
A PHONETIC, MORPHOLOGICAL AND SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF ARABIC WORDS IN MALAY

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1. Introduction

Loanwords is a universal phenomenon as there is no language which does not borrow lexical items from other languages either to adopt new concepts or to enrich, increase and develop its vocabulary. Arabic itself borrowed words from Persian, Greek and Latin. Furthermore, in modern times, it has borrowed words from Italian, French and English.

Borrowing words may occur in languages which belong to one group such as French and Spanish, or in others which belong to different groups such as Arabic and Malay as the first belongs to the Semitic languages group whereas the latter belongs to the Malay-Polynesian family (Payne 1970:1)

It is worth mentioning here, however, that although Malay has borrowed several thousand words, terms and expressions along with adopting the Arabic script (Bey 1983: 78-82), Arabic, on the other hand, borrowed nothing at all from Malay. The reason for that can be attributed to the literary, cultural, scientific and religious superiority of Arabic. To Malays who embraced Islam in 674 A. D., the sacred and prestigious Arabic became their source of inspiration. They adopted the Islamic laws, traditions and concepts as well as their terms and expressions.

Like other borrowing languages, Malay tends to assimilate the Arabic loanwords so that they may follow its native words, agree with its phonetic and morphological systems and finally become part of it. As a result of that only a few Arabic words like *mimbar*, *nasab*, and *rasul* have retained their original shape. The majority of Arabic loanwords in Malay, however, have been so greatly changed that it becomes extremely difficult to recognise such words as *pakar*, *nalar*, *zapin*, *betek* and *silap*. The last two words have

been changed not only in form but also in meaning. The word *betek*, papaya, is a corruption of the original word **بطيخ**, watermelon, whereas the word *silap*, error, is the Malay form of the Arabic word **خلاف**, difference. Such phonetic and semantic changes are not restricted to these two words, but have affected a great number of Arabic loanwords in Malay. Compared with Arabic loanwords in other Muslim languages, and even with other loanwords in Malay e.g. Portuguese, the Arabic loanwords in Malay have undergone tremendous changes. This paper is an attempt to illustrate the phonetic, morphological and semantic changes that occurred to the Arabic loanwords in Malay. To reach this end, the descriptive and comparative methods are adopted.

2. Phonetic Changes

Phonetic changes of Arabic loanwords in Malay fall into four categories:-

- (a) Substitution,
- (b) Deletion,
- (c) Augment; and
- (d) Vowel exchange

(a) Substitution

As Malay has no identical vocal signs for the letters /ح/, /ث/, /ع/, /ف/, /ط/, /ض/, /ذ/, and /د/, therefore it substitutes them by other letters (Zaki 1990: 100-123). Illustrating all such alterations would need several pages. Therefore, for the sake of brevity, I will limit myself to the letter /ق/. Here are some examples.

Arabic	_____	Malay
(i) /ق/	_____	/K/ Kalbu
قلب		
(ii) /ق/	_____	/Kh/ Khatifah
قطيفة		
(iii) /ق/	_____	/g/ gamis
قميص		
(iv) /ق/	_____	/r/ telar
قطار		

(v) /ق/
قافلة

/c/
cafilah

As seen in the above forms the letter /ق/, a plosive, has been altered into five different letters, three of them i.e., /K/, /g/ and /t/ are plosives whereas the /c/ is a fricative and the /Kh/ is a combination of a plosive /K/ and a fricative /h/.

(b) Deletion

Deletion occurs to a great number of Arabic words in Malay. The letter /ع/, for instance, is often dropped from words such as *uzur* (عذر), *ulamak* (علماء) and *doa* (دعاء). Similarly, the letters /ح/, /ذ/ and /ء/ are deleted from the words *Kemat* (كثرة), *eja* (هجاه) and *soal* (سؤال) respectively.

De-clustering of double consonants is another aspect of deletions as in *datal* (دلال), *nabi* (نبي), *giat* (غنية), *tahjud* (تقبر) and *tafakur* (تفكير). This phonetic change, however, is a common phenomenon in Malay. It occurs to loanwords from other languages such as English as in *waran* (warrant), *bil* (bill) and *elaun* (allowance) (Tham 1970: 38). It apparently helps pronounce such words by drawing them closer to the phonetic and morphological systems of the Malay language.

Deletion, however, is not limited to one letter, but it occurs too to more than one letter. Parts of words are also dropped either from the beginning of a word as in *dollah* (عبرالله), the middle as in *maward* (هالورد) and the end as in *malsa* (ملفحة). Both the initial and final parts of a word can be deleted as in *eja* (هجاه) as the letter /ذ/ and the letter /ء/ are dropped.

(c) Augment

In contrast with deletion, augment occurs by adding a letter or more to the beginning of a word as in *dahulu* (أول), to the middle as in *terperkor* (تفكر) or to the end as in *ilmiawan* (علمي).

Prefixes and suffixes are two aspects of augment (Asmah 1983:89). Added to Arabic words, these prefixes and suffixes greatly succeed in changing the shape of these words and Malayize them. They become as a mask which hides their Arabic features. Such change occurs to most of the Arabic words as in *memikiran* (فكر).

