

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**ISLAMO-ENGLISH: A VARIETY OF ENGLISH FOR THE UMMAH****HAJA MOHIDEEN BIN MOHAMED ALI**

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ABSTRACT

Islamo-English is a term coined or preferred by the present researcher to refer to the use of Islam-related expressions and Islamic religious content in English usage. Islamo- is a prefix, giving the sense of 'Islam-relatedness', a type of prefix usage similar to Italo-, Greco- and Judeo-. The mixing of English and Islam-related terms in both scholarly works and popular reading materials has been in use for a long time. But these expressions have not been sufficiently researched, albeit some studies have been done. Islamo-English expresses Islam-related and Muslim-related content through the medium of the English language. Islam encompasses all fields of knowledge- human as well as revealed. There is much Islamic knowledge expressed through English, not only in academic and professional publications, but also in popular reading materials in print and online. The aim of this paper is to present the mixing of English and Islam-related vocabulary in Arabic (and Malay and other Muslim-majority language speakers) in non-academic, non-scholarly reading materials, casually read printed materials, online material, creative writing and lyrics from Muslim singers. This includes newspapers, magazines, newsletters, brochures, pamphlets, leaflets, notices and online sources. These materials and the content therein are targeted mainly at laypeople, not scholars or professionals. Many of such materials are made available in tertiary institutions, libraries, mosques, suraus (prayer halls) and public places. Islamo-English, or Islamo-speak then, as the present researcher would like to propose, is the use of English which has an Islamic character, identity and content related to the religion and its adherents, not necessarily always strictly with reference to the religious aspects. The primary users of this variety of English are inevitably Muslims worldwide, but non-Muslims too residing in majority Muslim societies do get indirectly exposed to it. It may even be beneficial for the latter to be familiar with the meaning of these expressions for improved inter-religious understanding, harmony and tolerance.

Key words- Islam, Muslims, English usage, Islam-related expressions, Islamo-English

Literature Review/Background

Ismail Raji al Faruqi¹ (1995) proposed the concept of Islamic English in his seminal publication *Toward Islamic English*. His influential work paved the way for interested academics and scholars to look into various aspects of this variety of English, which is a variety based on the use of English with a religious base. Abdul Malik Mujahid² discussed the features of Muslim English in an online article. The present researcher studied the contemporary Islamic terms in English dictionaries³. He has also exemplified how Islamic terms may be appropriately used in English usage, especially for Muslim users of English⁴. Al-Faruqi's concern was the distortion of Muslim proper names, places and Islamic concepts related to their faith through misspelling, mispronunciation and inaccurate translation. The transliteration sometimes produced grave errors. Thus he argued for Islamic English and provided a framework as to how this may be done. Research on Islamo-English and Islamo-speak, the two terms introduced by the present writer, are an extension of the hugely influential and pioneering work done by al-Faruqi. The Muslim users of English today are found far and wide, in what Kachru⁵ describes as the three types of countries where English is now being used in varying degrees, in inner circle countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia; in many outer circle countries such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Malaysia and Nigeria as well as in expanding circle countries where Muslims from former British-ruled countries and other nations have migrated and settled in substantial numbers. Argungu⁶ had opined that Muslims were probably the single largest non-native community of English language users in the world today. It is not an understatement. Therefore the need to use English appropriately among fellow Muslims has been very much realized. English, and not Arabic, is the dominant lingua franca for the Ummah or the Muslim community worldwide. Islam is not a religion confined to Arabs or the Middle East.

The translation of the Holy Qur'an is a very good example of Islamo-English. An excerpt from Surah 21 (19-24) illustrates:

19. To Him belong all (creatures) in the heavens and on earth. Even those who are in His (very) Presence

are not too proud to serve Him, nor are they (ever) weary (of His service):

20. They celebrate His praises night and day, nor do they ever flag or intermit.

21. Or have they taken (for worship) gods from the earth who can raise the (dead)?

22. If there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods besides Allah, there would have been confusion in both! But glory to Allah, the Lord of the Throne: (High is He) above what they attribute to Him!

