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The impact of Arabic on English in Asian Polities: A Comparative Study

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Abstract:

The paper examines the contact of Arabic with English in selected countries in Asia, the region where English has the largest potential of growth and where it is embedded in a variety of multilingual habitats and cultural settings. It surveys Arabic loans in different domains of influence, and raises the question of what that means in the context of the Englishes paradigm and the social transformation processes nationally and regionally. Data consisted of a glossary of loans of Arabic in English or “Arabisms” that was collected mainly from on-line newspapers in Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Singapore, Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, all of which have a strong or even a majority Islamic population. To supplement the data, we use the Corpus of Global Web-Based English. As study of the impact of Arabic on English is a neglected field of research, findings will add a new dimension to the study of varieties of English. The paper has a methodological and theoretical angle that goes beyond the “national-boundary” approach inherent in models of English, when we use a regional and religious angle and reduce the Anglo-centricity in accounts of whole language habitats. It bears upon educational and socio-political matters that follow from English-in-contact with other languages.

Keywords:

Arabic loanwords, newspapers, Asia, World Englishes

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1. The history of language contact with Arabic and English

Some illustrations of Standard English in print media such as *The Straits Times* (Singapore), *The Australian* (Australia) and *The Times of India* (New Delhi) were given by Quirk and Stein (1991) to show that they used, what they called an internationally valid Standard English. It was essentially Standard British English. At that time, they did not refer to the Malaysian *New Straits Times*, but could have taken an example like the following as an illustration of its conventions in orthography, morphology and grammar. There is nothing that deviates from Standard (British) English in grammar, but not so where lexis is concerned:

- (1) “He [the Deputy Prime Minister, Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin] said such programmes would educate Muslims on the reasons behind Islamic rules and the *hikmah* (good tidings) they bring... He called upon Islamic academicians and *ulama* to intensify efforts to restore the country’s position as the centre of knowledge for *Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah* teachings in the region... He said the government was prepared to cooperate with and help Islamic scholars and Islamic non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to carry out more *dakwah* (preaching of Islam) and *tarbiyyah* (give advice based on Islamic teachings) programmes.” [paraphrases *sic* *New Straits Times*, 21 May 2014]

The spelling of *centre*, *organisation* and *programme* with *-re*, *s-* and *-mme*, respectively, are solidly Standard British English. So is the somewhat archaic word *academicians*. What is striking and makes this passage Malaysian (and/or appear Islamic) are the Arabic loanwords *hikmah* “good tidings,” *ulama* “clerics,” *dakwah* “preaching of Islam,” *tarbiyyah* “give Islamic advice” and *Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah* which is the proper name of an organization that operates in Great Britain, Australia, and Malaysia, a school of Islamic thought and an organization which follows the teachings of the prophet Muhammad (Azirah, Leitner & Al Aqad 2017: 25). From a linguistic angle, the lexical items cast an Islamic perspective on the text using British English grammar that is moderated by semantic paraphrases. Without them, the words could make comprehension to foreign or non-Islamic readers difficult. They also signal the localization of English in Malaysia. On a political level, they show the interdependence of the State and Islam in a multi-religious nation. We ask whether that assumption can be generalized to other Muslim-majority countries. We also aim at surveying the impact of Arabic on Asian English(es) in comparison with its impact on native and other second language varieties.

2. State of the Art and Research Questions

Given the long history of Arabic in contact with other languages, it is surprising that there has been very little research and on its impact on Englishes especially in Muslim majority polities. As a former trade and migrant language and until now a religious language, there were influences ranging from the classical to the colloquial and dialectal spheres (Beg 1979; Versteegh 2001). Arabic has influenced orthography, pronunciation, word formation, grammar, pragmatics and discourse. Research was reviewed in Azirah and Leitner (2011, 2016) where sociolinguistic studies by, e.g., Ferguson (1959), Thomason (2006) and the glossary of loan words compiled by Abdul Jabbar Beg (1979) as well as the study of Arabic loans in German by Nabil Osman (2008) were referred to. Arabic can be seen to be a strong donor language from several perspectives (Beg 1979; Campbell 1996; Deveux 2019). There are older layers of borrowings documented in the *OED Online*, *Webster’s* and other dictionaries. Older influences

on English and other languages were studied by Cannon (1992), Scott (1896, 1897) and others. A study by Wilson (2001) on the Arabic influence on Middle English has also been carried out. There is, however, a lack of research on the role of Arabic in the Southeast Asian region today.

A study on names in Indonesia indicated that the choice of Arabic names is usually symbolic and connected not only to parents' desires for having a pious Muslim child, but also to a larger tendency for an expression of an Islamic identity for the child. Arabic names are becoming increasingly popular among all infants and is most prevalent among male children (Kuipers & Askuri 2017). There are international words which are increasingly found in Islamic finance like *sukuk*, international Islamic terrorism like *jihad*, and in discussions of Islam or Islamic law like *syariah laws*, *hudud* "criminal law" and *hajj* "pilgrimage to Mecca." There are many loan words that can be found in countries with a majority or strong Islamic community which count as typical of local varieties of English or as an Islamic-Arabic lexical layer (Azirah, Leitner & Al Aqad 2017; Azirah & Leitner 2020).

