

## The Origin of Human Language According to Ibn Ḥazm (B)<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Regarding the Islamic perspective of language and its origin, some said that language is *tawqīf* from God and others said that it's *iṣṭilāḥ*, the group who said that language is *tawqīf* justify their position from the Qur'ānic verse "And he taught Adam the names of all things" They said that this is evidence that the origin of human language is God. This group accentuated the pre-eminent role that divine agency played a part in the imposition of language, i.e. words have been assigned their meanings primordially by God.

The counter argument to the idea of *tawqīf* is that if God is the originator of human language, what was the language that he taught Adam? Is it Syriac or Arabic or Hebrew or the Greek language? Moreover, was it one language or more than one, or did he teach him the names of all things in all languages?

The second viewpoint contrary to *tawqīf* is referred to as *iṣṭilāḥ*, this viewpoint predicates that language was established and evolved via a process of common convention and agreement: words together with their meanings were assigned and given intrinsic value by human beings, although both viewpoints posit that the actual relationship between words and their assigned meanings remain entirely arbitrary, rejecting any natural link between the two. It is important to add that later Islamic scholarship accepted that both the viewpoints of *tawqīf* and *iṣṭilāḥ* were plausible, furthermore, within the course of the 9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> century opinions on this topic were ostensibly polarized between the orthodox and rationalist camps, with the former endorsing *tawqīf* and the later endorsing *iṣṭilāḥ*.

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The reason to why I was motivated to explore and write about this topic is so I can reintroduce the Islamic perspective regarding this controversial issue, I will mainly be concentrating on the ideas and viewpoints of Ibn Ḥazm and the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' from this point onwards, I would like to know their views about the origin of human language, i.e. what is the origin of human language according to them?

**Keywords:** language, Ibn Ḥazm, tawqīf, Ikhwan al-Ṣafā', iṣṭilāḥ. human language.

## Introduction

According to Afghani<sup>3</sup>, people in Andalusia cared about language, sciences and literature, other than legal sciences, language sciences were of great importance and influence to the people at that time, and however more one understood regarding these sciences the more, he/she were appreciated by the people.

Ibn Ḥazm responds to the individuals who wonder if the previous generations discussed this topic, i.e. referring to language and names, and he says that this science lies inside the heart and soul of every wise man, as any bright mind would use the tools that God endowed upon him to gain the benefit of this science, while the ignorant is like a blind man until he becomes aware of this science.

He also adds that our previous generations didn't write about the topics pertaining language, this phenomena only occurred when ignorance became widespread among the people regarding the different meanings of the word according to the signs of the language, then scientists made books in subjects relating to language and grammar, which put an end to the issue about words and

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<sup>3</sup> Al-Afghani 1969, *ibid*, p.10.

their meanings, until then were they able to understand the speech of God and his prophet.

He also adds that<sup>4</sup> God gave the human being the organs that enable him to speak, including the chest, the throat, the lungs pipes, the palate, the tongue, the teeth, and the lips, he also provided language with the air that's pushed by the beating of the tongue to the ears, by this, the speech moves from within oneself to the listener, in an understandable language, through a language that they both know and understand, and this is something that is special and reserved only for the human being, as animals can't speak.

From what I have mentioned above, it's obvious that Ibn Ḥazm asserts on language and its sciences: For him language is a tool through which we can understand the speech of God through, referring to the Holy Qur'ān and the sayings of the prophet, in addition to this, through language people are able to differentiate between words and their meanings, i.e. you may have a text that contains a word that's repeated many times, but that same word which is in the same context has a different meaning each time it is used, for this reason, language sciences are very important.

Ibn Ḥazm mentions<sup>5</sup> that he read what his wise forefathers wrote about regarding language and the differences between names which all nations had agreed on their meanings, even they have different names with the same meanings, and this is because the nature of society is the same, but the choices they make differ and vary, they also arranged the information which demonstrate the structures of these names, and what is correct of them and what is not. Among these are the eight books of Aristotle regarding logic. He also believes

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<sup>4</sup> Al-Andalusi, Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Taqrīb fi- Ḥadd al-Manṭiq*, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmyia, Beirut, pp. 10-11.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Andalusi, Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Taqrīb fi- Ḥadd al-manṭiq*, *ibid*, pp. 12-13.

that it is important to read and study these books as they are the best of their kind and useful, as there are four different opinions regarding this topic, and it necessarily follows three of them are false and one of them is right.

This fourth opinion<sup>6</sup> is embodied in the people who investigate with pure minds and thoughts, and then they will be able to obtain light from it, and understand its exigencies.

Ibn Ḥazm considers<sup>7</sup> the benefit of these books to be found in every science, including the Qu'rān and the prophets sayings, the benefits of these books can also be used in understanding the things that God and his prophet compiled, and what they contain regarding their meanings, and the terms which have different pronunciation but the same meaning.

As Orvoy stated<sup>8</sup>, Ibn hazm didn't any study for language, but he expressed his views and thoughts through many of his legitimate and explanatory texts, between his works of Ṭawq al-Ḥamama and al-Tqrīb li-ḥadd al-Mantiq, there is a similar vibe that is represented in the wordings of the letters, that advance the level of the real letter manifested in the idea that God substituted it through his inspiration, as well as the dictionary meanings being given other meaning.