23. He cannot be questioned for His acts, but they will be questioned (for theirs).

24. Or have they taken for worship (other gods) besides Him? Say, "Bring your convincing proof this is the Message of those with me and the Message of those before me." But most of them know not the Truth, and so turn away.

(From The Quran Translation by Yusuf Ali in www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli)

It has now become a common feature to include Islamic expressions in the mass media. A matrimonial advert in a weekly newspaper in India managed by Muslims is as follows: *Proposals are invited from respectable and religious families, following Quran and Sunnah, for our daughterGirl practicing Islam and observing purdah with veil. Option to settle in Canada.....*

FELDA (Federal Land Development Authority) citizens paid a tribute to a former Malaysian prime minister, Tun Abdul Razak, for initiating a rural land development project that has benefited many rural folk immensely. The settlers being mostly Malay and Muslim took out a full page advertisement in English to thank the present prime minister, Datuk Seri Najib. In their advertorial, they had used Arabic/Islamic terms to indicate their religious identity:

Every morning at dawn after *subuh* prayers our parents would carry out your father's sacred decree.....

.....The news of your father's return to *Allah Subhanahuwataala*.....shocked our parents.

54 years of challenges, sacrifices and success, *Insyah Allah*.....(New Straits Times, July 23, 2010, p.27).

Even international news agencies have begun to use Islamic terms for the sake of accuracy.

A Reuters picture has the following caption: *The Moroccan faithful performing terawih prayers on the esplanade of the Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca.* An AP picture has: *An Iranian ulama reciting verses of the Quran at the shrine of.....*

According to Brown⁷ Islamic terms have been sometimes given Western interpretation or a limited definition of the target term. These include 'jihad' and 'halal'. The word 'jihad' today may also be used in a strictly non-religious sense, for example: *The new government considers eliminating corruption among public sector employees a jihad.* A writer⁸ in *Radiance Viewsweekly* even uses the word 'jihad' as follows to show the hatred Hindu fundamentalists have towards Muslims: *Behind the popularization of hate are the Saffron forces. They have invested enormous labour, time and money in their Jihad against Muslims.* Similarly, 'halal' does not always have to be restricted to the issue of food and meat alone.

Islam-related terms in Muslim-majority languages such as Malay are found aplenty in Malaysian English newspapers. For example: *Unforgettable buka puasa with orphans* and *Telco's offerings range from prayers to Hari Raya songs.* Urdu language speakers are often known to say *namaz* instead of *salah* (the act of worship in Islam). Indian Muslims are known to use 'bayan,' (religious talk) 'dargah,' (the shrine of a saint) and 'madrasa' (a religious school) in their English discourse. Islamo-English may be used in a way which is widely intelligible or in restricted national and ethnic contexts. Although Islamo-English has Arabic terms predominantly, there is scope for other Muslim-majority languages too in this variety. Although Islam is not a common geographical entity the Islamic expressions are shared by English-speaking Muslims worldwide (Mahmudul Hasan, 2014)⁹.

Method

The data for the study comprises Malaysian newspapers- *The Star* and *New Straits Times*, the news articles and advertisements included; magazines, newsletters, fliers and casually read materials in various forms, online material such as posts on social networking sites and lyrics available from internet sources.. These were collected over an unspecified period of time as and when convenient until the present. The language of these is English,

but there was also some code mixing in Malay, besides the use of Islamic Arabic expressions.

Findings and Conclusions

The data revealed some very useful findings related to many aspects of the life of Muslims.

Religious festivities

During important religious occasions such as Ramadan there were numerous expressions related to the holy month of fasting. The users expressed feelings of piety during this significant month. Some examples of the mixing of English (and sometimes Malay) are as follows:

Spirit of Ramadan, Ramadan bazaar; Ramadan buffet; Daily sahur will be served from 1-5.30 am; The hotel's surau...; has also a resident imam to lead Solat Tarawikh every night; Let us pray that this Ramadhan will bring us determination to perform more ibadah, to improve our iman and to become a better Muslim and Muslimah; and Dell wishes you Selamat Hari Raya Aidilfitri; Hari Raya Aidilfitri Hi-Tea and Concorde Hotel distributes 'bubur lambuk'. The commercialization of the blessed fasting month of Ramadan is obvious from the many advertisements during this month, for example, "Aidilfitri Banquet" and "Ramadan has arrived again, and for a truly hearty iftar or *buka puasa*, head for Coffee House at the -----Hotel, KL.

