



Between Expression and Identity

Islamic Civilizations – Approaches to the Study of Islam in South Asia

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Introduction

The Arabic verb *da'a* holds great significance for members of the Dawoodi Bohra community. *Da'a*, which means both to beckon or call and also to pray and supplicate is the basis for the appellation of the community's leader, the Dai al-Mutlaq, as well as the religious organization that he administers, Dawat-e-Hadiyah.¹ Dawat is a reference to the Fatimid tradition of beckoning and a representation of the activities of the various Ismaili missionaries over the past centuries. The Dai is the noun created from the verb *da'a*, who is both one who beckons and one who prays. In this manner, the Dai al-Mutlaq (pl. Doat Mutlaqeen) beckons members of the community towards his Dawat and also prays for their well-being, prosperity, and salvation. What binds these two acts of beckoning and prayer together is their dependency on a medium of communication, a language. It is no wonder then that the Dawoodi Bohra community over the centuries has developed a concept of a communal language, aptly called Lisan al-Dawat, or the 'language of beckoning' or 'prayer'.²

This paper will discuss the history and formation of this language till its present form. I will try to identify sources within the Fatimid, Ismaili tradition that seem to be inspirations for the concept of Lisan al-Dawat and through them emphasize the fluidity and dynamism of the language. The paper will offer a brief linguistic survey of the language so as to highlight its key components as well as its anomalies in comparison to similar languages. Furthermore, I will discuss its present day proliferation within the community, its impetus and its effects. Finally, Lisan al-Dawat will be discussed in context with British colonial categorizations of the South Asian society and juxtaposed with similar identity reconstruction trends within and outside of the Dawoodi Bohra

community. Ultimately, this paper will thrive to portray Lisan al-Dawat as a dynamic movement between expression and identity.

Lisan al-Dawat: The Language of Beckoning

In simple terms, Lisan al-Dawat refers to the language spoken by the Imam, and in his absence, the Dai of a particular time.³ However, this concept is dealt in much more detail and intricacy in internal publications of the Dawoodi Bohra community. For a more nuanced understanding of the concept of Lisan al-Dawat a detailed study of such an internal publications will serve us well. In a publication produced by al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah, the seminary and research institute of the Dawoodi Bohra community, the following extract translated from its original in Arabic can be found: “The Quran is its [Lisan al-Dawat] soul, Arabic is its foundation, the knowledge of Allah’s *awli>yah* is its essence, Fatimid literature is its character, and each era’s *wali’s* expression is its criterion.” (Emphasis mine.)⁴ Each phrase can be dealt with separately.

The Islamic connotations to the first phrase are quite apparent. Although Lisan al-Dawat is for the most part based off of the South Asian vernacular of Gujarati, this definition emphasizes that its underlying spirit is that of the Quran. South Asian Muslims, especially Ismailis, are often faced with criticism from Wahabi and Wahabi-influenced sects from the Arab world for their various cultural and religious traditions that many Sunni Muslims believe to be antithetic to Islamic dogma. This description of Lisan al-Dawat can be taken as an attempt to thwart such criticisms and to establish the Islamic identity of the language.

Building upon this Islamic identity is the second phrase in regards to Arabic being Lisan al-Dawat's foundation. Although the official communications of the Dawoodi Bohra community are mainly in Lisan al-Dawat, Arabic is considered the *lingua franca* of the community and is one of the mediums of instruction in al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah. His Holiness, Dr. Syedna Mohammed Burhanudin⁵, the current Dai of the community is fluent in Arabic and advises members of the community to learn it as well. Such emphasis on Arabic has many major reasons. Firstly, as Lisan al-Dawat continues to develop, more and more Arabic vocabulary is added to its lexicon. Secondly, religious and secular education are highly stressed by Syedna.⁶ A better knowledge of the Arabic language allows for a better understanding of the Tayyibi texts that are so highly revered by the community. Finally, among these texts are books of esoteric meanings that lose their semantic density when uprooted from their Arabic words. Thus, certain aspects of the Arabic language are lost in translation. To this effect, Dr Yusuf Najmuddin, the late rector of al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah explained that the word Imam couldn't be translated into any language. "The Imam will always be Imam."⁷ It is interesting to note, however, that despite this position of Arabic in the Dawoodi Bohra community, Lisan al-Dawat still remains the language of communication to the extent that Yemeni Dawoodi Bohras take classes to learn it regardless of their knowledge of Arabic.

The foremost purpose of Lisan al-Dawat is to enable the Dai to transmit Ismaili concepts and doctrines to the community through an understandable medium. At its essence then, Lisan al-Dawat is a vehicle for the transmission of knowledge, or *'ilm*. A great portion of this doctrine and belief is incorporated in Fatimid literature, or *al-Adab al-Fatimi*, a term especially coined to refer to the body of works produced by

Tayyibi Dawoodi Bohra scholars over the centuries. Thus, Lisan al-Dawat is replete with connotations of this literature. For example, the previous Dai, Syedna Taher Saifuddin⁸ had written a panegyric, also commonly referred to in the community as *qasi>dah* (also often pronounced as *qasi>do>*, a common practice in changing Arabic ta> marbut}ah endings into a long o> in Lisan al-Dawat), that had a widespread influence. Although in Arabic, it was commonly recited at community gatherings and even taught to children. In the opening verse, he uses the word *baraka>t*, (sing. *barakat*) meaning prosperity or growth. Today, *barakat* is an everyday word that has religious connotations of blessings. Lisan al-Dawat in this way serves as a characterization of Fatimid literature and a vehicle of Fatimid doctrine.

The most important aspect of the definition provided by al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah's publication, however, is the relationship of the language to the spiritual head of the faith at that time. The criterion of Lisan al-Dawat is the speech and expression of the Dai. Due to the importance of the Dai's sermons and the reverence given to his words, his vocabulary, his manner of expression, and his pronunciation become the standards incorporated into Lisan al-Dawat. As a child, listening to his broadcasted sermons, I distinctly remember asking my parents meanings of certain words (which often were not previously known by them as well) and eventually utilizing them in my own speech. A brief narration of the history of the community and the development of Lisan al-Dawat will emphasize this pivotal concept.