It seems as if Ibn Ḥazm is talking about the logic of Aristotle, which I have mentioned above, he investigated the Greek writings about language and its sciences, especially those that were made by Aristotle, and this also gives us evidence that he did the research and went through a lot of important texts, it is safe to say that he read those texts with an open mind in order to get the benefit

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<sup>6</sup> Al-Andalusi, Ibn hazm, al-Taqrīb fi- Ḥadd al-mantiq, ibid, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Andalusi, Ibn hazm, al-Taqrīb fi- Ḥadd al-mantiq, ibid, p.15.

<sup>8</sup> Orvoy 2010, ibid, p. 495.

from them, in most of his books, he speaks about language, and he gives very useful information regarding the sciences of language.

According to the writer<sup>9</sup>, Ibn Ḥazm observed that the mind has no command, it can't order any logical or rational principles, instead God is the eternal truth with full knowledge and wisdom and the human being is a receptive creature, he has three receiving organ, they include sense, language, and the mind, language is independent, but it can't express anything which can't be assigned by sensory experience, while the categories of the mind aren't precedent or addendum, but are contemporary to the action of the senses.

In the argument about the objective attribute of language, he chose an intermediate answer embodied in the idea that God is the originator of language, and this is what forms the understanding not the words.

Orvoy states<sup>10</sup> that the ideas of Ibn Ḥazm about language didn't have any influence in the Arabic classical studies, except the dilation that Ibn maḍa'a gave to it through criticizing the artificial and complicated theories of the grammarians, and calling for a return to the episodes of language itself.

According to the writer<sup>11</sup>, Ibn Ḥazm's aim isn't to be specialized in language and literature or to compete against those who are specialists in these fields, but what forced him to gain interest in such topics was the necessity for research, since language, is connected to literature and criticism comes along with such literature, he also believed that there was ignorance about certain terms which were used on a daily basis to describe objects, and that there was

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<sup>9</sup> Orvoy 2010, *ibid*, p. 497.

<sup>10</sup> Orvoy 2010, *ibid*, p. 503

<sup>11</sup> Owis, Abd al-haleem, Ibn Ḥazm and his efforts in the historical and cultural research, the second edition, al-zahra'a for Arabic notification, Cairo, 1988, p. 99.

also ignorance in grammar, which is the science that differentiates between language symbols that can cause a difference in meaning.

He also considered language as the basis for all other research, he was cultivated linguistically, and advised those who didn't want to specialize in language to read some of the basic books in this science, which he himself studied in comparative form.

One of his views regarding language is that all Semitic languages like Hebrew, Arabic, Syriac and Aramaic have common characteristics and extreme characteristics, and for him they all belong to the same origin.

This view about language according to him<sup>12</sup> is an advanced view recognized by a minority of groups, of which preceded European scientists by two centuries, he was also objective in his view about languages, and in spite of his austerity toward his Arabic and Islamic origin, he didn't view the Arabic language as superior to all other languages.

Ibn Ḥazm legislated a law for the people of his time to serve the purpose of public cultivation, for this he said that the claimant of truths has to coincide with the Qur'ān, its meanings, the narration of its terms, its rules, the sayings of the prophet (peace be upon him) and his diaries, which were collected to express the praised virtues about his life, for this purpose, there's a need to read the ancient and the modern manuscripts and to advertise the status and stature of the country, and to know the language that enables the reading of the translated books, and to investigate what it is used for, while reading with suffice grammar enabling one to recognize the different meanings of the different terms.

Then he adds, you need to know what topic you are researching in the plethora of different sciences, and the ability to recognize and differentiate

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<sup>12</sup> Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Takrib fi hadd al-Mantiq*, *ibid*, pp. 183-184.

between what is true and what is not, and most importantly to know your duties and obligations towards God, which will aid you in worshipping him with knowledge, not with ignorance, i.e. why and how to worship God, and to know all the jurisdictions that God asks us to follow, and to abandon the sayings and actions that he warned us from.

It became obvious to me that for Ibn Ḥazm religious texts had a certain preference over the mind and its judgments, he cared about language and the sciences pertaining to language because of its importance in society in general, even those who aren't specialized in language and the sciences of language they still must have background knowledge about it, and this background knowledge comes from reading the ancient books of Greek philosophers, and their basic writings about language.

Ibn Ḥazm was objective in his research and study of language, he was searching for the truth, nothing more and nothing less, even though he was Arab, he never declared that Arabic is the best language among all other languages, or that it is the language that God taught Adam. His research and writings as related to language was because of its importance and for understanding other sciences, so one can fairly conclude that language is important for other branches of knowledge and science.

## **What's the origin of the human language according to Ibn Ḥazm, *tawqīf* or *iṣṭīlāḥ*?**

According to Ibn Ḥazm<sup>13</sup>, language is *tawqīf* from God, as it has been mentioned in the holy Qu'rān when God says<sup>14</sup> "And he taught Adam the names of all things" this is called the listening proof. In the same context, there's the necessary proof, which is embodied in the saying that if speech was *iṣṭīlāḥ*, then people will never reach an agreement about speech/language until they are mature, and until their minds are developed, and they have completed all the sciences. Then they need to have a look at everything in the world, to know the boundaries, the agreements and the disagreement.

He also notes that between the first existence of the human being and the time when he becomes mature, there are many years during which he needs education and protection from others, since he is not able to take care of himself for a large chunk of his/her life (usually from birth until adolescence. There's also no room for coexistence between parents and their children without speech through which they can communicate, understand each other, and express their needs, such as the need for vegetation and hydration, and the need for protection from the heat and the cold. Because of this, there must be names for all things.