Linguistic Islamification

We have also noticed attempts to anglicize Arabic/Muslim language lexical items. There are plural forms with the suffix -s for surah, hadith, ulama, imam and kulliyah. The suffix -ic is used, for example, in 'Qur'anic verses'; 'Ummatic Mission'; 'Ummatic week'; -ize in 'Islamize'; -ation as in Islamization; -ist in 'Islamist'; -ly in Islamically; the prefix non- as in 'non-halal' and e- in 'e-Nikah card'. Some have even gone on to be creative and invented 'kafirize' and 'halally'. Shamimah Mohideen¹⁰ considers such creativity as a form of linguistic innovation.

Devotional terms

Uniquely Islamic terms which non-Muslims will probably not understand abound in this variety associated with Islam/Muslims. Some of the terms are profoundly Islamic and may not be even understood by many Muslims for whom Arabic is a foreign language : Recitation of Dua; Let's Solat; Let's perform qiyamullail; How to be a good dai'e;

The miracle of Isra' Mi'raj; Follow your child's fitrah; Bring back the victory of Islam through the spirit of taqwa; Al-Aqsa mosque was the first qiblah before the Ka'abah, the land of the anbiya; ...to lend a hand and be prepared to become the best ummah; and "Insyah Allah, we hope the discussions with Volkswagen, now entering its second stage, will be successful". The following flyer¹¹ taken out by the Centre for University Social Responsibility of International Islamic University Malaysia has the objective to "foster the spirit of Ukhuwwah based on the principle of Ta'aruf, Tafahum and Takaful between the villagers and volunteers" in its Ummatic mission to Cambodia "Towards achieving Mardhatillah." In written communication in English, some prefer to begin their letters with the Islamic greeting- 'Assalamualaykum' (there are variations in spelling) and end with 'Wassalam' and 'Jazakallahu khairan.'

The primary reason why Muslims prefer to use uniquely Islamic/Arabic expressions is due to the specific Islamic content and unavailability of satisfactory equivalent terms in English. Sometimes the Islamic concepts are explained within parentheses for the benefit of the readers, for example: The State Islamic authorities later ruled that the act was *haram* (forbidden); This has nothing to do with their *aqidah* (faith); Leadership is an *amanah* (trust) and He said the country could now manage its zakat (tithe) collection professionally. The Malaysian News Agency (Bernama) photo showing the Prime Minister of Malaysia and his consort on a spiritual journey to Makkah had this caption "..... performing the tawaf (circumambulation around the Kaabah) while on umrah during Najib's four-day visit to Saudi Arabia. Islamo-English is widely used for religious awareness purposes as the following flyer heading indicates: "Solat Jemaah Unite Ummah."

Economics

Islamic economic terms have also been included in newspapers: Sukuk (Islamic bonds) well received;to introduce tawarruq trading in personal financing scheme;we already have a number of Islamic financial institutions, both in banking and takaful (Islamic insurance); Bank Islam....providing Shariah-based banking products; Riba is categorically prohibited; Shariah-compliant

unit trust funds; Apply for mudharabah savings account today (Bank Islam flyer). In an article "Riba in the Quran," Waqar Anwar explains why riba (which is widely interpreted as interest or usury) is forbidden in Islam. Firstly riba is categorically prohibited, secondly, it is stated that riba is what is over and above the principal and thirdly that it is unjust (zulm). It is also said that riba is destined to destruction (mahq). (From *Al-waha*, pg.19)¹²

What follows is a caption of a business report:

Sukuk well-received

Enough takers for MAS bonds, it will unveil new business plan next week

(*StarBiz*, 13 June, 2012, p.1)

In an article on Islamic banking, *Reader's Digest* (October, 2010) explains about some Islamic banking products related to mortgages and car financing as follows:

Typically, the bank enters into a *Murahaba* or *Ijarah* financing contract. In a *Murahaba* financing contract, the bank will buy the item in question (property or vehicle) from a vendor that the customer is dealing with, and then sell it to the customer at an agreed marked-up price. This price is payable in instalments. In an *Ijarah* financing contract, the bank will buy the item from the vendor, then lease it to the customer for a period of time with an option for the customer to buy the goods at the end.