Like all Muslims, the Dawoodi Bohras trace the history of their faith to the pre-Islamic period, all the way back to Adam. According to Fatimid theology, all prophets prior to the Prophet Mohammed were essentially beckoning to the same religion, the

same Dawat. As the times changed, modifications were made to the religion and ultimately it culminated in the form of the religion of Mohammed, Islam. In a similar manner, as civilization developed and languages transformed, the prophets adapted themselves to the languages of their people. As noted in the Quran, “And we have not sent any prophet but with [the ability to speak in] the language of his people so that he may explain to them”.⁹ The languages utilized to beckon and call forth mankind towards that changing religion were all at a particular time the Lisan al-Dawat of that period. This is why in the famous Ismaili philosophic work of “Ikhwa>n al-S{afa””, which the Dawoodi Bohras believe to be written by Imam Ahmad al-Mastu>r, we are informed that Syriac, Greek, and Hebrew were all once used by the prophets to beckon their people. Each one was a Lisan al-Dawat.¹⁰

With the advent of Islam and the Prophet Mohammed, naturally Lisan al-Dawat is now the Arabic language. It is worth mentioning that although Lisan al-Dawat is seen to be a link to the Arabic language, the concept of Lisan al-Dawat does not begin with Islam and the use of Arabic as the Quranic language, but prior to Arabic receiving its Islamic connotations. Moving on, with the establishment of the Fatimid kingdom first, in North Africa and then in Egypt, Arabic remained the Lisan al-Dawah. During the course of my research on this topic I was asked whether the Arabic spoken was *fush}h}ah* or colloquial. When we look at Fatimid texts, especially those of al-Qadi al-Nu'ma>n and his “Maja>lis musa>'ira>t” in which he reports quotes from the various Fatimid caliphs including al-Imam al-Mu'iz and al-Imam al-'Azi>z, we can infer that *fush}h}ah* is the Lisan al-Dawat. However, due to the variations of Arabic dialects across North Africa and Egypt there is a possibility that *fush}h}ah* remained confined to Dawat missionaries and

positions in the religious hierarchy whilst the general followers spoke in their local dialects. Since my focus here is more on Lisan al-Dawat in its contemporary form I have not done more research on this issue, but it is a viable option for exploration. It is also in this period that we find the first references to the term Lisan al-Dawat in Fatimid works by al-Mu'ayyid al-Shi'razi.¹¹ Another key feature in the history of Lisan al-Dawat from this period is that the first missionaries to South Asia are sent by al-Imam Mustansir billah. Here they encountered the Gujarati vernacular for the first time, only it is referred to as "*lughat al-hind*". It is said that not only did these first missionaries learn the new language from the local inhabitants but that they acquired a level of proficiency in them, "*wa tamahhara biha*". This proves that the language was not only learnt by these missionaries as a means for daily life but to aid in the propagation of Dawat and the spreading of its doctrine amidst the indigenous population.¹²

After various schisms in the Ismaili community, the Tayyibi Musta'li Dawat was transferred to Yemen in the 12th century. Here we have the first instance of the position of the Dai and the beginning of the Doat Mutliqeen. Lisan al-Dawat remains in the form of Arabic because it is spoken in Yemen as it was in all previous places the Dawat existed. Scholars claim that the same Arabic dialect was used by the Yemeni Doat as was used in Cairo, meaning *fus}h}ah*.¹³ This can be gleaned from Arabic theological works and poetry written by Yemeni scholars and Doat for the next five centuries. In Sayyidna Idri's 'Imad al-Din's historical work "'Uyun al-akhbar'" we find yet another reference to the term Lisan al-Dawat, interestingly enough in his reference to the Fatimid caliph, al-Imam al-Zahir and his use of the language.¹⁴

Finally, in the 16th century the Tayyibi Dawat was transferred to Gujarat, India. For the first time after the advent of Islam, Dawat is based out of a non-Arabic speaking land. Initially, as I had mentioned earlier, the missionaries sent by Imam communicated with the indigenous population in Gujarati. As was in Yemen, however, the *lingua franca* of the literati remained Arabic as it is today. Prior to the transplantation of Dawat to the subcontinent, Tayyibi scholars from India would travel to the Dai's court in Yemen to learn from him and rise in the religious hierarchy. For this reason, Indian scholars were fluent and able in the Arabic language. To make this knowledge and Tayyibi doctrine accessible to the general population of South Asia to whom they would return, the Dai's representatives in Gujarat would formulate a system of introducing the Arabic language into the vernacular. Due to their expert knowledge of the Arabic language, the initial missionaries, and later on the Indian *Du'a>t* were able to slowly alter the vernacular that was spoken in the community. As the lexicon from Arabic and Persian grew, the lexicon from Sanskrit and other vernaculars lessened. What remained, for the most part, was the morphological and syntactical structure of Gujarati. As for the term Lisan al-Dawat as a specific reference to this newly formed language, it does not occur until 18th century in the period of Syedna Abdeali Saifuddin. Before then, this language was either referred to as *lughat al-hind*, the language of India, or *al-lughat al-gujra>ti>*, the Gujarati language. One should note however, that despite being called Gujarati, it was still written in the Arabic script as present day Lisan al-Dawat is.¹⁵ In the development of Lisan al-Dawat in the subcontinent, one will also notice slight nuances between the Lisan al-Dawat of different regions of Western India. For instance, the Ujaini dialect of Lisan al-Dawat differs, mostly in lexicon, from the Surti or Ahmedabadi

versions. We will discuss this in more detail in the following section. In the beginning of the 20th century, under the leadership of Syedna Taher Saifuddin, the community saw many changes and identity reformations.¹⁶ But if the seeds for these changes were sown in that period, the fruition was in the late 20th century under the leadership of the current Dai Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin. It is in his era that this combination of Arabic and various vernaculars take on their identity as Lisan al-Dawat. But before we discuss the causes and means of the proliferation of Lisan al-Dawat in the contemporary Dawoodi Bohra community, let us first discuss its linguistic components.

