

SOME REMARKS ON ARABIC LOAN-WORDS IN MALAY

HAJI MUHAMMAD BUKHARI LUBIS
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Referring to certain linguists and lexicographers such as Wilkinson and Swettenham, M.A.J. Beg writes in another book: "My criticism of their work is directed to the discovery of truth and not to belittle their contribution." (*Persian and Turkish Loan-Words in Malay*, 1982, 27.) It is with the same spirit of scholarly inquisitiveness that I submit a few comments on Beg's book entitled *Arabic Loan-Words in Malay*. The book has been published three times: in 1977 (May), 1979, and 1983 (with a foreword by T.B. Irving).

My remarks are limited to two categories: 1) Recognizing Arabic loan-words in the field of Malay proper names; and 2) Recognizing Persian loanwords in general Malay vocabulary.

Discussing the usage of Arabic in Malay proper names (*ibid.*, 91-2), Beg divides the names into three basic types, namely: (1) Arabic names, (2) a combination of Arabic and Malay words in proper names, and (3) Malay names of Malay origin.

Unfortunately, Beg's lack of familiarity with colloquial styles of Malay, in particular regional dialects, has resulted in a few errors about the allocation of proper names. So, in discussing the first type, Beg gives an example which slightly changes from its original Arabic form; that is Hamid bin Dollah. Thus he explains: "Dollah is the shortened form of Abdullah." The explanation is correct, but is still insufficient. In fact Dollah can be shortened to Lah just as Ibrāhīm can become "In".

In the second type he gives an example such as Jusoh bin Abdul Rahman. He thinks the word Jusoh is a Malay word. In fact, that word is a form of Yūsuf. In many Malay dialects final *f* in Arabic is borrowed as *h*, e.g. maaf becomes maah, etc. So the example is appropriate or correct for the first type, not the second. He also gives an example of Embong bint(i) Kasim. The example is correct if we assume that the word Embong is from Embon/Embun, which is a proper (or a pet) name of a woman, and the sound *n* becomes *ng*, especially in the Terengganu dialect. The word Embong, however, is in fact also the proper name of a man. So the given example should be written like this: Embong bin/bint(i) Kasim.

The tendency to abbreviate names, especially in vocative use, has been noted above (°Abdu'Lāh becomes Lah; Ibrāhīm becomes In). Beg should have realized that Jah is not a Malay word, but rather a shortened form of Khadijah or possibly other Arabic names, for examples Fā'izah and °Azīzah. Note that in some dialects of Malay *z* is pronounced *j*.

Beg gives two incorrect examples of the third type (Malay names of Malay origin). He seems to consider the name Deres (which he cites in the example: Mahyom bint(i) Deres) as a name of Malay origin. The name Deres, in fact, is a

form of Idrīs. It is of clear Arabic origin. The same case happens to this example: Melah bint(i) Awang. Strictly speaking, Melah is the shortened form of Jamilah. Thus both examples must be included into the second type, not the third.

Certainly there are proper names of Malay origin (e.g. Melor, Dayang, Hitam, Busu, Long, Puteh, etc.), but because of his inability to recognize Arabic in colloquial speech he has provided spurious etymologies of proper names of Arabic origin.

At this point I would like to discuss the relationship of Persian and Arabic loanwords in Malay.

Beg says teachers in *pondoks* (a sort of boarding school where religious subjects are taught) and "Arabic schools" are called *ustādh*. Sometimes, he adds, teachers of religious subjects at a higher level are also called *ustādh*. He states the word *ustādh* (lit. expert) is of dubious origin (*ibid.*, 95). In a later publication, Beg rejects an opinion that the word *ustādh* (in Malay *ustadz* or *ustaz*) is of Persian origin and considers it was directly borrowed from Arabic. He says:

Wilkinson and Winstedt-Ibrahim Linggi assume that the Malay word *ustadz* is of Persian origin. This assumption is misleading. In modern Persian, the word *ustād* means a lot of things such as "ostad, master; Professor; master craftsman". According to another Persian dictionary, *ostād* or *ustād* means "Professor". In Arabic, the *Ustādh* means: "A master: a skillful man, who is held in high estimation: a preceptor; a tutor; a teacher; a craftsman". According to another Arabic dictionary, *Ustādh*, pl., *asātidhah*: master; teacher; professor; polite form of address for intellectuals." The Malay word *ustadz* or *ustaz* is not the same as the Persian word *ustad*. The Arabic word *ustadh* ends with the letter dhal (ﺫ), (ﺪ). The difference between the Arabic and Persian words is that of ending with a *dhal* or *dal*. The Malay word *ustadz* or *ustaz* was borrowed from the Arabic word *ustādh*. In Jawi spelling this becomes immediately evident; but in Rumi or Romanised spelling also the ending of the Malay word with a *dz* or *z* also brings it closer to the Arabic sound or spelling. The ending *dz* or *z* represents the Arabic letter *dhal*. Thus it is quite clear that the Malay word *ustadz* was directly borrowed from Arabic." (*Persian*, 27-8.)

With such arguments, I would not dare reach the same conclusion. Etymology is the science of tracing the form (sounds) and semantics (meanings) of words through time. A careful analysis of the meaning and sound of *ustadz* does not support Beg's argument.

Explaining the meaning of *ustād* in Persian, Beg refers only to Lambton's *Persian Vocabulary* and Razi's *The Modern Persian Dictionary*. Let me add other important sources. Sulaymān Ḥayīm explains that the word *ustād* means "a master, a teacher, a professor. One who is skilled in an art or profession, an artisan. (*Farhang-i Jāmi' Fārsī-Inglišī*, vol. I, 1975/1354HS, 75-6.) To Steingass, the word means "a master, teacher, tutor; an artificer, manufacturer, artisan; a barber, ingenious, excellent, celebrated famed for any art or work of ingenuity." (*A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, 1973, 49.)