(Fogarty, M, 2010, p.87).

With regard to investment funds in the form of bank deposits, "There is the *Mudharabah* deposit where the banks enter into a joint venture with the depositor and share the profit generated. Also, there is the *Wadiah* deposit where the banks may give you a *hibah* (gift) instead of paying you interest" (Fogarty, M, 2010, p.88).

Islamic attire

Clothing connected to Muslims is often found in context and advertisements. The 'hijab' and 'tudung' are fairly popular. Other examples found were: House of Abaya; An ethos of tolerance has prevailed, with churches, bars and miniskirts, co-existing with burqas; andessentially outlawing Muslim women from wearing the niqab. An article in a newspaper has the following on fashion by Muslim women which is Syariah-compliant:

Designers and hijabi models compete in a Muslimah fashion competition

That hijab fashion has gone mainstream is a given..... with clothes made for Muslim women.....has seen the potential growth of the Muslimah fashion market.....

.....with all the contestants in Syariah-compliant clothes.

The Sunsilk Lively Clean & Fresh Hijabku, Gayaku competition.....to create an outfit for a hijab-wearing woman.

(NST, Life & Times Style, 18 December, p.2)

Law

References to Islamic law are found in news materials: It is not sinful or wrong under the fatwa (decree) to borrow money in order for one to perform their pilgrimage and your Haj is still valid (sah);committee...is set up with the members comprising the state mufti, chief kadi.....; Hudud is a term used in syariah to describe the class of punishment for crimes such as theft, fornication, adultery, apostasy and consumption of alcohol and other intoxicants.

A news report captioned "Buried Quran recovered" had the following content: The State Islamic authorities later ruled that the act was *haram* (forbidden).

(New Straits Times, July 19, 2007, p.24).

Islamic language usage

Spelling reform is underway in Islamo-English. Makkah is the preferred term for Mecca, Madinah for Medina, Qur'an for Quran or Koran. There are also variants for some words. There are both 'nasyid' (in Malay) and 'nasheed' for Muslim devotional songs, 'sharia', 'shariah' and 'syariah' (in Malay) for Islamic law, 'salam' and 'salaam' for the Islamic greeting; 'hadith' and 'hadeeth' for the sayings and deeds of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH); 'Ramadan' and 'Ramadhan' for the Islamic month when Muslims the world over observe fasting; 'haj' and 'hajj' for the pilgrimage to Makkah; and 'solah' and 'solat' for the Islamic prayer which is observed five times a day. . Pronunciation spelling is the guide. So, some writers tend to double the spelling for vowel sounds to help pronounce the words accurately. Sometimes diacritic marks are used to guide, but these are in scholarly writings, for

example, Al-Qur'an, da'wah and du'a where transliteration guidelines are followed.

A flyer, which contains a number of Islamic expressions, calling upon Muslims emphasizing the importance of solat appears below as it was actually produced:

CAMPAIGN

"SOLAT JEMAAH UNITE UMMAH"

"HURRY UP FOR THE SOLAT JEMAAH,

GIVE PRIORITY FOR THE CALL OF THE MASJID,

BRIGHTEN YOUR RESTLESS HEART WITH SOLAT JEMAAH"

"SOLAT JEMAAH STRENGTHEN THE ISLAMIC BROTHERHOOD"

"Your small contribution to mosque is great in the side of Allah,

Serving mosque get you closer to the Jannah,

Spreading salam among Muslims, strengthen your love of Brotherhood"¹³

Appeals for donations for Islam-friendly worthy causes contain religious expressions which will be only understood by Muslims:

The construction of this new building is aimed at....., doing the Dawah work in a well-organized manner.....without any financial crunch.

We make an earnest appeal to you.....endeavour.

Jazakallahukhairankatheer. May Allah bless you with His Rahmah here and in the hereafter! Ameen (*Radiance Viewsweekly, Vol.LI No.30*).

