

This report is based on an international conference held at the University of Cambridge on the 10th and 11th of April 2010. The conference brought together leading scholars, military-intelligence language experts and policy makers from around the world. The report aims to capture the essence of the presentations and discussions at that event, reflecting upon the varied relationships which exist between language, conflict and security, and focusing primarily on the Middle East. At this time of heightened security concern in the public sphere and an increasing emphasis on security studies in academia, a consideration of these relationships and interactions is both critical and timely. Scholarship from the fields of history and social anthropology through to politics and media studies has often paid insufficient attention to the force of terminology and semantics in social and political action. This report responds to this trend by highlighting the manifold ways in which language becomes involved in the specific processes of conflict and management of security interests.

Language, Conflict and Security

REPORT OF A CONFERENCE HELD AT THE
PRINCE ALWALEED BIN TALAL CENTRE OF ISLAMIC STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE (CIS)

APRIL 10–11 2010



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

ISBN 978-0-9563743-2-5



LANGUAGE, CONFLICT AND SECURITY

*Report of a Conference held at the
Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre of Islamic Studies,
University of Cambridge, 10 – 11 April 2010*

CONFERENCE ORGANISERS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The conference was organised by Professor Yasir Suleiman and Yonatan Mendel, and supported by the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre of Islamic Studies and Department of Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Cambridge. Sincere thanks go to the presenters, discussants, chair-persons, and attendees, whose participation made the event such a success, as well as Emma Wells and Clare Bannister for their administrative and organisational support. We would also like to thank Drew Mecham for preparing the report, Paul Anderson for revising it on many fronts, and Shiraz Khan for designing it with efficiency and speed.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THIS CONFERENCE BROUGHT together leading scholars from around the world, as well as military intelligence language experts and policy makers, to consider the different relationships between language, conflict and security. The focus was principally but not exclusively on the Middle East. A consideration of these relationships and interactions is both apt and timely. There is a generally heightened concern with security in the public sphere, and an increasing emphasis on security studies in academia. At the same time, scholarship, from history and social anthropology to politics and media studies, often does not examine closely enough the force of terminology and semantics in social and political action.

In exploring the connections between language, security and conflict, the conference considered a wide variety of case studies that range from language policy in Israel to the aftermath of the “Danish cartoons” affair; from attitudes towards Arabic in Iran to the use of “combat linguists” by the US military in Iraq. While most of the research summarised here explores contemporary and near contemporary events, some takes a historical perspective, examining for example controversy over transliteration following Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt, policies of Arabisation in newly independent Algeria, and historical influences on the Armenian dialect in Jerusalem. Throughout the case studies and the discussions, participants debate the different ways in which language becomes involved in specific processes of conflict and particular struggles for security. While research presented at the conference emphasises the historical specificity and particularity of each case, taken as a whole the research also demonstrates that language, conflict, and security are almost always intertwined with one another: it is difficult to study one element without taking into account the way in which it is implied by and contained within the others.

This is in contrast to previous approaches to the subject. Traditionally, studies of the relationship between language, conflict and security have defined them narrowly: “security” as a term related to military and defence institutions; “conflict” as a violent dispute between states; and “language” simply as verbal and written communication. In order to draw out the complexity of the situations studied, and the ways in which these three elements can relate to one another, the case studies in this conference adopt a broader approach. Participants in this conference are interested not just in the state security achieved by military power, but also in “cultural security”, pursued through language tests and policy, and in the “security” of particular discourses: which words can and cannot be used safely. Similarly, the case studies approach conflict not just as open armed hostilities between states, but extend the concept to discursive struggles, conflicts of values, clashes of definitions and priorities, and tensions between dialects and accents. This approach enables us to approach language as a site for diagnosing tensions that might exist elsewhere in society, which may precede or signal the potential for physical conflict. This approach also speaks to the fact that security is often a feeling: *perceptions* of tension, conflict and safety can be as important as their material manifestations.

In seeking to triangulate the relationship between these broader concepts of language, security, and conflict, the case studies inevitably find that there are many connections between them. At one level, language carries information. Thus, security practitioners, such as army officers and intelligence linguists, see language in the field of active military conflict as a means of enhancing their own security by learning about hostile communications. To do so effectively requires a knowledge of colloquial dialects and cultural idioms, which security establishments in the United Kingdom and United States increasingly emphasise in their language teaching. But at another level, language expresses values and feelings, and can manifest social tension and act as a proxy for conflict between different groups. Indeed, political, moral, ethnic, and religious perspectives manifest themselves in particular dialects, vocabularies and even systems of transliteration. This means that language can become a venue for conflict. In Iran, for example, some resist the influence

of Arabic on Persian, either to assert a certain kind of national identity, or because the Islamic connotations of Arabic mean that for some it is associated with the current regime. Similarly, a different case study argues that a controversy in France in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century over different ways of transliterating Arabic in fact reflected different political positions on the issue of colonisation.

Thus, a basic question has already been posed: how does language work? The crucial idea, which many of the studies at the conference take as their starting point, is that language can “act”. That is, it does not simply convey information used by other actors; rather, the use of language is itself an act that can have social and political force. The force of particular speech acts can never be considered in isolation, however. They are always part of a wider field of power relationships in which institutional decision-making, and the influence of competing discourses, shape how the speech act can be understood and received; in short, the context matters. Thus, in the case of the US military in Iraq, representatives from the military asserted at the conference that the use of the local dialect to improve communication with the population in Iraq will start to foster trust. In other words, they argued that, in addition to any information conveyed, the use of the local language is an act that itself has social force: it creates good will. Others in the conference argued that the military presence in this context, and therefore the motives for using language, serve to undermine the possible benefit; foreign military presence is, as it were, a louder language that drowns out the potential for good will.

However this particular case is assessed, the theoretical starting point is that there is action as well as information inherent in language. This leads to the question: what kind of action? Unsurprisingly, different answers emerge from different case studies. In some cases, language can be used to define who is entitled to security. Language can act to legitimise particular groups and their claims. Indeed, organisations like Hezbollah employ words like *muqāwama* [“resistance”] within a narrative of Lebanese national interest to elevate their own aims and affirm their position in Lebanese society. In another example, research shows

that the language of the Israeli Supreme Court favours the rights of Jewish-Israelis over Palestinian Citizens of Israel, as it is embedded in a discourse that asserts the Jewish-Israeli normative worldview as unproblematic. Thus, language can be used to justify particular decisions. It is also used to justify particular actions. For example, CNN defines militant actions of the United States as “effective” or “ineffective”, while it views militant actions of Hezbollah through a prism of morality. Employing different linguistic prisms in this way – effectiveness in one case, morality in another – asserts that actions of the United States, unlike those of Hezbollah, are morally unproblematic. Poetry is another register of discourse that can suggest who should and who should not have the right to security; in this way, it justifies the actions of those who are judged to deserve security. For example, one case study shows how Hebrew poetry on the 1948 *Nakba* expulsion of Palestinians from their homes acknowledges Palestinian suffering, but ultimately privileges Jewish-Israelis and justifies actions for the sake of their security.

These examples show that actors can use language instrumentally: specific words, expressions, translations and linguistic structures are used to justify extraordinary actions for the sake of achieving security. This raises the question: how can we explain the ‘power to justify’ of particular terminologies and linguistic strategies? The perspective employed by many case studies to answer this question is that language acts symbolically. That is, words operate within and bring to mind wider narratives that are themselves embedded in deeply held values and feelings. These wider narratives – for example, particular understandings of history, identity and nation – may emphasise the security of one group over another. In general, because of their symbolic force, words have the ability to favour, marginalise, stigmatise and motivate different groups. This idea, of the symbolic power of language, follows Austin’s notion that “words do things”¹, and runs through many of the case studies presented at the conference. It is explored particularly in the section on translation. One case study shows that by retaining the foreign term for an idea or action, such as *intifada* or *jihād*, the Western media effectively attributes negative connotations to whatever it denotes. If the word

intifada, for example, were translated as “uprising”, it might connect with comparable ideas within the Western audience’s own tradition and find a more sympathetic reception. Because it involves so many decisions about whether and how to render the symbolic power of particular terms, translation emerges as a heavily political act, especially in contexts that are directly concerned with security and open conflict.

In some cases, the symbolism of language operates not only at the level of individual words, but on a much larger scale. Case studies about language policy in Israel and Egypt show that not only particular words but entire languages may gain a certain symbolic association which affects the political relationships, rights and resources enjoyed by native speakers of those languages. This symbolic association can be affected by deliberate policies, such as the way in which Egyptian institutions teach Hebrew, or Israeli institutions teach Arabic. In both cases, it was suggested that these languages have acquired a connotation of “otherness”, which is pivotal in shaping perceptions (among Egyptians) of Israelis and perceptions (among Israelis) of Palestinians. The way in which government institutions actually teach the language of the nation’s “Other” tends to reaffirm such perceptions even when the state’s official discourse seems not to.

Another theme which brings together the Israeli and Egyptian case studies is how the relationship between language, conflict and security can be played out in the politics of space. One case study analysed how language in Israeli society can create boundaries that separate and discriminate between Jews and Palestinians. For example, while by law Israeli road signs must be in Hebrew and Arabic, increasingly the government has replaced Arabic names with Arabic transliterations of Hebrew names. A proposal currently being considered would have signs to Jerusalem direct an Arab to *Yerushalayyim*, not *al-Quds*. This would serve to erase Palestinian identity. Another example of the political dimensions of “spatial semiotics” is the way in which the Egyptian government labels certain problematic areas of Cairo according to the needs of the state. When the state wants to ignore problems connected to the lack of municipal services, it describes these neighbourhoods as

“temporary” or “small”; when it wants to intervene militarily to confront threats to the ruling party, it fashions these neighbourhoods as “haphazard” and “cancerous”. In both Israel and Cairo, actors use language to define and politicise space. By “erasing” Arabic references to places, or by negatively labelling the space associated with a group, those who wield discursive power seek to justify their own actions or to present them as natural and inevitable.

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The conference was held at the University of Cambridge on the 10th and 11th of April, 2010. This report aims to capture the gist of the presentations and discussions at the event. Discussions were held under Chatham House rules, which means that comments are not attributed to individual speakers in this report. Not everyone agreed with every point made. Therefore, no individual participant should be identified with any or all of the views expressed in this document. Nor should the views expressed here be attributed to the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre of Islamic Studies or the Department of Middle Eastern Studies.

SECTION 1

Approaches to the Power of Language

Context: The Changing Notion of Security

THE END OF THE COLD WAR has led to changes in the way that “security” is understood, both by those in military and security establishments, and in academia. During the Cold War, the dominant framework for understanding conflict was the “realist paradigm” of security studies. This assumed that states were the only actors, and that they sought to defend themselves against those with opposing interests: “us” against “them”. During the Cold War, this perspective led to a mutual escalation of armament. Since the end of the Cold War, and with the changing nature of the threat faced by many governments, non-state actors have increasingly been included in security considerations. This has led to questions, both in security establishments and in academia: how should “security” be defined and understood, whom does it protect and endanger, whom does it include and exclude, and how?

