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Shahzaman Haque

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## **Which language for understanding and practicing Islam in multilingual Europe? Case studies from immigrants from the Indian sub-continent & Suriname**

Shahzaman HAQUE, Inalco (Paris)

shahzaman.haque@inalco.fr

### **Abstract**

This paper draws on the fieldwork conducted into the language practices of Muslim individuals in the Nordic countries and the Netherlands. All the informants in the study were born in the Muslim quarter in the Indian sub-continent, with the exception of one informant who is from Suriname. Few works (Schor, 1985; Haque, 2014, 2012; Zolberg & Woon, 1999) in sociolinguistics seem to focus on the practice of Islam by immigrants in their daily lives, in which a plethora of languages are used for different functions. Previous works (Peach & Vertovec 1997; Ogan et al. 2013) have shown that the perception of Muslims in Europe is not favourable, and this factor has become a constraint when seeking to collect data for a large sample of the population. Sociolinguistic and ethnographic tools such as questionnaires, interviews, field notes and participant observation were employed to gain insight into socio-cultural practices and linguistic attitudes. The diachronic case studies have provided an in-depth understanding of the role played by different languages in the understanding and practice of Islam by immigrant Muslims. If Arabic is the principal sacred language for prayers and other rituals for immigrant Muslims, Urdu is considered as an important second religious language for many believers, as literature on Islamic teaching is widely available in this language. Also, due to the rise in popularity of social media and networking and their usage on smartphones and other electronic devices, English has appeared as another auxiliary language used in resources on Islamic

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discourses, and it has been ascribed the role of lingua franca for the dissemination of religious knowledge.

1. **Introduction.** Few works (Schor, 1985; Zolberg & Woon, 1999; Haque, 2014, 2012) in sociolinguistics seem to focus on the use of diverse languages by Muslim immigrants to understand and practice the teachings of Islam in their daily lives. The verbal repertoire of immigrants may represent a plethora of languages used for different functions but less studies have focused on the religious languages. Previous works (Peach & Vertovec 1997; Allen & Nielsen 2002; Ogan et al. 2013) have shown that the perception of Muslims in Europe is not favourable. This phenomenon has become a constraint when seeking to collect data for a large sample of the population. In Europe, Islam was introduced by the channels of migration, particularly after the Second World War, as reported by Fetzer and Soper (2005:2). Later on, especially after 1970, the reunion of families of Muslim immigrants led to an exponential population growth of Muslims in Europe<sup>1</sup>. It has now, therefore, become vital to understand how the third largest religious minority in the Western Europe copes with religiosity through different languages. What are the languages which are employed in practicing the Islamic faith? Are religious practices confined to the Qur'anic Arabic or they go beyond utilizing other languages for specific purposes in religiosity?

From a diglossic viewpoint, the High variety of the language were ascribed prestigious functions in the society, such as, religious sermons, composition of holy books, speech, broadcast and language of communication for all institutions like churches, temples, mosques, schools, courts, parliaments etc. The Low variety of the language has generally no official recognition. Either it is a spoken variety of folklore traditions and popular literature, or in some cases, if it has a written code, it would be used in the lower administration. This was noteworthy, when in British India, in 1835, Persian was replaced by English as the official language of the higher administration. Subsequently, Urdu

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<sup>1</sup> Estimated population of Muslims has been around 25.8 millions in mid-2016 according to Pew Research Centre. <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/29/europes-growing-muslim-population/> In the Netherlands, the reunion of families started in the early 1970s. Muslim families were thenceforth recognized as part of the Dutch society.

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acquired the status of the official language of the lower administration. Prestigious and powerful languages have been instrumental in not only in the dissemination of religion but also in the literacy of the target population. These powerful languages were in fact languages in which holy books were composed. Many ethnic populations of the world were exposed to literacy by the means of religion. Winsa (2005:265) stipulated that like many other protestant countries, Bible was the main source of literacy among the masses in Sweden. Even today in the Indian sub-continent (Pakistan, India and Bangladesh), the *madrasahs*, which are the Islamic institutions of learning – mainly for boys, impart first lessons in Arabic – the language of the Qur’an. The teaching curriculum in modern *madrasahs* focuses on languages not spoken in home, such as Arabic and Persian. Urdu, English, computer skills and science subjects, particularly mathematics are taught as well. As for girls, literacy was confined to Qur’anic learning till as late as the 19th century in the Muslim community, and moral teachings were allowed only for Hindu women in Bengal in 1877. Manchanda (2004: 123), referring to the thesis<sup>2</sup> of H.R. Mehta of 1929, describes the education of girls in the Punjab region between 1846-1884. She writes that the education of Muslim girls were sufficient if they could learn to read and recite a religious text. Quoting G.W. Leitner<sup>3</sup>, a British Orientalist, Manchanda mentions from his report that “Among the Muslims and the Sikhs, emphasis on the reading of religious texts were made literacy socially acceptable”. Arabic and Nagari or Gurmukhi were the only script they were exposed to learn to read only the holy texts<sup>4</sup>. The passionate narration of an 8 year old Muslim girl’s learning trajectory of Urdu by C.M. Naim (1987), testifies the struggling period of women’s education in the late 19th century. Bibi Ashraf, who later became Muhammadi Begum, wrote several essays and writes in her biography on the Urdu education which was largely forbidden :

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<sup>2</sup> H.R. Mehta. 1929. A history of the growth and development of western education in Punjab 1846-1884. Lahore, Language department, Punjab.