Regarding the outcomes of contact, Azirah and Leitner (2016) and Leitner (2014) have argued against the defining role of national boundaries in studies of varieties of English and suggested that there are cross-national properties based on commonality of language type, inference, religion and other factors. It is this line of thought that we are developing further in this study on the Arabic influence across polities with an Islamic majority or large minorities in South and Southeast Asia.

3. Data and Methodology: Arabic Corpus of Asian English (ACAE) and Global Data

The lack of primary data and the poor lexicographic coverage of Arabic loans limits the study of Arabic-English contact outcomes to the small number of words that occur in political reports on religion, terrorism and social security. *Fatwa* (Islamic legal ruling by an expert) and a number of others have become known but words like *hikmah* (wise), *dakwah* (religious preaching) and *tarbiyyah* (religious education) or *solat* (prayers), *sembahyang* (to pray, to worship) and *iftar* (breaking the fast) have not. Many more words are found when one reads newspapers like *The New Straits Times* and *The Star* in Malaysia, Pakistan's *Dawn*, Indonesia's *Jakarta Globe*, Brunei's *The Brunei Times* or Bangladesh's *The Daily Star*. Reading blogs, political or academic speeches and "listening to" what people say in the public domain brings to life the currency of Arabic loans. It seems to us that the topic of the Arabic influence should be studied from the Arabic-Islam nexus wherever Islam plays a role globally or in particular regions like South and Southeast Asia.

We collected data mainly from mainstream English online newspapers of seven Asian countries, i.e. Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Singapore to form a special purpose corpus, the Arabic Corpus of Asian English (ACAE) during the period of 2014 to 2017. The newspapers were selected on the basis that they were leading ones in each country and have a wide readership. ACAE consists of data from mainstream online English newspapers, blogs and some political speeches. It primarily focuses on formal public language in newspapers. It also includes formal spoken medium in the form of speeches. Blogs were added to cover the more informal language and we used political speeches in Malaysia and informal observations on the rise of Arabic expressions and even of code-switching in Malaysia to

highlight the role of Arabic and Islam in Southeast Asia. We have excluded purely Islamic sources, such as pamphlets, sermons, Islamic encyclopedia, discussion forums, and Islamic political discourses. They would have had countless Arabic loans but we deemed their readership too specific for multi-religious societies. The program that was used for analysis is Wordsmith 7.0 which automatically generates an alphabetic and frequency wordlist. A glossary of Arabic loanwords (with raw frequency data) was retrieved manually. To broaden our dataset, we used the glossary for searches in the very large Corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE) (Davies 2013) with 1.9 billion words from twenty native and second-language Anglophone countries (excluding Indonesia).

According to Wordsmith, there are 306,048 words form tokens, 25,418 word types in 643 texts (or files) (The term “token” refers to the total number of words in a text, corpus etc., regardless of how often they are repeated. The term “type” refers to the number of distinct words in a text, corpus etc.). The sources are listed in Table 1:

Table 1: A break-up of the Arabic Corpus of Asian English (ACAE) data

| Country | Sources | Articles | Tokens | Unique Word Forms |
|-------------------|----------------------------|------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Malaysia | Malaysiakini | 39 | 243 | 107 |
| | New Straits Times | 34 | 314 | 161 |
| | Sunday Mail | 28 | 147 | 85 |
| | The Star | 24 | 138 | 66 |
| | Business Insider | 9 | 22 | 17 |
| Singapore | Asia One | 33 | 3 8 | 94 |
| | Today Online | 11 | 34 | 24 |
| | Jamiyah | 19 | 172 | 102 |
| | Channel NewsAsia | 16 | 16 | 42 |
| Pakistan | Dawn | 48 | 247 | 171 |
| | The News International | 25 | 121 | 76 |
| | Pakistan Today | 21 | 146 | 52 |
| Indonesia | Jakarta Globe | 52 | 431 | 161 |
| | The Jakarta Post | 29 | 169 | 98 |
| India | The Indian Express | 19 | 175 | 89 |
| | The Times of India | 42 | 237 | 130 |
| | Hindustan Times | 11 | 56 | 32 |
| Brunei | The Brunei Time | 37 | 418 | 201 |
| | Borneo Bulletin | 53 | 522 | 279 |
| Bangladesh | The Bangladesh Today | 17 | 110 | 57 |
| | The Daily Star | 45 | 450 | 219 |
| | Bangladesh Jamaat-E-Islami | 31 | 360 | 126 |
| | TOTAL | 643 | 4566 | 2389 |

Source: Authors' calculation

We eliminated most proper, institutional or place names, but found many words also function as proper names. In some cases, we have found it useful to include names like *Taliban*, *Alqaeda*,

Quran or *Allah* as reflections of recent political debates worldwide that trigger other loan words like *fatwa* or create loan translations like *holy war*. In the glossary collected from our corpus, we have found the following twenty-five Arabic loan words amongst the top 500 words used in the text corpus (see Table 2). The rank order is on the left of the words and on the right is the frequency and the number of different texts they occur in:

