

An empire of learning: Arabic as a global language

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With the Islamic conquests in the 7th century, Islam was transformed from a localised religion to a universal one. Something similar happened to the Arabic language: what had been the language of the Arab tribes, became the language of Islam.

Within the conquered territories, the close contact between conquerors and conquered led to the disappearance of most local languages and the eventual adoption of Arabic as the first language.

In Islamic countries outside the Arab world, Arabic never developed into a language of daily communication, but it did serve as a major tool for learning. Through Arabic, people gained access to a vast store of knowledge, not only in religion, but in other sciences as well. In this paper, I shall deal with the effects of this process of globalization, in particular in West- and East-Africa and in Indonesia.