Only a few Arabic words do not incur such changes and particularly the words which entered Malay in religious phrases e.g. *salla* (صلى), *asyhadu* (أشهد) and *auzu* (أعوذ).

(d) Vowel Exchange

Apart from the changes of letters, Arabic vowel signs i.e.; *dammah*, *fathah* and *kasrah* have been extensively exchanged. The *dammah* is changed into *fathah* as in *masyarakat* (مُشَارِكَة), and into *kasrah* as in *mesyuarat* (مُشَاوَرَة). In other cases the *fathah* is changed into *dammah* as in *muhabah* (مُحَابَة) and into *kasrah* as in *selamat* (سَلَامَة). Meanwhile, the *kasrah* is changed into *fathah* as in *sajadah* (سَجَادَة).

It is worth mentioning here that although *kasrah* and *dammah* are phonetically similar as they are both vowels, nevertheless, the *kasrah* is not changed into *dammah*, though the *dammah* is changed into *kasrah*. The latter occurrence is seen as a common tendency in civilized communities (Anis 1984:91). As for changing the *fathah* into *dammah*, it is considered exceptional.

Changes in letters and vowels can be attributed to both the phonetic system of the Malay language which differs from that of Arabic and the tendency to subjugate the Arabic words to the Malay pronunciation and phonological system.

Some of the other changes are caused by the inability of the Latin script to represent the Arabic sounds and vowels. The Latin vocal signs are unable to precisely represent the long and short vowels. The /ح/, for instance, is represented by /i/ as in *adib* (أَدِيب), by /e/ as in *akek* (عَقِيق) and by /y/ as in *Syed* (سَيِّد). The /و/, likewise, is represented by /u/ as in *lau* (لَوْ), by /o/ as in *roh* (رُوح) and by /w/ as in *hawa* (هَوَاء). Sometimes the / / is represented by these three letters in the same word as in *ahwal*, *ahual* and *ahwal* (Iskandar 1986:282).

The inability of the Latin script can also be clearly seen in its failure to differentiate between the long and short vowels like *dammah* as in *huruf* (حُرُوف), the /أ/ and *fathah* as in *na'am* (نَعَام) and *na'am* (نَعَم) and /ي/ and *kasrah* as in *jahiliyah* (جَاهِلِيَّة).

Nevertheless, some of these phonetic changes are not made by the Malay language. Rather, such forms had been received from other languages e.g. Hindi, Javanese, Indonesian, Portuguese, Tamil, Dutch and so forth. For example, the word *Kesohor* (مَسْهُور) is borrowed through Indonesia. The word *nipis* (نَفِيس), precious, is borrowed through Turkish as the Turkish word *nepis* means both precious and thin. Malay borrowed the word from Turkish with the latter sense. A number of Arabic loanwords in Malay reached it via India. Words like *Sahib*, Master, *Sunat* circumcision and *haudah*, seat erected on the back of an elephant, entered Malay through Hindi languages as they maintain the meanings they acquired in the Indian environment.

3. Morphological Changes

Malay language has employed Arabic words in a new and different way. It rendered these words new uses based on the Malay concept of parts of speech (Asmah 1983: 119-128) which is entirely different from the concept conceived by the Arabs (Sibawaihi 1966:12). No other Muslim language, with the exception of Indonesian, has done so. There are ample examples for this phenomenon, but I will present only two words. The first is the word *wafat* (**وفاة**), death, a noun which is also used as a noun in Persian, Turkish and Urdu whereas in Malay is used as a verb meaning to die. In addition, the word is usually associated with Prophets as in the sentence "Setelah Nabi wafat, Abu Bakar dilantik menjadi Khalifah" i.e. "After the Prophet died, Abu Bakar was elected as a caliph." The second example is the word *hebat* (**هبة**), reference, which is also a noun in Arabic and is borrowed and used as a noun in Persian, Turkish and Urdu. The word, however, is used in Malay as an adjective meaning terrific as seen in the following sentences;

"Pertengkaran hebat berbangkit dalam biliknya.
(A terrible noise was heard in his room)."

Apart from this, the Arabic loanwords in Malay have endured several other types of morphological change: They were deprived of the definite article, connected with prefixes and suffixes and repeated to form the plural, adverbs, adjectives and verbs.

In addition to that, some Arabic words have been divided into two parts as in the word *silsilah* (**سلسلة**), chain, which is written Malay as *salah-silah* and *silah-silah*.

In contrast with that, sometimes two words are written as one as in **السلام عليكم** which is written as *assalamualaikum*. Furthermore, the expression **رضي الله عنه**, which consists of three words, is written in Malay as one word in *radiallahuanhu*.

These are, undoubtedly, tremendous morphological changes which meant to comply these words to meet the morphological system of the Malay language.

4. Semantic Changes

Earlier in this paper, I have displayed the phonetic changes that occurred to the Arabic loanwords in Malay. Such changes, however, did not have much impact on the meaning of these words. Most of the semantic changes have been made through three modes i.e.;

- (a) extension of meaning,
- (b) restriction of meaning, and
- (c) transfer of meaning.