Table 2: Arabic loans in the first 500 most frequent word forms in the Arabic Corpus of Asian English (ACAE)

| | | | | | |
|-----|----------|----------|-----|-----------|--------|
| 41 | Islamic | 1194/347 | 287 | sukuk | 143/26 |
| 65 | Islam | 694/214 | 297 | shariah | 140/51 |
| 71 | Muslim | 615/215 | 305 | Jamaat | 138/55 |
| 79 | Muslims | 530/195 | 318 | mufti | 133/60 |
| 108 | Allah | 358/109 | 319 | sultan | 133/60 |
| 153 | takaful | 243/32 | 374 | Quran | 114/53 |
| 159 | Muhammad | 238/110 | 409 | Sunni | 106/53 |
| 182 | Taliban | 209/54 | 428 | Islamist | 100/43 |
| 206 | hudud | 186/15 | 437 | Jihadists | 98/40 |
| 220 | jihad | 169/47 | 464 | hadith | 95/34 |
| 230 | haji | 166/47 | 467 | Sunnah | 95/32 |
| 227 | syariah | 151/50 | 476 | sheikh | 92/47 |
| 267 | Jamiyah | 148/18 | | | |

Source: Authors' calculation

The blogs we included come from several countries. Political speeches and observations on how Arabic loans were used in speech were added from Malaysian sources. We do not imply that our choices are representative of all seven countries but they are certainly indicating trends.

4. Findings and Discussion

It was one of our first impressions that Arabic loan words today are strongly connected with Islam and are quite unlike loans in Malay, to give an example, which contain a large number of common words of Arabic descent (*see* Azirah & Leitner 2011). The meaning of recent loans does not seem to go outside the (religious) domain, though denotation and reference, of course, are widened to apply to the modern world. They stay within the onomasiological domain from which they have been taken. Non-literal uses in humor do not occur in the data. Such semantic developments away from the source are quite common with, e.g., Aboriginal loan words in Australian English (Leitner & Sieloff 1998). Another impression was that only few Arabic loans seem to display very high frequency except *Islam*, *Muslim* and derivatives. It is their large number and open-ended onomastic scope that makes them so visible that they must count as an active category of words.

We will focus on several domains of use, meaning, functions and frequencies. Some data from non-Asian countries are included from GloWbE to retain a level of authenticity but are not further analyzed. We will exclude a discussion of formal matters such as variable spelling conventions of Arabic loan words, as that has been dealt with in Azirah and Leitner (2016) and Azirah, Leitner & Al Aqad (2017).

4.1 Religious and Political Leaders

We will begin with names and titles like *imam*, *mufti*, *sheikh*, *emir*, *sultan*, *mullah*, *ustad* and *maulana* for Islamic leaders, whose meanings and uses may differ according to tradition and different Islamic nations. A good discussion of the political history of these terms can be found in Laffan's (n.d.) study of Malay and Malaysian history. These words, except *ustad* and *maulana*, are well-known in the non-Islamic world and have entered European languages in the sixteenth century. *Maulana* and *ustad* are first attested in 1832 and 1903. Contact was so intensive between Europe and Islamic countries that several words like *sheikh* and *emir* became sources of colloquial phrasal German idioms, such as the idiom meaning "let's go without paying" "Da sprach der *Scheich* zum *Emir*, jetzt zahlen wir und dann gehn wir. Da sprach der *Emir* zum *Scheich*, da gehn wir lieber gleich." Also in British English (BrE) such profane non-Islamic uses occur:

- (2) ... because Arsenal [London-based football club in the English Premier League] is better being run by a board or by a *sultan* or an oligarch who is using it as a tax write-off. (GloWbE)

The corpus reveals similarities and differences. The words *mufti*, *sheikh* and *imam* occur 66,025 times in variant forms in GloWbE. A little less than 20 percent of all tokens come from countries where English is generally the first language used (11,126), with the order of frequency being *imam* (6845), *sheikh* (various forms) and *mufti* (718). Worth observing is the influence of Islam in BrE (but also in Zanzibar English). BrE always has the largest number of tokens, given its large Muslim minority. As far as Asian second language countries are concerned, the three lexemes have 45,179 tokens, once again with the largest number of tokens for *imam* (31,960) followed by *sheikh* (forms) (9,178) and *mufti* (1,557). What is striking is that all words and especially *imam* occur most frequently in Pakistani English, which seems to have a very rich vocabulary for religious leaders.

In the political-religious Islamic hierarchy, the *emir* (2,013 tokens) ranks highest in political terms. It is by no means the most frequent word. *Sultan* (10,522) occurs over five times as often in GloWbE, peaking in Malaysia (2,121), followed by Pakistan (1,331). In general, Islamic terminology a *sultan* is "the sovereign or chief ruler of a Muslim country" (*OED online*). It is typically a title followed by the name of the *sultan* and is then often capitalized. The frequencies in Malaysia are easily explained as the heads of the states are sultans out of which the head of the nation, the king, is regularly elected for five years. Sultans appoint a *menteri besar* or chief minister of a state government. A *mufti* is an expert in Islamic law and empowered to make rulings like *fatwas*:

- "The Sultan of Selangor ... has advised Muslims not to be hasty in criticizing *fatwas*, or edicts, without fully understanding their contexts."¹

More specific in rank is the *maulana*, who is revered for his piety. The word is often used as a title of honor. An *emir* is an Arab prince or governor of a province or military commander (in traditional terms). Related is a *sheikh*, who controls a religious community. A *sheikh* is the ruler of a tribe, who inherited the title from his father. *Sheikh*-also often serves as a title for prominent Islamic leaders or clerics.

