

# The Effects of Cultural Factors on The Language Learning

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## Abstract

The study aims at identifying the cultural problems, encountered in the translation of Arabic proverbs into Malay and the influence of Arabic and Malay Culture in language learning. To master and understand any languages, students must understand the culture and environment that will help them in process of language learning. The significance of the study stems from the fact that the interrelation of culture and language is to the extent that many classifications of culture are based on linguistic factors. In this article, the cultures division is assessed on Malay and Arabic as they belong to different cultural types. So that, the article will discuss various cultural factors that effects on the language learning and the proverbs translation especially between Malay and Arabic languages. This is also to find out the similarities and differences between Arabic and Malay languages on that factor in terms of ecological and culture. Hence, this article also going to explore the comparison between the two languages in learning the proverb which is influenced by cultural factors. The methodology in translation that used in this study is semantic translation. In a semantic translation scenario, one strives to convey the syntactic and semantic structures of the source language in the target language. This method most closely reproduces the original text in a foreign language, while maintaining context and culture. Data of the study comprised Malay and Arabic proverbs. They were selected from Malay and Arabic books and online databases of proverbs. Translating the selected proverbs collides with many challenges, of which the cultural ones are observed as the most manifest. What adds to the translation challenges is the colloquialism of the proverbs, which gives them enough semantic, social, and cultural values that cannot be stripped or ignored in the literal translation of the proverbs. The paper concludes that differences in translations are associated with the metaphorical schemas of the Arabic and Malay proverbs, which are attributed to cultural differences of the two languages. At the end, there are suggestions for further relevant investigations

**Keywords:** Language, Proverb, Culture, Arabic, Malay

## Introduction

One of the requirements for a student to master a language correctly is that he must also understand the culture through the language learned. If the aspect of this culture is not given

attention in language learning, it will result in a failure to master and communicate accurately in the language learned.

The students usually assume that only a limited language skill is enough to dominate the structure of language competence regardless of other aspects such as socio linguistic competence, discourse, strategy, and so on and so forth. However, apart from the structure of language competence, students must consider other efficiencies, especially those related to the culture of language.

Thus, this article will discuss various cultural factors that effects on the language learning especially Malay and Arabic languages. This is also to find out the similarities and differences between Arabic and Malay languages on that factor in terms of ecological, culture so on and so forth. This article also going to explore the comparison between the two languages in learning the proverb which is influenced by cultural factors.

### **Methodology**

This study is secondary data that will be found through library research. Primary reference resource includes the language and rhetoric books, and whatever of resources that discussed the topic, including magazine, journal, paper, etc. In addition, this study will concentrate to the differences of environmental and cultural factors in two different languages: Arabic and Malay.

### **Objective**

This research is implemented with hope to be able to achieve several objectives and specific objectives that are able at the same time to give the contribution and benefit to society. The aim of this research is:

- (1) To analyze the effects of cultural factors on the language learning.
- (2) To compare the use of proverbs between Arabic and Malay languages.
- (3) To identify the similarities and differences between the society of Arabs and Malay people.
- (4) To contribute the benefits of this finding to lecturers, teachers, and student's community.

### ***Language and Culture***

A human being was created with a natural ability to use multiple languages. Through language, humans could construct and develop an ideal and unique personality. This kind of personality will develop a community of people that will contribute to the creation of a society. Language builds community. Thus, the existence of society and their integrity can be seen through language and culture.

Language and culture are the main contributors to the existence of a high civilization and progress. Therefore, the language is a medium to gain knowledge. No nation in the world whose civilization was built through a foreign language, or a language not understood by the nation itself. Thus, to understand the language, everybody must understand the culture and environment that will help them in the process of language learning.

The term 'culture' itself, given definition by the *Kamus Dewan* (Dictionary produced by The Institute of Language and Literature of Malaysia) as a way of life of a society, civilization, progress (common sense) which refers to the entire human life in all areas involving common sense and their initiative. The culture also defined as follows: 1. the quality in a person or society that arises from a concern for what is regarded as excellent in arts, letters, manners, scholarly pursuits, etc. 2. that which is excellent in the arts, manners, etc. 3. a particular form or stage of civilization, as that of a certain nation or period: Greek culture. 4. development or improvement of the mind by education or training. 5. the behaviours and beliefs characteristic of a particular social, ethnic, or age group: the youth culture; the drug culture. (<http://dictionary.reference.com/>).

Language teaching cannot be separated from the culture. Language cannot exist without culture. Culture is the social practices and beliefs that determine the inherent texture of human life (Sapir, 1970).

Teaching and learning languages contains several components, which is the efficiency of the grammar, communicative competence and language proficiency and also knowing the culture. Scholar said that the knowledge of culture is the knowledge of customs and beliefs. (Byram & Morgan, 1994).

A user of language must has competence in a language where it can communicate effectively in that language (Omar, 2003). This can be achieved if students are exposed to the culture of the language. People move in a specific cultural environment and what is done by an individual in one culture may be different in other cultures.

Language teaching should focus on non-linguistic elements such as gesture or signs. Elements of this gesture can be explained by using some examples. First, when two individuals meet in a formal ceremony or event, or non-formal, which used different ways according to culture. Arab communities often will embrace each other, western society will shake hands or kiss her cheek and the Japanese will bow as a sign of respect when they meet each other.