<sup>3</sup> G.W. Leitner, 1882. A history of indigenous education in the Punjab : Since Annexation and in 1882, Calcutta.

<sup>4</sup> Sayeed (2013) has accounted the many-known early women in Islamic period who were instrumental in transmitting religious knowledge. Among them, the first name occurs is of Prophet Mohammad’s wife Aisha bint Abu Bark (d. 678) “promotes an unfailingly positive account of educational access and opportunities for Muslim women throughout history” (Sayeed 2013:2).

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In our family, it was customary to teach the girls to read, but it was strictly forbidden to write. Girls were taught the Qur'an sharif and Urdu so that they could gain a knowledge of the faith and of keeping fasts and performing the *namaz*<sup>5</sup>.

The difficulty is to determine the point of history when Urdu became the mirror of Islamic faith in the Indian subcontinent<sup>6</sup>. However, for the education of women, only religious texts were available, which shows an attempt to Islamicize the language. Although in those periods, it had a rich literary collection in Urdu, either relating to eroticism, homosexuality (Naim 2004) or later in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Urdu authors challenged the repression of women by the Muslim community through a series of literary texts on feminism (Naqvi 2004).

After 1947, with the creation of Pakistan, Urdu was given the status of national language but it is still not the official language of the country. In India, Urdu is one of the 22 constitutional languages, besides official language in 5 States<sup>7</sup> and one Union Territory, the Delhi. Though literary works, education, media are some of the main platforms in Pakistan where Urdu is still used, however, the number of speakers for Urdu in India has been reported more as Muslims than of any other religious community. Besides its Islamic connotation, I have argued earlier (Haque 2018<sup>8</sup>) to show that Urdu remains in some sort the “most underrated vehicular language of India”. In a case study conducted in the neighbourhood of Old Delhi, Ahmad (2015) has identified three kinds of Urdu speakers in the city of Delhi : (1) those who were born before 1947 - they speak and/or read Urdu irrespective of their religious faiths; (2) those who were born after 1947 – they were mostly

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<sup>5</sup> Though the Islamic prayers are termed as *salah* in Arabic, I will use the term quite often *namāz* (نَمَاز), used mostly by the Muslims of the Indian sub-continent.

<sup>6</sup> Tariq Rahman's paper (2012) gives a detailed account of Urdu's association with Islam and eroticism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century of the north India. During this period itself, according to him “the British officials and the Muslim reformers made deliberate attempts to purge the curricula of them. The erotic and the amorous was associated with moral degeneration, decadence and blamed for backwardness and political defeat of the Muslim ruling elite. For the ulema (clergy) it was not only associated with all these but was also a great sin”.

<sup>7</sup> Name of the States are as follows : Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Jammu & Kashmir, Telengana, Uttar Pradesh

<sup>8</sup> “Is Urdu the vehicular language of India ?”, Seminar, Department of Urdu, School of African and Asian Studies, BFSU, Beijing, 15 jui, 2018. <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/odTxuPnp-ISEC8vCdVTR2w>

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Muslim speakers; (3) those born after 1980 - negative attitude by the Muslim speakers about Urdu in so much that they call it Hindustani<sup>9</sup>.

This paper focuses on three practicing Muslim individuals from the Nordic countries (Norway and Finland) and the Netherlands, all with immigrant origins having ancestral links with India, and all being naturalized citizens in their host countries. The study reveals the language preference of these individuals towards understanding and practicing their Islamic faith and how they construct their Islamic identity in contemporary Europe based on largely circulated ideology of monolingualism and anti-multiculturalism.

From sociolinguistic viewpoint, my focus will be to know that what language is vital to maintain the religiosity of the participants. From sociological viewpoint, I will try to examine the religiousness of the participants under the framework of two theories as cited by van Tubergen (2013) quoting (Ruiter and Van Tubergen 2009) : 1. Social influence theory and 2. Religious market theory. The social influence theory pertains to the direct influence or relationship of one's person faith by his or her own social network. The more the network and environment of the person is religious in character, the more are the chances that the individual shows the sign of religiousness. As for religious market theory, it is concerned with the "supply of religious products: if individuals find the religious product they desire, they are likely to attend religious meetings" (Van Tubergen 2013).

Drawing inspiration from the religious market theory, I would like to propose another theory which would be pertinent in the absence of the above two theories. I call it the "Religious production theory" under which the environment of religion is created by the individuals themselves. I imagine an acute shortage of religious products and environment, which would compel the creation of religiosity from home itself and gradually extends to the neighborhood and to the whole town. It consists of strict adherence to the ritual worship ordained by Islam, bringing home the Qur'an and other religious literature, and

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<sup>9</sup> Term coined by British from 17th century onward to designate Urdu, Hindustani evolved as a hybrid form of idioms with lexical borrowing not only from Urdu and Hindi but also from Punjabi and English. In the early 20th century, Hindustani gained such a secular image in the North India that Mahatama Gandhi projected it as the future national language of the independent India.