Lisan al-Dawat in South Asia – Arabic and the Vernacular

There are said to be 1,652 mother tongues in the Indian subcontinent¹⁷. Among them, between two hundred and seven hundred languages belong to four language families.¹⁸ Such diversity originating from such a confined source will no doubt lead to similarities and commonalities between different languages and dialects. Which is why instead of classifying the following discussion according to the linguistic science, I felt it would be more suitable to do so according to the languages that have influenced Lisan al-Dawat.

Since Lisan al-Dawat is meant to be a bridge to Arabic, I found it appropriate to begin our discussion with it.¹⁹ The most obvious influence of Arabic on Lisan al-Dawat is its script. Its right-to-left orientation, the numerical values of its letter and even their shapes hold significance in the Fatimid Islamic tradition. Ikhwan al-Safa' dedicates a passage to the description of each letter and the erudition in its formation.²⁰ Another key benefit in writing Lisan al-Dawat in the Arabic script is that it helps individuals in

actually reading Arabic, especially for the recitation of the Quran and for prayers. Thus, choosing the Arabic script for Lisan al-Dawat has functions other than establishing an Islamic identity marker.

The second largest influence of Arabic on Lisan al-Dawat is the vast body of words it has added to its lexicon. As mentioned earlier, Arabic is essential for understanding Fatimid texts and literature. With the increased number of Arabic words present in Lisan al-Dawat, members of the community are day by day increasing their familiarity with the Arabic language. In a speech once given in Karachi by Dr. Najmuddin, he asks the audience how many of them knew Arabic. No one answered. He then recited a small couplet from a *qasi>dah* of Syedna Taher Saifuddin and asked them to translate it. Still, no one was capable. Then he deconstructed the verse and said each Arabic word one-by-one and then asked who understood them. Everyone raised their hand. His point was to prove that members of the community had knowledge of Arabic that they were unaware of.²¹ This knowledge comes from the vast pool of words found in Lisan al-Dawat that originate from Arabic. The following table will provide some examples.

Arabic	English Definition
rid{a>’	happiness
awliya>’ Alla>h	friends of Allah
buka>’	lamentation

One should note that due to the great amount of Arabic words in Urdu and Persian it can be easily assumed that these words were taken from these languages rather than directly from Arabic. I have tried to cite examples here that are more likely taken directly from Arabic due to their presence in Fatimid texts that are often summarized in Lisan al-Dawat and narrated on religious occasions or by Syedna in his discourses. For example, the

word *buka>*' can be recognized in a Prophet's hadith regarding lamentation on his grandson Husain that is commonly heard, especially during the month of Muharram.²²

With the introduction of Arabic words also came Arabic pronunciation and phonology. Granted, Arabic letters and words exist in Persian and Urdu as well but they have lost their distinct Arabic sounds. For instance, the Arabic letter *qa>f* is pronounced in Persian almost as the Arabic *ghayn*, but with less throated emphasis. Similarly, other *huru>f h{alqi>*, or letters which in Arabic are pronounced from the throat, are not done so in Persian such as *'ayn* and *h}a>*. We find similar trends in Urdu, as well. In fact, some Urdu scholars have even expressed the desire to remove Arabic letters from the Urdu language that do not retain their distinct identity, such as *th*, *h}*, *t}*, *z}*, *s}*, *d}*, *'ayn*, and *dh*. Scholars believe that these letters have now been replaced by single letters that express a similar sound.²³ For instance, the word *s{a>bu>n* meaning soap begins with a *s}* but in Urdu is really pronounced as a *s*. In all practicality, this pronunciation discrepancy is present in Lisan al-Dawat as well. In day to day speech, *s}a>bu>n* which happens to be the word for soap in Lisan al-Dawat as well, would be pronounced as it would be in Urdu, without the Arabic *s{a>d*. However, Dawat and its subsidiary educational institutes stress an Arabic pronunciation of the words incorporated into Lisan al-Dawat. This is stressed in al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah as well. When I was a student in the academy, I was once instructed to recite an Arabic paragraph from an treatise of Syedna Taher Saifuddin and then express its gist in Lisan al-Dawat in preparation for the annual oral examinations. After reciting the Arabic paragraph with proper Arabic pronunciation, I began to express the summary in Lisan al-Dawat, only now without the emphatic pronunciations of the Arabic words. I was told to produce the same sort of pronunciation

for the Arabic words in Lisan al-Dawat as I would recite them from an Arabic text. As this emphasis on Arabic pronunciation spreads through the community, more and more individuals are adapting this sort of speech. That said, the level of Arabic pronunciation is still not consistent throughout the community and is most proper amongst those with explicit knowledge of Arabic, specifically those of Jamea background.²⁴

Like many vernacular languages of South Asia, Lisan al-Dawat is influenced by Persian to a great extent. For the most part, this influence remains confined to lexicon and morphology and is not seen much in phonology or syntax. The question arises, as did previously with Arabic, that is this Persian lexicon being taken directly from Persian or through Urdu. It is likely that the majority of Persian words are taken directly from the Persian language due to the powerful influence of Persian over vernaculars during the Mughal period and the relative novelty of Urdu in comparison to the history of the Dawat in the subcontinent.²⁵ Urdu as an official language does not occur until the British colonial rule and their proclamation of the authority of Urdu in Bihar, the United Provinces and Punjab.²⁶ It can logically be concluded then that the Persian influence on Lisan al-Dawat precedes that of Urdu.

Persian vocabulary is most often found in Lisan al-Dawat literature and Syedna's discourses. I will discuss the pivotal role Syedna's discourses play in the standardization of Lisan al-Dawat in the following section, but here, it is of use to note that Syedna is familiar with Persian and often cites entire Persian couplets in his discourses.²⁷ The following table will highlight some of these common Persian words.

Persian	English Definition
bahtar	better
guftagu>	conversation
danda>n shikan	dumbfounding

Again, these words are fairly common in Syedna's discourses, especially the last two. *Guftagu>* is the word he uses when describing the final conversation between 'Abd Alla>h and Saki>nah prior to his martyrdom in Karbala. The period of the first ten days of Moharram referred to by the community as '*Asharah Muba>rakah* has an enormous role in the proliferation of Lisan al-Dawat. More interestingly, many of these Arabic and Persian words are introduced to Lisan al-Dawat by means of the specific discourse regarding Karbala and the events that unfolded there. This 1300 year old event has a profound effect on the character of Lisan al-Dawat today.