Some issues and questions pertaining to *istilah* which attempt to show its inefficiency include, *iṣṭīlāḥ* needs time to formulate and that is not available, and how will people agree on the names of all things and what to call everything around them without a language through which they can agree upon?

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<sup>13</sup> Al-Andalusi, Ibn Hazm, *al-Iḥkam fi uṣul al-Aḥkam*, Dar al-Kutub al-Maṣrya, the first part, the forth section, p. 29.

<sup>14</sup> The Holy Qur'an, Surrat 2:31.

He also observes<sup>15</sup> that people can't survive without speech, moreover, speech is composed of letters, therefore the composition needs a doer, and each action has a specific time to where it started, so this composition by necessity has a start, and the human being has not existed eternally, therefore the originator could not have been the human being, and what the human being currently knows started with God, so there is no other option except that it was taught to us by God.

Nevertheless, the saying that speech is the action of nature remains valid, but Ibn Ḥazm answers this by saying that this is an absurd statement by necessity, as nature can only do one action at a time and not many, and since the composition of speech is an alternative act comprised in many forms, then it can't be from nature.

However one might argue against this by stating<sup>16</sup>: habitats forced its habitants to speak in every language they spoke in ,but according to Ibn hazm this is impossible, as if languages are prescribed by regions and habitats then each region will have its own language, and this is not true from empiricism, each region has many languages as many people live in those regions, therefore this statement is incorrect, it's also not from the characteristics of nature to name the water without being named by another name that consists of alphabets.

Up to here I can say that Ibn Ḥazm advocates the idea which says that language is *tawqīf* from God, i.e. God is the originator of human language, and he taught Adam the names of everything in the world, Ibn Hazm depends on what has been mentioned in the Qur'ān as evidence where God says” And he taught Adam the names of all things”, and this according to him is the empirical

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<sup>15</sup> Al-Andalusi, *al-Ihkam fi usul al-Ahkam*, *ibid*, p. 30.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Andalusi, *al-Ihkam fi usūl al-Ahkam*, *ibid*, p. 31.

proof that God is the originator of human language, while the other proof that he used to advocate his idea, is the concept of necessary proof, which is embodied in the idea that it's impossible for people to agree on a language through which they can communicate, without a previous language or signs through which they can make this agreement upon. Because of this he criticized the idea of *iştilah*, although they might agree on some parts about the concept of language or on some names for objects around them; however language cannot come about without having a language that enables them to have this kind of agreement.

Although he doesn't ignore many other people's agreement pertaining to *istilah*, which states that there are many languages after there was only one at the beginning, through which they knew the essence of the things and their qualities, he counters this and adds that it's unknown to us which one of the many languages God taught Adam, but as he mentions it's most likely the most complete language, the most clear, the less problematic and the most abbreviated, he also declares that God saying "And he taught Adam the names of all things", is an assertion that ends the abstruseness in this case.

He declares<sup>17</sup> that some people claim that the language is Syriac, while others said it's Greek, while others said it's the Hebrew language, and others said it's Arabic, he also adds that from his research he found out that the Syriac, Hebrew and Arabic language are all one language stemming from the same roots, but they changed due to the change of the places where people lived, after they moved to many different parts of the world.

He mentions<sup>18</sup> that the one who contemplates the three languages (Arabic, Hebrew, and Syriac) will be sure that the difference between them is due to the change of the terms that people used at that time, as well as the

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<sup>17</sup> Al-Andalusi, *al-Ihkam fi uşul al-Ahkam*, *ibid*, p. 31.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Andalusi, *al-Ihkam fi uşul al-Ahkam*, *ibid*, pp. 32-33.

diversity of the regions which people occupied after they were living in one place, and from this fundamentally the origin of language was one language.

He also states that the Syriac language is the origin of the Arabic and Hebrew languages, and the first one to speak in Arabic was Ismael, so it became the language of his children and progeny, and as for Hebrew, it was the language of Iṣḥaq which then became the language of his children and progeny, and in regards to Syriac it was no doubt the language of Ibrahim, so it is fair to conclude that Syriac is the origin of all of the semitic languages.

But in the same context, he doesn't deny that Syriac is the language that God taught Adam at the beginning, as God might have taught Adam all the languages that we currently know and use all over the world, another scenario could be that it started off with one language and evolved into many others, and was distributed by his children, who lived in many different areas in the world.

Once again, he doesn't deny that the origin of all languages was one language, but he believes that this is the most one can posit as an explanation, i.e. it was one language at the beginning, but he doesn't know the reason why mankind made so many languages after there was only one, through which everyone could communicate and understand each other with.

He also adds<sup>19</sup> that some people theorize that a king had many languages in his kingdom, then he turned all of them into just one language in order for them to be able to communicate between themselves, but Ibn Ḥazm criticizes this by saying that this goes against logic, and proceeds to ask what forced this king to do such a difficult task ,that is without benefit, as it would have been easier for him to accustom his people on one language that they knew instead of making a new one.

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<sup>19</sup> Al-Andalusi, *al-Ihkam fi usul al-ahkam*, ibid, p. 33.

As evident from above, the concentration of these studies revolve around which language God taught Adam, as people differed regarding this point, i.e. some said that it's the Syriac language, others said that it's the Hebrew language, while others said it's the Greek language, and so on, Ibn Ḥazm differs with all of these takes and emphasizes that the Syriac language is the origin of Arabic and Hebrew, but that doesn't mean that it's the language that God taught Adam, and follows it up by saying that God might have taught him the names of all things in all languages and not just in a specific one.