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studying them, subscribing to television channels with religious content or leanings etc. Moreover, using also *halal* markets where all the edible products are decreed as lawful and permissible by the Holy Quran. In the similar vein, “*halal* tourism” is also a brainchild of the religious production theory<sup>10</sup>. Overall, both approaches, sociolinguistic and sociology of religion might provide the significant information on the cultural, religious and linguistic undercurrents of the Muslim immigrants with relation to Islam in Europe.

**2. Participants of the study and methodology.** The first part of the data was collected under the PhD program (Haque 2012) in which the focus was on the language practices and policies of Indian origin immigrants in Europe. Second part of the data was collected in the year 2018. Two families who participated in my doctoral study were from Norway and Finland. The fieldwork was conducted in 2007 in Norway at the house of the Indian family where the main breadwinner of the house who introduced himself as “Faiz” invited me to his home. He is my first informant of this article and his data emanates from the first part of the data collection as well as the second part, when he was re-interviewed in the month of September 2018. We are connected through *Facebook* since 2007 and he has been replying to my queries via this social network. The second participant, Saheed is from the Netherlands, and originally from Suriname, a former Dutch colony. He filled up the questionnaire and he was followed on *Facebook* in order to study his language practices with his peers. He responded to many of my questions through the chatting tool of *Facebook*. He was interviewed via the *WhatsApp* video call, also in the month of September 2018. My third informant is Areeb, the eldest son of an Indian origin family living in Finland. My fieldwork on him and his family went on for a year and a half - January 2009 to mid 2010. His parents invited me regularly for a longitudinal diachronic study on the language practices and policies of the family. Areeb was an informant in the first part of the collection of data, and as well as in the second part (from February 2018 to September 2018), as a young college student. He filled up the questionnaire by email and

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<sup>10</sup> Over more than hundreds and thousands of hashtags related to halal have been created on *Instagram*, picture and text social network telephone application. This has been a new trend. Many photos related to halal such as the mosques or foods are posted. Some of the popular hashtags are #halaltrip #halaltours #muslimtravels #halaltravels. Furthermore, we may find now the Halal dating websites and Halal matrimonial agencies on the Internet.



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gave a semi-structured interview on Skype. With “friend” status (like the other two informants) with me on the *Facebook*, he regularly responded to questions through this social media platform.

Email questionnaires was the first tool in which the participants were asked general questions on the language practices, competency and attitudes. Three questionnaires were sent to them. The aim of the first questionnaire was to elicit information from the participant about his civil status and his interaction in language with parents and siblings, and finally his views on the learning and speaking of a language. This questionnaire was personally structured by me with the help of my PhD supervisor, Marinette Matthey during my doctoral study (Haque 2012). The second questionnaire was borrowed from a research project on the intergenerational linguistic transmission of the three generation of Spanish and Italian immigrant families in Switzerland (PNR56, *Diversité des langues et compétences linguistiques en Suisse*). The third questionnaire was borrowed from the ongoing research project on “Multilingualism and Language Learning” in which the language learning experiences of the students are the main focus of the 21st century<sup>11</sup>. Before asking the informants to take part in the study, I sent them the call for papers for the current conference so that they may have idea about the research project and so that they could participate in the study if they wished to.

Interviews were an important part of follow-up process. Informants knew that the second part of enquiry would be primarily based on language practices related to religion. Though the interviews on *Skype* and *WhatsApp* was for around 2 hours, the main methodological flaw for this study, was not to meet them and visit their residential homes. This included fieldwork in the religious places frequently visited by them. The ethnographical tools such as field-notes, outcropping and participant observation would have yielded much better result. I have applied the member-checking tool of the ethnography under which I have sent my manuscript to the informants and asked their opinion on their reporting of languages related to religion. Gall *et al.* (2005) describe this tool as “member checking is a procedure used by the qualitative researchers to check their reconstructions of the emic

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<sup>11</sup> Project Link : <https://www.soas.ac.uk/world-languages-institute/projects/ml/>



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perspective by having field participants review statements in the researchers' report for accuracy and completeness". Considered as a risky tool because the informants may like to retract certain statements from the study which could affect the analysis, I have however used this instrument because the informants seemed to cooperate further in this piece of inquiry.

**3. Transmission of religious values.** Most Muslim families transmit religious values to their children through the primary sources of Islam (the Qur'an and the Hadith), in which believers are reminded to live in this world with a sense of God-consciousness (*taqwa*), which means to live and conduct oneself with the realization that God is with them and watching them. This message is best conveyed by parents to their children not only through preaching but through practical demonstration of the divine teachings and practices in their own lives. Children from the age of seven are encouraged to perform the obligatory five time daily prayers (*salat* or *nemaz*), and are reprimanded if they do not pray after reaching the age of ten. Young children are also encouraged to fast, as many number of days as they can, during the month of Ramadan so as to instill in them the habit of fasting, which becomes obligatory once they attain the age of puberty. The names of the children with their photos are published routinely and almost daily in the leading daily newspapers of Urdu in India as "*nannhe rozedaar*" (young fast holders). In the Indian Muslim context, Urdu more than any other language is used to convey the moral, ethical and other religious values in children as well as adults. Thus, next to Arabic, it acquires the status of a religious and pure language. Children learn Arabic mainly for the purpose of learning to read the Qur'an and performing the ritual prayers. It is taught in *madrassahs*, local mosques or at homes through private tuition.

