

Conflict or Coexistence highlighted the relationship between Islam, Sociology and Development. He observed that the Muslim backwardness is due to their attitude towards religion, modern knowledge and development. He suggested that socio-cultural realities should be studied from a new perspective so as to change the Muslim situation.

The closing session of the conference was addressed by Dato' Dr. AbdulHamid A. AbuSulayman, Rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia, who emphasized the need to continue the efforts for Islamization of the disciplines because the future of Ummah depends on the recasting of knowledge. Before the closing speech Prof. Haji Mohd. Aris Othman, the Head of sociology and anthropology department, IIUM, presented a brief summary of the deliberation of the conference. A committee of Muslim sociologists and anthropologists was formed to implement the programmes and suggestions of the conference.

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**International Conference on English and Islam:
Creative Encounters
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The world history is as much a history of civilisational clashes as it is of civilisational dialogues, the latter having become the rule rather than the exception as the evolution of a global culture unstoppably continues in the modern era. Human creativity, whether in art or in technology, is complex and universal, and as such cuts across all kinds of barriers such as political and geographical. Hence, it continues to contribute significantly to the increasing globalisation of cultural and religious traditions without diminishing their independent identities. With the advent of Islam in the 7th century, followed by the establishment of Muslim empires in various parts of the world, and through a series of crusades, contacts between English and Islam, and Arabic and Christianity were established. Whatever the argument is concerning the cultural invasion and political domination of the East by the West or vice versa, the fact is, both have influenced and learnt from each other

in all fields of life throughout the centuries. The international and cross-cultural dimensions of both have been expanding since the earliest contacts between the two.

It was against this background that the idea of an international conference on English and Islam was conceived by the Department of English Language and Literature at International Islamic University Malaysia. Nothing could be more appropriate than such a forum for this University which believes in the philosophy of integration of the human sciences with Islamic studies. The conference, *English and Islam: Creative Encounters 1996*, was a highly successful one, attended by about 60 paper presenters and about 200 participants from far and wide, giving the conference a truly international character. The three-day event (December 20-22) was an exploration of the historic and contemporary links between English and Islam in the fields of Linguistics, Language Education, Literature, Translation, and Islamic/Cultural Studies. The papers presented were as interestingly diverse as they were intellectually stimulating. Perhaps the first of its kind in the world so far, the conference certainly enhanced an understanding of the growing links between the two domains and provided a platform where both could define their increasing roles as the Muslim world passes through this period of globalization.

Such a conference also helped to bring together the endurability of Islam with the synergy of the English Language and Literature. Setting the stage for a truly creative encounter between the universal value system of Islam and the most international language of today's world, the conference broadened academic horizons and helped foster a new era in interdisciplinary studies and perspectives. It was indeed a meeting of the East and the West, covering a full range of topics, from the discriminating assessment of English translations of the meanings of the Qur'ān to that of Muslim contributions to the literatures in English and the science of the language itself, from Western writers' literary encounters with Islam and Muslims to the postcolonial and postmodern reactions of Muslims to several literary texts in English, from the role of dictionaries to the processes of language adaptation by young Muslim learners. In the process of highlighting the ongoing and vital connections between English and Islam, the contents of the papers spanned an 800-year encounter between the two, from the Middle Ages to modern times.

Among the papers presented were those by AbdelWahab Elmessiri (Egypt), AbdulWahid Lulua (Iraq), Cynthia Ho (USA), Carleen

Ibrahim (USA) and Amin Malak (Iraq-Canada). They spoke, respectively, about a new explanatory paradigm in reference to "English Poetry and the Metaphysics of Immanence," the contact between the medieval Andalusian and the English lyric poetry through the influence of the troubadours, the 12th century Andalusian scholar Petrus Alfonsi whose *Divina Clericalis*, originally written in Arabic, had a great influence on many English authors such as Gower and Chaucer, during the Middle Ages. Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, which along with Shakespeare's *Othello* and a host of other lesser known Elizabethan texts, may be credited to be among the earliest to have brought the Muslim world first to the English stage and finally the "Muslim Voices in the New Literatures in English." As we know, the Restoration, Romantic and modern writers extensively took part in the creative encounters between English, Islam and Muslims. The ongoing critical investigation of these encounters from modern and Western points of view, the rise of comparative literature as an academic discipline, and the cultivation of literary expression by immigrant Muslim communities in predominantly non-Muslim countries led some scholars such as M. M. Badawi (Lebanon), Mohammad Khalid-Taib (Malaysia), Earle Waugh (Canada) to write, respectively, about the need for an Islamic literary theory, introduction of Islamic reading materials in the comparative literature curriculum and the growth of a Muslim literary tradition in a country like Canada. Some presenters such as Norman Cary (USA), Fadia Faqir (Jordan-UK), Meneesha Govinder (South Africa), Umar AbdurRahman (Nigeria), and Syed Nasir Raza Kazmi (Malaysia) reflected on modern authors and their works from the perspective of gender, culture and/or religion in the contexts of Somalia, Jordan, Egypt, Senegal and India.