¹ *The Sun Daily*, 6 November 2014.

The *ulama* is a high-ranking cleric or academic in Islamic matters who can also act as a politician and leader of a country or political party. Ulama can be foregrounded as in Malaysia's Islamist party PAS or under Turkey's Islamist government by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who not long ago condemned a decision by the European Court of Human Rights to uphold the ban of women's headscarves by saying that "in this matter, the ulema, not the courts, should have the final say" (Amin 2011: 2). An *imam* reads the prayers at the mosque and has other community functions. Of course, these terms can be replaced by English translations, though with a loss of specification. The *Straits Times* of Singapore replaced *ulama* by "clerics" in an article headed "Clerics suggest Indonesians skip Valentine's Day" and had that example:

- (3) *Cleric councils* have banned celebrations in Banten and Palembang provinces. The Aceh Assembly of Clerics said celebrating the Western cultural event would be inappropriate for Muslims.²

Turning to *ustad* (or *ustaz*), who is often a teacher of Quranic matters, and *maulana*, here are two examples, from Brunei and Bangladesh:

- (4) *Ustaz* Hj Mail Besar of the Ministry of Religious Affairs spoke of the prophet's exemplary traits in teaching. ("Prophet Muhammad was the ideal teacher, learn from his methods").³
- (5) The congregation started on Friday with religious sermons of *Maulana* Jamir Uddin of Bangladesh after Fajr prayers.⁴

4.2 Living and Regulating Islamic Lives: Beliefs and Norms

Though many Asian countries are multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural, the concept of "multi" is often defined in terms of co-existing but internally diverse communities. Often restrictions are placed on their members on mixing. Malaysia, for instance, defines ethnic Malays as Muslims. Islam can be considered privileged as the constitution defines it as the official religion and it gets ample political and financial support.

Muslims participate in a variety of religious rituals. A range of values and norms follow and some may be enforced by *fatwas* or other regulations. There is, for instance, a cline of deontic norms, going from *haram* "forbidden" to *wajib* "must be done" with intermediate steps like *halal* "permitted." Here are some examples.

- (6) The *Mufti Fatwa* of Brunei Darussalam in 2012 states that it is incumbent upon us to refrain from touching any form of "*najis*" ["ritually unclean"], and this is a mandatory duty (*wajib*) which applies to all situations and circumstances... ("Touching dogs for no reason is forbidden in Islam").⁵
- (7) It is *wajib* (compulsory) to be cautious in sharing *hadith*. Ignorance is not a concession that allows a person to act as they like, especially in religious matters ("Pinch of salt' necessary when taking in hadith").⁶

² *Kyiv Post*, 12 February 2012.

³ *The Brunei Times*, 26 January 2014.

⁴ "2nd phase Biswa Ijtema," *The Bangladesh Today*, 1 February 2014.

⁵ *Brunei Bulletin*, 1 November 2014.

⁶ *The Brunei Times* 11 September 2014.

- (8) But PAS leaders are undaunted because they believe they are ready to implement it. Moreover, they say it is *wajib* or obligatory on them as Muslims to do it (“Pushing for ‘God’s law’ in Kelantan”).⁷

Wajib designates the strongest form of obligation that may range from not touching dogs, because they are considered unclean (and require ritual cleaning) to pushing for policies like on *hudud* for religious reasons without an open democratic debate. Example (6) refers to the internalized power of religion over daily life such as keeping away from impure things, fasting during Ramadan, etc. (7) is an example of guidance exerted by a *mufti*, and (8) shows political ends can impose the obligation. Islamic deonticity impacts upon people’s lives, whether or not they are active Muslims. *Mufti* regulations sometimes lead to disputes such as when a *fatwa* is pronounced on the prohibition of dogs for the blind (of any religion) in public transport as Muslims may inadvertently get in physical contact with them and require ritual cleaning.

A lesser obligation is that of *halal* for “permitted things, actions, etc.,” which describe anything under potential dispute over whether they are “permitted.” If they are not, they are *haram*. While this is well-known enough in the area of food, we will come back to it in the context of financial products and economic growth. One comes across situations like a problem over Cadbury’s chocolates, which allegedly contains *haram* ingredients. “Muslim NGOs had declared “jihad” on Cadbury late last month,” wrote a commentator in the *Malay Mail Online* (22 June 2014), after a government report made the finding public. It was quickly proven to be wrong but the damage had been done. The commentator added that many Muslims believe “that haram food will turn a Muslim away from his faith, pave the way towards committing sins, and affect his attitude negatively in many ways.” And many believe that Cadbury had done that deliberately “to weaken Muslims.” None of this is scientifically tenable and although Islamic institutions know that folk belief seems ineradicable. The Arabic loan word signals an Islamic interpretation of reality in Muslims’ lives and confers credibility in the eyes of many.