In many studies of the relationship between language, security and conflict, “security” typically connotes the defence of the nation against internal or external enemies as defined by the state. However, it can also include other types of security such as “economic security”, “food security”, and “cultural security”. Thus, the meaning of “security” is complex and depends on the nature of the threat as perceived and described by those with discursive power. In many cases, those with the power to define “security” approach it as an exclusive concept: implicitly or explicitly, the security of one party is defined at the expense of the interests and security of another.

As well as adopting a wider and more critical approach to the concept of “security”, the organisers of the conference seek to approach “conflict” in a wider and more critical way too. The term is used to include military, political, religious, social, and religious conflicts, which can exist anywhere on a continuum from active to dormant. Indeed, it is argued that a preoccupation with active conflict encourages the neglect of dormant tensions. It is important to seek to uncover less visible conflicts, and an important tool in doing this is the analysis of language and the power relations inherent in it; this means studying not only verbal but also gestural expression: body language, facial expressions, posture and proxemics².

Language bears a complex relationship to processes of conflict and struggles over security. A main aim of the conference is to seek to understand this relationship in its complexity and diversity. For some actors, especially those in the military and security services, language is used with the aim of increasing their own security or that of their constituency – either through dialogue that seeks to build co-operation and trust, or through gathering information and intercepting communications. For other actors, especially those in political office, language might be used to convince communities that they are secure, or threatened. Clearly, the language of “security” and “danger” can range widely, implying a threat to physical integrity, or cultural integrity, or religious integrity, and so on.

Language tends to define threats according to the ideology of those with political or discursive power; and because power is contested, so is language. For the analyst, this fact can be used to understand a situation of conflict or potential conflict. Language, in other words, can be approached as a medium that reveals the political, religious, or otherwise ideological concerns of those who use it to articulate threats or the need for security. Because language can function in these different ways as a proxy for deeper socio-political anxieties and ruptures, it can be used as a site of analysis to explore these things. It is also worth noting that where a particular conflict is intense, language itself is more likely to be seen through the prism of security. Western interest in the Arabic

language surged after the 9/11 attacks in the US; and in Israel, knowledge of Arabic is also an explicit security concern because of ongoing active conflicts.

Understanding the Power of Language

The conference considered three different theoretical approaches to understanding the power of language: the instrumental, the symbolic and the deterministic.

Instrumental

According to this perspective, speech is a form of action; it could even be said that speech itself acts. Language can be used instrumentally to incite, embellish or moderate conflict. This perspective is often overlooked in security studies; but to consider speech and not consider the action inherent in speech is a dangerous omission in understanding the language-security link. For example, elites can use the language of security to emphasise or even fabricate the existence of dangerous others, or exacerbate their otherness. This is especially the case where the identity of a state rests on the existence of real or perceived differences with (often dangerous) others.

Such speech acts can make conflict more likely. The articulation of an existential enemy can be used to justify extraordinary measures and suspend normal political protocol. The Copenhagen School termed this phenomenon 'securitisation'. For example, the Bush administration's 'speech act' of articulating terrorism as an existential threat from "dangerous others" accounted for the suspension of habeas corpus and other extreme measures in the United States after the 9/11 attacks in the US. In long-term conflicts, such as between the Turkish state and the PKK, securitisation becomes institutionalised: what is normally temporary and extreme becomes permanent. Individuals and groups become permanently cast in a mould determined by security priorities.

Symbolic

The second approach to understanding the power of language complements the first. Language is not only instrumental, it is also symbolic.

Indeed, in many cases language can be used to act precisely because it is symbolically loaded. That is to say, it is connected to and expressive of concepts that are embedded in deeply held values and feelings. Understanding how particular rhetorics are symbolically loaded, for different audiences, is therefore a key part of understanding how language can be instrumentalised in conflict. In some cases, the “value-loadings” of particular groups – national, ethnic, religious – can become flashpoints of and logics for conflict. Thus, the symbolism of language can be a site for expressing, and an indicator of, social anxieties and ruptures.

One way in which language acts symbolically is by describing a conflict and those involved in or affected by it. The words used to describe a boy languishing in a refugee camp determine his situation: if he is called a terrorist, he exists as a threat to the state and his fate may be sealed; if he is called a martyr, he exists in a narrative of resistance and his suffering testifies to the injustice of the oppressor; if he is called a victim, his suffering is part of a different narrative of innocence and violence, which may lead to accusations of war crimes. Similarly, the use of a particular rhetoric to describe events – e.g. as a “battle”, “engagement”, “operation” or “attack” – can link a conflict to security concerns and thus serve to justify particular responses. For example, the naming of a voluntary act of self-destruction that causes the death of others as a ‘suicide attack’ legitimises, and even moralises, a state response. Similarly, emotional language that invokes feelings of fear, betrayal, and humiliation recreates a sense of societal trauma that is politically useful to mobilise a population: Osama bin Laden referenced the ‘humiliation’ of Muslims to justify the September 2001 attacks in the US; Hitler called the actions of the Weimar government a ‘betrayal’, and so on.

Each narrative holds a politically charged meaning, useful or threatening to various groups and elites who seek to wield discursive power. The language used to describe conflict is thus highly contested – a site of conflict in itself. For a particular narrative (e.g. the security narrative) to take precedence over others (e.g. a humanitarian narrative or a resistance narrative), it must succeed in defining every element and actor involved in its own terminology.

The symbolism of language is often instrumentalised by “conflict entrepreneurs” – those who use violence to assert new norms. The conference was interested in how conflict entrepreneurs use discursive structures (narratives and meta-narratives) and material structures (such as conditions of suffering and institutions) to generate active conflict. These people often express narratives of grievance or victimisation, from positions of power, in order to galvanise support. Their narratives procure results only when they resonate with widespread meta-narratives – general conceptions of history, citizenship, religion, popular culture and folklore and so on. This ensures that active conflict seems necessary within individuals’ own personal narratives. However, a marketplace of narratives exists, which forces conflict entrepreneurs to deconstruct and discredit other narratives. For example, a government on the point of war might seek to discredit anti-war, non-interventionist, and humanitarian narratives. Elites might seek to limit the impact of alternative narratives in the media in order to justify extreme actions as defensive and necessary. An example is the current discussion of the use of torture in the United States: elites present acts, which would normally be regarded as unacceptable, as indispensable by placing them in a narrative which resonates symbolically with a meta-narrative that is already familiar and acceptable to their audience.

European Immigration Policy

Another example of the instrumental use of symbolic language is European immigration policy. Nearly every European state requires immigrants to pass a language test before becoming citizens. The rhetoric surrounding language testing is symbolic: ‘citizenship’ implies a sense of community within which one feels safe; ‘language’ is portrayed as a clear and unambiguous marker of identity; and ‘test’ assures people of the objectivity and the reliability of its results that it claims for itself. These terms act within a symbolic narrative of threat: European culture “under siege”. Citizenship appears to be in need of protection from the threat of immigration, and language tests, as “objective” assessors of a language in its capacity as a symbol of national identity (which is conflated with citizenship), protect the nation from threat by controlling access to it. Policy makers use the terms ‘citizenship’, ‘language’, and

‘test’ to make language tests appear necessary for and effective in maintaining European cultural security.

The relationship of language to security exists on different levels in this example. First, the state uses the language of ‘citizenship’, ‘language’ and ‘test’ to argue that its policy is legitimate and necessary to maintain (cultural) security. Second, in this case, language itself becomes a tool of power as a necessary prerequisite of access to the state-controlled institution of citizenship. Third, because ‘citizenship’, ‘language’, and ‘test’ contain a multiplicity of meanings, the state’s manipulation of these terms shows its ability to use language to define the nature of threat, affirm a sense of security, and manifest the power of the symbolic narrative in which language tests exist.

In discussion, it was argued that this example shows how the symbolism of words can mask political inequality:

- ‘Citizenship’ implies a sense of community within which one feels safe; however, that community includes a hierarchy of belonging that marginalises certain groups of people. For some groups, “citizenship” can be hollow in the sense that it does not procure them the same advantages as other “citizens”.
- The term “language” can also hide a hierarchy of value. One cannot speak of language so simply as if it is an unproblematic term with a unitary meaning. If the subject of the test is language, one must ask, which language? In order to pass the test and subsequently gain access to resources, must English be accent-less, or must the accent match the destination country (Irish, British, or Australian English)? Must one be fluent in both the literary and colloquial languages?
- The symbolism of the word “test” can mask a political agenda. The word implies objectivity, yet tests bespeak a certain cultural or political perspective and are thus often ideological tools of

the state. A language test unavoidably tests for culture, since in practice “language” and “culture” are often indistinguishable.

It was also suggested that the aim of maintaining “cultural security” through the policy of language tests might be counterproductive. On one level, ‘language’ might appear to be a useful condition for citizenship, because it has been constructed as a symbol of national identity. Yet, taken on its own, language is a poor indicator of behaviour that might contribute to the nation’s wellbeing. Is it really in the state’s interest to naturalise only those immigrants with good language-learning abilities?

Deterministic

A third approach to the power of language in conflict situations was briefly considered. The theory that language determines thought and action – the “deterministic approach” or the “principle of linguistic relativity” – was first extended to Arabic by Shouby (1951) and Patai (1973), and popularised by John Laffin (1985)³. These works argued that Arabic causes vague thinking, excessive emotion and, thanks to its diglossia, a split personality. According to Laffin, ‘Language [among the Arabs] creates violence, justifies and excuses it’. Even more recently, research from Haifa University published in 2010 argued that studying Arabic, much more so than other languages, is “hard for the brain”⁴.

Most academics shun such deterministic hypotheses. Shouby and Patai are widely regarded as outdated, and Laffin as a populariser. Nevertheless, their hypotheses remain prevalent in some spheres. Barbara Johnstone’s *Repetition in Arabic Discourse* (1991), a Brill publication, argued that repetition in Arabic discourse indicates a proclivity among Arabs for autocratic government and dogmatism. Another extension of the theory that language determines thought and action emerged in the popular sphere following the 9/11 attacks in the US. Several voices asserted that Arabic was a “language of terrorism”. This meant both that some terrorists use Arabic to express and promote their ideas – for example, to invoke a violent reading of the Qur’an – but also, more perniciously, that something in the Arabic language itself inclines

its speakers to think and act violently. This idea, that violence is built into the discursive core of Arabic, is highly questionable, and draws on earlier academic theories of the deterministic power of language.

Summary

In this introductory session, the question was asked, how does language function in conflict situations, particularly in regard to the concept of “security”? Three theoretical perspectives were outlined: the instrumental, symbolic, and the deterministic power of language. The first (instrumental) perspective asserts that there is action inherent in speech. Speech “acts”; language can be made to act or “instrumentalised”. This perspective suggests the need to pay attention to the way that language can act in conflict situations.

The second (symbolic) perspective complements the first: it argues that language often has an effect because of its symbolic power. The connotations, values and hierarchies implicit in certain words give language emotive, normative and political force. Because of their symbolic force, words have the ability to favour, marginalise, stigmatise and motivate different groups in an allegedly natural way. The symbolism of language depends for its power on meta-narratives in wider society. There is always a variety of competing narratives and meta-narratives in any social setting, and it is important to consider how “conflict entrepreneurs” seek to harness them in any particular situation, to achieve particular material ends.