For Ibn Ḥazm, there's no doubt that God is the originator of human language, and that he taught Adam the names, i.e. the language, but the question that was and still is present is which language was that? Was it one specific language or many? Or did he (God) teach him all the names in all languages? This is still an unanswered question, many theories and hypotheses were put forward with the objective to answer this question, but for Ibn Ḥazm, there was no agreement upon which language that was.

He also criticizes the theory of measuring and justification, i.e. it's not permissible to narrow or widen the text by the way of measuring and justification, for him the term denotation is restricted to what we hear from the specialists of language, to whom our linguistic issues originate back to.

According to the writer<sup>20</sup>, this theory in language was established as *tawqīf*, since God taught Adam all the names that people use, and since the self was formatted for Sama'a, so Ibn- Ḥazm refused this theory, since it abandons the terms of the language from its correct meanings, but at the same time, he doesn't deny that people form an agreement in order to make languages, however this will not lead to the difference in the meanings of these terms, i.e. if

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<sup>20</sup> Al-Zughbi 1995, *ibid*, p.123.

people make many languages and invent new terms; the meanings for which these terms were invented will stay the same.

Ibn Ḥazm believes<sup>21</sup> that God created all the creatures in this world, among these creatures are the human beings, then he gave him intellect and rationality as the Qu'rān says<sup>22</sup> " It is he who has taught the Qu'rān, he has created man, he has taught him speech ( and intelligence)," then he taught him the names of all things and this what distinguishes the Angels, human beings, and the demons apart, it's how each creature views everything in the world, and how they view things that are different, and for this reason, their names must be different, he also considers those who neglect this grace in themselves and in others of his kind, as one who will not recognize its importance, and aren't different from animals, as the only thing that distinguishes them apart is the looks.

It's obvious from these passages that God taught Adam the names, and gave him the intelligence to be able to differentiate him from all other creatures, and this is a mercy from God towards the human being, to be the only creatures who is able to speak in a meaningful language in comparison to animals, which can just make sounds when they communicate with each other. This ability enabled the human being to think about the world around him, and to be able to discover the hidden treasures of nature.

Another important point to mention is that it became clear to him that God taught Adam language, but it's unknown to us and him which language that was, or if it was only one language, or that he taught him all the names in every language that we know and use.

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<sup>21</sup> Al-Andalusi, Ibn hazm, the epistles of Ibn hazm al-Andalusi, the fourth part, first edition, the Arab institute for studies and publishing, Beirut 1983, pp. 93-93

<sup>22</sup> The Holy Qur'ān, Ṣurratt 55:1-4

Another point to clarify is that meaning will always stay the same, i.e. we use many terms to call on something, but that thing is the same although it has many terms, for example we have many terms for rain in Arabic, such as al-Ghyth, al-Haṭl, al-Rizq, al-Wadaq, and so on.

So as I have mentioned previously, many terms can be used for one thing, so different words can be used for the same meanings, and we have shown this to be the case in the Arabic language regarding the word rain, one can only imagine the terms used for rain in all other languages.

As stated by Afghani<sup>23</sup>, the origin of human language was one of the main questions that ancient philosophers and scientists investigated for a very long time. Muslim scholars were also interested in investigating and writing about this subject, a group of these Muslim scholars said that language is *iṣṭilāḥ*, among them are those who preceded Ibn Ḥazm, Ibn Jinni and al-Farisi, while others said that language is *tawqīf* from God ascertained for his worshipers, for Ibn Ḥazm, he investigated this subject by searching all the viewpoints available, he introduced the views of those who said that language is *iṣṭilāḥ*; and then he criticized their points using two arguments:

The first is that *iṣṭilāḥ* requires time which didn't exist because it's the subjective work of those who agreed on language, so who were those who agreed on language before the agreement? This question is impossible and contradictory.

The second argument is that the agreement on language can't occur without a language or a set of signs through which one can arrive at an agreement regarding the new language, because there has to be speech between

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<sup>23</sup> Al-Afgani1969, *ibid*, pp. 20-21.

them to be able to communicate and understand each other, therefore istilah cannot justify these interrogations and issues.

So, what Ibn Ḥazm is saying here is that language can't be *iṣṭilāḥ* for two reasons, the first one is the time that people need to talk about a language, through which they can communicate and call things around them just cannot be substantiated, and the second is their need to have a prior language through which they can communicate and understand each other, to be able to reach an agreement about the language that they are trying to formulate, and from this point there must be a language that enables them to communicate between each other, and that language must be *tawqīf* from God.

He also indicates<sup>24</sup> that the origin of language is *tawqīf* and this is justified through hearing, as it's a necessary proof from first principles that human beings exist, furthermore, one of the evidences for God's existence, and the truthfulness of the prophetic message, since there's no way for existence to manifest itself without speech.

He also adds that speech is composed of letters, and composition is a necessity for all humans, and every action must have a time when it started, therefore there was a time where human beings and language didn't exist.

What he is trying to establish is that language came into existence before humans, so even though it started with Adam, it must have existed before him and before he started using it with his family, so the question that is of concern to all of us is from where did language come from? Ibn Ḥazm answered this by stipulating that God is the originator, i.e. God originated the language or the languages that Adam, the first human being used, as if this wasn't the case how could he and his family communicate? From where did they get that language

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<sup>24</sup> Al-andalusi, *al-Iḥkam fī uṣūl al-Aḥkam*, *ibid*, P. 30.

from if it's not from God? And finally how were they able to agree on a language without another language to ground their communication upon?

