungai Riau dari kuala sampai ke hulu Riau. Maka berpalu-palulah

3. Strong adherence to the Islamic faith and practices. In the mind of the Malays, perhaps, they felt that it is destined for them to become Muslims, and, so long as they hold strongly to Islam, they will be in constant connection and communication with God's supreme power, help and guidance, which will ensure their success in this world and the Hereafter.

The three basic characteristics of the Malay society, which essentially form its inner strength, together with its worldview discussed above, become the prime mover, the motivation and the matrix of all its life activities working towards achieving maximum goodness. If ever there appear to be changes and corruption of these basic elements as a result of some external factors e.g. colonization and enculturation of foreign values and norms or due to internal weaknesses within the society, then the stimulus, motivation and direction will deviate resulting in loss of sense of direction and also, according to Prof. al-Attas<sup>34</sup> confusion in knowledge, values, conducts and objective, which are fast appearing within the Malay society now as manifested in many social ills, such as high profile corruption, cronyism, abuse of power, position, funds and properties, immoral and unethical behaviour, ostentatious and vainglory lifestyle, drug abuse, etc.<sup>35</sup> These phenomena have become real challenge and critical issues confronting the Malay society since the last decade.

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dagangan China dengan dagangan Jawa, dan demikian juga berpalu dagangan Jawa dengan dagangan Riau. Maka banyaklah saudagar China apa lagi Bugis banyaklah kaya-kaya. Maka pada masa itu banyaklah orang-orang kaya Riau. (Hasan Junus, pp. 181-182, quoting Raja Ali Haji, *Tuhfat al-Nafis*, Romanized version by Munir bin Ali, 1965).

<sup>34</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1978), *Islam and Secularism*. Kuala Lumpur: Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia, p. 121.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Mohd Kamal Hassan (1996), *Toward Actualizing Ethical and Educational Principles in Malaysian Society*. Kuala Lumpur: Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia, p. 233.

Basing on the above arguments regarding the worldview and characteristics of the Malays, all aspects of Malay studies and scholarships whether in language and literature, sociology and anthropology, thought and philosophy, or the art, to my mind, must take into account those fundamental elements of his worldview and also his basic characteristics, in order to be relevant and meaningful to the Malay society themselves.

The objective of acquiring knowledge to the Malays, ultimately is to achieve the reality of truth which will lead him to a final goal with unshakeable faith and conviction, namely to return to God with His pleasure and acceptance, well pleased by God and well pleased himself, as mentioned in the Qur'an:

“Return to your Lord, well pleased (yourself) and well-pleased by Him. Enter you, then, among My devotees, Yes! Enter you into my Heaven!”<sup>36</sup>

This is achieved by having true knowledge on what God wants of his life in this world and in the Hereafter that is leading a life according to the laws and regulation as revealed by God through the agencies and examples of the Holy Prophet s.a.w. Hence, having true knowledge and faithfully acting upon it, is intrinsically connected to the final adjudication of man's ultimate destiny.

### **The Concept of Truth in Secular Western Scholarship and in Malay Islamic Perspectives**

The current accepted scientific view on truth especially in Western scholarship, basing mainly on empirical factual data, is that it is relative; it is changing according to the prevalent norms and values of a society at any particular place and time. Seen from this perspective, there is no absolute and ultimate truth. It is relative because it is determined by society at a particular time and place, influenced by ever-changing variables such as mood,

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<sup>36</sup> *Al-Fajr*, 89: 28-30.

attitude, taste, life style, environment, fashion, infrastructure, etc. prevalent in that society.

One example of the changing vision of truth among modern society now is the death penalty of convicted murderer and other serious crimes, which at one time was lifted because it was considered uncivilized to take life even of a murderer, and life sentences was instituted instead. However, with rampant murder crimes committed everyday, death sentence was reinstated in many countries notably the United States of America.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, homosexual relation not very long ago, was considered as an unnatural act and punishable by law, (which is still upheld by many countries including Malaysia, Indonesia and all other Islamic countries). However, now, it is so common that in some countries even same sex marriage is permitted by law, for example the ruling of Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court on February 4, 2004 which sanctioned such marriages. The states of District of Columbia, Vermont, New Jersey, New Mexico and New York in the U.S. also allow same-sex marriages as there is no existing law that prevent such marriage.<sup>38</sup>

Those two cases of changing and relative vision of truth on what are accepted as true and desirable and therefore must be upheld by the society reflect the absence of the vision of absolute and final truth in the West.