As far as Persian influence on Lisan al-Dawat's morphology, or structure of words, we see a similar pattern between the two languages. For instance, the word for server or servant in both Persian and Lisan al-Dawat is *khidmat guza>r*, although in Persian it is written as one word and in Lisan al-Dawat it carries a different connotation specific to the service of the Dawat and the community. However, this word structure of combining the verb predicate (which in this case is actually taken from the Arabic verb *khadima*) and the word *gu>zar* is applied to words we do not find in Persian to create new Lisan al-Dawat words. For example, we have the word *shukur guza>r* which means one who is grateful in Lisan al-Dawat but is not found in Persian.

Lisan al-Dawat and Urdu have a very special relationship. In certain parts of South Asia in previous centuries, Urdu was the language of communication. Until recent time, local 'A<mils relied heavily upon Urdu for communication with the Dawoodi

Bohra congregations and often used Urdu in their sermons and discourses. However, as Urdu lost its universal character and began to pick up specific connotations of Sunni Islam, it proved to be detrimental in maintaining the unique Dawoodi Bohra, Shia Fatimid identity. I will touch on this subject later on in our discussion of Lisan al-Dawat and its implications of Dawoodi Bohra identity. The following is a small table that highlights some common Urdu words found in Lisan al-Dawat:

Urdu	English Definition
din	day
hamdard	empathetic
mahrba>ni>	sympathy

Hamdard and *mahrba>ni>* both have Persian roots but are used differently in Urdu and carry over those same connotations into Lisan al-Dawat. *Mahrba>ni>* for example is taken from the Persian word *mahrba>n* which means kind, but in Urdu and Lisan al-Dawat instead of meaning kindness because of the *i>* adjectival enclitic, it means having sympathy and often has a sarcastic tone to it. One could also say that Urdu grammar is similar to Lisan al-Dawat but this is due to the similarity between Urdu and Gujarati to which we now turn to.

By far the largest influence upon Lisan al-Dawat is that of Gujarati's. Until recent times, the general population referred to the Dawoodi Bohra language as Gujarati and was unaware of the difference between the two. I would like to clarify here that it is not because there were no differences between Lisan al-Dawat and Gujarati that people confused the two. It is more likely, that over time the subtle changes that took effect over Gujarati and converted it to Lisan al-Dawat went unnoticed. That being said, the similarities between the two are undeniable and even today when I go to my ancestral

town of Sidhpur, Gujarat I make no attempt to speak Gujarati and speak as if I was speaking Lisan al-Dawat. Fortunately, the rickshaw driver and *la>ri>wa>lo>* (street merchant) can understand what I'm saying and I'm not denied my *baraf go>lo>* (ice scrapings dowsed with syrup) or *pa>ni> pu>ri>* (small pastries filled with seasoned water). Another major evidence of the similarity between Gujarati and Lisan al-Dawat is that some of the various dialects of Gujarati are found also in Lisan al-Dawat, such as Surti and Kathiawadi.

Lisan al-Dawat's grammar and syntax is taken from Gujarati. Due to the great similarity between them, the influence is apparent and does not require as much discussion as the previous languages. Lisan al-Dawat also takes many words from Gujarati, although they are mostly those words that are found both in Persian and Urdu. The difficulty in determining which words are from what language, as I have mentioned above, is troublesome. This is due to the nature of the relationship between Urdu, Gujarati, Persian, and for that matter Arabic. To get a clearer sense of this we would have to search for manuscripts written in the Dawoodi Bohra community and compare the lexicon with their contemporary Gujarati texts. Unfortunately, we do not have many of these sorts of texts available. Possibly in the future more research can be done on this when these sorts of texts are found. For now, we will move on to the discussion of the peculiarities of Lisan al-Dawat.

An important historic phenomenon worth mentioning here is that although the clergy and religious scholars of the community opted to write their works and official communications in the Arabic script, the majority of Dawoodi Bohras used Gujarati as their mode of writing. Prior to the proliferation of texts and prayer pamphlets in the

Arabic script, most unofficial Dawoodi Bohra ritual catalogs were written in Gujarati, to the extent that even Quranic verses and chapters were transliterated from their Arabic original. When I was a child, I recall going through my fathers *marthiya* books, which he had used to recite lamentations on Husain and the Karbala narrative, and encountering a foreign Gujarati script that it was illegible to me. As a Sunday school going student raised outside of India, I was not familiar with any form of the Devnagari script and I could only read Lisan al-Dawat as it is written today in the Arabic script. This highlights the great expanse covered by the Dawat in just a few generations replacing the Gujarati script with the Arabic. It is interesting to note, however, that when official reports are presented to Syedna, numerical values are still written in the Devnagari script.²⁸ This is important because despite these moves towards the Arabicization of Lisan al-Dawat there are many aspects of Gujarati left in tact to retain the Dawoodi Bohra Gujarati and Indian cultural heritage. Here are some Gujarati words still used today in Lisan al-Dawat.

Gujarati	English Definition
pag	foot
kapr{a>	clothes
ma>thu>	head

A final language that has an apparent influence on Lisan al-Dawat is English. After the arrival of the British in South Asia, and as the Dawoodi Bohra community migrated from India and settled in the West, English began to play a large role in the community. This is most obvious in the English lexicon that is now incorporated in the language. Some words often found in Syedna’s transcribed discourse written in the Arabic script are given below.