In Malaysia and certainly Brunei, Muslims get a lot of instructions from religious leaders, institutions and government. Example (1) was a case in point. *Dakwah* describes the process of “preaching of Islam” and could be expressed more strongly as “proselytizing” as non-Muslims are the target of preaching. Following the rules of Islam brings *hikmah* or good benefits. *Tabiyyah* refers to the giving of advice based on Islam. The life of individuals, the community or that of the nation is regulated by values and norms expressed by *haram* “something absolutely forbidden” or *halal* “something allowed” or even *wajib* “something obligatory.” The force of the paraphrases can, of course, vary with context that may well escape readers unfamiliar with Islamic matters. *Dakwah*, for instance, was not just a name for an activity but acquired political value as the name of a fundamentalist Islamic movement in the late 1960s and was led by young educated students who returned from studies in Britain where they had interacted with more radical schools of Islam. Oxford Islamic Studies Online defines the concept as “General Malaysian term for missionary work, proselytization, and Islamization” and adds that it specifically refers to “the political Islamist movement that emerged in the 1970s through the activities of youth organizations. The entry on *dakwah* adds that it

“seeks greater application of Islamic laws and values in national life and articulates a holistic Islamic perspective of social, economic, and spiritual development. Became particularly prominent politically in 1979–82 at height of the Iranian Islamic revolution. Incorporated

⁷ *The Star*, 2 November 2014.

into the government in the 1980s through the appointment of Anwar Ibrahim of ABIM. Led to creation of the Islamic Bank and establishment of the International Islamic University and the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, reflecting the institutionalization of Islamization process. Particularly active in educational programs and initiatives.”

The *New Straits Times*'s paraphrase in (1), “preaching of Islam,” should then be understood in terms of something like the Oxford's encyclopedia as that makes the political connotations of the Deputy Prime Minister's speech clearer. In fact, he is specifically addressing young people with a conservative political idea. It was so strong in the 1970s that a former government of the same coalition took measures to stop the movement. *Tarbiyyah*, too, means more than the paraphrase suggests. True it refers to “giving advice,” but more importantly to organize action in education and upbringing and is a central theme in making people stay Muslims. It targets young parents. The use of the Quran's Arabic is thus a signal of political affiliation (see Oxford Islamic Studies Online).

Published in Brunei, the *Brunei Times* carries ample illustrations of the intensive propagation of Islamic concepts. Under the heading “Full-time Muslim with ‘Istiqamah,’” it explains the conditions under which a Muslim can act in the spirit of *istiqamah*. It begins by explaining the meaning and then goes on with a theological discussion:

- (9) The literal meaning of “Istiqamah:” to go straight into the right direction, acting rightly, allowing no deviation. It is derived from the stem “Qiyam,” which implies the continuity of doing something, following up with it and making sure that it is done in the right way and there is neither deviation nor swerving.⁸

One's behavior (*suluk*) should be “done for the sake of Allah (*ikhlas*), it should be based on knowledge (*ilm*), and should aim for worship (*ibadah*). Such articles can be found in contexts where the press seems to pursue the political aim of popularizing Islam.

5. Politicizing Islam

Arabic loan words play a political role in contexts where “the sanctity of Islam,” a well-known technical phrase in Malaysia and, no doubt, elsewhere in the Islamic world, is seen in danger and requires defence. Some Arabic words are seen as expressing Islamic concepts that can only be used by Muslims and are forbidden to non-Muslims. The concepts and the words become intricately intertwined. Malaysia may go further than other countries as a *fatwa* was made against their illegitimate use by the National Fatwa Council. The Penang Mufti Hassan Ahmad issued a decree that bans non-Muslims from using forty words “in any form, version or translation in any language or for use in any publicity material in any medium, including print, electronic and any form that could insult the sanctity of Islam.” Here is an excerpt from the report:

- (10) “‘SOLAT,’ ‘Surau’ and ‘Masjid’ are words non-Muslims in Penang are prohibited from using in their writings. The words are among the forty decreed by the Penang mufti, as provided under subsection 48(3) and (4) of the Penang Islamic Religious

⁸ *The Brunei Times*, 19 October 2015.

Administration Enactment 2004, as exclusive to Muslims. The other words are ‘Allah,’ ‘Firman Allah,’ ‘Ulama,’ ‘Hadith,’ ‘Ibadah,’ ‘Kaabah.’”⁹

The list includes *fatwa*, *kiblat*, *mufti*, *Ka’bah*, *Firman Allah*, *baitullah*, *kalimah al syahadah*, *haji*, *kiblat*, *imam*, and *azan*. According to the *Brunei Globe*, Brunei has forbidden the use of nineteen words to non-Muslims, i.e., “azan [call for prayer]; baitullah [house of god]; Al Quran; Allah fatwa; Firman Allah...”¹⁰

While violations of the “sanctity of Islam” may be hard to define and court cases have been rare, the use of these words in a non-Islamic context such as in another religion could be punishable. For example, this can be seen in the Malaysian High Court ruling against the Catholic weekly *Herald* from using the word *Allah* in its publication outside Sarawak, where the word has had a traditional use. It has been argued that the word is commonly used by Christians to describe God in Egypt, Syria, and Indonesia. *Fatwas* like the one referred to in example (10), therefore, do enter the debate among different ethnic and religious communities and conservative and more liberal groups. The court allowed three words to be used in Christian publications for educational purposes: *Kaabah* (Islam’s holiest shrine in Mecca), *Baitullah* (House of God), and *solat* (prayer).¹¹