According to Ibn Ḥazm<sup>25</sup>, language poses objectivity that evokes thought, and the important issue here isn't the categories that grammarians make, but the aims of the living language that permit the understanding, and the development of a language and its public forms is an evidence for its life, at the same time, it employs to its essence that gives the permission to interpret those forms within the language itself.

What I would like to conclude with here is to pose a question; this question is how do we think? I believe we think and express our rational faculties through words, as there's a clear connection between language and thinking, when we think about something such as our feelings, opinions, wishes, fears, we actually think with words, we mention these words in our minds and within ourselves.

### **The language of the people in Heaven and Hell**

Ibn Ḥazm says<sup>26</sup> that we don't know the language of the people in hell or in paradise, since there's no text or consensus about it, but there must be a language for them through which they are able to speak and communicate, and this can only be done in three ways: Either it's one of the languages that we currently use and know, or it's another language different than all of the languages that we know or use, or their might be many languages in use.

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<sup>25</sup> Al-andalusi, *al-Iḥkam fī uṣūl al-Aḥkam*, *ibid*, P. 30.

<sup>26</sup> Al-andalusi, *al-Iḥkam fī uṣūl al-Aḥkam*, p. 34.

While some claimed that it's Arabic, and those who claim this depend on God's statement <sup>27</sup>” And the close of their cry will be: praise be to Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds”, he also believed that Arabic is the language of the people in hell, and he substantiates this because of the Qur'ānic saying <sup>28</sup>” To us it makes no difference (now) whether we rage, or bear (these torments) with patience: for ourselves there is no way of escape”, in addition, they use the evidence of God saying “ Pour down to us water or anything that Allah doth provide for your sustenance”, as well as <sup>29</sup>“ They will further say: Had we but listened or used our intelligence, we shouldn't (now) be among the companions of the Blazing fire!”.

To reiterate, I see that the topic of the language of the people of heaven and hell to be something mysterious. Depending solely on the verses that are mentioned above, there must be a language for people who are in heaven or in hell, but because we don't know the language that God taught Adam, we will not be able to know the language of the inhabitants of heaven and hell, the same thing can be said about the number of languages, i.e. do they all speak one single language? Or do they have many languages to use and communicate with?

### **The debate about the best language.**

According to Ibn Ḥazm<sup>30</sup>, some people consider their language as the best among all other languages, but he considers this a meaningless assertion, i.e. there is no text that favors one language over the other. In this regard he quotes the Qur'ān

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<sup>27</sup> The Holy Qur'ān, Sūrat 10:10.

<sup>28</sup> The Holy Qur'ān, Sūrat 14:22.

<sup>29</sup> The Holy Qur'ān, Sūrat 67: 10.

<sup>30</sup> Al-andalusi, al-Iḥkam fī uṣūl al- Aḥkam, PP. 33-34.

saying<sup>31</sup>” We sent not a messenger except ( to teach) in the language of his own people, and to make things clear to them”, he also quotes another verse which says<sup>32</sup> “ So have we made the Qur’ān easy in thine own tongue, that with it thou mayest give glad tidings to the righteous, and warnings to the people given to contention”, so here God tells us that he didn’t send the holy Qur’ān in Arabic, except to be understood by the people, and not for any other purpose but that.

He also criticizes Galen<sup>33</sup> who says that the language of the Greeks is the best of all languages, as he considers all other languages similar to the barking of the dogs, or the croaking of the frog, Ibn Ḥazm sees this as a mere ignorance, as this applies to anyone who hears a language that is not his own, and this goes the same for someone like Galen, he also mentions that if people claim Arabic is the best as it’s the language of God’s speech, it’s just a meaningless claim, as God told us that he didn’t send a messenger except with the tongue (language) of the people, he sent various scriptures like the Bible, the Torah, the Psalms, and even spoke to Moses in Hebrew, and sent the manuscripts to Ibrahim in Syriac. Because of this languages are equal in consideration.

According to Afghani<sup>34</sup>, Ibn any differentiation between languages, by saying that that there’s Ḥazm ignored no one language better than the other, and this statement was coming from a man who was fluent in Latin and used to read and investigate the writings of Greek authors in philosophy and logic, he also knew Syriac and Hebrew, because of this, the writer says that his judgment on languages and his negation that no language is better than the other is a judgment based upon his knowledge and awareness.

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<sup>31</sup> The holy Qur’ān, Sūrat 14:4.

<sup>32</sup> The holy Qur’ān, Sūrat 19:97.

<sup>33</sup> Al-andalusi, al-Iḥkam fi uṣūl al- Aḥkam, P. 34.

<sup>34</sup> Al-Afghani 1969AD, *ibid*, p. 35.

So, it seems to me that Ibn Ḥazm considers all languages on equal grounds, no language is better than the other, even the Arabic language isn't better than another language as some people would like to say.

Since the Holy Qur'ān is in the Arabic language, this doesn't mean that Arabic is the best language, all it means is that God sent the Qur'ān in Arabic in order to be understood by the Arabs for whom the prophet was sent.

The same can be said about other messengers, i.e. they were sent by God with the tongue (language) of their people, and they got their holy books in the language of their people to make it readable and understandable to the nation that was receiving the message, so languages are equal from this point of view, and no one has the right to say that his/her language is the best in comparison to other languages.