Currently, in western scholarship there are three theories of truth<sup>39</sup>, namely:

1. The correspondence theory of truth where a statement or a proposition is true if it corresponds

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<sup>37</sup> By the year 2000, 72 countries in the world no longer authorized the death penalty for any crime, yet 87 countries, notably the Federal Government of United States of America and majority of U.S. states, still authorized the death penalty for some serious crimes such as murder, treason etc. (cf. MSN Encarta: Online Encyclopedia, Dictionary, Atlas, and Homework, <http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/refpages/RefArticle.aspx?refid=761570630>).

<sup>38</sup> Cf. About.com, <http://marriage.about.com/cs/marriagelicenses/samesexcomp.htm>.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*, pp. 114-121.

to the existing fact in the phenomenon world. This theory is acceptable if it involves things of quantity, locality and concrete objects, such as numbers, places, concrete things, *etc.* If it involves things of quality, values, and abstract form, then it is difficult to be absolutely and consistently upheld, instead relative values is the norm, e.g. beauty, justice, propriety, *etc.*

2. The coherence theory of truth where if a thing or action is in coherence with the requirement and practice of a society, then it is regarded as the truth and acceptable by the society, e.g. at one time the death penalty was lifted, because taking life is considered barbaric and inhuman, even though upon a convicted murderer. However, in time this vision of truth changed due to manifold increase in murder crimes, and death sentence was reinstated as this is in coherence with the condition of the society.
3. The functional theory of truth where a thing or an action is considered to be true and acceptable if it is fulfilling an immediate need and function within the society at any particular time, even though in reality it is difficult to prove of its truth using the accepted scientific method, e.g. the existence of God and all its related religious rituals. Such actions are acceptable, because they fulfil the need of society to be appeased and consoled in times of tragedy, disaster and death. However, as society "progressed", that vision of truth might change when the society no longer regards the existence of God and all its religious rituals, are fulfilling the need and meaningful function within the society.

In Malay society, on the other hand, truth is always absolute and inviolable. This is because not only it has to submit to those three criteria of truth namely correspondence, coherence and functional conditions within the society and the phenomenal world, but it must also be in the condition of "suitableness to the requirements of

wisdom, justice, rightness, reality and propriety; it is a state of being wise, just, right, real, proper".<sup>40</sup>

Basing on the above argument, truth can be defined as the condition or state of suitability and propriety with regard to a thing or an action, where not only it corresponds and coheres with what is existing in society and in the phenomenal world and play a meaningful function, but it also must be in a state of being proper, wise, just and real as determined by the inviolable authority of the Qur'an and Hadith. For example the Malays always regard homosexual relation, sodomy and sex outside marriage, though may be rampant in the world today and therefore corresponds and coheres with the prevailing condition in the society, as unnatural and illicit acts and therefore forbidden, because it violates the very nature and purpose of creation where the proper sexual relation is between man and woman in marriage, for the main purpose of procreation to build future generation, besides sexual pleasure.

### **The Theory of Language from the Perspective of the Malays**

The Malays believed that, as taught by the Qur'an and the Hadith, the origin of all human beings as God's creation, is from one father and mother namely Prophet Adam a.s. and Eve. From the pair, children were born and they multiplied and flourished into communities and societies, and in time, through their movements and migrations to other parts of the world to seek alternative habitations and separated by long distance of space and time, new tribes and nations arose. The Malays also believe that together with the creation of Prophet Adam and Eve, God also revealed to them a language to be used for the purpose of communication within their community. As the community became bigger, movements and migration of people took place in search of new and better places to live and build

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, p. 126.

new societies. Through the passage of time, hundred or even thousands of years, and separated by vast distance and influenced by new physical and social landscapes, the original language changed and underwent the processes of evolution, resulting in the formation of new languages.

All those phenomena are clearly mentioned in the Qur'an, as follows:

"O mankind, fear your Lord who created you from a single person, out of it his mate and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women ..."<sup>41</sup>

"O mankind, We created you from a single (pair of) male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other..."<sup>42</sup>

"Then He taught Adam names of all of them"<sup>43</sup>

"He has created man. He has taught him speech"<sup>44</sup>

What are meant by names as mentioned in verse 31 of *Sūrah al-Baqarah* above, are none other words in the form of sound symbols which refer to the things that were created by God. Words in reality constitute a language. According to some scholars, "names" in the above verse not only relate to words but also relate or refer to "inner nature and qualities of things which include feelings"<sup>45</sup> because God being the Creator of all things knows exactly what are the structure and nature of things He created, and the names He has given them surely reflect and describe also the nature and qualities of those things as well. Just as a scientist on discovering a new chemical substance will give a name which, in most cases, reflects the chemical elements constituting the substance, which are actually its inner

<sup>41</sup> *Al-Nisā'*, 4: 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Al-Ḥujurāt*, 49: 13.