Yet other scholars like Solehah Ishak (Malaysia), Ernest Wolf-Gazo (Germany) and Ahmad Kamal Abdullah (Malaysia) took up the issue of the cross-cultural interaction among various cultures, languages and literatures such as English and Malay; The paper by David Blanks (USA) highlighted the current challenge of teaching English literature in an Arab cultural context. These are only some potentially internationalising interactions which the living vitality of the indigenous cultures and texts, in contact with the foreign, irresistably invite. Nur Nina Zuhra (USA) gave articulate expression to this universalizing impulse which transcends local and national borders in her paper on acclaimed British director Peter Brook's 1970s adaptation of Farid Uddin Attar's 12th-century Persian mystical masterpiece *The*

Conference of the Birds. Some of the papers dealt with the colonialist discourse of T.E. Lawrence (in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*), Alexander Kinglake (in *Eothen: Traces of Travel Brought Home from the East*) and the expatriate American author Peter Bowles who spent most of his creative life in Tangier, Morocco. Naturally, these authors (Ahmed al-Nimeiri of Sudan, Elio di Piazza of Italy and Ralph Coury of USA) attempted to apply the discourse of Orientalism, examining the extent of its usefulness and tenability in studying those works. Some papers, for instance, the one by Jalal Uddin Khan (Bangladesh), took issue with the theory of Orientalism, in favour of the essentially aesthetic and literary appreciation of literary works. In her paper Gabeba Badèroon (South Africa) notes the (in)compatibility of Islam and postmodernism in the South African context.

The papers by Samer Akkach (Australia), Hassan el-Nagar (Sudan), Ahmad Shehu (Nigeria) and Majeed Salehy (Iran) were devoted to discussions of the literary qualities and translation of the meaning of the Qur'ān, pointing out in particular the beauty of the Qur'ān's narrative devices and the difficulty of translating its rich meanings owing to its divine origin. While Yusuf Rahman (Canada) took a discerning look at the Western approaches to Qur'anic studies, Yasièn Mohamed (South Africa) made a discriminating literary analysis of T.J. Winter's translation of al-Ghazālī.

The range of papers presented at the conference and the areas of interest that they revealed were indicative of the importance that English continues to have in the modern world. This was particularly evident from the fact that they covered semantics, lexicography, grammar, the teaching of English as a Second/Foreign Language, sociolinguistics, English for Specific Purposes, error analysis, the Islamisation of Language and Linguistics, and so on. In general, it could be seen that the papers fell into three broad areas: Language and Linguistics, Language Teaching, and Islam and the English Language.

Adam Brown (UK-Singapore) and Haja Mohideen (Malaysia) examined the role that vocabulary played in English and noted that there were some problems which arose for Muslims with regard to certain terms and vocabulary items in English. Brown, for example, said that there were Islamic terms which have been defined in a number of well-regarded contemporary English dictionaries in ways which Muslims would consider to be derogatory and offensive. However, he also mentioned that some dictionaries did have definitions which Muslims would find acceptable. He pointed out that the

COBUILD dictionary, which is closely associated with the University of Birmingham in the UK, was noteworthy for its Islamically appropriate definitions. As Brown acknowledged, this might not be an accident—Birmingham having one of the largest Muslim populations in the UK. Haja Mohideen, on the other hand, examined ways in which lexical items which were commonly found in everyday language might give offence to Muslims. He noted that these lexical items could easily be replaced with others which would not be Islamically inappropriate. Similarly, Hazidi AbdulHamid (Malaysia) pointed out that the English language was not the sole possession of the native English speakers and that other speakers could appropriate the language for their own purposes in their own environments. The English language in Malaysia, for example, could certainly develop meanings which were appropriate for Malaysian and Muslim purposes.

Dahiru Muhammed Argungu (Nigeria) and Sulaiman Dufford (USA) examined the difficulties that Muslim students might have in learning English, particularly from a cultural point of view. Argungu noted that English Language Teaching materials were generally produced with a strong Western cultural content. He pointed out that this cultural bias led to confusion on the part of the students and therefore a lack of motivation, because the materials were perceived as being culturally antithetical and anomalous.