English Word	Lisan al-Dawat Variation
general	<i>janral</i>
college	<i>ka>laj</i>
double, double	<i>dab}al, dab}al</i>
hospital	<i>ha>spit}al</i>
school	<i>isku>l</i>

Again, here we have the introduction of foreign word in Lisan al-Dawat due to the narration of Karbala. Syedna, when quoting the last words of Husain to his sister Zainab prior to his death, says: “*dab}al, dab}al kapr}a> phenjo>*”. “Make sure you wear two (double, double) layers of clothing.”²⁹ Obviously, *dab}al, dab}al* were not the exact words used by Husain, then why is it used by Syedna here? To answer this question, we can refer to an extract of one of Syedna’s discourse regarding the usage of English. He discusses the importance of speaking English as well as other languages in today’s world. He goes on to permit members of the clergy and *khidmat guza>r* to utilize certain words from English when their Lisan al-Dawat counterparts would not be understood, giving the example of ‘constitution’ and the Lisan al-Dawat equivalent (taken from Arabic) *dastu>r al-‘amal*.³⁰ Thus, Syedna’s use of *dab}al, dab}al* here may have greater impact on his audience than any equivalent, or it may not have an equivalent at all. But does Syedna’s use of an English word, or anyone else’s for that matter, in the midst of a sermon or discourse include it into Lisan al-Dawat. In his unpublished dissertation, Husain Haidermota claims that the mere use of an English word by Syedna does not qualify it to be included into the Lisan al-Dawat lexicon. Rather a continuous use, such as with *dab}al, dab}al*, that has no equivalent and which carries its own distinct connotations should only be considered an addition to Lisan al-Dawat.³¹

Until now, we have discussed the influences of other languages on Lisan al-Dawat, but there are certain aspects of Lisan al-Dawat that are peculiar to it and products of the merging of various languages within it. One of these aspects is Lisan al-Dawat phonology. Although it imports words from various languages, they are not necessarily pronounced in the same fashion. The following table will clarify this concept.

English	Persian	Urdu	Gujarati	Arabic	Lisan al-Dawat
path	t}ari>qat	t}ari>qah	rasto>	t}ari>qah/t	t}ari>qo>
tongue	zaba>n	zuba>n	ji>b	lisa>n	zaba>n

In our first example, the word for path is similar in all of the languages except for Gujarati. Lisan al-Dawat’s version however is pronounced differently because of the Gujarati masculine gender ending added to it. So we have a word that originates from Arabic but then in Lisan al-Dawat is given a Gujarati gender ending thus leading to an anomaly in pronunciation unheard of in the other languages. In the second example, the ending for the word remains the same as it is in its borrowed language of Persian, yet the difference arises in its pronunciation. The short vowel sound ‘a’ is pronounced like it is in Arabic, not Persian. Here the Arabic system of pronunciation is being applied to a Persian word thus creating a word that is pronounced completely different in Lisan al-Dawat than any other language.

Even before the recent movement towards Lisan al-Dawat, Bohras were known to have a distinct manner of pronouncing Gujarati. In a book about the travels of two Indians in East Africa during the first decade of the 20th century, one of which was a Bohra, the author notes that “he spelled many words as he, a Bohra, would pronounce them”³².

Also, in regards to semantics, borrowed words often tend to gain connotations they previously did not have, and often lose their previous connotations entirely.

Word	Original Language	Original Meaning	Lisan al-Dawat Meaning
sa>yah	Urdu	shadow/shade	Liba>s Anwar outer piece
'urs	Arabic	bride/wedding night	death anniversary

Here we see the original word means shade, but in Lisan al-Dawat it now also refers to the outer piece of clothing worn by men. *Liba>s anwar* is the specific name of the traditional Dawoodi Bohra men's dress which is worn to all official religious gatherings. *'Urs* is taken from Arabic and now refers to the death anniversary of a spiritual figure. The name reflects an Arabic couplet written by Sayyidna> T{ah}ir Sayf al-Di>n which states that this death anniversary is named an *'urs* because as a bride becomes happy on the day of her wedding, so do angels when you leave this world and enter theirs.

As I had mentioned earlier, Lisan al-Dawat also tends to differ from one place to another. This is a reflection of the local influence on the language, thus creating dialects. The following example shows how regional differences affect the syntax.

Are you coming?	English
tu aawe che تو اوائے چھے؟	Popular
tu aaweys تو اوائیس؟	Kucchi

Here the *che* of popular Lisan al-Dawat is dropped and replaced with an 's' that merges into the verb, almost like *ast* in Persian. Similarly, from locality to locality we have differences in the lexicon used as well as the pronunciation. Often times, Dawoodi Bohra

communities of a certain region will highlight these differences to create their own sub-identity within the larger community. For instance, when Syedna travels to Mewar area, members residing in cities of that area such as Udaipur and Rajkot call him by yelling “*kamma> Moula>*”. An even more interesting phenomenon is that a few years ago I traveled to Kuwait when Syedna was there and Rajsasthani Dawoodi Bohras who despite now residing in Kuwait, still continue to address Syedna with “*kamma> Moula>*”. Hence, Lisan al-Dawat dialects function as identity markers within the community. Although derived from various languages as mentioned above, Lisan al-Dawat’s ability to be identified with Dawoodi Bohras and its phonological and semantic peculiarities grant it the status of being a language in its own right.

Contemporary Proliferation and Development of Lisan al-Dawat

The Dai is by far the single largest factor in the proliferation of Lisan al-Dawat today. As the religious leader of the community, and the contemporary source of Dawoodi Bohra doctrine and theology, his words form the basis of the faith of thousands of believers. Since these words are in Lisan al-Dawat, members of the community find the need to learn and adapt to this language. Although publications in other languages exist, the medium Syedna uses himself is Lisan al-Dawat. Every year, thousands of Dawoodi Bohras flock to the venue that Syedna chooses to deliver his annual Moharram sermons. These ten days are by far the biggest incentives for many Dawoodi Bohras to learn and become fluent in Lisan al-Dawat. In a more direct manner, Syedna often instructs members to learn and adapt Lisan al-Dawat in their homes. On numerous occasions, Syedna exhorts his followers, especially those in Western countries to not lose ties with their culture, faith and heritage, which he believes are inherently linked to

Lisan al-Dawat. We will discuss this further in the last section of this paper. Also, on most occasions, extracts from Syenda's *wa'az* or discourse are published and circulated. Without familiarity with Lisan al-Dawat individuals cannot understand and benefit from these publications.