6. The Domain of Law

Law is one of the most important domains in any nation and plays a crucial role in national identity. In the multi-religious nations under investigation there are significant differences in legal systems, which bear upon the likelihood of Arabic words occurring inside the legal systems, the press and elsewhere in the public domain. In countries with an Islamic majority, there can be competing legal systems, i.e., the Common Law, if they were former British colonies, and the Shariah law. Shariah normally applies to Muslims only. Islamic countries differ as to the extent they have implemented Shariah law. Brunei has gone furthest in introducing *hudud* law, a source of criticism by Western nations. Political sections in Malaysia call for *hudud* law to be introduced in the state of Kelantan. A retired Chief Justice of Malaysia, Abdul Hamid Mohamad, clarified the approximation of the two laws, the Common Law and Islamic Law in a talk at Harvard University in 2008. To quote:

“Islamic law was only applicable to Muslims and, even then, restricted only to matrimonial matters, inheritance and in regard to the administration of mosques, *waqf* and the like. Criminal law, based on the English common law as codified in India, was already in place. The only offences that the States are allowed to legislate were and are offences ‘against the precepts of Islam’ and only applicable to Muslims. Similarly, the English law of Contract, law of Evidence and others, which had been codified in India were introduced in Malaysia. At that time, Islamic banking, Islamic finance and ‘*takaful*’ were unheard of.”

Discussing a case of competitive systems Abdul Hamid Mohamad clarifies that “we reminded ourselves that we were interpreting the words ‘precepts of Islam’ used in the Constitution and not issuing a ‘*fatwa*’ on the ‘precepts of Islam’.” So up to now *Shariah* only applies to matrimony, inheritance, conversion, child education, etc. For the rest, a modified Common Law

⁹ *New Straits Times*, 11 January 2014.

¹⁰ *The Sun Daily*, 23 February 2014.

¹¹ Available at: (<https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysias-high-court-rules-christians-can-use-word-allah-in-publications>), (accessed June 2014).

system is in place. But there remain competing cases such as the prosecution of Malay men cross-dressing as women, which the Court of Appeal found unconstitutional in 2014 (Azirah, Leitner & Al Aqad 2017).

The likelihood of Arabic loans appearing in the public domain is confined to *Shariah* law but they do, of course, appear in academic contexts and they are diffused by the press. A key area to show the impact of *Shariah* law is gender relations. There is a range of infringements as well as criminal acts for which the term *khalwat* is commonly used in Malaysia. Originally in Arabic, *khalwat* literally means “solitude” and refers to a period of 42 days in which someone searches solitude to reflect upon his relation to Allah. This use reminds of a similar period of retirement from contact in Christianity, which is still alive in the Catholic Church. The long period of six weeks has gradually been eroded to a few days in Islamic countries (see example (11)). A related sense in (12) refers to a place name which may well originally have been a location traditionally used for *khalwat*. The dominant sense in MalE describes a situation between members of the opposite sex which may suggest a deeper intimacy than is allowed for unmarried couples and counts as a crime and a sin (see (13)). GloWbE’s data illustrate the widest semantic spread. There are forty-nine tokens of which thirty-six come from Malaysia, nine from Pakistan, three from Kenya and one from Tanzania. While Pakistan has nine tokens, three of them refer to a period of solitude to be closer to God. Here are some illustrations:

- (11) However, temporary solitude (Khalwat) of a few days is necessary for the Mubtadee (beginner in *Tasawwuf*).¹²
- (12) After visiting the Khalwat and Lalpura ruby mining areas the valley was safe enough for the author.¹³
- (13) A popular film actress was detained by a religious department team after she was suspected of committing *khalwat* (being in close proximity) with a man at a condominium in Ukay Perdana, Ampang on Sunday night, reported *Harian Metro*.¹⁴

The Malaysian Enactment No 3 of 1964 of the Administration of Muslim Law Enactment of 1963 lists in Section XI punishable offences. Section 115 defines *khalwat* as a situation in which genders are “found in retirement with and in suspicious proximity to any man [or woman]” (other than those he or she cannot marry by Muslim law) “shall be guilty of an offence” and be punished by imprisonment, a fine or both. The version of 1988 uses more Arabic words as they express the dominant and sole valid interpretation better:

“Any female [or male] person who, in any place, found living with or cohabiting with or in retirement with or hiding with any male person who is not her *muhram* [close relatives such as parents, and siblings] other than her spouse that would arouse suspicion that they commit *maksiat* [sin] shall be guilty of an offence of *khalwat* and shall be liable.”

- (14) Fifty-two unmarried Muslim couples face charges of sexual misconduct and possible jail terms after being caught alone in hotel rooms by Malaysia’s Islamic morality police during a New Year’s Day crackdown ... The detained, mostly students and young factory workers, are expected to be charged with “*khalwat*,” or “close proximity,” which under Malaysia’s Islamic *Shariah* law is described as couples not married to each other being alone together in a private place.¹⁵

¹² See GloWbE, “*khalwat*.”

¹³ See GloWbE, Kenian tokens.

¹⁴ *The Star*, 16 December 2014.

¹⁵ *The Star*, 4 January 2010.

