

Issues on Arabic Scriptures in Malay/Indonesia Language: A Study of its Contributions in the Development of Regional Culture, Language & Literature Literacy

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Abstract. This paper touches on the important role of Islam in Malay literature and culture literacy, in the region. Malay literary and cultural treasures that were originally oral traditions have changed after the local community has embraced the teachings of Islam that bring along the Arabic scripture or Arabic writing system. This system of Arabic writing has greatly influenced Malay literature and culture. This paper therefore explores academically the role, contribution and discussion regarding the future of Arabic Scripture in the region. It would not be too much to say that it was the Arabic writing system that made the Malay community illiterate. This paper is expected to benefit not only to those who study literature and linguistic but for those with a background in Islamic studies too to study the regional literature and culture, especially those related to Malay studies.

Keywords: *Arabic scriptures, Malay Arabic Spelling, Literacy*

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1 Introduction

The Arabic scripts also known as Jawi (also known as Arab Gundul or Arab Melayu in Indonesia) is a form of writing inherited by the Malay language derived from the Arabic language spelling system. In this paper, Bahasa Indonesia also considered as a variant of Malay language similar to the language that spoken by the British, American or Australian is considered English. The spread of Islamic teaching and the development of the Malay sultanate power in the region come along with the control of the trading ports over the Straits of Malacca

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stimulated the development of the Malay language as an intermediate language for various matters.

To make it more understandable this map below provides pictures the spread of Islam in the region.



Figure 1. The spread of Islamic Teaching in South East Asia

Historically, this writing system came with Islam and developed its spelling system in accordance with the Malay language. Who was the first person to introduce this customized spelling system for the Malay language is still unknown to scholars in the region. It is believed that the local Islamic scholars have invented this Malay spelling. What is certain is that this Arabic alphabet has contributed greatly to the language, literature and culture of the region.

2 Problem Statement

In recent times, it seems that the writing of the Malay Arab world is darkening its future. This is because it seems like there is no space for the growth of Arabic scripture in Malay/Indonesia

language. While at the same time, there are still many aspect of language, literature and local wisdom treasures are preserved in the form of manuscripts, books and travelogue for us to carry on academic research that are very useful to all of us in many ways written in Arabic scripture.

We purposely prepare this paper in English to make it accessible to international readers. If anyone is interested in furthering the research of existence Malay Arabic may carry on the further research in future.

3 Objective

The objective of this paper is to promote the literacy of Arabic writing in Malay/Indonesia language for scholars of language, literature and Islamic studies in the region as well as for the international community. This kind of Malay literature studies may cross the boundaries of Malay language, literature and culture to Islamic studies.

4 Discussion

The picture below is the alphabet of Arab that used in Malay / Indonesia language. The table below shows the additional alphabet that invented by the Malays too to fulfill the spelling of Malay words due to the original Arabic scripture unable to spell few Malay words.

ث	ة	ت	ب	ا
tha	ta marbuthah	ta	ba	alif
د	خ	ح	چ	ج
dal	kho	'ha	ca	jim
ش	س	ز	ر	ذ
syin	sin	zai	ro	dzal
ع	ظ	ط	ض	ص
ain	zo	to	dhod	sod
ق	ف	ف	غ	غ
qof	pa	fa	nga	ghain
ن	م	ل	گی	ک
nun	mim	lam	ga	kaf
ي	ء	ه	و	و
ya	hamzah	ha	va	wau
			ن	ی
			nya	alif maqsurah

Figure 2. Alphabet Of Arab That Used in Malay (1)



Figure 3. Alphabet Of Arab That Used in Malay (2)

Indonesian, Malaysian and Brunei languages is derived from the Malay language. Due to the wisdom of political policy of the country, Indonesia chooses to change the Malay language become Indonesian language (this does not require further description). Arabic scriptures have contributed greatly in the early days for Islamic education, literature and culture. The so called “formal” education in the region for Muslims will be Islamic education. Medium language is Malay and translated Malay books or references were written in Arabic. People's literacy at that time was Arabic alphabet literacy.