<sup>43</sup> *Al-Baqarah*, 2: 31.

<sup>44</sup> *Al-Rahmān*, 55: 3-4.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1938), *The Glorious Qur'an: Translation and Commentary*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, p. 24, note 48.

nature and qualities. For example hydrochloride acid comprises elements of hydrogen and chlorine that constitute its inner nature and qualities. So when Prophet Adam a.s. was given the names of all the things named, not only he knew the names but also he acquired the knowledge of the inner nature and qualities of them through those names. Thus he was able to describe them when commanded by God, after the Angels failed to do so, as mentioned in the Qur'an:

“He taught Adam the names of all things; then He placed them before the Angels, and said: “Tell Me the names of these if you are right. They (the Angels) said: “Glory to Thee, of knowledge (of those things) we have none, save what has Thou taught us. In truth it is Thou who has perfect knowledge and wisdom. He said: “O Adam, tell me their names”. When he (Adam) had told them their names, God said: “Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of heaven and earth, and I know what you reveal and what you conceal.”<sup>46</sup>

From the above analysis, it is clear that knowledge of things was revealed to Prophet Adam a.s together with the revelation of a language which described them. In fact, to Prophet Adam a.s. as well as to the Angels, those things although they have already existed, were unknown because their names, which described their inner nature and qualities, were not yet revealed to them. It is when God revealed to them the names, i.e. a language, which described the nature and qualities of those things, only then they have knowledge of those things. Describing the nature and qualities of things are actually putting relational meanings to those things, by means of which we are able to identify and comprehend them and place them in our cognitive scheme of understanding and thus to be able to have knowledge of them.

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<sup>46</sup> *Al-Baqarah*, 2: 31-33.

For example we will know what the term “syzygy” is, an unknown entity initially, by describing its nature and qualities which actually form parts of its meaning, such as: it is a noun and not a verb or adjective, it is a common noun and not a proper noun, it is abstract and not concrete, an so on, and its meaning is “the nearly straight-line configuration of three celestial bodies (such as the earth, the moon and the sun during a solar or lunar eclipse) in a gravitational system.” In linguistic convention we can arrange such cognitive scheme as below:

Syzygy: + Noun, + common, + abstract, + inanimate,...

“the nearly straight-line configuration of three celestial bodies (such as the earth, the moon and the sun during a solar or lunar eclipse) in a gravitational system.”<sup>47</sup>

The cognitive scheme of a thing actually describes also the physical and ontological environment of its existence and thus we are able to comprehend and apprehend them. This cognitive scheme makes up the relational meaning of any word which enables us to understand them in relation to other words and use it properly in meaningful utterance or sentence. Relational meanings, then, form a semantic field within our mind, connecting together a group of words which are closely related in meanings to couch a certain semantic theme as focus or topic, e.g. the concept of God, life, justice, beauty, success, happiness, family, home, community, nation, knowledge, education, etc., as stated by T. Izutsu, a Japanese Islamic scholar, as below:

“Relational meaning is a concrete manifestation or crystallization of the spirit of culture and a most faithful reflection of the general tendency, psychological or otherwise, of the people who use the word as part of their vocabulary.”<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, p. 1198.

<sup>48</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu (1964), *God and Man in the Qur'an*. Tokyo: Keio University, p. 24.

From this analysis, it is clear that language plays a profound function in acquiring and in fact in forming and establishing knowledge within our mind. The process of conceiving knowledge within our mind in reality is the process of emplacing meaning of the thing we want to know in our cognitive scheme. We know and have knowledge of a thing or a phenomenon when we can place it within a semantic field with a theme or a focus, and know in what system it exists and what were its functions in that system.

For example we understand and have knowledge of "syzygy" when we know that it exists in a celestial system and functioning in a gravitational relation between three celestial bodies, e.g. the sun, earth and moon, causing certain celestial effect on those bodies, such as the weather and meteorological changes, celestial movements, attraction, attrition, etc. We are able to comprehend this concept and processes when there is a condition of congruence between our understanding of the external objects or phenomena and our cognitive scheme within our mind which will establish relational meanings of the external object. In the case of Prophet Adam a.s., he was able to comprehend the names and the inner nature and qualities of all things as taught by God when he was able to emplace them in relational meanings within the cognitive scheme in his mind. This is actually the process of thinking, and thinking, according to some scholars, is in reality the using of our mental language to form meanings, concepts, propositions, etc. within the mind. Mental language of course need not necessarily uses actual words and sentences but instead "manipulates whole paradigms of grammatical elements, relations, structures, word-classes and such grammatical orders that are in most cases "behind" and "above" the focus of personal consciousness.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. Benjamin Lee Whorf (1956), *Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, John B. Carroll (ed.), Cambridge: Technology Press of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, p. 252.