**4. Reporting religious languages.** During the fieldwork conducted on four Indian families in four countries of Europe (Haque 2012), there was no mention of any religious or sacred language in the questionnaire. However, questions were asked related to the languages known to the informants and their levels of competency in each of the known languages. Only during the semi-structured interviews that role of holy languages surfaced in the conversation and subsequently further evoked. Often, the presence of these languages in

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the verbal repertoire of the informants were discovered with ethnographical tools such as participant observations, outcropping, field-notes and later they were confirmed in the subsequent interviews. Some hypothesis for not reporting the sacred languages might be the limited competency of the informants, and hence, they may have thought that it would not be “counted” by the researcher. Additionally, its limited functional or almost non existing existence in the daily lives of the informants might lead to its non-reporting. As argued in my previous study (Haque 2011:51), “possible reasons for such contradictory reporting of actual language practices to investigators might be the guilt of shame felt by the informants over the fact that they are not speaking the host country languages, or speaking their first language in domains such the workplace, family residence, and school”.

In the second phase of data collection, only the person from the Netherlands reported the usage of Arabic and Dutch in religious practices. The young informant from the Finland reported that English has been the main source of religious information. For the person from Norway, English too was the main language which served the function of religiosity. English has appeared as the principal *lingua franca* for many Muslims around the world, thanks to its global “world language” status. Many new Islamic chaplains who have succeeded in conveying the message of Islam in simpler words. The attitude toward English from Muslims is not as docile as it appears to be, because the first image that English represents, is of the history of colonialism and Christianity. Then, it represents the ideas and ethos of Western values through the domination of Western civilization since over 300 years. Ratnawati (2005) has shown the negative images of English in the Muslim world, such as in Morocco where “English is often perceived as a tool for imperialism”. Likewise, in Saudi Arabia, she demonstrates that if one group believes English as a basic requirement, another group is hostile “exposing our young children to foreign language and culture will be a calamity for their cultural and religious upbringing”. Quoting Asmah (1992) on Malaysian Muslims, learning English is “to learn the language of the Christians” (p. 120) or that of “the colonialists” (p. 122). The points which I have shared above have been likewise perceived in the Indian sub-continent. However, recent study by Ratnawati has shown the change in the attitude among Malay Muslims. 90% of them have a positive attitude and they disagree with the fact that they will lost their own cultural values by

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learning English. In India, through the lens of economic values, English was commonly believed to be the language of social ascension or upward mobility. For its religious role, the credit may go to the Indian Islamic preacher, Zakir Naik, who founded the Islamic Research Foundation in 1991. He used English as the lingua franca for the Indian Muslims and Indian public in general, for disseminating the Islamic knowledge either in colloquial forms and rendering the Qur'anic Arabic verses simpler by the means of interpretation. His TV channel, Peace TV became popular with millions of viewership and his books in English became a hit with Muslim youths. Known as the famous televangelist, his role transcended from the traditional Muslim preachers, when he “covered contemporary Muslim issues, responding to challenges posed to him by non-Muslims, clearing up misconceptions about Islam, and debating with influential non-Muslim figures” (Haqqani 2011: 1-2). None of my three informants, however, mentioned the name of Zakir Naik, and this I believe is attributed to their growing up and living in Europe.

## **5. Case studies**

*5.1 Case study from Norway.* Faiz, 56 years, lives in Norway since 1996 when he was 34 years old as a doctoral student. I went to collect data in the year 2007 at the home of the family. Living with four children and his wife, Faiz was working in a company where English was the major language. The fifth child was born in 2011. The mother tongue reported by the parents was Urdu. They both hail from the same city called Patna in India. Hindi, English and Norwegian were three other languages reported by him. Hindi was reported also by the elder child but rest of the children reported only Urdu as the mother tongue and English and Norwegian were the two other main languages. Urdu is the main language of communication inside the home. The mother has done a painstakingly effort in teaching Urdu at home. She bought Urdu primers for her children on every trip to India with them.

Faiz has a PhD in science. He has been working in a private consulting firm for over a long period of time based in Norway and for four years from 2014 to 2018, he went to explore a business opportunity with his wife and three kids in Dubai, U.A.E. Previously, before

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moving to Dubai, he lived in Trondheim and subsequently upon his return, he shifted to Oslo.

The second phase of data collection with Faiz started in the month of September 2018. He gave a semi-structured interview over *Skype* video call. The interview was conducted in Urdu with some phrases in English by both of us.

English was reported to be the main language of religion. Faiz describes English as his “real” mother tongue but he told that he was often reminded by others to use Urdu as his mother tongue, because Urdu would represent his Islamic identity better than English. Having lived two years in England with his parents during his childhood and later being enrolled in an English medium school, Faiz feels much more comfortable in English than in any other language. All his resources on the Internet related to religious scriptures and discourses are in English. He listens quite often to the famous young Muslim scholar Numan Ali Khan on Youtube channels. Another person he listens to is Abdul Aziz Abdul Rahim, an Islamic scholar of Indian origin who has settled in the USA, and undertaken the mission of translating the Qur’an in English and other Indian languages. He disseminates Islamic knowledge and teaches Qur’anic Arabic lessons mainly through his own website [understandqur’an.com](http://understandqur’an.com), and also through YouTube channels. Faiz visits the websites and downloads the videos and texts from his website in English. Huge contents on Islamic resources on different topics are also available on the Internet, in books, and on different TV channels.

