

The Role of the Imam's Knowledge of Languages in Proving Imamate

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Abstract

One of the prominent features in Shi'a traditions regarding the Imams (peace be upon them) is their knowledge of languages and their ability to speak all human languages. This article, employing a descriptive-library approach and utilizing narrative sources and theological texts, examines this characteristic and analyzes its role in proving Imamate. First, the indicators of Imamate from the perspective of Shi'a theology are explained. Then, citing authentic hadiths, the ability of the Imams (peace be upon them) to speak all languages is examined as one of the signs of divinely-inspired knowledge (*'ilm ladunnī*) and their authority (*hujjiyyah*). This characteristic not only demonstrates the vast scope of the Imams' knowledge but also, within the Shi'a epistemological system, serves as evidence of their connection to the source of divine knowledge and their suitability for the office of Imamate.

Keywords: Speech, Divine Proof, Non-Imam, Different Languages, Indicators of Imamate.

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Introduction

Regarding this subject, Mr. Hassan Erfani, in 1997 (1376 AH solar), via two articles published in issues 5 and 6 of the journal *'Ulum-e Hadith*, compiled the hadiths related to the Imams (peace be upon them) speaking different languages. However, the present writing approaches this characteristic differently, examining it not merely as a virtue, but as one of the criteria for recognizing the Imam. The purpose for conducting this research is to explain the role of knowledge of languages in proving Imamate and to analyze its function when facing the crisis of confusion and distinguishing the Imam, whose obedience is obligatory (*Imam al-Muftarad al-Ta'ah*), from claimants to Imamate.

The indicators of Imamate in Shi'a traditions can be divided into two general categories: physical indicators and non-physical indicators.

Hasan ibn al-Jahm said: I was sitting with Abi al-Hasan (Imam Reza, peace be upon him). He called for his young son [Imam Jawad, peace be upon him], seated him on my lap, and told me, "Undress him and remove his shirt." I removed it. He then said, "Look between his shoulders." So I looked, and there, on one of his shoulders, was something like a seal embedded in the flesh. Then he said to me, "Do you see this? My father had the same mark in this same place." Kulaynī, 1407 AH, vol. 1, p. 321)

In the aforementioned narration, it is clearly stated that the indicators of Imamate are classified into two physical and non-physical¹ categories (Al-Majlisi, 1403 AH, vol. 25, p. 120). The present writing seeks to examine one of the indicators of Imamate that falls under the category of non-physical characteristics.

Statement of the Problem

Statement of the Problem In the theological and narrative framework of Twelver Shi'ism, the Imamate is defined by characteristics that transcend ordinary human capacities. Among the most significant and thought-provoking attributes attributed to the Infallible Imams (peace be upon them) in the traditions (*Hadith*) is their comprehensive knowledge of all human languages and their ability to converse in every tongue. This faculty, which serves as a manifestation of *'Ilm al-Ladunni* (divinely inspired knowledge) and an indication of their connection to the divine source of revelation, has historically been regarded in Shi'i theology as a crucial sign of the Imams' legitimacy (*Hujjiyah*). Despite the significance of this subject in establishing the Imamate, previous studies have primarily adopted a

1. Explanation: It appears that the Imam also has a mark on his body that indicates his Imamate, such as the Seal of Prophethood, and it is possible that it is specific to the two Imams. Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 25, p. 120.



descriptive and reportorial approach, focusing predominantly on the collection and classification of relevant traditions. For instance, the works of scholars such as Hassan Erfani (1997) have centered on the gathering and categorization of Hadiths concerning the Imams' linguistic abilities. However, a fundamental question remains: is this ability merely a "personal virtue" or an extraordinary "miracle," or does it possess a specific epistemological function within the theological discourse, particularly in "distinguishing the legitimate, divinely appointed Imam (*Imam al-Muftarad al-Ta'ah*) from false claimants to the Imamate"? In contexts where Islamic societies have faced ideological crises and the emergence of various claimants to the Imamate throughout history, the need for a precise criterion to recognize the true *Hujjah* (God's proof) is an undeniable necessity. The core problem addressed in this study is how the faculty of "speaking in multiple languages" functions as an efficient indicator and a probative criterion for establishing the Imamate and resolving the state of confusion (*Tahayyur*) for seekers of truth. Consequently, by moving beyond a purely descriptive approach, this research aims to elucidate the role of this attribute within the system of Imamology and to investigate its capacity as a primary criterion in the process of identifying and validating the station of the Imamate.