The third (deterministic) perspective runs counter to the first two. Rather than paying attention to the agency of individuals and the particular words they use, or to the force of social meta-narratives, it argues that the inherent structural characteristics of a language inevitably lead its speakers to behave in a certain way. Intellectually, this idea is not robust and does not lead to helpful analysis, but it continues to have some purchase in wider society. This puts a duty, it was argued, on scholars and practitioners to combat such unfruitful and misleading ideas, and thus to contribute to better decision-making and policy-making.

Methodology

Several participants argued that ‘security studies’ is the best place to anchor the future study of the links between language, conflict and security. But it is important to develop rigorous concepts and theories – the idea of “security”, for example, might need to be expanded and critiqued. Then it is important to develop appropriate methodologies: what do these concepts and theories imply about the way in which the links between language, conflict, and security should be studied? Some suggested that academics could develop better methodologies by consulting and working with security practitioners; others disagreed, arguing that the aims of the academy and the security establishment diverge too far to support such collaboration.

SECTION 2

Perspectives from the US and British Military and Security Establishments

THE CONFERENCE HEARD case studies that explored the use of foreign languages within security and military organisations. Some of these case studies emerged out of the field experience of intelligence officers, and of linguists working with the US military in Iraq. Valuable perspectives were also presented by academics who work in an arena that is affected by the increasing language needs of security organisations.

US Military in Iraq

Language Knowledge and Conflict

Representatives from the US military argued that knowledge of a foreign language and culture can be used to defuse and avert conflict. The US military understands conflict in terms of escalating levels of force. Its training programmes approach the knowledge of a foreign language as a tool to deal with conflict at the lowest level of force: if soldiers can communicate with locals, both sides improve their chances of preventing active conflict. In general, security in the field improves when military officers have better linguistic knowledge of their conflict zones and staff who are able to converse with the local population. Others argued that the very presence of a foreign army overrides or precludes the potential for language to ameliorate or avert conflict.

Cultural Knowledge and Diplomacy

Military representatives argued for the importance of culture in knowing a language and thus in reducing conflict. The US military language-training scheme instructs soldiers in the language and the culture of their area of deployment because of the role cultural idioms and non-verbal factors play in communication and conflict. The US military seeks to

capitalise on the cultural and linguistic abilities of the soldiers it trains in languages by deploying them to the same area repeatedly. The recurrent deployment of ‘culturally aware’ soldiers facilitates greater language acquisition and the growth of personal relationships that can alleviate potentially contentious situations. Several at the conference questioned the ability of military training to foster “true cultural awareness”; culture is complex and multifaceted and tends to be taught in a way that ultimately affirms the perspective and interests of the teacher.

Similarly, military representatives noted that Arabic pedagogy at the United States Military Academy at West Point seeks to train ‘soldier diplomats’, which it defines as soldiers with cultural sensitivity and the ability to navigate in linguistically and culturally diverse situations. Others at the conference, again, questioned the idea of a ‘soldier diplomat’, arguing that a soldier’s primary role is incompatible with a diplomatic function.

The Symbolism of Language: Labelling

The conference considered the idea of ‘critical languages’ – a term used by the US military and Department of State to classify languages of security importance, such as Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Chinese and Russian among others. Some argued that the label implies that these languages are only valuable because of their security implications, and pushes the languages into the realm of ‘Other’. Against this, it was argued that ‘critical’ reflected not just a security imperative but also a cultural one; Arabic, for example, should be taught so active conflicts can be averted through communication and cultural understanding, and in order to minimise the other-ness of the language. A similar debate arose around the labelling of a language within the military and security establishments as a “target language”. Some suggested that this label maligns the language in question; others argued that it is standard terminology in linguistics and language pedagogy in the US to refer to the language being monitored or learnt.

Recruitment and Staffing

The US military faces various practical problems when dealing with

foreign languages in conflict zones. First, contractors meet the immense demand the US military have for linguists. While, for the military, contractors aid security because they provide linguists who can interact with the local population, in some ways they diminish the military's knowledge and control. A significant problem is quality control: there is no system of oversight to know whether or not a translator or interpreter is providing accurate translation. There are also logistical issues: officers seldom know much about the specifics of linguistic support and tensions can arise over who is responsible for feeding and housing the contract linguist, and what happens if they refuse a dangerous mission. In short, issues of responsibility and oversight can become clouded; and as private businesses, the contractors' main concern is their profit margin.

Another difficulty is how to use linguists effectively. The US military classifies all Arabic linguists in the same category, regardless of the dialect they speak. This reduces their utility; a gulf-speaking linguist could be on assignment in Iraq at the same time an Iraqi speaker is in Saudi Arabia. Native speakers often provide the most effective translations, since this requires cultural knowledge if idiomatic meaning and non-verbal communication is not to be lost. But native speakers often cannot obtain security clearance, which limits their usefulness.

British Security and Intelligence

Cultural Knowledge

Representatives from British intelligence services argued that collaboration, cultural awareness and linguistic flexibility, as opposed to extensive knowledge in the formal register of a single language, lead to fewer misunderstandings of the communications they monitor and, consequently, increase security. Misunderstood idioms can often lead to unnecessary conflict. Therefore, training programmes emphasise the importance of cultural (rather than purely linguistic) knowledge and fluency, and linguists are now called 'language and culture specialists' to reflect the importance of cultural idioms in translation.

Recruitment and Staffing

Recruitment has also changed, to reflect the desirability of learning several languages rather than just one. During the Cold War, the British intelligence services employed linguists who spoke, for example, only Russian and put them to work in isolation. Today, the intelligence services recruit people with an interest in languages in general and who display the ability to learn languages quickly. Unlike the Russian expert of the Cold War, today's 'language and culture specialists' can add a language to her or his repertoire, switch between those languages in a single conversation, and recognise cultural idioms in a foreign language. The importance of collaboration is also emphasised: 'language and culture specialists' are encouraged to work on surveillance as well as translation projects and to work closely with other types of specialist.

The representatives argued that native speakers, and speakers of Middle Eastern languages as heritage languages, are immensely useful. However, they noted that there are two questions that need to be asked: loyalty to the United Kingdom, and the scope of their fluency. Some who apply for intelligence work may only speak the Middle Eastern language at home, which means they are fluent when conversing about certain subjects but potentially unequipped to deal with more complex topics.

The flexibility and cultural understanding emphasised by both the British and US security establishments, both in the field of active conflict and in the military classroom, mirror the changing nature of conflict and security. New zones of conflict arise frequently, and governments cannot afford to train a cadre of specialists dedicated only to the language of a specific area.

Pedagogy*Dialects and Linguistic Sensitivity*

As well as 'cultural sensitivity', the US Military Academy at West Point aims to teach sensitivity to the dynamics of language in general. Arabic pedagogy includes both Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Egyptian colloquial. Instructors of Modern Standard Arabic use news media to

teach the diversity of the language and culture, comparing state-run papers with opposition ones, and reputable Arab newspapers with reputable US dailies. Students discuss the differences in the way news is portrayed in the press, used by the state, and received by the public. West Point teaches both Egyptian colloquial and – importantly – strategies to negotiate between the various dialects. If the student learns Egyptian dialect, he or she can still communicate in Morocco, without formal training in Moroccan dialect. Colloquial and MSA instruction come together in online comments on news articles and satellite programmes with viewer involvement – such as BBC Arabic’s *nuqtat ḥiwār* (“Talking Point”). In the BBC programme, students see first-hand how native Arabic speakers from various Arab countries negotiate their different dialects and communicate with each other. Code-switching strategies (the ability to switch between dialects or formal and informal registers of a language) and an awareness of the language-culture link enable the students to be more versatile and flexible linguists, regardless of the particular language in which they were trained.

The Military-Security Establishments and the Academy

It was noted that the US and UK military and diplomatic corps have consistently found it difficult to recruit enough qualified speakers of Middle Eastern languages; even linguists who pass the requirements for proficiency established by the organisation for which they work refrain from public speaking in the foreign language because they lack confidence and fear they will appear less proficient than they ought to be and face demotion. After the 9/11 attacks in the US, the needs of the US and UK security establishments for linguists with better language capabilities intensified, and high goals were set for in-house language training programmes. However, the supply of qualified teachers remains insufficient.

Some participants suggested that the security establishment could work more closely with universities to help meet this need for qualified speakers and teachers. It was argued that the current structure of Middle East and Oriental Studies departments – where graduate students and adjunct faculty teach language, while tenured positions are reserved for

area studies specialists, and experts in literature and linguistic theory – discourages students from further study of the language. Some at the conference advocated tailored university courses in translation and cryptology, government-funded post-doctoral fellowships in pedagogy and applied linguistics, and regular meetings of government, military and academic language professionals to develop programmes that meet the needs of a security situation in constant flux.

Others at the conference noted that university departments exist to produce new knowledge and to provide well-grounded understanding that supports a vibrant society, not to train apprentices in specific skills required by the security establishment. Although the academic arena is already affected by the needs and priorities of the security establishment, it is vital to preserve the independence of universities from the state, for example in the ambit and direction of research and in the provision of education that will enable individuals to fulfil their potential and contribute to society. A concern was expressed that the security establishment in the US has dominated some university language programmes for its own use, and that this compromises academic and educational freedom.

That is not to say that language pedagogy should be static; it is a developing field where it is important to keep abreast of changes. In terms of method, it was suggested that the best paradigms of instruction match the reasons the student chooses to study a language; many students are interested in modern culture and media, and using the spoken language to interact with people – consequently, it was suggested, the classical, literary canon should be fully complemented with cultural and media materials. The normal method of teaching European languages – starting with conversational rather than literary language – might be fruitfully applied to the teaching of Middle Eastern languages, especially Arabic. More emphasis could be put on vital communication skills such as dialect and code-switching. Finally, more immersion experience, even within the Western classroom, as well as the possible addition of an extra year to a BA degree, would help to produce more competent speakers of Middle Eastern languages.

SECTION 3

National Language Programmes and the Language of the “Other”

NATIONAL LANGUAGE PROGRAMMES that teach the language of a nation’s ‘Other’ provide another source of data to study the relationship between security, conflict and language. The conference considered the teaching of Arabic in Israel, Hebrew in Egypt, and Persian in Syria. In all cases, the status of the ‘other’ language reveals socio-political conditions and attitudes within the country that have implications for security.

Arabic in Israel

Policy and Perceptions

Arabic language policy in Israel is double-sided: Arabic is an official language, but in many ways it has a second-class status and is mainly associated with security concerns. The status of the Arabic language in Israel mirrors the status of the Palestinians in the country. Just as Arabic is an official language, Palestinians hold citizenship in Israel; but Palestinian citizenship of Israel is in many ways hollow, and there are many qualifiers to the official status of the language. Some noted that despite its official status, Arabic is non-essential to life in Israel in the official domain, except for security purposes. A 2003 survey by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics reported that 79% of adult Jews had no knowledge of Arabic. A comparable ignorance of Hebrew among Palestinians in Israel would result in the speaker’s marginalisation and exclusion from Israeli society. Further, despite the existence of Arabic schools in Israel, no university teaches in Arabic. Universities require Hebrew and English competency before admission, but not Arabic, despite its official status.