The reason I enumerate these definitions is to argue that there is no basic or no great change in the meaning of *ustādh* (Arabic) and *ustād* (Persian). As far as

the semantics of the word are concerned both Arabic and Persian words display a similar range of meaning.

Because of the difference of the last letter (*dh* in Arabic and *d* in Persian), Beg concludes that the Malay *ustadh* or *ustaz* is not the same as the Persian *ustād*. He bases his opinion on how the Malay word is written (in Romanized/Rumi and especially in Jawi spelling). To condense my argument, I suggest that Beg seems to have overlooked the way Malays pronounce the word. Except in official addresses or formal reading, those who do not know Arabic would pronounce *ustaz* as *ustad/ustat* or *usta'*. So far, I have not found a Malay word (originally Arabic) in which word-final *dh* or *z* becomes *d*. This argument is parallel to other loanwords from Persian which occur in Arabic: *pingān* (Persian), *finjān* (Arabic) and *pinggan* (Malay) "plate"; *shilwār* (Persian), *sirwāl* (Arabic) and *seluar* (Malay) "trousers". (Cf. Hava, *al-Faraid Arabic-English Dictionary*, 1970, 909-11.)

It seems that Beg considers the word *bakhshish* an Arabic word (*Arabic*, 104-5). He argues that the Jawi (Malay) spelling of *bakhshish* contains five letters (ba-kha-shin-ya-shin) which is similar to the Arabic spelling, whereas the Persian spelling has only four letters (ba-kha-shin-shin). Finally he stresses:

On the evidence of spelling, we can conclude that the Malay *bakhshish* was borrowed from Arabic and not from Persian. Therefore, *bakhshish* is an Arabic loan-word in Malay. Had the Malays borrowed the word *bakhshish* from either Persian or Turkish vocabulary, then *bakhshish* would have been a four-letter word. (*Persian*, 22.)

I disagree with Beg. Because of the letter *yā'*, which is included in the Jawi and Arabic spelling and excluded in the Persian spelling, he reaches such a conclusions. To me the reason is not concrete. Does he not know that the vocalization of Malay words is usually by three vowels, i.e. *alif* or *yā'* or *wāw* (correct for the Jawi spelling), not by *tashkīl*, like in Arabic or Persian. Therefore, in order to follow the exact or the nearest pronunciation Malays add these three vowels into the Jawi spelling. This happens in words which are originally from either Persian or Arabic. The words like خورما (date) and مهر (seal) in Persian become /کورما/ خورما and مهر respectively in Malay. The words like جلد (binding), موسم (season), مشکل (problem), شکر (gratitude), and تمدن (civilization) in Arabic become جیلد, موسیم, مشکیل, and شکور, respectively in Malay. These phenomena encourage me not to conclude that the Malay word *bakhshish* was borrowed from Arabic. It is equally possible that the word is from Persian.

In the second edition (p. 77) Beg has stated that the number of Persian loanwords in Malay *current usage* (the italics are mine) hardly exceeds two dozen. He mentions in a related footnote that according to Za'ba, there are a little over 70 Persian loanwords in Malay. He corrects, however, this opinion in the third edition (p. 77) by changing the words 'two dozen' to 'a hundred'. Furthermore he encourages readers, in a related footnote, to refer to his recent publication, *Persian and Turkish Loan-Words in Malay*.

Before Beg published the third edition I disagree with the inaccurate statement in the second edition because I could easily find more than that. For instance, we note *anggur, badam, badi, bang, bedebah, bius, kurma, (haram) jadah, domba, firman, gandum, gusti, kismis, mohor, nafiri, nakhoda, nisan, pasar, perca, piala, syabas, syahbandar* (esp. in Indonesia), *sanubari, saudagar, seluar, serban, takhta, temasya, tembakau, cabuk, cokmar, pinggan* and *taman*. (Cf. Alessandro Bausani, "Notes sur le Mots Persans en Malayo-Indonésien," in *Acta Iranica*, Première Série, vol. II.)

Although his latest opinion is more accurate, I would add that, without dividing into current and old usage, there are almost 200 Persian loanwords in Malay. Beg's research on this matter is also insufficient since he excludes in his references Bausani's important above mentioned article.

In the first edition, because of lack of time, it is reasonable that Beg was unable to refer to Amran bin Kasimin's M. Litt. thesis, entitled "Arabic Words in the Malay Vocabulary: A Critical Study of Existing Malay Dictionaries," which he submitted to the Institute of Malay Language, Literature and Culture, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (The National University of Malaysia) in 1976.¹ But why did Beg fail to refer to it in the second (revised) edition in 1979 and even in the third (revised) edition in 1983? Certainly he had sufficient time to do so.

Amran's thesis is very comprehensive (xlvi + 469pp.) and I believe it is useful and helpful for Beg's book. Had Beg referred to the thesis, then his book could have become an exhaustively revised (second or third) edition. Perhaps it could still be revised for a later edition, *inshā'a' Līh*.

Haji Muhammad Bukhari Lubis
Dept. of Arabic Studies &
Islamic Civilization,
University Kebangsaan Malaysia.

¹Related to this thesis, in a speech the Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Musa Hitam, urged Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka to publish M.A. and Ph.D. theses on Malaysiana which were submitted to local universities. I suggest that Amran's thesis have priority for publication as soon as possible.