- (15) The Terengganu PAS Youth wants to mobilize its vigilante squad to check on the rising cases of *khalwat* (close proximity) in the state...¹⁶

7. Money and Finances

Investments, savings and other financial devices have become big business in the last few decades and a few countries like Malaysia, but also non-Islamic countries like Great Britain, are keen to acquire a share of the gains involved. Arabic loans have come into use as they describe most adequately what terms mean in accordance with Shariah law. *Sharia-compliant* is a frequent technical hybrid term to describe products that follow the sharia regulations. There are a number of national and international institutions that have published glossaries and other materials that explain, and make accessible, Islamic banking and insurances and the relevant Arabic words for it in English. A global agent, so to speak, is the Institute of Islamic Banking and Insurance (IIBI), which is a registered charity and not a profit-making company with its headquarters in London. IIBI (n.d.) has issued a glossary of financial terms in Islamic banking but there are others. The glossaries are for the expert and the general banking public alike and there appears to be a solid fundament of codification right across the Islamic finance sector and a diffusion of knowledge into the international banking world. Islamic banking and insurance is becoming a growth area and with it the use of Arabic-Islamic words.

Currently, the media and the public domain only use a few technical terms. The most prominent words are *takaful* and *sukuk*. The first is commonly known as “Islamic insurance” and designates “a form of insurance based on the Quranic principle of mutual assistance (*ta’awuni*). Structured as a charitable collective pool of funds...” (Institute of Islamic Banking and Finance n.d.). *Sukuk* is a financial certificate. While it is similar to a conventional bond with the key difference being that they are assets backed, *sukuk* represents proportionate beneficial ownership” (Institute of Islamic Banking and Finance, n.d.) and is used to, for example, replace housing loans by a lease back system. GloWbE has an interesting pattern for *takaful*. There is a total of 898 tokens and only twenty-three in native English countries (four in Great Britain, sixteen in Australia and three in New Zealand). India has thirty-one, Sri Lanka nineteen, Pakistan twenty-six and Bangladesh has twenty tokens. In the African countries one finds nineteen tokens. The vast majority of 741 tokens comes from Malaysia, which shows the significance of Islamic banking there. Most of the Pakistan tokens explain the “*taka* industry” in the Middle East or in Sri Lanka. *Sukuk* is more frequent overall with 1,112 tokens. It is more widely spread so that 148 tokens come from Western countries and 134 from Western-type second-language countries, i.e., Singapore and Hong Kong. As for the rest, once again the majority is from Malaysia (771).

In academic contexts words like *takaful* are discussed in relation to a number of other Islamic concepts, as is illustrated here:

- (16) “Under *Shariah* law, conventional insurance is prohibited due to the elements of *gharar*, *maysir* and *riba* in its implementation. Instead, *takaful* was introduced to replace conventional insurance. In order to ensure that *takaful* operates within *Shariah* law, a *takaful* contract is developed based on the concept of *tabarru*... The types of contracts

¹⁶ *The Star*, 23 September 2009.

that can potentially be used include those created based on the principles of *hibah*, *waqf*, *sadaqah* or...” (Asmak & Shamsiah 2010).

Some Arabic words are quoted even in the German press. “*Die Welt*” carries a report on Islamic banking:

- (17) “‘*Riba*, ‘*Gharar*‘ und ‘*Maysir*‘ heißen die größten Sünden, Zins, Spekulation und Glücksspiel. Das Zinsverbot ist die populärste Idee. Dass Geld aus sich heraus wächst, ohne dass eine Ware gehandelt wird, schien dem Propheten frevelhaft.“¹⁷

Interest, speculation and gaming, i.e., *riba* “interest,” *gharar* “uncertainty” and *maysir* “gambling” are the biggest sins, the article headed “Allah’s failed bankers” explains. If the trend towards Islamic business becomes more vigorous, more Arabic loans will enter the public domain (Azirah, Leitner & Al Aqad 2017: 29-30).

8. Pragmatics and Discourse Conventions

Pragmatics deals with language use in context and there is a range of topics in which Arabic plays a role. But we must add loan translations and code switching in and out of Malay and other languages. It is hard to reduce the influence on Arabic as, for instance, the Malay culture and Islamic practices are so close to one another. One could as well argue that what we find is both Islamic-Arabic and Islamic-Malay and similar statements could be made about Pakistan, Bangladesh or Brunei.

“Peace be upon him” or *pbuh* is a routine formula of reverence across the Islamic world. It follows the names of “prophet,” “Mohammad,” “the Prophet of Islam.” The acronyms *SWA* and *SWT* perform the same function; all express something like “*salla Allah alaihi wa sallam*” “may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him.” There are differences in meaning, of course. Thus, *SWT* is “*Subhanahu Wa Ta’ala*” “the most glorified, the most high.” There are 11,332 total tokens of *pbuh* in GloWbE, more than half of it (5,987) come from Pakistan. While these are religion-based formulae of reverence, they do occasionally occur in international academic contexts like the talk by the Malaysian judge mentioned earlier and can be found in local academic contexts although they are normally edited out in normal newsprint and academic texts.