Faiz finds Urdu to have a limited role in his own religious practices. He prefers always English translation for reading out a text if he finds something written interesting in Urdu. Not having learned or studied Urdu for a long time, his competency skills in reading Urdu and familiarity with its vocabulary is to some extent weak. Contrary to the general belief that Urdu is only associated with the Muslim community, Faiz having lived in Lucknow (in India) told that Urdu is a predominantly spoken language of its inhabitants, Muslims as well as non-Muslims. He gives example of a WhatsApp group from Lucknow of which he is a member, where his non-Muslim friends post in Urdu. Although he does not associate

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Urdu with either Islam or Muslims, yet he is conscious that Urdu has been given the status of a religious language in India. The only religious resource in Urdu he relies upon is a YouTube channel by Amir Sohail, a scholar who teaches Arabic grammar for the purpose of understanding the Qur'an via the medium of Urdu. For these lessons and talks in Urdu, Faiz draws parallel with the channel of Numan Ali Khan, and understands the discourse in Urdu.

Arabic was neither reported by Faiz nor by any of the members of the family in the questionnaire. During the fieldwork in 2007, it was noticed that the male members of the family were offering prayers (*salat*) reciting Qur'anic Arabic at home. Faiz attributed the improvement of his reading skills in Arabic over time, to his constant education through Amir Sohail's website and video channels in Urdu<sup>12</sup>. He thinks that Arabic is a significant language for Muslims, and to understand well the meaning of Qur'an, and other religious texts, all Muslims should master the language. During his four years stay in Dubai, he enrolled himself in an Arabic class, but that was more for his business purposes rather than for meeting his own religious objectives. He has joined other online classes particularly those run by Numan Ali Khan himself<sup>13</sup>. Like all Muslims, he too offers his ritual prayers (*salat*) in Arabic. However, like many Indian Muslims, he pronounces his intention (*niyat*) to pray in the Urdu language.<sup>14</sup>

Faiz has adequate competency skills in Norwegian, although he does not use this language at all for religious purposes. He regrets that the Norwegian is not used by the Islamic community as it should have been because most of the immigrants learn Norwegian and it could serve as the lingua franca for bridging the gaps between the different sects, different linguistic and ethnic communities. He said that every year during the Ramadan, it is advertised that the sermon of Eid prayers would be translated in Norwegian, but he has

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.lisanulquran.com/>

<sup>13</sup> Faiz gave example that the <https://bayyinah.tv/> is run by Numan Ali Khan where he found a wealth of information and online Qur'anic Arabic classes. He took the life subscription of this channel.

<sup>14</sup> Considered as the essential part before commencing the *salah*, Faiz indicated that the Indian Imams have emphasized that without the "*niyat*" the *salah* could not be performed. But nowadays, according to him, many scholars consider needless to pronounce the *niyat* verbally, not being the part of the Prophet Mohammad's practice.

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noticed that the translation of the sermon is done in Urdu, and not in Norwegian. However, the language of the website of the mosque run by the Islamic Cultural Central Norway is Norwegian<sup>15</sup>. He recalls that only on one occasion during the religious attendance of Islamic Council of Trondheim, he used the Norwegian language to address the meeting on some specific questions related to certain practices of Islam.

Examining the trajectory of Faiz over 11 years, my understanding is that the absence of the religious social network and religious market theory in Norway, when the family was in Trondheim, did not have a detrimental effect on his religiosity. As there were people of different faiths and linguistic communities, but no practicing Muslim families in the nearby neighborhood, Faiz and his wife created an in-home religious ambiance that would help them practice their faith. The in-home religious production information stems from the data collected in 2007. The inner home religious environment in Faiz's family was regulated by Urdu language, mother tongue of his wife. Religious instructions were given to the children and discussions on these lines were carried out in Urdu. Both Faiz and his children could also go through the collection of Islamic literature in English that was available at home.

*5.2 Case of Saheed from the Netherlands.* Saheed, 44 years old is a second generation immigrant, who hails from Suriname. He came with his parents to the Netherlands at the age of five and was brought up in Amsterdam for a large part of his life. He reports Urdu and Suriname Hindi as his native mother tongues. However, it is in Dutch, in which his level of competency is high as he received his education in that language and is fluent in it. In terms of his level of competency, English takes the second place after Dutch. He lives with his three children and wife in Amsterdam. Currently, unemployed after having worked in the IT sector, I came to know Saheed when I met him in a train in the Netherlands. Though Urdu was declared as the mother tongue along with Suriname Hindi, we never spoke with each other in Urdu or Hindi. The interview was conducted in English. Saheed spoke some words in Urdu related to religious practices that will be discussed later.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.islamic.no/>