The Importance of Recognizing the Indicators of Imamate

Recognizing the indicators of Imamate has been of such importance among Shi'a traditionists (*muḥaddithūn*) that some of them have dedicated independent chapters to this subject in their hadith works. For instance, the late Al-Kulaynī, in his book *Al-Kāfī*, includes a chapter titled "Chapter on Matters that Necessitate the Proof of the Imam" (Al-Kulaynī, 1407 AH, vol. 1, p. 284) – matters which the Infallible Imam must possess. In this chapter, Al-Kulaynī mentions 7 narrations, all of which describe specific qualities exclusive to the Imam (peace be upon him). The late Majlisī, may God have mercy on him, in his *Biḥār al-Anwār*, opened a chapter called "Comprehensive [Chapter] on the Attributes of the Imam and Conditions of Imamate" (Al-Majlisī, 1403 AH, vol. 25, p. 115), in which he transmits 39 hadiths.

The Qualities of Imam in the Works of Traditionists

Shi'a traditionists, in their hadith works, have endeavored to state the indicators of Imamate precisely and with solid documents. This effort indicates the foundational position of Imamate in Shi'a thought and the necessity of correctly recognizing the Infallible Imam. Among these works is the book *Manāqib Āl Abī-Ṭālib* (peace be upon them) by the late Ibn Shahr Āshūb, in which, citing Imamiyya traditions, it is stated: The Imam must possess fifty signs. These signs are a collection of physical,



knowledge-based, moral, and unseen-related characteristics that together prove the Imam's divine authority (*hujjiyyah*) and station (Ibn Shahr Āshūb Māzandarānī, 1379 AH, vol. 1, p. 253). The late Al-Ṭabrisī in *Al-Iḥtejāj* (Al-Ṭabrisī, 1403 AH, vol. 2, p. 437) and the late Irbilī in *Kashf al-Ghummah* (Irbilī, 1381 AH, vol. 2, p. 290), and the late Al-Ṣadūq narrate traditions from the blessed presence of Imam Reza (peace be upon him) in which 30 qualities are mentioned for the Imam. A notable point is that the late Al-Ṣadūq narrated this tradition in his books *Man lā Yaḥḍuruhu al-Faqīh*, *'Uyūn Akhbār al-Reza*, *Ma'ānī al-Akhbār*, and *Al-Khiṣāl* (Ibn Bābawayh, 1413 AH, vol. 4, p. 418).

In the tradition attributed to Imam Reza (peace be upon him), which enumerates thirty characteristics for the Imam, there is no explicit mention of the ability to speak different languages. However, this characteristic can be considered as one of the instances of the phrase "the most knowledgeable of people" (*A 'lam al-Nās*), because the Imam's comprehensive knowledge of sciences and cognitions includes mastery over various languages and dialects. From a theological perspective, such an ability is not only a sign of the Imam's divinely-inspired knowledge (*'ilm ladunnī*), but also plays an effective role in proving Imamate and distinguishing the real Imam from false claimants.

The late Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī, in *Al-Kharā'ij*, narrates a hadith from Imam al-Bāqir (peace be upon him) in which 10 qualities are mentioned for the Imam (Al-Rāwandī, 1409 AH, vol. 2, p. 569).

Speaking All Languages as One of the Indicators for Recognizing the Imam

One of the crucial indicators for recognizing the Infallible Imam is their ability to speak different languages; a characteristic presented in Shi'a traditions as a sign of the Imam's all-encompassing knowledge and connection to the source of divine knowledge. This ability serves as a tool to distinguish the real Imam from false claimants, and for this reason, Shi'a traditionists have paid special attention to it. Thus, they have dedicated independent chapters to this subject in their hadith works; such that this characteristic is considered in narrative sources as one of the criteria for the Imam's authority (*hujjiyyah*). The late Al-Ṣaffār, in his book *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, has a chapter titled "Chapter on the Imams (peace be upon them) Speaking All Languages" (Al-Ṣaffār, 1404 AH, vol. 1, p. 333). In this chapter, he narrates 15 hadiths. He has another chapter titled "Chapter on the Imams (peace be upon them) Knowing All Languages" (Ibid., 1404 AH, vol. 1, p. 337), in which he narrates 7 hadiths.



It seems the difference between the two chapters opened by the late Al-Şaffār in his hadith work ¹(Ibid., 1404 AH, vol. 1, p. 333) lies in the type of interaction the Infallible Imam (peace be upon him) has had with different languages. In the first chapter, narrations are cited that indicate the Imam (peace be upon him) could speak various languages; meaning the Imam actively and verbally spoke to different people in their language. However, in the second chapter, the focus of the hadiths is on Imam's understanding and comprehending the meanings of different words and languages, without necessarily uttering a word of that language. This distinction indicates the different levels of the Imam's knowledge regarding languages and also the extent of their understanding and communication with diverse audiences. Or, the late Shaykh al-Mufid, in his book *Al-Ikhtisāş*, has a chapter titled "Knowledge of the Imams (peace be upon them) of All Languages, the Language of Birds, and Other Animals" (Al-Mufid, 1413 AH, p. 289). Similarly, the late Majlisī, in *Biḥār al-Anwār*, has a chapter titled "That They (peace be upon them) Know All Tongues and Languages and Speak with Them" (Majlisī, 1403 AH, vol. 26, p. 190). 'Allāmah Majlisī narrates 7 hadiths in this chapter.