Regarding perceptions of Arabic, it was noted that in schools, Arabic is an obligatory subject in Israel between grades seven and ten. Yet, in 2008 only 3,665 Jewish students chose to continue their study of Arabic as an optional subject for the *Bagrut* (matriculation certificate, similar to English A-levels). The Szold Institute for Research in the Behavioural Sciences in Israel reported that 50% of Jewish Arabic teachers in Israel cite the low image of Arabic as the main obstacle in wanting to learn the language, which, some argue, contributes to the idea that the main motivation for learning the language tends to be security-related. Many Israeli Jews see Arabic as the language of the ignorant and generally low 'Other', or as the hated language of the enemy. Not only do these facts reveal Israeli Jews' general complacency toward – and for some, disdain for – Arabic, they also show that Arabic is essentially a 'foreign' language in Israel.

Implications for Security

As a consequence of these perceptions and policies, Arabic has a low status in Israel. This fact poses a security threat, in two ways. Firstly, Israeli language policy and the second-class status of Arabic, which reflects the second-class status of the Palestinians, foster resentment that has the potential to spark active conflict, according to anecdotal evidence presented at the conference. It is certainly true that many Israeli Jews explain the marginalisation of Arabic in functional terms, arguing that Hebrew is dominant simply because it is more widely understood, including by Palestinian citizens of Israel. But some Palestinians feel that Hebrew language policy – such as Hebrew language tests for university admission and jobs – aims to turn Palestinians into Jews culturally. Others say that language policy in Israel is an attempt to expel its Palestinians from the state; they argue that full fluency in Hebrew requires knowledge of Judaism and Jewish culture and that language tests capitalise on Palestinian's ignorance of Judaic terminology in order to criticise their overall ability in Hebrew. Language policy and conflict feed off each other: negative Jewish-Israeli perceptions of Arabic contribute to Palestinian resentment, which in turn encourages negative Israeli perceptions of Arabic.

Secondly, ignorance of the language used by potentially hostile groups undermines Israeli security. The Israeli Military Intelligence Directorate (*Agaf Ha-Modi'in*, or AMAN) relies on Arabic speakers, yet the low status of Arabic in Israel discourages Jewish Israelis from learning the language. To encourage students in the study of Arabic, and thereby increase its potential cadre of Arabic speakers, AMAN created the *Telem*'s unit to promote Oriental Studies. One of *Telem*'s many initiatives is a programme called *Makne Da'at* ["Provider of Wisdom"] that has the same purpose. These efforts ultimately seek to increase security by encouraging more students to study Arabic and by offering extra-curricular training to make them more useful to the security establishment.

Policies that link Arabic to "security"

Makne Da'at, as one prominent example of *Telem*'s projects, links the Arabic language with security. To convince students to choose Arabic as optional subjects for the *Bagrut* ("A-levels"), *Telem* offers short military experiences for students of Arabic. In grade ten, students taking Arabic can participate in *Telem*-run 'Oriental Youth Battalions' [*Gadna' Mizrahanim*]. The curriculum of this four-day training seminar and camp includes the importance of studying Arabic, the role of Arabic in the intelligence unit, Arab culture and current events, a listening course, a course on terror organisations and physical activities. The 'Oriental Youth Battalions' experience provides exposure to spoken Arabic, which is not present in the classroom, and a taste of army experience. In grade eleven, after students have chosen their *Bagrut* subjects, students of Arabic can participate in a programme called 'Intelligence on the Horizon' (*Modi'in ba-Ofek*). AMAN hopes that this two-day seminar will encourage students to continue with Arabic – many students drop out – and to choose a career in intelligence. 'Intelligence on the Horizon' covers intelligence, Arabic, global terror, Islam, and military heritage (i.e. stories of glorious military exploits and brave soldiers). After this, *Telem* invites Arabic students on tours of the Intelligence Memorial Museum where they hear stories of captured Israeli spies and can simulate encryption.

These programmes seek to encourage students who chose Arabic as an optional subject to continue in their study. The programme sends soldiers in uniform into Arabic classrooms to explain the benefits of studying Arabic and to promote a career in intelligence. It should be noted that none of these programmes operates officially under the auspices of the Ministry of Education; each school that participates does so on a voluntary basis. However, some at the conference argued that the Ministry of Education tacitly supports the programmes by allowing them to fill a gap in Arabic pedagogy that the Ministry ought to fill.

Thus, Israeli Military Intelligence seeks to train school students in the linguistic and extra-linguistic skills that it requires, and to increase the numbers of students taking Arabic so that it will have a larger and better selection of graduated students from which to recruit. These efforts connect Arabic to security. Like its American and British counterparts, AMAN recognises that for Arabic knowledge to contribute to security, its cadre of Arabic speakers must know colloquial and spoken Arabic. Indeed, while Arabic pedagogy in Jewish-Israeli schools emphasises Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), *Telem* seeks to fill the gap in Arabic pedagogy by offering students materials in Palestinian colloquial and media Arabic (a formal, educated register, but not fully MSA). AMAN also recognises that its Arabic speakers must know more than the language itself. *Telem* seeks to supplement Arabic education with training in skills useful to security, such as encryption, loyalty to Israel and the army, and cultural awareness, although the ‘culture’ of which *Telem* encourages awareness includes an emphasis on ‘terrorism’ rather than Arab music and literature.

Implications of the “Security Prism”

These efforts to encourage the study of Arabic link it with the security establishment, and ensure that the language is seen mainly through the prism of security. Indeed, as a military-run unit, *Telem* treats Arabic as a security necessity and little else. Ironically, as some at the conference asserted, the Israeli security establishment hopes to increase security by training more Arabic speakers; however, this effort fashions Arabic as an enemy language, which fosters resentment among Palestinians

frustrated by the low status of Arabic in Israel. Furthermore, Military Intelligence is one of the only sources of colloquial Arabic material; therefore, many Jewish Israelis with the capacity to speak to Arabs on the street learned colloquial Arabic in a setting antagonistic to Palestinians.

Some of the multi-media *Telem* provides emphasise the cultural and personal side of Arabic, such as posters that show Muslim festivals or the Five Pillars of Islam, media recordings, and examples of Arabic proverbs. One of *Telem*'s posters lists the 'top-ten' reasons to study Arabic. At the top of the list are reasons like: "an additional foreign language is always an advantage" (implying that Arabic is a foreign language despite its official status); "Arabic is a means to learn about culture"; "Arabic can open personal contacts", and so on. At the bottom of the list are other reasons: Arabic studies in school involve activities with intelligence units and qualified students can hope for a career in military intelligence. The list can be interpreted in different ways. In the United States, where the 'top-ten' genre originates, a lower position on the list indicates a more important reason, but it is unclear if that is the intention in this case. Some at the conference argued that the association of Arabic with security appears at the bottom of the list because the Israeli military wants its motives to be less apparent.

In summary, *Telem* produces materials that imbue Arabic with both cultural and security significance. It is difficult to appraise the impact of the less overtly militaristic materials on students' conceptions of Arabic and Palestinians. Similarly, it is difficult to prove the assertion that Arabic occupies a wholly negative position in Israeli pedagogy. However, it is undoubtedly the case that the materials without direct security implications are presented in a context that is otherwise overwhelmingly imbued with security significance. Some suggested that "purely cultural" materials inevitably become imbued with connotations of security when they are presented by a military organisation. The risk in presenting Arabic language and culture through the security prism is that it demonises it and generates resentment towards the status of Arabic in Israel.

Hebrew in Egypt

In Egypt, the status of Hebrew differs from the status of Arabic in Israel in that it is not an official language and few Egyptians speak Hebrew as their native language; however, the similarities between the two cases are otherwise strong. In both countries, the language of the 'Other' meets with demonisation and is linked with security concerns, and in Egypt, it was argued, Hebrew is connected both instrumentally and symbolically to security. Knowledge of Hebrew represents the adage 'know thy enemy' – Egyptian state security benefits from understanding Israeli communications – but additional significance lies in the symbolic place of Hebrew in the Egyptian consciousness. In the estimation of some at the conference, the status of Hebrew in Egypt can demonise Israel or can aid the normalisation of relations between the countries by humanising Israelis.

Hebrew pedagogy in Egyptian universities began in the first half of the twentieth century when scholars in Egypt taught Hebrew alongside other Semitic languages such as Akkadian, Syriac and Aramaic in order to examine the linguistic relationship between those languages and Arabic. The placement of Hebrew in this context fashions it as either a dead language or important only insofar as it relates to Arabic. However, after the onset of active conflict in the middle of the twentieth century, Hebrew studies emphasised the 'Israeli dimension' over comparative linguistics, and sought to access that dimension via three stages of literature: the Bible and ancient Hebrew literature, medieval Hebrew literature and its relationship with Arabic (including the *haskalah* movement), and modern Hebrew poetry, short stories, drama and so on. This formulation of Hebrew studies examined Hebrew on its own terms – except for the medieval connection with Arabic literature – but without ever being able to dissociate itself from the politics surrounding the language in its Middle Eastern context.

The advent of active conflict propelled the study of Hebrew in Egypt from that of a dead language relevant mainly to the study of Semitic philology to that of a living language and culture. Some at the conference argued that the post-conflict conception of Hebrew as a living,

vibrant language humanised Israelis and was a necessary step in aiding the normalisation of cultural relations between Egypt and Israel. It should be added, however, that the potential utility of Hebrew to normalise cultural relations is not necessarily realised just because universities structure their pedagogy in a way conducive to the conception of Israelis as peaceful neighbours; many conference participants felt that despite the symbolic interpretation of Hebrew pedagogy in Egypt, Hebrew represents nothing more than the language of the enemy and Egyptians demonise it accordingly.

In the case of both Arabic in Israel, and Hebrew in Egypt, policy makers highlight the importance of studying these languages as a bridge for understanding between people. However, in both cases the reality is often far from this stated ideal.

Persian in Syria

Persian in Syria does not represent the language of an enemy, yet Persian language pedagogy has political ramifications and signals a political agenda. Research presented at the conference suggested that Iran uses the Persian language as a tool of cultural diplomacy to strengthen political relations between Syria and Iran. Some in Syria resent the political dimension they perceive to pervade the Persian language programmes, but overall, these programmes are well received and encouraged by the state and universities.

Syria and Iran reaffirmed political relations soon after the Islamic Revolution; however, relations on a popular level remained ambiguous. To improve cultural relations, Iran promoted Persian language programmes in Syria, first at Iranian-funded Persian cultural centres and later, in the 1990s, at universities. Initially, Syrian universities marginalised Persian; the Iranian government, via the cultural centres, provided universities with enough materials and teachers to achieve limited but, it transpired, inconsistent teaching. In the mid-1990s, the Iranian cultural attaché in Syria recommended increased Iranian involvement to meet student demand to study Persian. Students, he wrote, wanted to take Persian because of the cultural congruence

between the two nations and the many Iranian visitors to Syria, but resources in Syrian universities prevented them. Whether or not the attaché's assessment of student demand for Persian is accurate, it is clear that Iran increased efforts to promulgate Persian in Syria. By 1996, Persian language courses were well established at four major universities and in 2005 the first Persian language department opened. Speeches by Iranian diplomats and Syrian state officials accompanied the event and emphasised the ability of language-learning to cultivate bilateral relations. Since then, two more universities have opened, or have plans to open, departments of Persian.