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The principal religious language of Saheed is Arabic in which he performs his prayer and he reads the Qur'an. He started learning Arabic at the age of 7 and by the age of 13 or 14, he finished reading Quran as well as his lessons in Arabic. His Arabic classes were first held at his maternal grandfather's house (he calls نانا *nana* in Urdu), where with some of his cousins, he used to go every day after school for an hour or so. His *nana* taught them to read elementary Arabic and also gave them assignments in Arabic reading and writing. Later, he joined the Saturday classes in the Amsterdam mosque, where Arabic classes and instructions on prayers would be held for around 3 hours. To gain competency in reading Arabic, especially the Arabic text of the Qur'an, and memorizing some of its smaller chapters (*surahs*) in order to perform the prayer were the main objectives of the class. This is also the objective of teaching Arabic to young children in the Indian subcontinent. According to Rosowsky (2006:312), "it is impossible for Muslims to offer the prayer without reciting the first chapter of Quran"<sup>16</sup>. Saheed did not take any tuition or private lessons in Arabic during his holidays in Suriname. Often, it has been found that the immigrant children are given private lessons for religious instruction or heritage language in the country of origin of the parents. This has been the case with Areeb, the third informant, who was given Qur'an lessons. However, with the popularity and ease of access to online classes, teaching of Qur'an and Arabic has been considerable facilitated over the last two decades or so, and there seems to be no real need of employing private tutors as was the practice a few decades before. Saheed said that the Imam had told him to make the Qur'anic supplications in their original Arabic form because of the divine blessings attached to them. The primordial importance of Arabic for Islam has been noted by many scholars in sociolinguistics. According to Calvet (1999:37), quoting Al Gazairi<sup>17</sup> on Arabic language "The language of Adam is Arabic; it is also the language of the paradise. When he disobeyed his God, he was made to speak in Syriac". Calvet says further that the common understanding in Islam is that no other language can overtake Arabic in terms of eloquence and poetry. Qura'nic Arabic has thus occupied an important place in the verbal repertoire of all Muslims, practicing and even non-practicing. Truncated competency in

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<sup>16</sup> The name of the first chapter of Quran is "Al-Fatiha" which means (The Opener). It has seven verses.

<sup>17</sup> Al nur al-mubin fi qisas al-arabiya, Beyrouth 1978. (Bounfour 1976).



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Arabic is suffice to accomplish the prayer<sup>18</sup>. Assumed that the Qur'anic Arabic, being the preferred language of the God, endows authenticity of one's Islamic identity with a sense of rapprochement with the God. During the Friday sermons (*khutba*) or religious gathering (*jalsa*), the imam or person delivering the speech precedes it with recitation of few verses of Qur'an and other invocations in Arabic. Although this may not be fully understood by many believers, yet it provides certain authenticity and gravity to the religious discourse being delivered. For Saheed, the supplications are uttered always in Dutch.

Saheed considers that the Dutch is fast becoming the common vehicular language of Muslims in the Netherlands<sup>19</sup>. Many Islamic shops have also emerged out in the last 5-7 years in Amsterdam where one can find books and texts translated in Dutch. For him, Dutch was reported as the main language of reading literature and consulting topical information on Islam. He also thinks that Dutch will be embedded slowly in all walks of life of the immigrant community. It has the potential to become the *lingua franca* of the Muslims in the Netherlands. Perhaps for this reason, according to Saheed, the permit to build a mosque on a community's ethnic or linguistic grounds was not easy to obtain. Different linguistic communities praying together in the Grand Mosque of Amsterdam indicates the new role of Dutch language as the language of Islam. The Imam delivers his sermons and talks in Dutch commonly understood by all congregants. Regrettably, with exceptions, some Imams prefers to address the audience in Urdu on the basis of its Pakistani or Indian origin rather than translating his discourse from Arabic into Dutch. Saheed found it easier and more natural to seek certain information in Dutch than in English. He mainly uses the Internet to find translations of the Qur'anic verses. He types naturally in Dutch, for example, he said to me, "If I type Vertaling Surah Ar Rahman on Google, it will give me the translations (vertaling in Dutch) and all the results in Dutch and very rarely in English"<sup>20</sup>. Likewise, Dutch has been the main language to get information on hadith (Prophetic sayings). Some mosques (Djame Moskee Taibah, Grand Mosque,

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<sup>18</sup> By truncated competency, I mean those competencies in languages which are based on the domains or to fulfill specific activities.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K-Z90l0f7Y>, consulted on 18.09.2018. A Muslim lady is asking question on the sermon to the assistant imam of a mosque.

<sup>20</sup> Perhaps Saheed missed the point that Google, the famous search engine, shows the result on the basis of the location of the Internet user unless such function has been turned off.

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Amsterdam) uploads the videos of the sermons (*khutbas*) and other religious discourses delivered in the mosque on its official channel<sup>21</sup> on YouTube, which are mostly in Dutch<sup>22</sup>. Videos are broadcast live and can also be watched later in the recorded format. He hardly ever went to bookshops to buy religious books for himself. He preferred to borrow and benefit from the rich collection of Islamic texts of his father-in-law. As for his children, he bought them religious texts in story format.

Urdu or Suriname Hindi has almost no role to play in the religion. Saheed does not see it having any attachment or bonding to the Islam. He can read Urdu translation of Qur'an but with great difficulty. Therefore, he prefers to read in Dutch. He hardly remembers the usage of Urdu for religious practices. Before starting to offer his ritual prayer (*salat*), he only uses Urdu to express his intention to pray, as he was taught back home. His children, however, do it in Dutch.