A noteworthy point in the chapter division of the late 'Allāmah Majlisī, unlike the approach of the late Al-Şaffār in *Başā'ir al-Darajāt*, is that he gathered the hadiths related to the Imam's ability to comprehend and speak different languages into a single chapter. This approach suggests that the late Majlisī considered both types of Imam's interaction (verbal and perceptual) under a single general heading related to the Imam's knowledge of various languages, whereas Al-Şaffār maintained a structural distinction between these two categories of narrations.

Sources for the Imam Speaking Different Languages

The first source that mentions the characteristic in question is the late Al-Ḥumayrī in his book *Qurb al-Isnād* (Al-Ḥumayrī, 1413 AH, p. 339).

He speaks to people in every language

The same narration is transmitted by the late Al-Kulaynī (Al-Kulaynī, 1407 AH, vol. 1, p. 285) and the late Al-Şadūq in *Ma'ānī al-Akḥbār* (Bābawayh, 1403 AH, p. 102) as [He speaks to people in every tongue and language]. The late Al-Mufid in *Al-Irshād* (Al-Mufid, 1413 AH, vol. 2, p. 224), the late Al-Ṭabarī in *Dalā'il al-Imāmah* (Al-Ṭabarī al-Āmulī al-Şaghīr, 1413 AH, p. 337), and the late Al-Ṭabrisī in *A'lām al-Warā* (Al-Ṭabrisī, 1390 AH, p. 304) also transmit it.

1. "Chapter on the Imams (peace be upon them) that they speak all languages" and "Chapter on the Imams (peace be upon them) that they know all languages".



Documentation (Isnād) of the Narration

The difference among the transmissions found in sources like *Qurb al-Isnād*, *Al-Kāfi*, and *Ma'ānī al-Akhbār* is that each of these narrations is transmitted through a different chain of transmission (*sanad*) and from a different Imam. The narration in *Qurb al-Isnād* is transmitted from Imam al-Kāzīm (peace be upon him), the narration in *Al-Kāfi* from Imam Reza (peace be upon him), and the narration in *Ma'ānī al-Akhbār* from Imam al-Bāqir (peace be upon him). Furthermore, the chain of transmission used by Shaykh al-Mufid in *Al-Irshād* matches the chain of the narration in *Al-Kāfi*. On the other hand, the chain (of transmission) used by the late Al-Ṭabarī in *Bishārat al-Muṣṭafā* leads to Abū Baṣīr, who is the same narrator of the *Al-Kāfi* tradition, but his method of transmission differs from that of Al-Kulaynī. In contrast, the chain (of transmission) used by the late Al-Ṭabarī in *Dalā'il al-Imāmah* is completely identical to the chain of Al-Kulaynī in *Al-Kāfi*.

Hadiths of the Imams (peace be upon them) Speaking Different Languages

Abū Baṣīr said: I said to Abi al-Hasan (Imam Reza, peace be upon him), "May I be your ransom, by what [qualities] is the Imam recognized?" He replied, "By several qualities: (Al-Kulaynī, 1407 AH, vol. 1, p. 285, hadith 7, al-Islamiyyah ed.)

1. By something that has preceded from his father regarding him - like an explicit saying about him and granting him knowledge of Imamate -, so that it may be a proof for his Imamte.
2. He answers any question he is asked. and if they remain silent in front of him, he initiates speaking.
3. He can tell about tomorrow.
4. He can speak to people around the world in any language, and people of any language can converse with him without a translator.

Then the Imam (peace be upon him) said to me:

"O Abā Moḥammad! Verily, the speech of no one is hidden from the Imam – neither the speech of birds, nor beasts, nor any creature that has a soul. Whoever does not possess these qualities is not an Imam."

According to the aforementioned hadith, one of the indicators for recognizing the Imam and the successor (*Waṣī*) of the Prophet (may God bless him and his family) is his ability to speak all the languages and dialects of the world. Therefore, the following narrations are mentioned which indicate that the Imams (peace be upon them) spoke different languages:



1. Persian Language

Then Imam said to me. O Abū Baṣīr said I will give you a sign before you stand. There it did not take us long that a man from Khurāsān entered and spoke to him (Imam Musā ibn Ja'far, peace be upon him) in Arabic. Abū al-Hasan (Imam Reza? Note: The chain mentions Abi al-Hasan, but the context often refers to Imam Kāzīm here. The text identifies him as Musā ibn Ja'far) answered him in Persian. The Khurāsānī man said: "By God, may I be your ransom, nothing prevented me from speaking to you in Khurāsānī except that I thought you did not know it well." The Imam said: "Glory be to God! If I do not know it well enough to answer you, then what is my superiority over you?" (Al-Kulaynī, 1407 AH, vol. 1, p. 285).