The involvement of the Iranian government in Persian teaching in Syria extends deeper than the recommendations for more and better Persian courses. A committee comprised of Iranian diplomats and Persian language teachers in Syria, most of whom are Iranian, determines Persian language curriculum; the curriculum includes courses on history and Islamic philosophy, in addition to the language. Persian in Syria is unique among foreign languages: no other foreign language department experiences the involvement of another state. Neither Syria nor Iran tries to hide the political aspects of language teaching and Iran's direct involvement in the pedagogy; most Syrians, according to the research presented, support Persian studies and Iranian oversight of those studies, although a former Syrian professor, interviewed in 2009, angrily felt that Iran used Persian departments to spread its propaganda, not to teach the language.

This example shows again that the teaching of a foreign language can have social and political ramifications. Persian language programmes in Syria operate under the influence of Iranian state structures. Both countries recognise the ability of language to shape social opinion of the 'Other' and foster cultural relations. Involvement in Persian pedagogy allows Iran to control the image of the country the language conveys; in this way language can be seen as a tool of the Iranian state to stimulate and solidify a political relationship that ultimately serves Iranian interests and security.

Summary

From the case studies examined in the conference, foreign language programmes seem to have the ability to foster physical, state security, directly and indirectly, either by increasing knowledge of the Other's actions and communications or by shaping perceptions of the 'Other'. In the way they teach Arabic and Hebrew, respectively, Israeli and Egyptian institutions put emphasis on 'knowing their enemy'; Iran, on the other hand, uses Persian to bolster state security, but less directly. Persian teaching in Syria allows Iran to spread cultural ties that solidify political ties. Each case manifests the ability of a language to shape perceptions of the culture and people that language represents, which, as some argued at the conference, Iran manipulates for its own good and Israel as well as Egypt dangerously ignore.

SECTION 4

Language and Selective Security: “Security for Whom?”

ANOTHER SET OF CASE STUDIES showed how different groups use language, particularly descriptive names and epithets, to define themselves as the right recipients of security, and thus to justify their actions as necessary to keep themselves secure.

Hezbollah

For example, Hezbollah uses the word *muqāwama*, or resistance, to define its goals and actions as beneficial to Lebanon as a whole. In party publications and speeches, Hezbollah surrounds ‘the resistance’ with rhetoric of the nation, its people, and dignity. The ‘resistance’ becomes an actor that acts in the best interest of all Lebanese. After the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon in 2006, Hezbollah secretary-general, Hassan Nasrallah, stated that the victory of the resistance had been a victory of the Lebanese people; the people of Lebanon achieved a victory, not Hezbollah. Although other political factions in Lebanon often accuse Hezbollah of inciting civil war, the organisation’s rhetoric suggests that in fact the ‘resistance’ keeps the type of factional warfare seen in Iraq out of Lebanon. By blurring the line between Hezbollah and Lebanon, Hezbollah casts its actions as just defence of Lebanon, regardless of the outcome. Furthermore, the organisation benefits from the intertextuality of the term *muqāwama*; by using a term many other groups in the Arab world use, Hezbollah aligns its resistance with theirs, and casts itself as part of a regional resistance to Israel and global resistance to the United States and ‘Western imperialism’.

In 2009, Hezbollah revised its charter, the *wathīqa*. After three years of internal political crisis in Lebanon – in which some argue Hezbollah

occupied a central position, particularly because of its connection to Syria and its use of armed force against other Lebanese–Hezbollah articulated stronger than ever the notion that ‘the resistance’ represents all of the Lebanese people; indeed, the resistance is the Lebanese people. In the charter, Hezbollah relates the history of Israeli intervention in Lebanon since 1982 and articulates its own involvement in the third person; the organisation becomes an external observer, yet describes its own actions in a way that casts them as the just actions of all Lebanese. Two points about Hezbollah were raised at the conference. First, Hezbollah’s intensified portrayal of itself as representing a unified Lebanon followed militant actions in 2006 that in fact divided Lebanese people. Second, Hezbollah is not unique in fashioning itself as a speaker for an entire society or justifying its actions as defensive. Hamas and Fatah both speak in the name of “our people” (*sha‘bunā*).

Israeli Supreme Court

Hezbollah uses the terminology of resistance to portray its actions as in the best interest of the Lebanese. This allows the organisation to elevate its own interests – ultimately, its own security – above those of other movements in the country. Another case study examined the Israeli Supreme Court’s use of specific words, loaded with symbolic meaning, to guarantee security for Jewish-Israelis. Two seemingly irreconcilable normative worlds struggle for representation in the Court, and because of its ostensible objectivity, the Court represents an important battleground. In it, participants hope to receive equal hearing, fair consideration, and gain a victory that carries the legitimacy of the Court. However, the presenter argued that the language of the Supreme Court rulings favours the Jewish-Israeli normative world; Jewish-Israeli terminology dominates in the rulings and marginalises the hardly audible Palestinian voice.

Another paper presented at the conference examined jurisprudence on targeted killings of Palestinians. Supreme Court rulings use words that emphasise the Jewish-Israeli perspective. Rulings conflate ‘Palestinian’ and ‘terrorist’, call the West Bank “the area” or “Judea and Samaria”, and refrain from referring to those Jews within “the area” as “settlers”.

This terminology promotes a Jewish-Israeli world-view, thereby sanctioning targeted killings as defensive. Ultimately, the terminology of Supreme Court jurisprudence allocates security to Jewish-Israeli interests at the expense of Palestinian interests – control of the terminology of actors and actions in a legal situation precludes the ability of the law to act as a language of redress. Rather than checking the executive, the Court, in this instance, legitimised the executive's policy. It was noted during the conference that the Israeli Supreme Court is not independent from the society of which it is a part; the general perspective of Jewish-Israeli society towards Palestinians and the perspective of the Supreme Court reflect each other. This case study raises questions about the place of the Supreme Court's rulings and terminology in other conflicts, and the role of courts in perpetuating and reflecting discourse and ways of thinking.

BBC Persian and CNN

Like the Court, the news media avowedly aim at balanced reporting, but in fact offer subjective political positions on whom security should protect, or to whom it should belong. These positions are communicated in the choice of language and terminology. In this way, news media can bolster or undermine claims that states make about military security for themselves. The conference discussed the exploitation of trigger words at BBC Persian and CNN. These words cause events to be viewed through specific prisms that define those events according to the political perspective of the news organisation. Because many consider news media to be 'objective', their interpretation of events may become definitive.

For example, CNN creates moral and political prisms for viewing events in the Middle East. The moral prism defines subjects as good or bad, while the political prism defines them as successful or failing. Words and phrases used to describe Hezbollah, such as 'terrorism' ensure its setting in the moral prism while words and phrases used to describe the 'Shock and Awe' campaign strategy in Iraq place it in the political prism – i.e. Hezbollah is judged as good or bad while 'Shock and Awe' is judged as a success or failure. Applying a moral component

to the actions of an enemy simplifies the actions of everyone involved; 'they' are offensive and 'we' are justly defensive. For example, if the United States assumes that the measures they take to ensure their security are just and right, because enemy actions are cast in a moral prism, the U.S. will judge its 'defensive' actions, such as the 'Shock and Awe' campaign, through the prism of effectiveness, thus exonerating themselves from being judged on moral grounds. A moral judgment of the 'Shock and Awe' campaign might reveal moral flaws, which makes efforts of the U.S. to secure its own state security less clear-cut, but in the final analysis this campaign is judged instead on grounds of success or failure.

News, as a genre, uses tools to create an image of objectivity, such as quotations marks, detached prose, etc. However, news outlets have a narrative. BBC Persian constructs its narrative around democracy in Iran, and exercises its reputation of objectivity to further that end. During the unrest that followed the 2009 Iranian presidential elections, the news organisation may have created protest by reporting its existence before it happened; if true, this prompts one to ask if the media power of the Green Movement in Iran in fact resides in BBC Persian. Although BBC Persian does not make an ostensible claim regarding security, its journalism seems to promote democracy over public order. News organisations use their reputation of objectivity to promote a specific narrative that affirms the security of one group or principle over another.

Hebrew Poetry on the Nakba

Poetry presents a more complicated view of the connection of language to security. Because of its ability to represent and express views that other mediums of communication cannot represent and express, poetry represents a potentially unique indicator of social feeling regarding conflict – it can express sorrow when the state only shows anger. The conference discussed some of the few representations of what came to be known as the *Nakba* (the 1948 creation of Israel, preceded and followed by expulsion of the Palestinians) in Hebrew poetry in an attempt to show the convoluted negotiation of Palestinian and Jewish suffering and the interaction between language, conflict, and security. Nathan

Alterman (1910–1970) was among the first Jewish poets to write about the expulsion of Palestinians; in ‘*Al Zot*’ (‘On That’, 1948) he casts the events of 1948 as a moral crime and a war crime. Interestingly, the Jewish daily *Haaretz* published his poetic descriptions of Palestinian suffering. Explanation of this anomaly lies in the implications of the poem. Although Alterman acknowledges Palestinian suffering at the hands of Jews and defines the mass expulsion of the Palestinians from their homes as a moral crime and a war crime, he ignores the morality of the implicit and persistent Jewish – later, Israeli – policy of expulsion. The *Nakba* in *Al Zot* becomes a one-time event; the expulsion was an extreme but isolated response to extenuating circumstances, since the poem portrays the *Nakba* as a one-time event, the Jewish collective can rest easy. Alterman’s poem, though expressive of Palestinian suffering, ultimately asserts the right of the Jewish collective to a security of existence at the expense of the Palestinians.

Another of the few Jewish poets who wrote about the *Nakba*, Avot Yeshurun, takes a different perspective; he blurs the distinction between Palestinian and Jew. Yeshurun’s jittery prose and oscillation between Arabic, Hebrew and English inhibit the portrayal of any group as monolithic or hegemonic. These linguistic tools combine with the explicit message of his poetry, especially ‘*Pesah ‘al Kukhim*’ (‘Passover on Caves’, 1952), to articulate the shared destiny of Jews and Palestinians. Yeshurun’s poetry suggests not only that both Jews and Palestinians have the right to security in and around Israel, but also that their security is commonly held; security for one only comes with security for the ‘Other’.

SECTION 5

Language as a Proxy for Conflict

THE NEXT SERIES OF CASE studies presented at the conference approach language as a site of conflict where different groups contend with each other. These case studies show that struggles over what terms to use, or even what language to use, can reflect broader tensions in society, and that analysing these struggles at the level of language can provide insight into the broader tensions. The case studies explored a controversy over transliteration systems in the 19th-century, Arabisation attempts in Algeria, Iranian responses to the impact of Arabic on Persian, linguistic influences on Armenian in East Jerusalem, and the recent Danish cartoon affair.