The second most important reason for the proliferation of Lisan al-Dawat in recent times is its constant use in religious gatherings and events. The Dawoodi Bohras have an active religious calendar and cities with established communities often have a busy social life. To understand and to be able to participate on a greater level, some understanding of Lisan al-Dawat is necessary. A reason often espoused for the dismissal of religious events is the inability to understand the discourses and sermons conducted.

To address these issues and make Syedna's discourses more accessible to members of the community, the Dawat has taken upon many initiatives in recent times. The following paragraphs will be a brief description of them and will include an appendix in the back for further information.

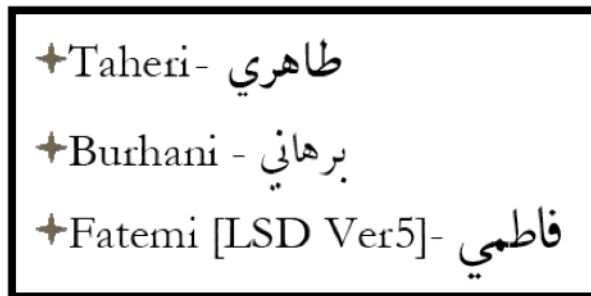
Al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah acts as the source for most academic and educational projects undertaken by the Dawat. It is here, also, that some sort of standardization for Lisan al-Dawat is reached just by the mere process of instruction and teaching. In the month of Ramadan, a majority of Jamea students and instructors travel to various cities and offer their services of philosophical and theological discourse to the local community. In this way, the Lisan al-Dawat taught and emphasized within the boundaries of the campus reaches homes and communities far away.

On a local level, Sunday schools or *madrasahs* teach children Lisan al-Dawat. The Ta'lim Department of Dawat regulates a curriculum that is implemented at the hundreds of local schools all across the world. In most communities, *madarash*-attending children will have a higher proficiency in speaking Lisan al-Dawat than their parents. For the past decade, al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah has been conducting summer crash courses in Surat for teenagers where students are familiarized with speaking and writing in Lisan al-Dawat amongst numerous other subjects. In addition to that, al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah's Quranic Arts and Sciences department, Mahad al-Zahra has initiated a Quran summer camp that, too, will designate a class to the instruction of Lisan al-Dawat. (See Appendix A)

Specific material for learning Lisan al-Dawat on one's own is also available in the form of printed publications. Such material is either official published by Dawat or offered by a local community or *jama'at* to aid local members. (See Appendix A)

A major medium for the proliferation of Lisan al-Dawat is audio recordings. Al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah's Audio department, a sub-branch of Mahad al-Zahra produces and publishes Lisan al-Dawat panegyrics, *mada'ih*, a couple times a year. Some of these CDs are distributed free of cost, such as the very long *nasihah* written by Syedna Taher Saifuddin, "Allah ta'alanu hamdu karje", "Praise Allah".

The World Wide Web is also being used for the instruction and education of Lisan al-Dawat. This year in Boston, the local Dawoodi Bohra community initiated a "Lisan al-Dawat Word-of-the-Day" mailing list in which recipients



would receive a new word from Lisan al-Dawat's lexicon everyday accompanied with its usage, English meaning and for pronunciation purposes, its transliteration. (See Appendix A) Various online websites also offer interactive tools to learn Lisan al-Dawat or downloadable do-it-yourself exercises. (See Appendix A) To facilitate greater use of Lisan al-Dawat, the past decade has also seen the development of Lisan al-Dawat fonts. The image below highlights the development of the script from an Arabic style in the oldest Taheri font, to a more circular, less rigid form in the most contemporary Fatemi font. Even from a stylistic aspect, the font is not similar to the default, Arabic, Urdu or Persian fonts used predominantly today.

Indeed, the advent of internet and easier means of publication, combined with the widespread influence of Syedna's discourse, brought about an efflorescent of Lisan al-Dawat within the Dawoodi Bohra community. We shall now turn to the effects this efflorescent has had on the identity of the community.

Language and the Dawoodi Bohra Identity

The British colonial era in South Asia is one of the most significant periods in the history of South Asia. The various policies that were implemented in this time have ongoing effects till this very day. As an aftermath to the British system of categorization, many communities found themselves searching for a means to define themselves.

Confronted by this system of classification, many groups were being associated with religions and dogmas they weren't even aware of or felt were antithetic to, such as the Khojas of Gujarat.³³ This combined with the general disarray of the Muslim community after the fall of the Muslim Mughal empire and the catastrophic repercussions of the Mutiny of 1857 left most Muslims searching for an identity that they previously weren't required to produce.³⁴

As the partition grew closer, nationalist trends began to emerge demanding that "India must be free, India must be a Republic, India must be United, India must have a Common Language, India must have a Common script"³⁵. This same movement began amongst Muslim leaders beckoning all Muslims to the adaptation of what was the purest form of Islam. These dual assimilative trends in India were a peculiar time for most Muslims as they were for the Dawoodi Bohra community. On one hand, the British system has required the need for identification and the creation of communal boundaries while on the other hand national assimilative trends required the adoption of a commonality that was absent of individual traits and characteristics.

Syedna Taher Saifuddin and his predecessor, Syedna Mohammed Burhanudin adapted and implemented policies that enabled them to maintain a distinct identity for the community, but also allow them to fall under the category of Indian Muslims. Lisan al-Dawat functions exactly in this way. Through its Islamic and Arabic connotations Lisan al-Dawat created a Muslim identity for the Dawoodi Bohra community, but simultaneously, its Gujarati heritage allowed them to remain within the Gujarati, Indian fold. The combination of the two separate identities merged into a new distinct Dawoodi Bohra identity that was specific to the community and not shared by anyone else. In this

manner, Lisan al-Dawat, as other identity markers of the Dawoodi Bohras, helped the community navigate this turbulent period of South Asian history.

In what way has language altered the identity of other communities? The most obvious example is that of Urdu and Hindi. Coming from the same Northern Indian dialect, the debates surrounding Hindi and Urdu were one of the greatest contributing factors to the separation of Pakistan and India, the polarization of Hindu and Muslim identity despite the thousands of years of history they commonly share. The Parsis, due to the variations of their Gujarati dialect were ostracized from the Gujarati community. “Their [Parsis’] mother tongue is Gujarati, though one cannot but say that they have not done justice to this mother tongue of theirs... Having been derived from Sanskrit and being its daughter, Gujarati must necessarily lean on Sanskrit – no one can question that”.³⁶ These are the words of none other than the father of the Indian nation, Ghandi. In this way, language can create and remove identity, both internally and externally.