A group of people from Khurāsān entered upon Imam al-Ṣādiq (peace be upon him). Before they could ask anything, he said in Arabic: "Whoever amasses wealth and guards it, God will punish him in proportion to it." They said in Persian: "We do not understand Arabic." The Imam (peace be upon him) said in Persian: (Whoever hoards dirhams, his punishment is Hell). Then he said: "Indeed, God created two cities, one in the East and the other in the West. Upon each city is a wall of iron containing a million doors of gold, each door with two leaves. In each city are seventy thousand people of different languages. I know all those languages, what is in them, and what is between them. There is no proof [of God] besides me, my fathers, and my sons after me." (Al-Rāwandī, 1409 AH, vol. 2, p. 753).

The Commander of the Faithful (Imam 'Alī, peace be upon him) said to her (the daughter of Yazdegerd): "What is your name?" She said: "Shāh Zanān, daughter of *Kisrā*." The Commander of the Faithful (peace be upon him) said in Persian: (Shāh Zanān is none except the daughter of Mohammad), "She is the Sayyidah of women. You are *Shahr-bānūyah*, and your sister is *Murwārīd*, daughter of *Kisrā*." She said: "آریه" (Yes). (Al-Ṭabarī al-Āmulī al-Ṣaghīr, 1413 AH, p. 196)

2. Turkish Language

Ibn Farqad said: I was with Abī 'Abd Allāh (Imam al-Ṣādiq, peace be upon him) when a non-Arab slave boy came with a message. He kept stammering and expressing himself poorly, such that I thought he was annoying [the Imam]. The Imam said to him: "Speak in any language you know well, other than Arabic, since you do not know it well, for I understand." So he spoke to him in Turkish, and he (the Imam) answered him back in his language. The slave boy left astonished. (Al-Rāwandī, 1409 AH, vol. 2, p. 759).



3. Nabatean (Nabaṭī) Language

Narratives on Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq’s Use of Nabataean Language.

A: It is narrated that ‘Alī (peace be upon him) came across Ḥasan al-Baṣrī who was performing ablution (wuḍū’) from a small stream. The Imam (peace be upon him) said: "Perform your purification thoroughly, O ‘Laftā’!" Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said: "Yesterday, you killed men who used to perform ablution thoroughly!" The Imam (peace be upon him) said: "Are you grieving for them?" He said: "Yes." The Imam said: "May God prolong your grief." Ayyūb al-Sijistānī said: "We never saw Ḥasan al-Baṣrī except grieving, as if he were returning from the burial of a dear one... I spoke to him about it, and he said: "It is the result of that righteous man’s curse upon me". ‘Laftā’ in Nabatean means ‘devil.’ Ḥasan al-Baṣrī’s mother had named him that and used to call him by this name during his childhood, and no one knew this until ‘Alī (peace be upon him) called him by it. (Ibid., 1409 AH, vol. 2, p. 547).

B. Mohammad ibn Abd al-Jabbar narrated to us on the authority of Abu Abd Allah al-Barqī, on the authority of Fadala ibn Ayyub, on the authority of a man from the Masami’a whose name was Misma’ and whose nickname was Kirdin, on the authority of Abu Abd Allah (peace be upon him). The narrator stated: "I was in the presence of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (peace be upon him), and his son Ismā‘īl was also present. At that time, we regarded Ismā‘īl as the imam after his father. During a lengthy account, he said that he had heard from a man that Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq had made a statement contradicting our belief in Ismā‘īl’s imamate. I went to two individuals from Kufa who considered Ismā‘īl the imam and informed them of this matter. One of them said: 'I hear and obey my imam, and I am satisfied with this command.' The other tore his collar and said: 'No, by God, I will neither hear nor obey, nor am I satisfied, unless I hear it directly from the Imam himself.'

(Safar, 1404 AH, Vol.1, P.339).

He went toward the house of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, and I followed him. When we reached the door, we sought permission. He permitted me to enter before the other. Then he granted the Kufan permission to enter. When the latter entered, the Imam said: 'O so-and-so, would you like a private letter to be sent to each of you? What so-and-so said is correct.'

The man replied: 'I wish to hear it from you directly.' The Imam then said: 'So-and-so (meaning Mūsā ibn Ja‘far) is your imam after me. Whoever claims imamate after him is a liar.' At that moment, I noticed that the Kufan man, who was well-versed in the Nabataean language, said to me: 'Dharaqa.' Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq had said 'Dharaqa' — which in Nabataean means 'Take delivery. Yes, take delivery.' We then took leave of the Imam."