Napoleon in Egypt and the Politics of Transliteration

Napoleon's voyage to Egypt and the subsequent production of the *Description de L'Egypte* sparked controversy over transliteration systems. The Comte de Volney proposed a new system for transliterating place names in the atlas of Egypt that was to accompany the *Description de L'Egypte*. This provoked opposition among an older generation of Orientalists, including Sacy, Langles and Caussin de Perceval. Lines of division arose between this "old guard", whose interaction with Arabic was confined to books, and writers and scholars in Volney's camp, who had visited Egypt with Napoleon's expedition. This conflict, which delayed the publication of the atlas by three decades, was a site for a wider controversy among scholars: the new guard favoured scientific methods that included an element of direct experience, whereas the old guard favoured textual approaches and theory.

There was also a broader political dimension to Volney's position. He

believed that European imperialism was unjust, and he opposed the growing colonial enterprise in the Middle East and Africa. Instead, he wanted commerce to replace direct colonisation as the civilising agent propagated by the West. His transliteration system embodied these views. He believed that it held an important key to breaking down the barriers of language and alphabet that impeded commerce and could contribute to conflict. A system that minimised those barriers would, he believed, be instrumental in ameliorating conflict.

French and Arabisation in Algeria

Algeria underwent radical changes between the arrival of the French in the 1830s and their defeat in 1962. These changes led to feelings of insecurity and uncertainty regarding Algerian identity. As a means of regaining or asserting a sense of cultural identity, Algerian elites adopted a policy of Arabisation. The French language represented a painful past and stood to be replaced by Arabic as a national language, with the addition of English as a primary foreign language. However, the process of Arabisation was contested even among those who supported it. A conservative camp of '*ulamā*' scholars advocated Islamisation alongside Arabisation, while the more liberal urban elites favoured Arabisation exclusive of Islamisation. Although the first independent government favoured gradual Arabisation without Islamisation, the 1965 military coup changed this policy. Military leaders empowered the '*ulamā*' who enacted a rapid scheme of Arabisation with Islamisation.

However, Arabisation did not mean that the French language became wholly demonised or died out. Rather, it experienced what some scholars have called 'language maintenance' and 'language spread'; attitudes to and usage of the French language developed in more complex and diverse ways which reflected demographic, geographical and economic changes in Algeria. Since the 1965 revolution, the population of Algeria has more than tripled; the younger generations did not experience colonisation, so for them French does not hold the negative connotations it holds for their parents. However, in rural areas, where extended families tend to live together, resentment of French is transferred from one generation to the next more easily.

Furthermore, Algeria's colonial-era urbanisation and industrialisation associated industry and cities with the French presence and language, which could contribute to the generally more positive feelings found in cities toward the language. According to research presented at the conference, many Algerians associate French with "modernity" and Arabic with "God and religion" – which is not to say that religion is necessarily at odds with modernity. In the past, political and social leaders used the associations of French and Arabic to exploit fissures in Algerian identity, yet Algerians today tend to embrace bilingualism; French and Arabic each fulfil separate yet equally crucial roles in society.

Arabic in Iran

In Iran, the influence of Arabic on Persian often elicits hostility. Arabisation of Persian began with the Muslim conquests of Iran, and today nearly half of all Persian words derive from Arabic. Anti-Arabic sentiment emerged almost immediately after these early conquests; in the tenth century, Ferdowsi resisted the influence of Arabic and sought to use only Persian words in the *Shāhnāmeḥ*. However, even the Persian national epic could not completely avoid Arabic borrowings – two percent of words in the *Shāhnāmeḥ* originated in Arabic. Today, Persian purists still resist the threat of Arabic to Persian. Some go so far as to translate basic Islamic phrases, such as *bismillah* ("in the name of God") into their Persian equivalents, and the *Farhangestān*, the Persian language academy in Iran, like many other language academies throughout the world, creates Persian neologisms for foreign terms.

However, the conflicts that find expression in the shifting relationship in Iran between Arabic and Persian go beyond linguistic and nationalistic pride. Because of the association between Arabic and Islam, resistance to Arabic can also represent resistance to the Islamic Republic. Arabic can function as a register of Islam in Iran: an ayatollah must, for reasons of religious credibility, write his *risālah* (treatise) in Arabic to accord with the fact that the Qur'an is in Arabic and that Islamic theology is articulated mainly in Arabic. In a similar vein, to reflect the fact that Islamic terminology is mainly of Arabic origin, the

Islamic Republic of Iran takes a positive attitude towards the language. Arabic in Iran is also a register of respectful formality. Persian uses different registers to indicate levels of formality, intimacy, and social rank. When advancing a request, for example, the addressor will employ certain vocabulary to indicate his or her lower social position and respect for the addressee. Arabic words tend to signify formality and distance, as opposed to informality and intimacy.

Because of these associations of Arabic in Iran, conscious use or avoidance of the language can indicate political position or positioning; for example, the President of Iran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad uses Arabic to appear formal and religious and thereby legitimise his presidency in the eyes of the Guardian Council. Conversely, intentional use of Persian where Arabic is typically employed can represent hostility to the government. Thus, Arabic in Iran is a medium through which conflicts over culture and politics can be played out.

Armenian Dialect in Jerusalem

The dialect of the Armenians in Jerusalem bears a long history of influence from other languages: Greek, Turkish, Standard Western and Eastern Armenian and Arabic. Written influence appears in Byzantine-era mosaics that include Armenian script, as well as in manuscripts of Arabic written in Armenian script. Spoken influence is manifest in vocabulary-borrowing, verb-doubling (i.e. using synonymous verbs from both languages sequentially), and sentence order. Some traces of influence can be traced to specific events: certain Greek borrowings resulted from a Byzantine decree that required mass liturgy be conducted in Greek, while Turkish influence is connected to the Armenian exodus from the Ottoman Empire that resulted from Ottoman actions toward the Armenian population. Other influences developed over time from daily interactions: some Arabic manuscripts from the era of the Crusades were written in Armenian script, providing evidence of the level of interaction between Armenians and Arabs; and much Greek influence in Armenian results from the fact that Armenian and Greek monks shared monasteries for centuries. The contemporary dialect is also influenced by the inter-ethnic roots of its speakers: neither the

Armenian community in Jerusalem nor its dialect is monolithic. Inter-ethnic groups are detectable from their dialect; for example, Turkish inflections indicate Armenians with Turkish roots.

The Armenian dialect in Jerusalem thus shows different influences, which is evidence of interaction with other languages and countries through history. Indeed, both written and oral Armenian show a complex negotiation between Armenian and the various politically dominant languages over time. In this regard, it is interesting to note that Jerusalem Armenian shows no influence from Hebrew or English. This suggests that Israeli-Armenian relations, as well as relations between Armenians and the various sources of English, are substantially different from other relationships that Armenians have shared with dominant languages and political powers during the last two millennia. It is hard to conclude definitively why this might be the case, without further research. Possible explanations were offered: that Armenians consciously resist Hebrew and English as symbols of imperialism or because they represent a threat to Armenian identity; that Armenians see themselves in an Arab ethnic context and consider Hebrew and English incompatible with that context; or that Hebrew and Armenian have not interacted long enough for borrowings from the former to enter the latter. But broadly, the extent to which different languages influence each other in specific contexts is a function of wider social and political dynamics; the configuration of a language can be read as evidence of these dynamics and the tensions inherent in them.

Danish Cartoons

The 2005 Danish cartoon affair shows how actors can use language to perform, provoke and resolve conflict. In this case, actors negotiate their way through a morally and symbolically charged language of offence, hurt, regret and reconciliation. But they do so instrumentally: appealing to different audiences using different messages in different languages. In this case, both the Danish government and the Danish “Community of Muslim believers” reached a solution by tailoring their messages for particular audiences in different languages. This strategy for resolving conflict worked because words do not always travel

easily from one language or discursive community to another: they are containable. By contrast, the initial conflict was triggered by an image, and owed some of its intensity to the fact that images can travel further and more quickly than words, across language barriers and into different discursive communities. This example also shows how a particular conflict can relate simultaneously to different types of security: economic security, cultural security and physical security.

Following *Jyllands-Posten's* publication of cartoons that depicted the Prophet Muhammad as a terrorist, the Danish Muslim group 'Community of Muslim Believers' called on the press and the government to apologise for the cartoons; Muslim Arab immigrants comprised most of the 'Community' and their command of Danish was weak. When the Danish press and government rejected their demands, they galvanised support in the Arab-Muslim community, where they could articulate their position in a language they felt comfortable using. Employing Arabic, which few Danes knew, the 'Community' described Danish actions, from their publication of the cartoons to their refusal to apologise, in terms that were perceived to encourage hostility to Denmark. By shifting the discourse into Arabic, the 'Community' was able to articulate their position to a sympathetic audience, and prevent the Danish government from asserting contrary views. Worldwide Muslim protests and attacks on Danish missions finally prompted a Danish apology, but by this point the Danish government had realised the power of language. They monitored the communications of the 'Community' and found vast discrepancies between what they said to the Danish public and what they said to the Muslim world. For example, in Danish, the 'Community' accepted the apology and spoke of reconciliation; in Arabic they encouraged more boycotts of Danish goods, and circulated offensive cartoons that the Danish newspaper had not printed. The Danish government utilised the same strategy and issued two apologies, a Danish apology expressed sorrow that the Muslim community was offended by the Cartoons, and an Arabic apology expressing regret for publishing the cartoons.

The cartoon controversy shows two actors using language to enhance their own security. When the 'Community of Muslim Believers' failed in

Danish, they turned to Arabic, which compromised security for the Danish state. The Danish government responded by increasing their awareness of the Arabic communications and eventually used Arabic against the 'Community' to offer two apologies, each one acceptable to the target community.

Summary

The case studies in this section approach language as a site of conflict; language bears associations with broader social, political or religious viewpoints, which actors exploit to enhance their own position and increase their security. The security at stake varies from state security to cultural security; violent protests posed a security threat for the Danish state, while prolonged French colonisation compromised the security of Algerian culture for some. Different notions of security overlap. Some saw the protests in Denmark as posing both a physical threat and a challenge to cultural values such as the priority of free speech.

SECTION 6

Translation and Maligned Terminologies

THE DANISH CARTOONS episode suggests that in situations of conflict and its resolution, words and images can act differently from each other because of their different dynamics. In some cases, images can travel further and more quickly than words, across language barriers and into different discursive communities. The relative “containability” of words was exploited by actors in that situation to reach a solution. The question of the dynamics of words – their trajectories, containability, their speed of travel and their impact – raises the issue of translation. Translation can facilitate but also complicate the way in which words travel and have impact: how they move or fail to move.