Lisan al-Dawat has had profound effects on the identity of the Dawoodi Bohra community. First of all, it clearly associates the Dawoodi Bohras by use of its Arabic script and lexicon to the Islamic faith. Simultaneously, it affords members of the community a direct link to their leader, Syedna Burhanuddin. In effect, it links the identity of the leadership, the elite of the community, to the rest. Due to its Gujarati and vernacular influences, Lisan al-Dawat serves as heritage link for thousands of Dawoodi Bohras who do not reside in India anymore. Due to the dynamic nature of the language, it allows for a sense of fluidity which reflects in the dogma and practices of the community. Not only does Lisan al-Dawat add to the identity of the community, it also reflects certain aspects of it as well. Through additions in its lexicon, such as the ones I

discussed in regards to the Karbala narrative, Lisan al-Dawat highlights trends within the Dawoodi Bohra community. For instance, the recent addition of *ta'abuda>t* reflects a new movement that designates forty days in the year for increased communal worship. In this way, a linguistic history of the language would reflect a cultural and religious history of the community as well. Lastly, it allows the community to maintain a distinct identity without compromising their nationalistic and Islamic ones.

Conclusion

Dr Yusuf Najmuddin once said in regards to Lisan al-Dawat that as long as it portrays and relays the criterion of Fatimid thought and literature, then what language it is really doesn't matter.³⁷ Expression is the key. Lisan al-Dawat has reached this status in the community today because it enables the Dai to spread his philosophy to his people. As time changes, the criteria for what shall be Lisan al-Dawat will change as well, and Lisan al-Dawat will change once again. In this way, the community's language is inherently linked to its language, which is linked to the leader of that period. It offers them a means of expression and a sense of identity, it is therefore, a language 'between expression and identity'.

Appendix A

Mahad al Zahra introduces the first ever Hifzul Quran e Majeed Summer Camp.
 RAJAB 6TH 1429 H TO SHABAN 7TH, 1429 H – JULY 8TH, 2008 TO AUGUST 8TH, 2008

The camp will be for mumeeneen from the ages of 10 to 22.
 The program will last for one month in Surat,
 India for a total cost
 of \$750.00.

GOALS AND PURPOSES:

- QURAN E MAJEED MEMORIZATION
- SCIENCE OF RECITATION
- EXEGESIS AND TAFSEER
- LISAN UD DAWAT PRACTICE
- Fiqh AND AKHBAAR CLASSES
- LISAN UD DAWAT PRACTICE
- NAMAZ PUNCTUALITY
- ZIYARAT ROAD TRIP

MEMORIZATION
 Participants will memorize under the guidance and instruction of Mahad al Zahra khidmat guzaars. Initial targets will be for Surat ul Balaad, for more advanced individuals, separate custom targets will be created.

TAFSEER
 Not only will participants memorize the Quran e Majeed, but they will also have the opportunity to learn about and understand the *surahs* they memorize in conjunction with *Moulana's bayanaat mubarakah* and *Dawat e Hadiyah Kitaabo*.

FIQH / AKHBAAR CLASSES
 Along side their Quranic education, participants will take classes taught by Jamea khidmat guzaars on Islamic jurisprudence, *fiqh* and *akhbaar*, Islamic history as well as other subjects.

NAMAZ PUNCTUALITY
 The Quran e Majeed exhorts punctuality and adherence to *ibadat*, especially *namaz*. Participants of the summer camp will have the opportunity to pray all five times with *imamat* in the historic masjids of Surat.

ZIYARAT
 During their time there, participants will be taken on an educational *ziyarat* trip of Dorat Mullaqin SM and Huddod Kiram SM.

RECITATION
 Participants will be able to utilize Mahad's advance AV studio to hone their skills of recitation. Personal, one-on-one instruction will be given to educate individuals regarding Quranic rules of recitation, otherwise known as *Ahkaam ut Tajweed* as well as *makharij* or Arabic pronunciations. Also, participants will practice recitation of *qasaaid*, *marthiyas*, *azaan* and *takbirah*.

LISAN UD DAWAT
 Language is an integral part of our children's upbringing. Burhanuddin Aqa ^{TUS} has always stressed the important of Lisan ud Dawat. The summer camp will help individuals in both speaking and writing Lisan ud Dawat.

“the memorization of the Quran is much needed”
 - Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin ^{TUS}




Enrich your child's life this summer with the *barakat* of the Quran e Majeed at Mahad al Zahra's summer camp.
 Please register with the Mahad al Zahra representative by June 6th, 2008. Contact information provided on the back.




Figure 1 Quran Summer Camp - Lisan al-Dawat Instruction

Bayan Mubarak

Listen and Learn Lisan ud dawat.

[Read text] [Play Audio]

Figure 2 Misbah.info - Children's site for Lisan al Dawat

» LANGUAGES - LISAAN AL DAAWAT

Lisan Al Dawat is the language, our Maula Al Dai Al Ajal Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin TUS has chosen to speak in. It is derived from arabi, urdu, farsi, and gujarati.

Saut Al Iman provides a vast variety of Madaeh and Marasi in lisan Al Dawat. Kalaams like "**mazhar chhe bhala kaun khuda na ane hamnam**" by Al Dai Al Ajal Syedna Taher Saifuddin RA, and Madaeh written by Syedi Abdeali Imaduddin RA are ideal backbones for the learning of the language and its rich literature.

"Allah Ta'la No Hamd Tu Karje" and "Biradar Tu Nasihat Sun" are the most ideal kalam for the learning of Lisan Al Dawat.

Beside above mentioned, Nasaeh of Syedi Abdeali Imaddudin Saheb RA and Syedi Shaikh Sadq Ali Saheb are the best source to learn Lisan Al Dawat. Saut Al Iman covers few Nasaeh in the Volume Four.