The writer also adds that language in the thoughts of Ibn Ḥazm, is a tool for clarification and facilitation in order for human beings to be able to get their needs and wants, as in the study of sciences he uses language as a tool for clarification in order to make the sciences easier for him, also the subject area of theoretical science has a need for such tool, especially studies pertaining to logic, Ibn Ḥazm considers this science as one that faced attacks from its enemies, and he took it upon himself to refute the advocators for suppressing science, he also encouraged his linguistic thoughts which he practiced in all his writings, and these thoughts are summarized by clarifying the scientific exigencies with public terms which are understood by the public.

Ibn Ḥazm also criticized<sup>35</sup> those who say that Arabic is the language that God taught Adam, by saying that God sent the messengers with the language of their people, as God says<sup>36</sup> "We sent no messenger except (to teach) in the

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<sup>35</sup> Al-andalusi, al-Ihkam fi usul al-Ahkam, ibid, p.35.

<sup>36</sup> The Holy Qur'ān, Sūrat 14: 4.

language of his own people”, so it seems as if God is telling us each messenger was sent with the language of their nation in order for their people to understand and in order for future generations to understand the message being preached

Besides this, the alphabets in all the languages are the same, therefore no language is better than the other, he also criticized the idea which states that the Jewish used to talk in a different language rather than in Hebrew for the purpose of lying, thinking that the angels who write what they say will be fooled and write their actions in a different language, Ibn Hazm considered this as foolishness, as God knows what we hide in our minds and hearts, and he knows all languages.

### **The speech about the name and the named things**

According to Ibn Ḥazm<sup>37</sup>, the views about whether names are the same as the things they stand for or not, are divided into two sects, one of these sects consider names as the same thing as the things they stand for, while the other sect doesn't agree with such an idea.

The sect which said that the names are the same thing for what it stands, depend on God's saying<sup>38</sup> ” Blessed be the name of thy lord, full of majesty, bounty and Honor”, so he said that it is unacceptable to say praise not for God, since if the name is something other than the named thing, it will not be permitted to say “Blessed be the name of thy lord”.

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<sup>37</sup> Al-Andalusi, Ibn hazm, al-Fasl fi al-Milal wal ahwa'a wanihal, al-Salam al-Alamyia library, part five, p.19.

<sup>38</sup> The Holy Qur'an, Sūrat 55:78.

It's also said that God's saying<sup>39</sup> "Glorify the name of thy Guardian-lord most high", must be considered in its apparent meaning without interpretation, since glorification in the language of the Qur'ān, and through which God spoke to us is an entertainment of something which is evil, and there's no doubt that God asked us to glorify his name which is a word that consists of alphabets, either it was written or spoken.

He also finds no difference between God's saying<sup>40</sup> "So celebrate with praises the name of thy lord, the supreme", and his saying<sup>41</sup> " And celebrate the praises of thy lord the while thou standest forth", and the celebration being referred to above is something other than God, as we celebrate God and his name.

Here I can infer that Ibn Ḥazm is against the idea which says that names are the same as named things or the things they stand for, for him the names of God are something separate from God, the names of God for him are words that consist of letters, while God is above and beyond all such jargon.

He also criticize<sup>42</sup> the saying that al-Ism is derived from al-Sumu, and the other saying which says that it's derived from al-Wasm, he considers them as two invalid sayings, he believes that the term al-Ism wasn't derived from anything, but it's a situated name like Ḥajar, Jabal, and khashaba, and other names have no derivative forms, and the evidence for this is God saying<sup>43</sup> "Say: "Produce your proof if ye are truthful".

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<sup>39</sup> The Holly Qur'ān, Sūrat 87:1.

<sup>40</sup> The Holly Qur'ān, Sūrat 56: 96.

<sup>41</sup> The Holly Qur'ān, Sūrat 48:52.

<sup>42</sup> Al-andalusi, al-Fasl fi al-milal walahwa'a wal-nihal, ibid, p. 20.

<sup>43</sup> The Holly Qur'ān, Sūrat 2:111.

I.e. bring your proof that al-Ism is derived from Elsumo, or vice versa, and if you don't bring this proof, this will be a lie that you made against Arabs and God who is the originator of all languages.

He also mentions that their sayings against God and the Arabs are without knowledge ,because from where would they extrapolate the knowledge to know that the Arabs met and said that we will derive the term “ al-Ism” from al-sumo” or from al-Wasm? And if the word ”al-Ism" is derived from al-sumo, then the naming of the dog and the pig is considered as praising both of them.

Regarding the Qur'ān's take on this, God states ”And he taught Adam the names of all things”, from this verse Ibn Ḥazm extrapolates three views, either God taught him all the names in Arabic, or God taught him all the names in another language other than Arabic, or God taught him the names in all languages including the Arabic language, so if he (God) taught him all the names in Arabic, then the term“ Ism” is part of the names that God taught Adam, since it necessitates that God taught him“ All the names”.

And if God taught Adam all the names in a language other than Arabic, then that would mean the Arabic language is used as a translation for that language, as for each name in the unknown language that God taught Adam, a name from the Arabic language must be substantiated, and on the other hand if God taught him all the names in all the languages, then the word ”Ism” is also one of the names that God taught him.