Translation also reveals the inherent political implications of language: it cannot occur independently of interpretation. Which words are translated, which words are not translated, and the connotations associated with either, can be telling. Added to this is the question of ambiguity. The most powerful language often works through ambiguity, which can either enhance or diffuse the symbolic power of a word. Translation makes it possible (and in many cases necessary) to reduce or increase ambiguity. In all, translation affords the translator a degree of power to define a situation. Where the definition of “security” and who is to benefit from it is at stake, the power of the translator is particularly important, since whoever controls the discourse also effectively decides who has the right to be secure. The power of translation is also evident in ‘maligned terminologies’ – words that gain a negative connotation when directly imported from one language into another. Societal actors can use maligned terminologies to define an event or an idea in a negative and restricted way, and thus support their own right to cultural, political, or any other type of security.

An example of a maligned terminology is the term *intifada*, commonly used in the Western media to describe the Palestinian uprisings in 1987 and 2000. The original meaning and context of *intifada* is the ‘shaking off’ of check-points and occupation. But in the West, the word has connotations of disruption and violence; it never signifies liberation from oppression. Thus, in the West, the retention of the original Arabic term empties it of its primary meaning. Indeed, the word *intifada* attaches a negative connotation to the events that might evaporate if the word were translated. In Israel and the West, the decision not to translate is a deliberate policy, but it is not quite a universal one. Baruch Kimmerling, an Israeli sociologist, used the Hebrew word *hitkomemut* [uprising] to describe the *intifada*. The term enjoys positive associations among Jewish Israelis and, some at the conference suggested, complicates their understanding of the events of 1987 and 2000. If an author in the West translates *intifada*, the translation might lead the reader to adopt a perspective that does not support the way in which the Israeli state pursues its claim to security.

Furthermore, retention of the term in its original language allows the importing culture conveniently to forget about similar ideas in its own discourse. The Arabic word *shahīd* (“martyr”) is an imported and maligned term among Israeli Jews. Some at the conference suggested that the use of the Hebrew epithet *Kiddush ha-shem*, a broadly comparable concept⁶, would lead Jewish society to develop a more sympathetic understanding of the *shahīd*. The retention of the Arabic word *shahīd* rather than the use of a comparable Hebrew concept enables Jewish media to malign the term and remove it completely from the Jewish experience.

In Western consciousness, *jihād* is maligned both in translation and when the term is directly imported from Arabic. As often as not, the term is translated. Both the translation, ‘Holy War’, and the original term contain a maligned connotation of violent religious fanaticism, something the West prides itself on avoiding. Yet, as some at the conference argued, the closest way to render the cultural and historical implications associated with *jihād* into English would be ‘Crusade’, a

term that captures the religious and non-religious connotations of *jihād*. Instead, whether in translating or retaining the Arabic word, the West depicts *jihād* and its perpetrators as something totally ‘Other’ – removed from the Western experience and justifiably stopped by extraordinary measures.

As well as constructing “otherness”, the use of maligned terminology can hinder the resolution of conflict and the promotion of security. The Arabic word *hudna* is a technical Islamic term for a temporary peace agreement between Muslims and others. The agreement was first conceived as tactical: in the year 628, the Prophet Muhammad agreed to a *hudna* with the Makkans, then resumed fighting when his forces were strong enough to conquer the city. Some at the conference argued that when Hamas offers a *hudna*, Israel chose to understand the offer through the prism of the year 628. A different perspective would be that fourteen centuries have passed since then and the concept may have developed: Morocco’s treaty of independence took the form of *hudna*, as did Egypt’s peace with Israel. If Islamic concepts are seen as static, the *hudna* concept is maligned and loses its potential to work towards peace.

In summary, the state, the media, and individuals use both translations and ‘maligned terminologies’ to affirm claims to security of various types, from cultural to physical security, and this is often done at the expense of the “Other”. These translations and maligned terminologies can be studied in order to reveal these strategies and the attitudes underlying them.

SECTION 7

The Linguistic Landscape

THE RELATIONSHIP between language, conflict, and security also plays out spatially. Actors use language to create boundaries and define space in a way that enhances their own sense of security (at the expense of others'), or that justifies their own actions and approach to conflict. This was explored in two case studies in Israel and Cairo.

Israel – “there is no-one to talk to”

Research presented at the conference examined the semiotic processes through which Israeli society creates boundaries to separate Jews and Palestinians. Three methods create these boundaries:

- erasure: to forget, deny, render invisible, or forcibly eliminate social facts that fail to mesh with a particular vision of the world;
- conisation: where a linguistic element represents a social phenomenon, and the two are bound together in a seemingly inherent association; and
- fractal recursivity: the projection of conflict salient on one level onto another, unconnected, level.

The case study focused on the method of erasure, considering the opinions of a number of Jewish students studying Arabic. These students have erased Palestinians from their consciousness; although Palestinians live in close proximity, the Jewish students feel that there are no Palestinians with whom they can practice speaking. The student requires a certain type of Palestinian; the Palestinians they interact with daily fail to meet those criteria and are effectively erased from the

student's consciousness. On the state level, Israeli insistence on a certain type of Palestinian restricts the efficacy, or even possibility, of political negotiations. A student's complaint that "there is no one to talk to" on the Palestinian side echoes the then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's sentiment at the Camp David negotiations in 2000, when he said "there is no partner", referring to the Palestinian leadership at the time. The ideal negotiation partner for Jewish Israelis cannot be found in Palestine because Palestinians are seen as far too restive or apathetic. Palestine is "erased" because the type of Palestinian interlocutor Jewish Israelis desire does not exist. On a more tangible level, road signs in Israel also serve to erase Palestinian identity. By law, signs must be in Hebrew and Arabic, yet increasingly, the state has replaced Arabic names with Arabic transliterations of Hebrew names. A proposal currently being considered in Israel would change Arabic road signs so that they direct an Arab going to Jerusalem to *Yerushalayyim*, not *al-Quds*.

Cairo's informal districts

Another case study focused on Cairo. At least half of the city lives in "informal" districts – those built without state permission or planning and without access to municipal services. In some cases, densely populated neighbourhoods grew up as homesteaders from rural areas transformed their farmlands. These informal districts pose threats to two different kinds of security. First, the lack of municipal services leads to the accumulation of sewage and other dangerous waste which endangers public health in these areas. Second, armed groups living in these areas threaten the security of the ruling party. The government deals with these threats partly through the linguistic strategies of "erasure" and "negative iconisation". When the state finds it prudent to ignore informal Cairo, it uses rhetoric that downplays the problems and "erases" the neighbourhoods: words like 'shelter' [*'nawā*] present the neighbourhoods as temporary when in fact they are many decades old; 'shack' [*'ushsha*] portrays the settlements as small when in fact they are multi-storied concrete structures; and 'hamlet' [*'izba*] describes them as rural to make them seem less threatening to public health or the state. When armed groups threaten the security of the ruling party, state rhetoric shifts: the neighbourhoods are iconised as 'random' [*'ashwā'ī*] or

even ‘cancerous’ [*saraṭānī*] growth. State sources describe the buildings as deformed and haphazardly arranged, while labelling those who live in them as criminals, beggars, and rebels. This negative iconisation supports the government policy of responding to the perceived threat with violence.

In both Israel and Cairo, actors use language to draw boundaries and politicise space. Those in power define space in a way that enhances their own security while ignoring the potential threats others face. By erasing a group or region, or negatively labelling the space associated with a group, those who wield discursive power seek to justify their own actions or present them as natural and inevitable.

CONCLUSION

Triangulating the Links between Security, Conflict and Language

THIS CONFERENCE SET OUT to explore the relationship between language, conflict and security. If a genuine sense of security feels increasingly rare and conflicts seem increasingly unpredictable in today's world, language at least appears familiar and is almost everywhere. It gives logical form to our experiential world, enabling and requiring us to arrange our experience into categories and concepts. It gives material form to our conceptual world, enabling us to communicate using words and gestures. And it therefore enables us to be social, to achieve shared understandings, and to establish the ground on which we interact. Because language is social, it inevitably involves and expresses conflict, which in turn implies another basic instinct: the desire to feel secure.

How then should we understand the different relationships between language, conflict and security? Although the conference began by posing this basic theoretical question, it emphasised the importance of approaching it through grounded empirical data. The case studies presented at the conference ranged widely, from the negotiation of Palestinian and Jewish suffering in Hebrew poetry about the *Nakba* to a consideration of European immigration policy; from a scholarly controversy about Arabic transliteration systems in the early nineteenth century to current recruitment and training policy in the US military and UK security services.

The case studies and discussions summarised here suggest that there are at least two distinct elements in the relationship between language and conflict: language is both an instrument and a site of conflict. At one

level, language is an instrument of conflict – it is a tool for asserting one’s own material interests and desires against other people’s. It can be used in this way both “instrumentally” and “symbolically”, but these two approaches to understanding the power of language are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Language is used “instrumentally” to make arguments, advance claims and justify actions. But these processes often draw on the “symbolic” power of language: its ability to evoke feelings, values and norms that are involved in motivating action.

But there is another level in the relationship between language and conflict which emerged during the conference. Because language is symbolic, it is not only a tool of conflict, but also emerges as the site of conflict: people struggle to assert control over it. This struggle over language is discursive rather than purely material. The conference noted that those with discursive power, who have the upper hand, are more able to define terms, to set the parameters of debate and contest, and to assert through the way in which they speak what is seen as right and meaningful and what is not. But even in the most authoritarian societies and the most “modern” ones where the official speech of state institutions pervades all areas of life, discursive power is never absolute. In other words, discursive conflict is always a possibility: a certain type of conflict is always inherent in language.

The case studies explored the relationship between these two different kinds of conflict – the material and discursive – as a recurring theme. Much of the research presented at the conference explored these discursive struggles. Partly it sought to identify how the discursive battles are fought: the tactics and the symbolic struggles that are implicit in the use or avoidance of certain terminologies – the tactics of translation, the use of maligned terms, the ability of certain words to allude to powerful meta-narratives. But the conference also continually posed the question: what should we read into these particular battles over words – what do they say about other tensions in society, what are the material and political struggles that they can be used to diagnose? The various case studies posed this question in particular ways: whose identities and claims to security are being recognised as legitimate, and whose are being

“erased” in the way the Egyptian state refers to certain residential districts? How is space that is contested being defined and controlled through language, and to whose benefit? What specific hierarchies of value, for example among different types of citizens or applicants for citizenship, are established through the discourse that surrounds immigration policy in Europe or the language on road signs in Israel-Palestine?

The reverse type of questioning is also important: not just what are the political implications of particular kinds of language, but how does the distribution of material and political resources in any situation skew a discursive contest? For example, how does the institutional power of a Supreme Court determine whose legal claims and thus which wider political movements and vocabularies are given legitimacy and which are not? How does a state’s power to determine language policy influence the symbolic associations attached to a language and its speakers, and with what effect? How does diplomatic power determine which languages are taught and how? How do the exigencies of particular military campaigns and the funding that they attract affect the way that particular “cultures” and languages are understood, taught and valued – and what it means to be “culturally sensitive”? In short, how does institutional and political power determine who speaks and who doesn’t; whose terms and language they must use; who is heard and who is not; and how they are judged to have spoken?