C: 'Ammār al-Sābātī narrated: Imam al-Šādiq (peace be upon him) addressed me in Nabataean, saying: "*O 'Ammār, Abū Muslim fa-zallalahu fa-kasāhu fa-kasāhahu bi-sāṭūrā.*" 'Ammār said: I told him, "I have never seen any Nabataean more eloquent in the Nabataean language than you." The Imam (peace be upon him) replied: "O 'Ammār, it is the same with all languages." (Safar, 1404 AH, Vol.1, P.333).

D: The Imam (peace be upon him) said: When the Commander of the Faithful (Imam 'Alī, peace be upon him) was advancing toward the Khawārij of Nahrawān, he halted in a district called Qaṭuftā. The people of the Bādaryawā region came to him and complained about the heaviness of their land tax (*kharāj*). They said to him in the Nabataean language that they had neighbors whose lands were larger yet their tax was lighter. Imam 'Alī (peace be upon him) responded in Nabataean: "*Wa-gharzuṭā min 'ūdyā*" — meaning: "Truly, a short rajaz (poetic meter) is better than a long rajaz." (Safar, 1404 AH, Vol.1, P.335).

In Al-Manāqib, Ibn Shahr Āshūb records the following phrase instead of the above:

"*Zi'r awṭā'ihī min zi'r arbāh*" (Ibn Shahr Āshūb al-Māzandarānī, 1379 AH, vol. 2, p. 56) — meaning: "A small amount of smoke is better than a large amount of smoke."

4. Indian (Hindī) Language

A. Abū Hāshim al-Ja'farī said: I entered upon Abī al-Ḥasan (Imam al-Hādī, peace be upon him), and he spoke to me in Indian (Hindī). I could not reply to him properly. Before him was a leather bag (*rakwah*) full of pebbles. He took a single pebble, placed it in his mouth, and sucked it for a while. Then he tossed it to me, and I placed it in my mouth. By God, I had not left his presence before I could speak seventy-three tongues, the first of which was Indian (Hindī). (Ibn Ḥamzah al-Ṭūsī, 1419 AH, p. 533)

B. Suddenly, a man came to me and said: "Respond to your master!" He kept taking me through various places until he entered me into a house and a garden. There I saw my master (Imam al-'Askarī, peace be upon him) seated. When he looked at me, he spoke to me in Indian (Hindī), greeted me, informed me of my name, and asked me about forty men, one by one, by their names. (Ibn Bābawayh, 1395 AH, vol. 2, p. 439)

C. Abū Hāshim said: I went to serve Imam al-Hādī (peace be upon him), and he spoke to me in Indian (Hindī). I could not answer him properly. At that moment, the Imam (peace be upon him) took a pebble from a leather bag full of pebbles, put it in his mouth, and sucked it. Then he gave it to me, and I put it in my mouth. By God, I had not left his service before I could speak seventy-three tongues, the first of which was Indian (Hindī). (Al-Ṭabrisī, 1390 AH, p. 360)



5. Nubian (Nūbī) Language

a. It is narrated from al-Reza (peace be upon him) who said: My father, Mūsā (peace be upon him), told al-Ḥusayn ibn Abī al-‘Alā: "Buy me a Nubian¹ slave girl." Al-Ḥusayn said: "By God, I know a precious Nubian slave girl, the best I have seen from Nubia. Were it not for one characteristic, she would be suitable for you." The Imam (peace be upon him) asked: "What is that characteristic?" He said: "She does not understand your speech, and you do not understand her speech." The Imam smiled and said: "Go and buy her." He did so. (Al-Rāwandī, 1409 AH, vol. 1, p. 310)

When I brought her to him, the Imam asked her in her language: "What is your name?" She said: "*Mu’Nisáh*." He said: "By my life, you are Mu’Nisáh (the companionable one). But you had another name before this; your name previously was Ḥabībah (the beloved one)." She said: "You have spoken the truth."

6. Zuttī (Language of the Zutt people) [^6]

a. On the authority of Abī Ja’far (Imam al-Bāqir, peace be upon him) who said: When ‘Alī (peace be upon him) had finished fighting the people of Basra, seventy men from the Zutt (a people of Indian/African origin) came to him, greeted him, and spoke to him in their tongue. He answered them in their tongue and said to them: "I am not as you say. I am a created servant of God." But they refused [to accept this] and said to him: "You are He (i.e., God)." He said to them: "If you do not recant what you have said about me and repent to God Almighty, I will kill you." They refused to recant or repent. So he ordered that wells be dug for them. They were dug. Then he connected some of them to others, threw them into them, sealed their tops, and then ignited a fire in one of the wells that had no one in it. The smoke entered upon them, and they died. (Al-Kashshī, 1409 AH, p. 109)

7. Sindhi (Sindī) Language [^7]

A. The Catholikos (Jāthalīq) said: "O son of Moḥammad, there is a Sindhi man here, a Christian, proficient in debate and speech in Sindhi." The Imam (al-Reza, peace be upon him) said to him: "Bring him to me." He brought him. The Imam spoke with him in Sindhi, then began to debate and move him step by step in Christianity, all in Sindhi. We heard the Sindhi man say: "Thabaḫī, thabaḫī, thabaḫlah." Al-Reza (peace be upon him) said: "He has declared God's oneness in Sindhi." Then he spoke to him about Jesus and Mary. He kept elevating him from one state to another until he said in Sindhi: "I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and that



1 . Nubia: It was the name of a tribe in Sudan.