The final part of this paper is devoted to investigating these three types of semantic change.

(a) Extension of Meaning

Malay has extended the meaning of some of the Arabic words. This extension covered the abstract words as well as proper nouns. The first is exemplified by the word *Isra* (إسراء) which means night journey in Arabic. In Malay, the word *Isra* refers to "journey" in general.

The second type of words can be exemplified by three words. The first is the word *Duldul* (ذلدل) which is the name of the mule of Prophet Mohammad. In Malay the word means merely a mule. The second word is *Lela* (ليلى) which is originally the name of Lila al-'Amiriyh, Qais bin Milawah's girlfriend. The word in Malay means darling. The third word, *Bilal* (بلال بن رباح) stands for the Prophet's companion and the first caller for prayers in Islam. In Malay the word *bilal* is used to refer to anyone who performs this religious function.

(b) Restriction of Meaning

This mode is a reverse of the previous one. Compared with extension of meaning, restriction of meaning is more common in Malay. The words *ajam*, *kabit* and *walimah* will be given as example for this phenomenon. The first word *ajam* (عجم) refers to non-Arabs or those who speak incorrect Arabic. In Malay, the word refers to the Persians only. The second word *Kabit* (خبث) means in Arabic malicious, whereas in Malay it means sneak thief. The third word *walimah* (وليمة) in Arabic stands for any party that can be given on any occasion. In Malay, the word sense is merely related to wedding party.

Another aspect of restriction of meaning appears in confining the meaning of a word to only one particular field. Here are some examples:

Arabic word	Meaning in Malay	Type of Meaning
Amil (عامل)	collector of titles	religious
Adab (أدب)	good-manners	moral
murid (مريد)	pupil	worldly
tabir (تعبير)	interpretation of dreams	classical

The table above clearly shows how the words *amil*, *adab*, *murid* and *tabir* have been restricted to the religious, moral, worldly and classical senses respectively whereas the various other meanings have been completely overlooked. The word *tabir*, for instance, does not refer to 'composition' a modern sense for the word. Besides, all its other meanings i.e.; expression, declaration, assertion, term, phrase, utterance of feeling, etc. (Cowan 1976:588) are excluded.

(c) Transfer of Meaning

The meaning of most of the Arabic loanwords in Malay excluding the basic religious terms, have been greatly changed. This change falls into two categories i.e. (i) words given new meanings which differ from their original meanings, and (ii) words given opposite meanings

(i) Words Given New Meanings

The number of words which belong to this category is much greater than the second one. Words such as *tasbih*, *mukim*, *hasud*, *sais*, *munshi* and *kaedah* are just a few example of the words whose meanings have been altered.

A word can be assigned to refer to an object which may be related to the object for which it was originally assigned as in words like *tasbih*, *kuliah* and *dawat*. The latter, *dawat* (دواة), in Malay, means ink whereas in Arabic it means ink-pot.

In Malay, words like *ma'jun*, *istislam* and *nida* are assigned to refer to meanings which somewhat differ from their original meanings in Arabic although the old and new meanings are still related. For instance the word *nida* (نداء) means sound in Malay whereas in Arabic it means call.

Other words like *ta'lik* and *wadi* refer in Malay to things which are entirely different from the things they stand for in Arabic. The meaning of the word *wadi* (وادي), for example, has been shifted from valley to desert stream.

(b) Words Given Opposite Meanings

The words of this category are comparatively few. Words such as *hebat*, *hasrat*, *mandab*, *asfar*, *jahiz*, *hemat* and *sorak* are some of the examples. The first word *hebat* was morphologically discussed in the third part of this paper. The latter, *sorak* (صراخ), which in Arabic means screaming, means in Malay to cheer as in the following sentence;

"Para penonton bersorak kerana pasukan itu menang."

"The audience cheered as the team won."

As seen above, semantically, Arabic loanwords in Malay have been abundantly changed. In fact, these words have encountered numerous changes which they have not experienced in other Muslim languages such as Persian, Urdu and Turkish. The words *Kabus* and *saat* are two examples which suffice to support my opinion. In Arabic the word *kabus* (كابوس) means nightmare and it maintains the meaning in Persian, Turkish and Urdu. In Malay, the word meaning is changed into misty. As for the word *saat* (ساعة), its Arabic meanings include hour, watch, while, minute, day of judgement and moment. Persian has retained the first three meanings, whereas Turkish maintained hour and time. As for Urdu, it retained time, hour, while, minute, moment, clock and watch. In Malay, however, the meaning of the word *saat* has been changed into second.

5. Conclusion

In short, Arabic loanwords in Malay have been subjugated to various kinds of change in conformity with the phonetic and morphological system of the Malay language. Exposed to so many Malay features, Arabic words have been greatly removed from their origin. Moreover, the Malay's adoption of the Latin script in the 1960's helped to further change the spelling of the words. This development has contributed to the phonetic corruption of the words and the distortion of their pronunciation.

Nevertheless, a good knowledge of these Arabic loanwords in Malay is of great significance to the Malays not only in their effort to learn Arabic, but also to acquire, use and fully understand their Malay language as well.

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