Ibn Ḥazm also criticizes those who say that “al-Ism” is derived from “al-sumo”, or from “al-rasm” then he mentions the poetry of Labeeb, Ila al-Ḥawl thum Ism al-Salam alikoma wann yabki Ḥwla kamila faqd i`athar. So Ibn Ḥazm says that this poetic verse can be interpreted in two ways, either al-Salam is one

of God's names, since God says<sup>44</sup> "The Sovereign, the Holy One, the source of peace, (and perfection), the Guardian of faith, the Preserver of Safety", and this would mean that the name of God is a protection for the human being, and the second interpretation, that was derived from the term "al-Salam" and al-Taḥya", is that of if what they said about Labeed's verse is correct, then what A'icha said: "Inna ahjur ismak", should also be correct, but that would mean it employs that the name is not the named thing, and that his name, peace be upon him, is another thing other than himself, since she said that she will leave his name and not him.

Then he examined<sup>45</sup> the saying which states that the name is something other than the named thing, and those who say this depend on God saying<sup>46</sup> "The most beautiful names belong to Allah: so call on him by them; but shun such men as use profanity in his names", he says that God is one however his names are many, there's also a saying from the prophet, that God has ninety nine names, and whoever memorizes them enters heaven.

So, Ibn Ḥazm considers this anecessary proof, and went on to criticize Muhammad bin al-Ṭayib, and Ibn Fūrak when they said that God has one name, so he considered this as an opposition and accusation against God, his prophet and the holy Qur'ān.

Then Ibn Ḥazm mentions<sup>47</sup> that they used God's saying "And he taught Adam the names of all things...." And that they consider this as an apparent verse which suggests that all the names are something else rather than the named

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<sup>44</sup> The Holy Qur'ān, Surratt 59:23.

<sup>45</sup> Al-andalusi, al-Fasl fi al-milal walahwa'a wal-nihal, ibid, p. 21.

<sup>46</sup> The Holy Qur'ān, Surratt 7:180.

<sup>47</sup> Al-andalusi, al-Fasl fi al-milal walahwa'a wal-nihal, ibid, p. 22.

things, since God taught them (the angles) just the names, and this means that the named things stand by itself.

Like all Muslims, Ibn Ḥazm considers God to be one, not two or more, but that he has ninety nine names, and this is evidence that God is separated from his names; the same thing can be said about other such names as well.

They also protest for the prophet saying that the most beloved names to God are Abed-Allah, and Abd al-Raḥman, and the most faithful are Hamam and al-Ḥarth, and all of this shows us that names are an important aspect but not the deciding factor, i.e. someone maybe called abed-Allah and Abd al-Rḥman, but hated by God because of their vile actions.

He also used<sup>48</sup> God saying<sup>49</sup> “The word of thy lord doth find its fulfillment in truth and in justice”, and “ he taught home the names of all things” and<sup>50</sup> ” Verily, when he intends a thing, His command is, “be”, and it is, so he believes that everything in this world which is in existence is arranged by the “it is” of God, and this is why nobody can change or substitute, it’s also true that God gave everything its correct name, so it’s unacceptable to call things with names other than what God has prescribed to them, as this will be equivalent to changing the words of God, and this is something that God consider a great evil.

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<sup>48</sup> Al-andalusi, al-Fasl fi al-milal walahwa’ a wal-nihal, ibid, p. 2.

<sup>49</sup>The Holy Qur’ān, Sūrat 6:115.

<sup>50</sup>The Holy Qur’ān, Sūrat 36:82.

## Conclusion

As I come to the conclusion of my research, just to summarize, in this research paper I investigated the origin of human language according to Ibn Ḥazm and the Ikhwan al-Şafā', I concentrated my research strictly on Ibn Ḥazm after investigating the historical debate about this topic, I also briefly went through some of the ideas about the origin of human language that were present before the time of Ibn Ḥazm, such as the Greeks, the Mu'tazilites the Asharites, and the Ikhwan al-Şafā'.

What I found through my research is that there are two contradictory opinions about the origin of human language, which Muslim parties and scholars differed about, the first opinion is tawqīf and the second is iştīlah, these two viewpoints contradict each other, so while the tawqīf viewpoint accentuated the pre-eminent role that divine agency played a part in the imposition of language, God taught Adam the names of everything, and words have been assigned their meanings primordially by God.

The second viewpoint which is referred to as iştīlah predicates that language was established and evolved via a process of common convention and agreement, i.e. the origin of language is not from God, and words along with their meanings were assigned by humans.

Regarding Ibn Ḥazm and the Ikhwan al-Şafā', they emphasize the tawqīf viewpoint, but inside this viewpoint itself there are some other important questions that need to be asked, i.e. what was the language that God taught Adam? Was it one language or many or did he teach him all the names in all languages? These are the questions that Ibn Ḥazm was trying to answer even though he didn't specify a text for the study of language, but he indicates his views through many theological and philosophical writings.

Although my research title indicates that I will talk and deal with the ideas of Ikhwan al-Şafā' as well as the ideas of Ibn Ḥazm, I found it more appropriate to concentrate my research on the ideas of Ibn Ḥazm, and this was for many reasons, the first is that Ikhwan al-Şafā' talked about language in one of their epistles, epistle 17, while the second reason is that they represent part of the historical debate about language and not all, as they were before the time of Ibn Ḥazm, and the third and final reason is that Ibn Ḥazm and his ideas about language and its origin need a lot more research and investigation, thus more content and information.