[Listen Audio - Dil Si Hasad Nay Nikaal]

Online Exercises

01	Exercise 1	Words & Meanings	
02	Exercise 2	Sentences	
03	Exercise 3	Sentences	
04	Exercise 4	Urdu Tutorial 1	
05	Exercise 5	Urdu Tutorial 2	
06	Exercise 6	Words & Meanings - Noor Rupala Suhamna	
07	Exercise 7	Words & Meanings - Allah Ta'la Nu Hamd Tu Karje	
08	Exercise 8	Translation : Zikra Awwal	

Figure 3 Image of sautuliman.com - Lisan al Dawat lessons

الف

Meanings	معنى/مفهوم	Transliteration	الفاظ
4	3	2	1
Allah 's worshippers	خدا نا بنداؤ	Allah na ibaad	الله نا عباد
in Future	اؤنار زمان ما	Aaindah	أئنده
with tearful eyes	أنسون بيني أنكبو	Aabdeeda	أبديده
Relics	أثار	Aasaar	أثار
Rest	أرام	Aaraam	أرام

Figure 4 Image of Lisan al-Dawat glossary for learning the language

Endnotes:

¹ Arabic Transliteration: *al-Da'wat al-Ha>di>yah, al-Da>'i> al-Mut}laq*, Note on spelling: Since these words have been incorporated into English, I am using the conventional spelling within the community rather than the transliterated version from Arabic. These renderings of the words are also used in all official legal documentation.

See: Office of Public Sector Information, "Dawat-e-Hadiyah (England) Act 1993 (c. x), 1993 Chapter X", http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/localact1993/ukla_19930010_en_1, Accessed May 12th 2008.

For the names of *Du'a>t*, I have preferred to use the transliterated Arabic because there are no conventions to this regard.

² Arabic Transliteration: *Lisa>n al-Da'wah*, again taken here in the form most commonly found in Dawoodi Bohra internal publications and as used within the community.

³ Dawoodi Bohras believe that the Imam is in concealment and thus, the Dai acts as his representative.

⁴ *Majmu>'at al-Nashara>t il-'ilmi>yah*, (Karachi: al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah, al-T{ab' wa al-Nashr, 1990)

⁵ His Holiness' name has been published in official publications numerous times, therefore I'm using this official version here.

⁶ Jonah Blank, "Mullahs on the Mainframe", (Chicago: 2001) p. 207.

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- ⁷ Lisan al-Dawat: “*Ima>m to> Ima>maj che.*”, Dr. Yusuf Najmuddin, Audio recording, (Karachi: al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah, Mahad al Zahra, 1974).
- ⁸ I have refrained from conventionally transliteration for the proper names of community leaders that are often mentioned in English literature produced by the community for authenticity.
- ⁹ Quran 14.4 – Personal translation
- ¹⁰ Husain Haidermota, *Lisa>n al-Da’wah*, (F.J. Diss., al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah, 2005).
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Sayyidi> al-Shaykh al-Qutb, *Muntaz’a al-Akhba>r*, Volume 2, p. 349
- ¹³ Husain Haidermota, *Lisa>n al-Da’wah*, (F.J. Diss., al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah, 2005).
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., p.53
- ¹⁶ Jonah Blank, *Mullahs on the Mainframe*, (Chicago: 2001) p. 52.
- ¹⁷ Bruno Nettl et al., *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music: South Asia: the Indian Subcontinent*, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000) p. 5.
- ¹⁸ D.P. Patanayak, “The Eighth Schedule: A Linguistic Perspective”, *Language and the State*, R.S. Gupta, Anvita Abbi and Kailash S. Aggarwal, eds. (New Delhi: Creative Books, 1995) p. 50
- ¹⁹ Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin, *al-Iqtiba>sa>t al-Nu>ra>ni>yah*, (Surat: al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah, 1996)
- ²⁰ *Ikhwa>n al-S{afa’*, Volume 3, (Bayru>t: Da>r wa-Maktabat al-Hila>l, 1979) p. 143-45.
- ²¹ Shaykh Shabbir Rashid – Professor al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah, Personal communication.
- ²² *Tazyi>n al-‘asharah al-muba>rakah*, (Colombo: al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah, 2006)
- ²³ Rizwana Moin, *Urdū par ‘Arabīke lisa>nTāsara>t*, (Hydrebad: Dr. Rizwana Moin, 1998), p. 100.
- ²⁴ *Khidmat guza>r refers to individuals in the service of the Dawat and community similar to clergymen.*
- ²⁵ Javed Majeed, “‘The Jargon of Indostan’: An Exploration of Jargon in Urdu and East India Company English”, *Languages and Jargons*, Peter Burke and Roy Porter, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995) p. 183.
- ²⁶ Ibid, p. 184.
- ²⁷ Personal communication. I was present at a relayed discourse on the occasion of the martyrdom anniversary of Imam Hasan when he recited an entire Persian couplet.
- ²⁸ Personal experience.
- ²⁹ Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin, *al-Iqtiba>sa>t al-Nu>ra>ni>yah*, (Colombo: al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah, 2006)
- ³⁰ Syedna Mohammed Burhanuddin, *al-Iqtiba>sa>t al-Nu>ra>ni>yah*, (Surat: al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah, 1996)
- ³¹ Husain Haidermota, *Lisa>n al-Da’wah*, (F.J. Diss., al-Jamea-tus-Saifiyah, 2005).
- ³² Cynthia Salvadori, *Two Indian Travellers*, (Mombasa: Friends of Fort Jesus, 1997)
- ³³ Ali Asani, (unpublished article)
- ³⁴ Jonah Blank, *Mullahs on the Mainframe*, (Chicago: 2001) p. 48.
- ³⁵ Madame Bhikhaji Cama, quoted from *Our Language Problem and Unity of India*, Minocher K. Contractor, (Surat: 1982)
- ³⁶ Isaka, Riho. “The Gujarati Elites and the Construction of a Regional Identity in the Late Nineteenth Century”, *Beyond representation : colonial and postcolonial constructions of Indian identity*, Ed. Crispin Bates, New Delhi ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2006
- ³⁷ Yusuf Najmuddin, (Karachi: 1987)