In the field of Malay scholarship, perhaps the most profound analysis of the connection between words as symbols and their meanings as the things being symbolized was propounded by Professor Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas in his work *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition to the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam*. He mentioned that:

“The world of nature as depicted in the Holy Qur’an is composed of symbolic forms (*āyāt*), likes words in a book. Indeed, the world of nature is another form of the Divine Revelation analogous to the Holy Qur’an itself, only that, the great open book of nature is something created; it presents itself in multiple and diverse forms that partake of symbolic existent by virtue of being continually articulated by the creative word of God. Now a word as it really is, is a symbol, and to know it as it really is, is to know what it stands for, what it symbolizes, what it means. If we were to regard a word as if it has an independent reality of its own, then it would no longer be a sign or a symbol as it is being made to point to itself, which is not what it really is.”<sup>50</sup>

### **Varieties of Human Language and Discourses of Communications**

As mentioned above, basing on verses of the Qur’an *Sūrah al-Nisā’*: 1, *al-Hujurat*: 13, and *al-Baqarah*: 31, the Malays believe that human beings originated from a single pair of parents, namely the Prophet Adam and his wife Eve, and together with their creations, God also revealed a language for their use within their community. Among their progenies, some migrated to other parts of the world in search of better habitations, and through the passage of time perhaps several hundreds or thousands of years, separated by great distances, and influenced by different physical and social landscapes, new physical and social

<sup>50</sup> Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, p. 133.

features arose among mankind, resulting in varieties of different tribes, races and nations. Their original language also went through many changes influenced by different physical and social environments, resulting in the emergence of new languages.

However, historical and comparative linguistic studies revealed that among the thousands of languages of the world today evidence of language families indicating their common proto-language roots, can still be traced, for example the Indo-European Family of Europe, Western and Northern India, The Austris Family of Eastern Asia, The Hamito-Semitic family of Middle East and Africa, The Dravidian family of Southern India, etc.<sup>51</sup> Studies revealed that the further and the longer a family of languages separated, the more different they became, till finally no traceable similarities could be identified rendering them of different language families completely.

With regards to the studies of discourses of communications, also known as discourse analysis, a study by Dell Hymes called the ethnography of communication with a model called the 'SPEAKING' grid model,<sup>52</sup> described quite extensively various elements involved during a speech act. According to him a speech act involved at least eight elements, namely:

1. S = Settings, the situation of the speech act
2. P = Participants, the speaker(s), the listener(s)
3. E = Ends, the goals, outcome
4. A = Act sequence, actions involved,
5. K = Key, tone, manner, spirit
6. I = Instrument, channels of communication
7. N = Norms, rules governing speaking
8. G = Genre, categories such as poems, proverbs, riddle, prayer, oration, lectures, interviews, mythical tales, etc.

<sup>51</sup> Winfred P. Lehmann (1966), *Historical Linguistics: an Introduction*. New Delhi: Oxford & IBH Publishing, pp. 17-49.

<sup>52</sup> Dell Hymes (1972), *Direction in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

However, the above elements of communication involved only one direction or a mood of interaction and that is the horizontal mood between speakers and listeners. Beside horizontal, there are three more directions of interactions we can identify, namely: 1) the ascending or vertical interaction, 2) the descending interaction, and 3) the internal interaction. These modes of communication can be described in detail as below:

1. The ascending or vertical mood of interaction occurs between man and Supernatural Being, and in Malay society mainly between man and God such as in prayers, supplications, hymning in praise of God, *etc.*, and peripherally by Malay magicians, between man and the spirits such as incantation, magical spells, *etc.* Interaction between man and God when done on individual basis need not necessarily use the physical or phonological language, because what is in the mind of man will be understood by God, as mentioned in the Qur'an: "Verily, I know what you reveal and what you conceal".<sup>53</sup> However, when interaction is done within a congregation, then phonological human language must be used so as to be understood by all those present.