In addition to Ibn Ḥazm and the Ikhwan al-Şafā' and the Ashiriti also said that the origin of language is tawqīf from god, they also depend on the Qur'ānic verse "And he taught Adam the names of all things", as according to this verse, they state that the origin of human language is from God, while the other party assured that language is iştīlah, since they believe that languages don't demonstrate its implications for itself like the mentality implications.

Not just this, they also criticize those who say that language is tawqīf from God according to the Qur'ānic verse "And he taught Adam the names of all things", they believe that this verse is general.

Another view that I have mentioned is by Abu bakr al-Razi which says that language can be proved by tawqīf and iştīlah, i.e. partly be proved via tawqīf and partly via iştīlah.

What I have mentioned above shows us that this topic was studied and debated upon by many Muslim scholars and parties before the time of Ibn Ḥazm, furthermore, from this research, I found that Ibn Ḥazm was answering questions about this topic from one side by restricting himself to the apparent meaning of the Qur'ān, and from another side he was criticizing those who say that language is iştīlah and agreement between people.

As I have mentioned at the beginning of my research, this topic was also investigated in the Greek philosophical heritage, especially in the dialogues of Socrates, which is called *Cratylus* and this is according to the person who engaged with Socrates in the dialogue about the origin of human language.

In the same context, it has also been mentioned in the Bible, as it was said that Adam named animals accurately, and that animals didn't have names until Adam named them, and from this we can come to the understanding that God didn't reject the names that Adam gave to the animals.

In dealing with this subject, Ibn Ḥazm restricted himself to what has been mentioned in the Qur'ān, he was an advocate for the *Zāhirī* school of thought, which emphasized the apparent meaning of the religious texts and traditions, which can be either found in the Qur'ān or the Sunnah.

From the beginning he wasn't interested in his job as a minister, and as I have mentioned, he quit this job and moved his attention and focus to scholarship, reading and writing, he had many talents at the same time, i.e. he was a theologian, linguist, historian and poet, i.e. he was an encyclopedic scholar.

Another important point that forced him to write about many subjects including the origin of human language is the debates that he had with *Abi al-Waleed al-Baji*, they had debates about many subjects, including politics, religion, philosophy and language, and from my point of view, it seems that he wrote some writings concerning certain topics as an answer to what has been mentioned through those debates, or at least this is one of the reasons behind that.

Beside this, the *Zāhiri* school of thought that he belonged to, was a strong advocator of language and the sciences pertaining to language, as well as the meanings and the terms used, and this can be considered as a reaction to the

deviation that was committed by some scholars who were looking for money and status at his time. Regarding his forefathers, Ibn Ḥazm says that they didn't write about language, and the consequence of that was that ignorance became popular between the people, and then Muslim scholars took the initiative to make books which will help them understand the language, and the different meanings that come out from words.

The knowledge of Ibn Ḥazm came from many sources, and among those sources are the Greek philosophical works, especially Aristotle and his writings in logic and philosophy, Ibn Ḥazm believed that these books are very important in order to understand Islamic religious texts.

Ibn Ḥazm had no confidence in the mind, rationality and his judgments, since the mind depends on the experience of the senses, and these senses can't be trustful, for this reason he put the religious texts, the Qur'ān and the Sunnah as first principles, and this contradicts the school of thought of the Mu'tazilites.

His interest in language was because of its importance for scientific research, the ignorance about language and its various terms and meanings, which was also behind a lot of interpretative mistakes. Although Ibn Ḥazm emphasizes the tawqif worldview, he didn't deny that there was an agreement from the people to make many languages, after there was only one at the beginning.

Concerning the language that God taught Adam, as I have mentioned, there was no agreement about which language that was, some said it's Syriac, others said Arabic, others said it was Greek and others said it's the Hebrew language, while Ibn Ḥazm emphasized that Syriac is the origin of Arabic and Hebrew since it was the language of Ibrahim, while Hebrew was the language of Ishaq, and Arabic was the language of Ismael, from this point, he considers it as an origin of these two languages, but at the same time, this doesn't mean that it's the language that God taught Adam.

In contrast to Ibn Ḥazm, some previous Muslim scholars said that language is *istilah*, among these are Ibn Jinni and al-Farisi, this tells us that this debate about language was ancient in the Islamic philosophical tradition, and it became clear that Ibn Ḥazm investigated the thoughts and ideas of previous Muslim scholars, he found that it's important to clarify this subject and to direct Muslims to the right direction, for this he wrote about the topic of language to criticize the wrong ideas and thoughts of the ancients, both the Greeks and the Muslims.

Regarding the language of the people in heaven and hell, he says that it's unknown to us which language they will use, or if it's one language or more than one language, and as I have mentioned in my research he brings some verses from the Qur'ān which were used by those who claimed that the language of the people in heaven is Arabic, but he criticized them by mentioning other verses which indicate that Arabic is also the language of the people in hell.

Regarding the best language, i.e. which language is the best? Or to put it in another way is there a language that can be considered the best from amongst all other languages?

For Ibn Ḥazm all languages are equal, not only that, he considers it meaningless when someone says that his language is the best, such as the Greek philosopher Galen, who said the Greek language is the best from among all other languages, and that all languages are similar to the barking of the dog or the croaking of the frog.

Ibn Ḥazm neglected any kind of differentiation between languages, this opinion was a result of his knowledge about other languages, the second reason for this opinion is that he considers the same for God, since he spoke to Moses in Hebrew; he sent the manuscripts to Ibrahim in Syriac, and the Qur'ān to Mohammad in Arabic.

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