5 Westerns Interference

In the early days where English or Dutch education were not meant for all (only for the colonial children) the Roman alphabet is only to write in English or Dutch. Arabic scripture were widely, be it for newspaper, advertisement, formal letter until there was an attempt to print a Bible in Malay language written in Arabic scripture. The picture below shows Bata shoes advertisement using Jawi/Arabic Scripture.



Figure 4. Shoe Company Bata uses Arabic scripture for advertisement

At that time, the ads were delivered in Arabic script because this script certainly had good commercial value.

Later, Malaya and Indonesia as independent states that underwent modernization in education began to apply western alphabet to be used as official spelling system. English spelling is use in Malaysia and (certainly undergoing some refinement) Dutch spelling take its place in Indonesia. As a result, Arabic scripture writing has become increasingly unpopular and the newer generations are less well read.

In fact, that if we intend to do a research about all the cultural treasures that have been brought or stolen to Leiden and London we should not be illiterate in Arabic scripture. Otherwise, it would be troublesome for us to discover the secrets hidden in our literature and language written in Arabic scripture if we are unable to read it.

6 Obsracle

To learn the Malay Arabic spelling has its own challenges. It could be an obstacle to the newer generation who so use to western alphabet system. The obstacles arising to the Arabic Malay sound system for us due to its sound are still followed the Arabic sound system. For example, the vowel letters *Alif*. This Section will address this issue specifically.

The use of *Alif* in the Arabic scripture writing system is quite inconsistence and have no fixed rules. Giving the example, in the spelling of **ساي** [sa.ya], **بوك** [bu.ka] and

تردای [ter.da.ya] it is found that the *Alif* vowels are dropped in the final syllable. While the spelling of بوايا [bua.ya], بودایا [bu.da.ya], لوفيا [lu.pa] alphabet *Alif* are included in alphabetic vowels in the last syllable of the word.

The inconsistency of *Alif* function will derive many peoples make mistakes in spelling, writing and reading these particular words even though some of them have a background or knowledge in Arabic scripture. The main problem in this writing system is that it comes from Arabic writing, but at the same time, it does not fully follow the Arabic spelling system when used in Malay/Indonesia language. [1]

Another case is that there is a time the current situation with the development of the Malay language in term of new terminologies used by Malay language, Arabic scripture has to follow the Romanized spelling systems based on the correct phonetic and syllable to spell new word or new terminology.

To address this problem, the Arabic Malay writing system in Malaysia has undergone several changes and revisions by scholars. Some methods have been proposed by several figures such as the [2], [3], [4]. *Sistem Tulisan Jawi*. It is up to the users whether they willing to follow the rules or not follow it [5].

Furthermore in Malaysia there are an evening session Islamic religious schools namely KAFa (*Kelas Agama Fardhu Ain*) that teach Malay Arabic writing and Khat the Arabic calligraphy. Muslim students who attended this class will surely have knowledge of Malay Arabic writing through this educational system [6].

This situation happens in Malaysia and not in Indonesia. Nonetheless, those in Indonesia who attended the state Islamic University and *Pondok Pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) were also knowledgeable in Malay Arabic writing through the study of Islamic education, law, literature etc. that offer them the opportunity to examine classical Islamic books written in Malay Arabic. [7] [8]

7 Conclusion

In conclusion, Malay Arabic spelling has played an important role as a contributor to the writing system and literacy for the people of this region. Additionally in Malay literature, many local histories, literature, language, culture and wisdom are recorded in Malay Arabic writing.

This paper only pick up a small section of the Malay Arabic spelling system, there is much more to be learned in these matters. For examples the study of Arabic loan words in Malay/Indonesia

spellings, pronunciation changes in Malay/Indonesia language and so on. It is hoped that other scholars will continue this study in future.

There is no doubt that universities and institutions of higher educations do organize the seminars or special discussions on this Malay Arabic spelling system, but in order to strengthen it teaching and learning of this writing system needs to be preserved at the national level.

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