Magazines published by Muslims in the English language freely use Islamic terms in their content as the readership is almost exclusively Muslim. An Austrian woman who had converted to Islam narrates her conversion in an article where she uses a number of Islamic terms. Below is an excerpt:

We invited several brothers and sisters and I spoke the *shahadah* (Testimony of Faith). I had already learned how to pray and started praying as regular as possible. Of course, I was fasting in Ramadan.

I am very happy to belong to the Ummah of Muslims.....

.....I use my opportunity to talk about Islam. I try to live as a good Muslimah, to practice Islam and give a good example. Allah finally helped me to find the right way in my search of the truth,

al-hamdulillah (Radiance Viewsweekly, Vol. LI No 30).

In the same periodical mentioned above we noted many Islam-related expressions: *qurbani, ayat, salah, jihad, madrasas, fatwa, purdah, mufti, Hajj, Insha Allah*

Islamic songs

A new genre in Islamo-English is Islamic lyrics in the songs of some famous Muslim singers such as Maher Zain, Native Deen and Sami Yusuf. Their lyrics in English have Islamic religious content related to seeking repentance; leading a righteous life; love for Allah and His last Prophet. A few excerpts are given here from the three aforementioned entertainers:

Forgive Me by Maher Zain

I know, Oh Allah, you're the most forgiving
And that you've promised to always be there
When I call upon you
So now I'm standing here ashamed of
All the mistakes I've committed
Please don't turn me away and hear my prayer
(www.elyrics.net/maher-zain-lyrics/forgive-me-lyrics.html)

Similar to the above content of seeking forgiveness or *tauba* is "Supplication" by Sami Yusuf where he begs for forgiveness and mercy from Allah for his sins as his good deeds which, in his humility, are very few.

(www.azlyrics.com/samiyusuf/supplication.html)

It is essential for Muslims to repent and seek His forgiveness before their death and reach Allah free of sin. When seeking His mercy one has to be sincere and be determined not to repeat the same sinful activities.

Native Deen is a US-based group of African American Islamic entertainers. *Stand Alone* is one of their memorable songs:

Single mother raising her children
Now she's a Muslim
Started praying and wearing a headscarf
Was a healing for her heart
Struggling with no one to lean on
But with prayer she would be strong
(nativdeen.com/lyrics-not-afraid-to-stand-alone)
This song tells about the trials and tribulations of Aziza Davis, a single mother (white) whose difficulties are made worse when she converts to

Islam and starts wearing the hijab, the Islamic headscarf, which is a requirement for Muslim women. Although she was found to be the most capable person for the job at the interview she attended, she was told to remove her hijab. But she is determined to hold her own with Allah's help and practice Islam as her way of life. The lyrics assure Muslims they do not have to be afraid to stand alone as Allah is by their side.

My Ummah by Sami Yusuf

Look at where we were
And look at where we are
And tell me
Is this how he'd want it to be
Oh no! Let us bring back our glory
(www.lyricstime.com/sami-yusuf-my-ummah-lyrics.html)

In this song, it is mentioned that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) would plead for his Ummah's forgiveness in the hereafter, though the Ummah (the worldwide Muslim community) may not be deserving of his pleas to Allah. It motivates the listeners to reflect on the glory Muslims once enjoyed, and what they have become now. Islam encourages and exhorts its followers to seek knowledge so that they will be strong and help fellow human beings. Islam is not all about salah and repentance, becoming a strong Ummah in all respects is also emphasized.

Muslim entertainers such as the above, use English to spread Islamic values to Muslims to reflect upon and practice Islam in their life. Non-Muslims who listen to these lyrics will be able to understand Islam and empathize with Muslims.

Islamic creative writing

Islamic values in literature, including children's literature, are inculcated through content compatible with Islamic precepts. In the excerpt of a story below children are made to understand the purpose behind fasting:

"See, one reason why Muslims fast is so that they can appreciate the food that Allah has given them and to know what it feels like for less fortunate people," Assad stated.

(*The Eid Adventure*, from islamickids.tripod.com/id96.htm).

In the story below Muslim children are strongly advised against believing in so-called

charms or luck. An excerpt from the story goes like this:

"Anyway, I was trying to tell you that clovers don't give you luck. There is no such thing! Everything happens through Allah's (SWT) will. Did you know luck charms are haraam?".....
....."Believing in luck charms is like not believing in Allah (SWT)!"