2. The descending mood of interaction occurs between God and man. If it is on individual basis, then no phonological human language is necessary, example when God communicated directly to Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. in the form Holy Tradition (*Hadīth Qudsī*), God revealed the message directly into his heart in the form of meaning and when the Prophet wished to convey the message to the people, he used his own words to do so. This is also the mood of communication when intuition from God reaches mankind, where comprehension and cognition suddenly burst into his heart spontaneously and directly. However, when God wished to communicate to a group of people, a community, a nation or the whole human kind, then the

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<sup>53</sup> *Al-Baqarah*, 2: 33.

language of the group in phonological form was chosen by God so that the message can be understood by the whole group. The Malays believe that, as an article of faith, there are four main revealed books namely the Zabur revealed to Prophet David and his community, the Torah revealed to Prophet Moses and his community, the Bible or Injil revealed to Prophet Jesus and his community, and lastly the Qur'an revealed to Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. to the whole humankind. Each book addressed that particular community, except the last book the Qur'an revealed to Prophet Muhammad s.a.w., which addressed for the whole humanity till the end of time. The Qur'an says:

“We sent not a messenger except (to teach) in the language of his own people, in order to make (things) clear to them”.<sup>54</sup>

However, the Prophethood of Muhammad s.a.w. is for the whole humankind, as asserted by the Qur'an:

“We have not sent thee (Muhammad), but as a Messenger (*Rasūl*) to all mankind (*kāffatan li al-nās*), giving them glad tidings, and warning them (against sin), but most men know not.”<sup>55</sup>

Since there is no one common language for all human beings, God must chose one human language to convey the message to all, and He chose the mother tongue of Prophet Muhammad s.a.w. namely the Arabic language. That message must be conveyed and explained to other communities and nations either in Arabic language (which preferably be mastered by all) or in their own languages through translation and interpretation. For this reason countless numbers of translations of the Qur'an, hadith, great books by learned scholars of Islam were translated into almost every language of the world.

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibrāhīm*, 14: 4.

<sup>55</sup> *Saba'*, 34: 28.

3. The internal mood of communication, that is between man and his inner self, as in thinking deeply, reflection, meditation, and thinking aloud or soliloquy. In most cases phonological language is not used, except for thinking aloud. Instead mental language is used of course, as mentioned above. It needs not necessarily uses actual words and sentences, but instead "manipulates whole paradigms of grammatical elements, relations, structures, word-classes and such grammatical orders that are in most cases "behind" and "above" the focus of personal consciousness."

### Conclusion

Scholarship in Malay world studies particularly pertaining to the majority of the Malays who are Muslims, must take into account an alternative viewpoint on knowledge and language as outlined above, from the current accepted one as espoused by Western empirical and secular scientific knowledge. The current view that regards knowledge to consist only the observable and empirical facts acquired through studies, research and sense-experience, must be modified to accommodate also the type of knowledge that is intuitive and revealed in nature, arrived at by means of spontaneous and direct inspiration from God. This view is widely held by the Malays, and in fact all acquired knowledge are justified and validated by means of that revealed knowledge; if they are in accord, then they are accepted as true and justified.

To the Malays the main content of knowledge must focus on three fundamental elements, namely:

1. Knowledge of God as the Creator and Lord of the entire universe and the Originator of revealed knowledge, rules and regulation for the benefit of man
2. Knowledge of the world which is appropriate to be known so as to fulfil its purpose of its creation for the benefit of man during his sojourn in this world

- in preparation for his eternal life in the Hereafter when he dies,
3. Knowledge of the Hereafter as the ultimate and final destiny of man's journey in his life, which will be determined by his deed and action during his life in this world whether in accordance with what is revealed by God or otherwise.

With regards to language, the Malays acknowledge and affirm, as what has been mentioned by the Qur'an,<sup>56</sup> that together with the creation of Prophet Adam and Eve, God also revealed to them a language to be used for the purpose of communication within their community. As the community became bigger, movements and migration of people took place in search of new and better places to live and build new societies. Through the passage of time, hundred or even thousands of years, and separated by vast distance and influenced by new physical and social landscapes, the original language changed and underwent the processes of evolution, resulting in the formation of new languages.

Thus, all studies about the Malays, whether by Malay or non-Malay scholars, whether about his literature, his art, his culture and society or about his language and thought, must be seen and evaluated from the perspective of those three fundamental elements of knowledge that are firmly based on the teaching of the Qur'an and the Hadith. If the result of those studies reveals that they are in accordance with those three fundamental elements then they are termed as mainstream or central, but on the contrary if deviated from them then they should be termed as marginal or peripheral. For instance, the studies on the Malay magician which revealed that they are deviated from those three fundamental elements, in fact they are heavily coloured by animistic belief, should be considered as marginal among the Malays. To the Malays, truth and true knowledge is

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<sup>56</sup> *Al-Baqarah*, 2: 31 and *al-Rahmān*, 55: 3-4.

absolute and inviolable because they stem from the fountain of revelation from the highest Authority, that is, *Allāh al-Ḥaqq*, God, who is the Absolute Truth.