Moḥammad is the Messenger of Allah." Then he raised a belt he was wearing, and underneath appeared a zunnār (a sacred thread worn by Christians and Zoroastrians) around his waist. He said: "O son of the Messenger of Allah, cut it off with your own hand." Al-Reza (peace be upon him) called for a knife and cut it. Then he said to Moḥammad ibn al-Faḍl al-Hāshimī: "Take the Sindhi man to the bathhouse, purify him, clothe him and his family, and take them all to Medina." (Ibn Ḥamzah al-Ṭūsī, 1419 AH, p. 194)

B. Abū Ismā'īl al-Sindī said: I heard in Sind that God has a proof (ḥujjah) among the Arabs. So I left that place in search. I was directed to al-Reza (peace be upon him), so I headed to him and entered upon him while I did not know a single word of Arabic. I greeted him in Sindhi. He returned my greeting in my language. I began speaking to him in Sindhi, and he answered me in it. I said: "I heard in Sind that God has a proof among the Arabs, so I set out in search." He said: "That has reached me. Yes, I am he." Then he said: "Ask what you wish." So I asked him what I wanted. When I wanted to leave his presence, I said: "I do not know any Arabic. Supplicate to God to inspire me with it so I may speak it with its people." He passed his hand over my lips, and I spoke Arabic from that moment. (Irbilī, 1381 AH, vol. 2, p. 304)

C. Abū Ismā'īl al-Sindī said: (Al-Ḥamawī, 1995 CE, vol. 3, p. 267) I was in Sind when I heard that God has a proof among the Arabs... until he said: "I entered upon him (Imam al-Reza, peace be upon him) while I did not know a single word of Arabic. So I greeted him in Sindhi, and he returned my greeting in my language. I began speaking to him in Sindhi, and he answered me in Sindhi." (Al-Rāwandī, 1409 AH, vol. 1, p. 340)

D. Al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī al-Washshā' said: One day I entered upon 'Alī al-Reza ibn Mūsā (peace be upon him) and saw a group of people with him whom I had not seen and did not know. He was addressing them in Sindhi. (Al-Khaṣṣībī, 1419 AH, p. 316)

E. Ḥakīmah, the daughter of Imam al-Jawād (peace be upon him) and paternal aunt of Imam al-Hasan al-'Askarī (peace be upon him), used to visit Imam al-'Askarī and pray that God would grant him a son. Ḥakīmah said: One day, I went to Imam al-'Askarī and prayed for him as I had previously done. The Imam said to me: "Tonight—which is the middle of Sha'bān in the year 255 AH—the child we have been awaiting will be born. Stay with us tonight to break your fast." That night was a Friday night. I asked: "From whom will this child be?" He replied: "From your maid, Narjis." Ḥakīmah Khatun said: Among all the maids, none was dearer to me than Narjis Khatun. Whenever I entered the house, Narjis would greet me, kiss my hand, and remove my shoes with her own hands. When I went



to Narjis, she performed the same acts she always did. I embraced Narjis, kissed her, and prevented her from doing more. She then addressed me in the Sindhi language, and I replied to her in Sindhi¹ as well. (Al-Mas'ūdī, 1426 AH, p. 258).

8. Greek Language

A. Know, O Mufaḍḍal, that the name of this world in the current Greek language, well-known among them, is "Qūsmūs" (Cosmos), and its interpretation is "ornament." The philosophers and those claiming wisdom named it thus. (Mufaḍḍal ibn 'Umar, 1379 AH solar, p. 176).