So one conclusion that emerges from this conference is that language bears a multiple and almost contradictory relationship to conflict. At a basic level, it “gives form” to and “establishes ground” for social interaction. These metaphors of “giving form” and “establishing ground” seem to imply that language is something static: that it is a fixed framework within which actors can interact or compete. But several case studies also emphasised that language is what actors seek to mould and to shape to their own advantage – so it cannot be understood as static (despite the effort of some institutions to preserve it as such) but rather must be approached as continually shifting and contested.

In fact, the case studies presented at the conference suggest that language bears three different relationships to conflict: it gives form to the interests which actors struggle to assert over one another; it is a means for asserting these interests, liable to be manipulated instrumentally and symbolically; and because of this, it is itself a material which actors struggle with each other to control. In any specific conflict, these three aspects of language-in-conflict are intertwined and feed off each other. For example, actors struggle discursively with each other even at the stage of articulating their interests: are property rights contested before the Israeli Supreme Court to be articulated in reference to “the West Bank” or in reference to “Judea and Samaria”? Another example of how different aspects of language-in-conflict are intertwined is that actors struggle discursively with each other over the legitimacy of the symbolic narratives in which they couch their claims. For instance: should the publication of the Danish cartoons be understood within a narrative of free speech or within a narrative of blasphemy?

Through the diversity of the case studies presented at the conference, a central question emerges: what are the different ways in which language is involved in processes of conflict? But a second, related, question also emerges: how should we understand the relationship, in particular situations, between language and security? What role does language play in determining how “security” is understood, who should rightly enjoy it, and what can legitimately be done to achieve it? “Security”, of course, is in some ways a complementary concept to “conflict”: it speaks implicitly of the existence of a threat, and thus signals an existing conflict or the potential for one. At one level, the conference heard, the relationship between language and security is straightforward: language can improve security by averting conflict at an early stage, if one is able to build trust through dialogue, or learn of hostile plans early enough to defend against them. This is the rationale for using trained linguists in the military and security services, though difficult practical problems can emerge in terms of managing contractors (which add a level of complexity to a “theatre of conflict”), vetting and deploying staff, acquiring idiomatic and cultural knowledge, and being flexible enough to meet new linguistic requirements posed by emergent conflicts.

More critically, “security” often belongs to the vocabulary of those who are already in some sense powerful, since it implies the protection of legitimate interests, and thus argues for the maintenance of the status quo. Indeed, “security” forms part of a discourse that is most likely to be employed by those who have some coercive power at their disposal. In discursive terms, as was argued in discussion, it aims to justify, since it construes actions undertaken for its sake as defensive rather than offensive. Some noted that actions undertaken for its sake can include unusually extreme and hostile measures – contemporary discussions of torture were mentioned in this regard. Others added that, insofar as the concept of “security” justifies actions, it tends to do so by creating an “other” – those who threaten the security of the owners of the discourse. Ironically, this creation of “otherness” can often be counter-productive to the enjoyment of security in the long-term. This raised the question about whether the notion of security was often conceived too narrowly – implying the security of one party at the expense of another, and thus precluding potentially more fruitful ways of imagining “mutual security”.

How “security” is imagined is to some extent a function of geopolitical realities. Indeed, the conference noted that the concept of security has developed since the end of the Cold War. It has moved on as the practice of military conflict has changed. This changing geopolitical context has mandated the need for flexible training and the acquisition of multiple languages in military and security establishments. But with the changing practice of conflict, the understanding of “security” has also developed in the Academy. Many case studies argued that it should be approached critically: seen not as an unproblematic physical protection that states have a duty to provide to their citizens, but as a discursive and contested concept that can be used to “secure” one set of interests over another. As further evidence that the concept of security is best approached critically, as a discursive category, it is interesting to consider how the meaning of the word has spread to include notions such as food security, economic security, cultural security, linguistic security and so on; perhaps the category of “ethical security” is next.

Approaching “conflict” and “security” not simply as unproblematic material conditions, but as discursive categories that can be manipulated by social actors, reveals why it is important to study them through language. Understanding how the language of “security” and “conflict” works is not simply a theoretical concern for scholars. It can be used to diagnose tensions and low-level conflict, and it is also the means by which “conflict entrepreneurs” marshal the material and social resources that enable them to launch open conflict or make it more likely. So there is a practical rationale for understanding discursive tactics and struggles, which speaks again to the importance of a proper training in language: sensitivity to idiom, to the symbolic power of particular terminologies and the narratives in which they sit, and to the wider political and historical context that makes these narratives powerful motivators or “flash-points”. If nothing else, this shows how exploring broad theoretical questions, such as the relationship between language, conflict and security, can have practical implications for security practitioners and academics alike.

NOTES

- ¹ Austin, J. 1975. *How to do things with words* (Harvard: University Press).
- ² Proxemics: the study of the role of spatial distance in communication: e.g. how far apart people stand from each other.
- ³ The principle of linguistic relatively is also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. E. Shouby, "The influence of the Arabic language on the psychology of the Arabs," *Middle East Journal* 5 (1951): 284–302; R. Patai, *The Arab Mind* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973); John Laffin, *Know the Middle East* (Gloucester, England: Alan Sutton, 1985).
- ⁴ See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-11181457>
- ⁵ *Telem* is an acronym for *Tipu'ah Limudei Mizrahanut*, "the encouragement of Oriental studies".
- ⁶ In Jewish history and thought, the concept *Kiddush ha-shem* differs from the Arabic concept *shahid* in some respects, but the two concepts are certainly comparable in other respects.

LANGUAGE, CONFLICT AND SECURITY IN
THE MIDDLE EAST CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

10-11 April 2010

Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge

SATURDAY 10 APRIL 2010

- 9.00-9.30 Registration and refreshments
- 9.30-9.45 **Welcome – Prof. Yasir Suleiman**
Director of the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre of
Islamic Studies, University of Cambridge
- 9.45-11.00 **Security and beyond**
Chair: Sir Richard Dearlove,
Master of Pembroke College
Security studies and beyond
Prof. Karin Fierke, School of International Relations,
University of St. Andrews
**Security studies, Arabic, and new academic
alignments: bridging the transcultural gap**
Prof. Karin C. Ryding, Department of Arabic and
Islamic Studies, Georgetown University, Washington
D.C.
- 11.00-11.30 *Coffee Break*
- 11.30-13.30 **Language in conflict**
Chair: Dr Ian Patterson, Faculty of English, University
of Cambridge
**Languages in conflict in the Armenian quarter of
Jerusalem**

Prof. Bert Vaux , Department of Linguistics, University of Cambridge

French in Algeria: from bitterness to appropriation

Prof. Mohamed Benrabah, Department of Linguistics and Foreign Languages, Stendhal-Grenoble III University

Media, conflict and war: potent objectivity as a media strategy

Mr Kusha Sefat, Senior Producer at Press TV and consultant to the former spokesperson at the Iranian Foreign Ministry

Hizbullah and the Semantics of resistance

Dr Jacob Høigilt, Middle East Researcher, Fafo, AIS, Oslo, Norway

13.30-14.30 *Lunch Break*

14.30-16.30 **War of words**

Chair: Dr Boping Yuan / Linguistics / Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge

Fighting talk: language and narrative in the social construction of political violence and civil war

Dr Richard Jackson, Reader in International Politics, Prifysgol Aberystwyth in Wales &

Dr Helen Dexter, Centre for International Politics, University of Manchester

Linguists in war

Lt. Col. Mark Gagnon, Academy Professor (returning from Iraq) United States Military Academy – West Point

Persian: the need for less commonly taught languages in the post-9/11 world

Ms Lindsay Sparling, Persian language analyst and subject expert

DLIFLC and the languages of the Middle East

Lieutenant Colonel Christopher Watrud, Chief of Staff, Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, U.S. Army

16.30-17.00 *Coffee break*

17.00-19.00

Israel, Palestine, language and terminology

Chair: Prof. Yasir Suleiman, Head of Department of Middle Eastern Studies, and Director of Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre for Islamic Studies, University of Cambridge

The Palestinian Nakba in Hebrew poetry, 1948-58

Prof. Hannan Hever, Head of School of Literatures at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem

The political discourse of Israeli occupation: the spirit of Orientalism

Prof. Ahmad Atawneh, Department of English, Hebron University,

‘There is no Arab street in Israel’: language ideology and spatial practice in a divided landscape

Dr Abigail Sone, Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto

Listening for silences in the courtroom: law, language and the politics of denial in Israeli supreme court jurisprudence

Dr Michelle Burgis, School of International Relations, University of St. Andrews

SUNDAY 11 APRIL 2010

9.00-11.00

Reading between the lines: the other side of language and conflict

Chair: Dr Amira Bennison, Senior Lecturer in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, University of Cambridge

Language tests as Europe’s gatekeepers

Prof. Elana Shohamy, School of Education,
Tel Aviv University

The struggle over Arabic: lessons learned from the Danish cartoon affair

Dr Helle Lykke Nielsen, Asc. Professor, Centre for
Middle East Studies, University of Southern Denmark

Making the map of Egypt: Orientalists, army and modes of transliteration

Ms Tami Sarfatti, PhD Candidate (currently finalising
thesis *Les Égyptiens de l'an VI: Bonaparte's Savants*
and the Description of Egypt) at UCLA

Cityscapes of disorder: the social production of the 'Ashwa'iyyat discourse in Cairo

Dr W.J. Dorman, Lecturer in Middle East Politics,
School of Government & International Affairs,
Durham University

11.00-11.30

Coffee break

11.30-13.30

Teaching other's languages

Chair: Prof. Colleen McLaughlin, Faculty of Education

Teaching Arabic in Israel: language or politics?

Dr Shlomo Alon, General Supervisor of Arabic Studies
in Israeli Ministry of Education

Teaching Hebrew in Egypt: on foreign language teaching and normalisation

Dr Mansour Abdel Wahab Mansour, Hebrew studies
teacher, Department of Semitic Languages, Faculty of
Languages, Ein Shams University – Cairo. Serve as a
Hebrew translator for the President

Persian language teaching in Syria

Ms Nadia von Maltzahn, DPhil Candidate in Modern
Middle Eastern Studies, St Antony's College,
University of Oxford

Arabic vs. Persian in Iran

Prof. William Beeman, Chair, Department of Anthropology, University of Minnesota

13.30-14.30 *Lunch break*

14.30-16.30 **Is Arabic under attack?**

Chair: Dr Khaled Hroub, Director of Cambridge Arab Media Project

Language and security: teaching the Arabic language in a changing security environment

Col. Dr David F. DiMeo, Academy Professor of Arabic and Director, Centre for Languages, Cultures and Regional Studies, United States Military Academy – West Point

Army in the classroom: the attempts of the IDF to encourage the study of Arabic in Israeli high schools

Mr Elhanan Miller, Graduate Student, Department of Islamic and Middle East Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

The politics of non-translation: on Israeli use of *intifada*, *shahid*, *hudna*, and *Islamic movements*

Mr. Yonatan Mendel, PhD candidate, Department of Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge

Language, conflict and security: exploratory perspectives

Prof. Yasir Suleiman, Head of Department of Middle Eastern Studies, and Director of Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Centre for Islamic Studies, University of Cambridge

16.30-16.45 **Closing remarks – Professor Yasir Suleiman**