### **The Influence of Arabic and Malay Culture in Learning**

Understanding the Arab and Malay culture will facilitate the learning of language. Here, given a few examples to illustrate the cultural influence in language learning:

1. The use of body language to convey a meaning is different from society to another. We have to understand their culture in order to understand their language and meaning. In the Malay community 'shook his head' from left to right and right to left is to show the meaning of 'not want'. However, the Arab community, if done so, they will not understand it, because in their society, to show the meaning of 'not want', is they will use sound signals on the tongue and then looked a little heads up. Thus, without understanding their culture, we will not know their message and language. In addition, usually the Arab community, when they put the right hand above his head and said 'ala raksi', this indicates that they are willing to provide any assistance requested. However, if someone does not understand their culture, then they would

be surprised because the word 'ala raksi' it means 'on my head'. Moreover, the use of sign to the meaning of 'wait a minute' is different from Arabic and Malay culture.

2. A greeting as an appreciation for something is different from culture to another. Usually, if a student does not understand Arab culture well, they just will say the word 'syukran' to indicate thanks like in Malay culture. However, the Arab community itself, they often use other words to show great appreciation such as 'barakallahu fikum'. These words not only show our thanks, but at the same time praying that God will bless his friend. In addition, the word commonly used in expressing gratitude in Arabic is 'jazakallahu khairan kathira' which means 'May Allah bestows much good to you'.
3. Expressing the greeting 'how are you' or in Arabic " *kaifa ha luk* ' many times in one occasion is normal, and it is a sign of caring. If students not understand the Arab culture, they would give a negative impression because the greeting 'how are you' in Malay culture is usually expressed at the beginning of the meeting only, not expressed many times.
4. Culture of the Arab community is that they will give a little of bitter coffee as the last menu to the guests who came to their house. Even though the host did not reveal any word or a request for the guests left, but it can be understood through their culture that when coffee is served, it means suited for guests to go home because there is no other meal will be provided to them.

### The Influence of Arabic and Malay Culture in Proverbs

Here, the author brings some Arabic, and Malay proverbs as an example. We can see that the proverbs are translated using different words according to the environment and their culture, but the meaning is the same. It is a strong evidence that the culture is very important to understand the language:

1. Proverb in Arabic: '*yusibu 'usfurain bihajar wahid*' (يصيب عصفرين بحجر واحد), translated in English as "to kill two birds with one stone". But in Malay language, this proverb should be translated as: "sambil menyelam minum air", which means "drink water while diving". These proverbs in Arabic and Malay languages have similar meaning which mean: "to do two works at the same time". However, the question is why the proverbs use different words to convey same meaning? Are the environmental and cultural factors influence the translation of these proverbs? Arab society is very common with birds and stone objects. For example, according to the ancient belief of Arabs, before one is travelling, he will see the bird fly to ensure security along the way. Similarly, stone objects synonymous in Arab society, due to the circumstances of their lives in the desert filled with sand and stones. The environment in Malay community is totally different from the environment that exists in Arab society. Hence, the proverb should be translated with different expressions according to the Malay culture and environment but by the term that carries same meaning. Thus, correct translation of the proverb is "drink water while diving".

2. Proverb in Arabic: '*Innaka tadribu fi hadid barid*' (إنك تضرب في حديد بارد), translated in English as "*Actually you beat iron that was cold*". But in Malay language, this proverb should be translated as: "*bagai anjing menyalak bukit*", which means "like a dog barking the hill". These proverbs in Arabic and Malay languages have similar meaning which mean: "to do things that are not helpful". Arab society has always been famous for its war and the use of iron in the war. While in the Malay community, the barking of dogs, especially in the evening having an impact on the community to use it in their proverbs.
  
3. Proverb in Arabic: '*La tashummu al-ghayth faqad auda al-naqd*' (لا تشم الغيث فقد أودى ) translated in English as "*You will not smell rain, actually died the kids*". But in English, this proverb known as *It is no use crying over spilt milk*. But in Malay language, this proverb should be translated as *Nasi sudah menjadi bubur* which means rice has become porridge. These proverbs in Arabic, English and Malay languages have similar meaning which means: 'things that do not have regretted as it has happened'. 'Goat' is already synonymous with the Arabs. In fact, diversity in goat-based cuisine is a privilege to be among the Arab community compared to other communities. While in the Malay proverb, the word 'rice' and 'porridge' is used because rice is the staple food in the Malay community. When using more water in cooking rice, it will become porridge, and there is no rice anymore. In short, environmental factors play an important role in both proverbs.
  
4. Proverb in Arabic: '*Qabla al-ramyi yurash al-sahm*' (قبل الرمي يراش السهم), translated in English as "*before shooting, give the feather to arrows*". But in Malay language, this proverb should be translated as: "*sediakan payung sebelum hujan*", which means "prepare an umbrella before raining". These proverbs in Arabic and Malay languages have similar meaning which means: "to get prepared before do something". Arabs are familiar with the using of arrows in the war, so this object is used in the expression of this proverb. While the Malay community whose living in Malaysia familiar with the raining throughout the year, so they use an umbrella to protect themselves from the raining. Thus, an umbrella is used in their proverbs.

### Conclusions

From this article, it is shown that culture plays an important role in learning and teaching languages. It is hoped that many researchers are interested to do research in the field of culture in language teaching because every language represents the nation. Accordingly, to learn a language, knowing a culture is a must to master the language effectively. In addition, a translation of proverbs must be associated with a clear understanding of the culture of a nation. If a language is learnt by focusing on aspects of grammar only and ignoring the cultural and environmental aspects, then the translation will not bring the correct results.

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