Ingram and Kurvers<sup>23</sup> have reported that the Surinamese Muslims founded the Dutch branch of World Islamic Mission (WIM) in 1975 under the “absence of financial support from foreign institutions that contribute money to the construction of mosques in Europe”. Saheed narrated how his family, particularly his father-in-law were instrumental in opening a mosque in Amsterdam and he refers to it as “our mosque”. The elder members of the family of Saheed invested their time and money to build the religious infrastructure in Amsterdam when they came in 1975. This coincided with the foundation of WIM as stated above. When the religious production theory was put in place around 43 years ago, the social influence theory was also in motion. Saheed recalled that his Qur'anic Arabic classes were held at his grandfather's house. There was a strong religious network composed of Saheed's family members, and this helped him to imbibe the religious values.

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXcDI9nBuii4GwzJtU44wtQ>, consulted on 18.09.2018. The name of the channel is Alladin Studios.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jtqBVaf5s8c>, consulted on 18 September 2018. In this video we can hear the first passage in Dutch but later on the language of speech is Urdu. The Qur'an'ic verses are then recited as a part of dua, later translated in Urdu and not in Dutch, just before the meal.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledgebase/2-integration-and-the-politics-of-mosque-construction-a-case-study-of-the-surinamese-muslim-community-in-the-netherlands>, consulted on 6 october, 2018.

5.3 *Case of Areeb from Finland.* Areeb, 19 years old, lives in Finland where he is enrolled in the first year of college. Urdu and Hindi are the two mother tongues reported by him in the questionnaire. English was the main language of his schooling. He has a good competency level in Finnish. He took his music classes in Finnish and later his engineering courses, which he quit after one year, were also in Finnish. Working part-time as a coach for the cricket team, Areeb uses Finnish as the language of instruction to young boys. Outside and inside the home, he speaks in Urdu with his parents. He travels to India every 2 or 3 years and while there, he speaks only in Urdu or Hindi with his extended family members and loved ones others, while interacting with them. The interview was conducted mainly in the Urdu language. Areeb did, however reply to some questions in English.

The main languages for understanding and practicing religion for him are Arabic and English. In the questionnaire, Areeb did not report his competency in Arabic or its function in performing his prayers. According to Areeb, “I thought it was not necessary to point it. It has a very limited function for me”. As mentioned before, previous literatures (Rosowsky 2006; Jaspal and Coyle 2009) have indicated that the aim and objective of learning Arabic is limited to reciting the verses of Qur’an. Jaspal and Coyle (2009:4) noticed on the second generation Muslim immigrants from the South Asia in the United Kingdom that “the meaning of the verses recited is seldom understood”. Some prominent verses are learnt by heart in order to perform the ritual prayer (*salat*). But in the learning process, Urdu first-tongue speakers find it difficult to pronounce some of the sounds of the Arabic alphabets. Arabic phonemes like ض for which equivalent may be /d<sup>s</sup>/ but pronounced more or less from the influence of Indo-Iranian or particularly Farsi language like /z/<sup>24</sup>. Another example is of ث /θ/ (IPA Arabic) but most commonly pronounced as /s/ by Urdu speakers<sup>25</sup>. Areeb said that his recitation of the Qur’an had improved considerably

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<sup>24</sup> Around the period of the holy month Ramzan for Muslims, a rage debate erupts over the orthography by the Indian Muslims over Ramzan versus Ramdan. The shifting from Ramzan to Ramdan is seen as an act of fundamentalism by many people including those who are Muslim themselves. I have written a blog in this regard : <https://urduturnon.hypotheses.org/12>

<sup>25</sup> Though I have used the term Urdu speakers from linguistic viewpoint, it may happen that many Muslims do not have any written knowledge or even reading knowledge of the Urdu script. The schooling is done in Hindi-medium. An influence of the phonemes belonging to the Indo-Aryan

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at the age of sixteen when he took a two months course in *Tajweed* over Skype from a Professor in Saudi Arabia<sup>26</sup>.

He goes on to say, “To me, the main language of transmission of religious knowledge has been Urdu.” Areeb came to Finland when he was three and a half years old. Instructions in religion were given to him by his mother in Urdu when he was 5 years old. Basic Arabic lessons were taught at home in Finland and during holidays in the hometown in India. On Urdu he says :

*Shru shru mein maman seekhati thi urdu. Thoda bahut hadees parhaya. Hum sab urdu mein parha hai. Kalma urdu mein seekha hai, kalma ka maani urdu mein jaante hain. Jaise aap surah lijiye, surah al -fatiha, uska maani urdu mein aata hai.*

In the beginning, it was my mother who taught me. I read also the Hadith. I read everything in Urdu. I learned verses in Urdu, its meaning in Urdu. Take for example, Surah – Al – Fathia, I know its meaning in Urdu.

Urdu had a significant impact on him as the basic creed of the Islamic faith, meaning and implication of the opening chapter of the Qur’an, along with some of the Prophetic sayings (Hadith) were explained to him by his mother in the Urdu language. This continued till the age of fourteen or so, and then stopped by his mother, who took up a job and had to take care of my younger brother. On being asked whether he remembered any *hadith* in Urdu, his reply was in the negative. He recalled that on his visits to India, he would attentively listen to the religious sermons delivered in the Friday prayers in mosques and would understand about 60-70% of the content. However, Areeb thinks that the role of Urdu since 5 or 6 years has been diminishing fast and he was relying more on English.