9. Hebrew ('Ibrānī) Language

A. Then al-Hārūnī took out a book written in Hebrew from his sleeve and gave it to 'Alī (peace be upon him). 'Alī (peace be upon him) looked into it and wept. Al-Hārūnī said to him: "What makes you weep?" 'Alī (peace be upon him) said: "O Hārūnī, my name is written in this." He said: "O 'Alī, read your name, which place is it written in? For this is a book in Hebrew, and you are an Arab man?!" 'Alī (peace be upon him) said: "Woe to you, O Hārūnī! This is my name. In the Torah, my name is Hābīl, and in the Gospel, Ḥaydar." The Jew said to him: "You have spoken the truth. By the One besides Whom there is no god, this is the handwriting of my father Hārūn, dictated by Mūsā ibn 'Imrān (Moses). It was inherited by the fathers until it came to me." (Al-Jawharī al-Baṣrī, n.d., p. 17)

B. From Umm al-Miqdām al-Thaqafīyyah... Juwayriyyah bint Musharrah told me: "We were crossing the bridge of *Ṣirāt*² with the Commander of the Faithful, Imam 'Alī, (peace be upon him) at the time of the afternoon prayer ('Aṣr). The Imam said: 'This is a land upon which punishment has descended. It is not appropriate for a prophet or the legatee (waṣī) of a prophet to pray here. However, any of you who wishes to pray here, may do so.' The people scattered to the right and left and began praying. I said to myself: 'By God, today I will imitate this master in my prayer; I will not pray until he prays.' (Ibn Bābawayh, 1385 AH solar, vol. 2, p. 352)

"So I continued travelling with him. Gradually, the sun began to set, and I grew very anxious because I had not yet prayed and the time was running out. Then the sun set, and we continued on our way. The Imam said: 'O Juwayriyyah, give the *adhān* (call to prayer).' I said: 'You ask me to give the *adhān* while the sun has already set?!' He said: 'Give the *adhān*.'

1. In the narration of Ithbat al-Wasiyyah: p. 258, instead of Bissinidi "in the Sindhi language", it is reported as Bissiyadah which means 'she received me with a high degree of authority'. In this case, it would be excluded from our example.

2. The Sirat is a river in Iraq, and some copies of the dictionary state: It is a river in the Euphrates.



So I gave the *adhān*. Then he said to me: 'Give the *iqāmah*.' So I gave the *iqāmah*. As soon as I said '*qad qāmati al-ṣalāh*', I saw the Imam's blessed lips move, and I heard him utter something that sounded like Hebrew. Immediately, the sun rose until it reached the position it occupies at the time of the *ʿAṣr* prayer. "The Imam performed the *ʿAṣr* prayer. When we had finished praying, the sun went back down to its setting position, and the stars appeared in the sky. I said: 'I bear witness that you are indeed the legatee of the Messenger of God.' The Imam said: 'O Juwayriyyah, have you not heard God Almighty say: "So glorify the name of your Lord, the Most Great" (Sūrah Wāqīʿah, 56:74).

'I said: 'Yes, I have heard it.' He said: 'I asked God by His Great and Mighty Name, and He turned the sun back for me.'"

10. Roman (Rūmī) Language

A. It is narrated from Dāwūd ibn Farqad who said: The killing of al-Ḥusayn (peace be upon him) and the matter of his son being taken to Syria were mentioned in the presence of Abī ʿAbd Allāh (Imam al-Ṣādiq, peace be upon him). He (the Imam) said: "When he (Imam Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn) entered the prison, one of those present said to another, 'How beautiful is the construction of this wall!' On it was an inscription in Roman (Rūmī). ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn (peace be upon him) read it. The Romans whispered among themselves, saying, 'Among these prisoners, no one is more worthy of avenging the blood of the slain one (al-Ḥusayn) than this one,' meaning ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn." (Al-Rāwandī, 1409 AH, vol. 2, p. 754)

B. Al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (peace be upon him) testified for his father, ʿAlī (peace be upon him), and his testimony was swift. ʿAlī (peace be upon him) said in Roman (Rūmī): "Tālūn wa Qālūn," meaning "good." (Ibn al-Ashʿath, Al-Jaʿfariyyāt, 1409 AH, p. 142)

C. He (Imam al-Reza) returned to that gathering. They brought him a Roman slave girl. He spoke to her in Roman (Rūmī), while the Catholikos listened, as he understood Roman. Al-Reza (peace be upon him) said to her in Roman: "Which one is more beloved to you, Moḥammad or Jesus?" She said: "Previously, before I knew Moḥammad, Jesus was more beloved to me. But after I came to know Moḥammad, I love him more than Jesus and the other prophets." (Ibn al-Ashʿath, Al-Jaʿfariyyāt, 1409 AH, p. 347)

D. He said: "Indeed, Mūsā ibn Jaʿfar (peace be upon him) lived for a period of time, speaking to the Nabateans¹ in their language, to the people of Khurāsān in Persian (Dariyyah), to the Romans in Roman (Rūmī), and to the non-Arabs in their own languages." (Al-Rāwandī, 1409 AH, vol. 1, p. 351)