Zaidan Ali Jassem (Syria-UK) provided an interesting and timely overview of a sociolinguistic description of language differences and found that these differences might be manifested in various subtle ways. He said that it was only through a concise examination of the sociolinguistic factors which influenced language choice and language use that the language policy maker could reach an understanding of what language or languages were required and why. In a similar vein, Ratnawati Ashraf (Malaysia) examined the role of culture in English language teaching. She observed that there were a number of problems involved with the teaching of English, not only in Malaysia but also in the Muslim world in general. The problems that the teacher of English as a Second/Foreign Language or the designers of materials for ESL/EFL courses faced included problems relating to culture (especially the target culture of the English which was being taught). This especially related to the extent to which the culture of the speakers of the target language should be taught. She found that this was often a decision fraught with difficulty since some aspects of the target language culture might be inappropriate for Muslim students. She

suggested that a decision had therefore to be made as to whether these aspects of the culture should be taught, with an admonition that these were Islamically unacceptable, or whether they should be avoided completely. Tunku Mohani (Malaysia) described her experiences in teaching English grammar to a group of adult Muslim learners. She described the background of the students and said that if the learners' social, cultural, educational and language learning background were taken into account it was possible to design courses which were highly motivating for the students. Of particular interest was her description of the background of the students and the part that this played in the selection of appropriate materials and grammatical items to be taught.

In their jointly written paper Maya Khemlani and Lynne Norazit (Malaysia) were of the opinion that there was a considerable interest in teaching Muslim students about the target language culture among both Muslim and non-Muslim language teachers. However, they indicated that the reverse—opening the doors of Muslim culture to non-Muslim—was hardly ever discussed, let alone implemented. One problem which needed to be overcome was the question of the schema that the student operated with. That is, the non-Muslim student operated within certain cultural, religious and discursal parameters. They suggested that it was mutually beneficial for both Muslim and non-Muslim students for non-Muslim students to be exposed to different, Muslim, modes of thinking and discourse structures.

Adrian Hare (UK) examined the background to an Islamic approach to language and linguistics. He discussed the pragmatic problems of reconciling the sometimes-intractable differences between the target language culture. He also noted that although Muslim linguists wished to develop an Islamically appropriate approach to language, at the present time they relied on terminology developed by the Western linguists. They therefore lacked an Islamically based metalanguage, with which they might develop such an approach. Ali Ahmed Hussein (Sudan) extended the concern of English Language teachers to the area of teaching English for Specific Purposes. His interest was particularly in the area of teaching English for Specific Purposes in subjects which had an Islamic orientation. He pointed out that the teacher of English for an Islamically oriented subject should himself/herself be knowledgeable in the areas of Islam which were being taught.

There were a number of interesting and revealing papers which dealt with the field of linguistics and how it might be viewed from an Islamic point of view. Ahmed Babiker al-Tahir (Sudan) described the

vast contributions that Muslim linguists made to the field of linguistics (not only to Arabic linguistics). Abdulmunim Al Nasser (Jordan) moved to a more specific area, not related to English and examined the identification and the defining of the phoneme in Arabic linguistics. Much of what he had to say was relevant to the study of the phonetics and phonology of English. Nagwa al-Zeini (Egypt) gave a detailed consideration to the effect of early Qur'ān memorization training on memorization and comprehension from a psycholinguistic point of view. Jassem Ali Jassem (Syria) discussed *The Classical Arabic Tradition of Error Analysis*. He emphasized that the Arabic tradition had a long and venerable history and that the Arabic tradition had developed of its own accord. He said that particular types of common errors were found in Arabic and provided explanations of why those errors occurred and how important they were. The techniques which were used in analyzing errors in Arabic could usefully be adopted to the analysis of errors in English.

Paul Gracie (USA) brought us firmly into the 20th century, with a discussion of the CAIR-NET, and the ways in which it enabled Muslims in North America to exchange information with each other. He described the ways in which the Muslim community in North America was able to use the CAIR-NET to also counteract misinformation and distortions about Islam in the mass media and in the community at large. He indicated that the CAIR-NET had been useful and that he expected it to become even more useful in the future as a means of overcoming stereotypes of Muslims and Islam.

In the end all participants thought that the conference made a lasting contribution to the study of the creative encounters between English and Islam and that it was indeed a very successful international conference.

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