To understand the meaning of a Prophetic saying (*hadith*) or supplication (*dua*) in Arabic, Areeb turns to its translation in English. This helps him to have a better insight into the

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languages, like retroflex and aspirated sounds may also serve as hindrance in the utterance of the correct Arabic sound.

<sup>26</sup> *Tajweed* is the set of rules governing the way in which the words of the Qur’an should be pronounced during its recitation.

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message of the actual text in Arabic. He benefits from the rich resources available in English on the Internet as well as through mobile applications. He often watches videos on YouTube and benefits from talks and sermons given by Numan Ali Khan,<sup>27</sup> especially during the month of Ramadan. After hearing from Numan Ali Khan, he said that “Urdu was left away”. With the availability of such religious resources in English, there hardly remains any need of Urdu for him.

Finnish has no role to play in his life as a practicing Muslim. He only knows that the translation of Qur’ans is available in Finnish. With regard to Finland, his country of citizenship, I asked if he would like to see any national language policy which may help the immigrant community to perform their religious duties. Areeb’s response to my query was that there was no impact of religion on the Finnish society, overwhelmingly secularized. To my question if there were Islamic shops to be found in or around Helsinki, he said that he was not aware of any and thought that Finns were not a religious people. To him, Muslims appeared to be more in number than those who claimed to be Christians.

With the absence of religious social network in Finland as was the case in Norway, Areeb seemed to face the same kind of situation as Faiz. Areeb’s mother was the principal person to build the religious environment in the home. Being a devout person, she directed and guided Areeb towards acquiring knowledge of religion in a manner that did not come in the way of his school education. Around every 2 to 3 years, Areeb’s travel to India intensified the social influence theory. Areeb’s religious practice may be termed as “people might be involved in religious activities to please significant others” (van Tubergen 2013) (parents, uncles, relatives) irrespective of the fact that he himself was sincerely religious. The social influence theory is more in line with the social pressure. Children may be under a pressure to perform a religious act or do some religious duties to fulfill the desire of their elders.

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<sup>27</sup> This video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccQeAECKOWU>, illustrates Numan Ali Khan as extremely popular in the younger generation, particularly salient in the diaspora, in which from linguistic viewpoint, the second or third generation losing cultural and linguistic heritage are converging their knowledge into one language, which is English. It does not seem that Areeb knew Numan Ali Khan before going on Internet. Many prominent Islamic scholars in English are “suggested” or their names appear on the side screen on Youtube. Areeb’s mother reportedly suggested NAK’s name to his son.

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During holidays, when schools are closed, young Muslim male children in the Indian subcontinent are accompanied by their parents or guardians to the mosque to attend the Friday Prayers. Strong presence of a religious network takes care of transmission of religious knowledge and practice thereof. The abundance of “supply” in the market is illustrated with mosques and the call for prayers (*azaan*) resonating from them five times a day, as well as shops selling religious contents. Areeb was exposed to such kind of overwhelming religious environment in India on a fairly regular basis.

**6. Conclusion.** The case study on the three male European Muslim individuals gives a glimpse on the language usage for practicing their faith. All three of them, despite their differing levels of competency, reported Urdu language as their common mother tongue. Saheed does not consider Urdu as a language that has anything to do with religion, and he rarely uses it in a religious context. The role of Urdu has minimized for Areeb, who is now relying more upon the English for religious texts and sources on the Internet. Urdu has also a minimum role for Faiz in practicing his own faith. Among the host languages, Norwegian, Dutch and Finnish, only Dutch was reported to be the language whose function was to understand the translation of the religious texts from Arabic and for other religious materials. It happened so in the case of Saheed, because Dutch was his main language since the age of 5 years old whereas for Faiz and Areeb, Norwegian and Finnish were the side languages whereas English was the main language of work, school and extended network. The growing numbers of Muslim chaplain celebrities have also made the source of reference of Islamic knowledge for Faiz and Areeb. They both benefited from the lectures of Numan Ali Khan. Islamic doctrinal rules entail propensity and special bonding with the Arabic language for its believers. Faiz regards that Arabic should be the *lingua franca* for all Muslims so that it facilitates the communication between different linguistic and ethnic communities besides its sacred role in Islam.

Among the three theories on the religion, the religious production theory was conspicuous for Faiz who faced an acute shortage of social network and religious market related to Islam. During Saheed’s childhood, the religious production was in full swing, and along with that, he was exposed to the social influence of his peer groups and parents and

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relatives. Areeb remained deeply influenced by the social influence theory, on the one hand by his own mother who transmitted religious instruction and on the other hand by his family network in India. A close in-depth ethnographic study may further reveal the theories which with these individuals are exposed to, and which language is proving to be useful to function as an auxiliary religious language.

Heritage language has been represented as the central element in marking one's identity but their role seems diminishing for all the informants. Religious identity overlaps and appears to be, with varying degrees, pivotal in their life. Further study could narrow on the underpinnings of identity of the individuals as how they link it with their religious languages in their verbal repertoire.

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