1. Nabat: A non-Arab tribe who lived in a place between Arab Iraq and Non-Arab Iraq.



11. Abyssinian Language

It is narrated from Ibn Abī Ḥamzah, who said: I was in the presence of the seventh Imam (peace be upon him) when thirty slaves purchased from Abyssinia (Ethiopia) were brought in. One of them spoke, and his speech was eloquent. The seventh Imam (peace be upon him) replied to him in the Abyssinian (Ge'ez/Ethiopian Semitic) language. That slave was astonished, and all the slaves were amazed, for they had assumed that the Imam (peace be upon him) did not understand their language. The Imam (peace be upon him) then said to him: "I will give you some money; you are to pay each of the slaves thirty dirhams." The slaves went out, and some of them said to others: "He speaks our language more fluently than we do. This is a blessing from God upon us." (Himyari, 1413 AH, p. 336)

‘Alī ibn Ḥamzah said: When the slaves had left, I said: "O son of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him and his family), I have seen you speaking with the Abyssinians in their own language." He replied: "Yes." I said: "Yet you gave instructions only to that one slave." He replied: "Yes, I instructed him to treat his companions kindly and to pay each of them thirty dirhams monthly. From his speech, it became clear that he is the most knowledgeable among them. He is one of the sons of kings. Therefore, I appointed him over them and recommended him to attend to their needs. Moreover, he is an honest and upright slave."

Then the Imam said: "Perhaps you are amazed at my speaking to them in Abyssinian?" I said: "Yes, by God, I am." He said: "Do not be amazed. What remains hidden from you of my work is even more amazing and astonishing. What you have heard is nothing more than a bird taking a drop of water from the sea with its beak. Do you think that one drop diminishes the water of the sea?" The Imam (peace be upon him) continued: "The Imam is like the ocean; what he possesses never ends, and his wonders are greater than the wonders of the ocean."

12. Saqālibah (Slavic) Language

A. ‘Alī ibn Mahziyār said: I sent my slave boy, who was a Saqlabī (Slavic), to Abī al-Ḥasan al-Thālith (Imam al-Hādī, peace be upon him). The slave boy returned to me amazed. I said to him, "What is the matter, my son?" He said, "How can I not be amazed? He kept speaking to me in Saqlābī (Slavic) as if he were one of us..."

I thought that by speaking in this language, he wanted the slaves not to hear what was being said between them. (Al-Mufīd, 1413 AH, p. 289)

13. Khazar (Khazarī) Language

A. Al-Rashīd had ordered his servants... When he (Imam al-Kāzīm, peace be upon him) understood what they intended, he spoke to them in Khazarī and Turkish. They threw down the knives from their hands, jumped



to his feet, kissed them, and pleaded to him. (Ibn Shahr Āshūb Māzandarānī, 1379 AH, vol. 4, p. 301)

14. Chinese (Şīnī) Language

A. Ishāq ibn ‘Ammār said: I entered upon Mūsā ibn Ja‘far (peace be upon him) and sat with him. Suddenly, a man from Khurāsān sought permission to enter and spoke to him in speech the like of which I had never heard; it sounded like the speech of birds. Ishāq said: The Imam (peace be upon him) answered him with the same kind of speech and in his language... I said: "I have never heard speech like this!" He said: "This is the speech of a group of people from China. Not all Chinese speak like this... Do you marvel at my speaking to him in his language? I will tell you what is more amazing: The Imam knows the language of birds and the speech of every living creature created by God, and nothing is hidden from the Imam." (Ibn Ḥamzah al-Ṭūsī, 1419 AH, p. 462) and (Al-Majlisī, 1403 AH, vol. 48, p. 70)

The Imams (peace be upon them) Speaking Different Languages

1. Abū Ḥamzah Nuṣayr the servant said: I heard Abā Moḥammad (Imam al-‘Askarī, peace be upon him) many times speaking to his servants in their languages – Turkish, Roman, and Slavic. I was amazed by this and said to myself: "He was born in Medina and did not appear to anyone until after Abū al-Ḥasan (Imam al-Hādī) passed away, and no one saw him. How is this?" While I was thinking this, he turned to me and said: "Indeed, God, blessed and exalted, distinguishes His proof (*ḥujjah*) from the rest of His creation in every way. He gives him languages, knowledge of lineages, lifespans, and events. Were it not for that, there would be no difference between the proof and the one for whom the proof is established." (Al-Kulaynī, 1407 AH, vol. 1, p. 509)

Conclusion

In Shi'a narrations, specific characteristics and qualities have been introduced to distinguish the Infallible Imam from claimants to Imamate. Among these is the Imam's ability to speak all languages. An examination of the relevant hadiths shows that the Imams (peace be upon them), in various situations, spoke different languages, including Roman, Persian, Abyssinian, Nabatean, and Greek. This ability not only served the purpose of responding to audiences from different ethnicities and languages but was also used as evidence for the truth of their Imamate. Such a characteristic indicates the Imams' all-encompassing knowledge and his connection to the source of divine knowledge. Within the Shi'a theological system, it is considered one of the criteria for distinguishing the true Imam from false claimants.



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