(*Yasmeen and the four-leaf clover*, from islamickids.tripod.com/id74.htm)

Stories such as the above are aimed at helping children to grow up with Islamic beliefs and behavior.

In his poem "SMS to Sir Muhammad Iqbal," Kamal Hasan (an eminent Islamic scholar) addresses this piece of creative writing to the late Iqbal, a renowned Pakistani poet and philosopher. He writes eloquently on the plight afflicting Muslims worldwide in many spheres. An excerpt follows:

*Where is the ishq that used
to drive you to ecstasy?
Where is the nur that illumines
the heart and obliterates man's egoism?
Where is the mahabbah and rahmah
that forge the bonds
of love and salam?
Where is the hidayah that destroys insincerity,
hypocrisy and greed?
Where is the ilm that elevates
the soul to the True Master?
Where is the taqwa that
imbues thought and action with righteousness?
(Reach, January 2007:10)¹⁴*

Social media

Online communities on social networking sites too use Islamo-English, especially when the messages of Muslim users are directed at fellow Muslims, for example (as it appeared):

May Allah take us to see Him when we are the peak of our iman and ibadah. May Allah grant peace, redha (acceptance) and tawakkul (utmost trust and reliance on Him alone) to wives who have lost their husband. May Allah place my cousin's husband among those whom He loves. Ameen (posted on facebook, 8th February, 2014)

A facebook user cautions against Muslim consumers trusting products as permissible for them just because the packaging has Arabic words:

No offence but whatever arabic words that have been imprinted on food packages, does not mean it is halal@lawful to eat, not until you see the verified halal logo + your confidence.

(as posted exactly on facebook, 25th March, 2014)

This research has focused on common simple English expressions as used by the writers (and speakers) for a general audience. Therefore, mostly basic Islamic terms have been used. What we have found is that these terms are syntactically appropriately used and collocate grammatically and lexically with English, for example: *An imam at a mosque in Panama performing the call to Friday prayers*. The terms are oftentimes nouns- common, and sometimes, proper. Muslim users of English everywhere with a general understanding of their religion should be able to understand and use these terms linguistically and Islamically accurately.

Spoken Islamo-English

The speeches of Islamic scholars in English are a good example of spoken Islamo-English. Dr Zakir Naik is one, among the many who use English to explain about Islam in his talks. The following excerpt from one of his explanations serves as an example of how Islamic expressions are used within English:

...many people have the misconception that Islam came into existence, and the founder of the religion of Islam was Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) 1400 years ago....And the Holy Qur'an says in Surah Fatir he said that there were more than 124 thousand messengers sent on the face of the earth. By name we only know 25, mentioned in the Holy Qur'an- Adam, Moses, Jesus, Solomon, Muhammed..... the Torah, the Zabur, the Injel and the Furqaan. The Torah is the 'Wahee', the 'Revelation' which was given to Moses.....We believe in the Injel, the 'Wahee' which was given to Isa Alaysalam. This Bible that the Christians have today, is not the Wahee we believe in.....
(Zakirnaikcollection.blogspot.com)

Islamic scholars who address a mostly Muslim audience, unlike Zakir Naik whose audience is international and multicultural, use a lot of Arabic expressions and whole clauses in their English speeches. Some speakers use certain Arabic statements and then follow them up with English translation. The Qur'anic verses and hadiths were

maintained in Arabic for the sake of authenticity (Nurul Ikhlas, 2012)¹⁵.

Conclusion

How is Islamo-English different from al-Faruqi's *Islamic English*? The learned scholar has emphasized Islamic devotional terms with a heavy use of diacritical signs to avoid misspelling, mispronunciation and faulty translation. Islamo-English is more inclusive as it encompasses all linguistic expressions involving Islam and Muslims. The present work has identified Islam-associated terms as they have appeared in non-scholarly, popular reading materials meant for all. While non-Muslims and Muslims themselves not conversant with Arabic will probably be unable to use the Islamic English as advocated by al-Faruqi, the layperson can relate to common Islam-related expressions in various fields.

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