It is not easy to separate out pragmatic conventions due to Islam or the Malay or even Indian world for example in typical conventions of opening and closing official ceremonies and similar routine strategies for more modest events. The former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Najib Razak’s opening speech at the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) 2011 annual conference in Malay is an excellent example of Islamic-Malay rhetoric. A few formulaic expressions are quoted in (18) to (20):

- (18) “*Bismillahirrahmanirrahim*” [in the name of Allah, the most Beneficent, and the most Merciful] ...
(19) “*Alhamdulillah*,” disclosed a million words *thanks to the Almighty, Most Gracious, Most Merciful who gave his permission and aid so that we can once again gather in the hall this meaningful. Speech peace and blessings on the Prophet Muhammad who...*

¹⁷ „Allahs gescheiterte Banker“ *Die Welt*, 17 October 2015.

(20) Armed with a sense *tawadhu* “humility” at..., this time marked influx of New Year 1433 *Hijrah*... almost 1380 years of the death of *the beloved Prophet Muhammad* in 11 AH 632 AD. *He has returned to the bosom of God*. Gone forever leave us with two main holdings namely the *Quran and Sunnah* as the torch of all time so as not to miss in the course of this life...

The English version of this speech (see (21)), which was published in the press, projects a modern message to the international audience:

(21) *Alhamdulillah* (Praise be to Allah), we *thank Allah SWT* for allowing us to gather in this *hallowed hall*. *Peace and blessings be upon Prophet Muhammad SAW* (peace be upon him) whose leadership we look up to. In all humility, the Umno General Assembly this year is marked by the advent of the *Hijrah 1433 New Year*...

Example (22) is the opening of Prime Minister Najib’s 2016 budget speech and shows the flexibility to the occasion:

(22) “Mr. Speaker Sir, *In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful. All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the A’lamin. Wa bihi Nastai’n. Praise be to Allahu Ta’ala* who created the seven heavens and earth and who also created a state of darkness into the light. *Peace be upon the Prophet Muhammad, the chosen Messenger* who rejects falsehood, and safeguards rights and truths.”¹⁸

The opening of the lecture by the Malaysian High Court judge is also marked by Islamic-Malay conventions, without Arabic loan words and a more personal style. But many Arabic loans occur throughout the lecture like *fiqh* “jurisprudence,” *ibazah* “anagram,” *hudud* “restriction,” *masqasid* “purposes,” *mazhabs* “sect,” *takaful* “joint guarantee,” *sukuk* “islamic bonds,” *fatwa* “Islamic opinion,” *aqidah* “creed,” *ulama* “clerics,” *ummah* “nation,” *shari’ah* “islamic law” and [the Prophet] *s.a.w.* The more personal style shows up in the introduction where the speaker professes ignorance and then praises the benefits for himself. The closing appeals to Allah. We will quote the opening and closing:

(23) “I thought that my visit to Harvard last year to attend my daughter’s graduation was going to be my first and last visit here. However, thanks to Professor Baber Johansen... This is the greatest gift for my retirement. [End the lecture] *Let us pray to Allah* that we live long enough to see the development, if it happens” (Abdul 2008).

An even less formulaic opening address for a more internationally oriented group shows how conventions gradually change and approximate “Western” conventions:

(24) “*Bismillahirrahmanirrahim*,
Your Royal Highness, your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests. I am delighted to join all of you today at the very first conference of the Global Movement of the Moderates – I know many of you have travelled thousands of miles to be here, and I want to thank you for...-We have a saying in Malaysia, *tak kenal maka tak cinta* [Malay], which means ‘we can’t love what we don’t know’ – and it is my sincere hope that over the next few days we will come to both know and love each other better, and to put that mutual empathy and understanding into the service of facing down extremism in all its forms.”¹⁹

¹⁸ *New Straits Times*, 23 October 2015.

¹⁹ Speech by Najib Razak, Global Movement of the Moderates Conference, Kuala Lumpur, available at: <https://www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan/?m=p&p=najib&id=4125>, (accessed July 2014).

Pragmatic and discourse conventions are used flexibly to reach particular audiences and political purposes. Arabic loans seem to abound with Islamic and Malay audiences. They create harmony and agreement. They are also signs of the localization of English and of an Islamic layer of English and of a religion-based unity beyond national boundaries.

9. Conclusion

We have looked at the contemporary contact of Arabic and English, a vastly under-researched area. Arabic loans are, for instance, insufficiently covered in the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Given that lack of primary data, we compiled a corpus of the online press, blogs and other material available in the public domain of seven Asian countries. The Arab Corpus of Asian English (ACAE) was specially designed to collect Arabic loans though it is quite small in relation to what it was meant to “represent” (e.g., Azirah & Leitner 2016). It serves its purpose of identifying words used in the public domain in countries with sizeable Muslim communities. There emerged a picture that a good deal of what is needed to be known by Muslims about Islam and a Muslim life was covered in the public domain. There was also a good deal of political events’ coverage and religious issues. Comparing some data with Singapore, one would notice a difference between local and international reporting. The Corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE) with 1.9 billion words from twenty Anglophone countries is able to broaden the data base in terms of geographic scope. That allowed us to see similarities and differences between nations but especially learn the diasporic situation of Muslims in the Anglophone world. In Great Britain and to a lesser extent the United States, some Arabic words were used. But Canada, Ireland, Hong Kong, Singapore showed fewer occurrences of loans. There is a considerable difference between the data sampling of ACAE and GloWbE. We have excluded purely Islamic sources and collected data addressing a wide public. GloWbE sampled Islamic sources extensively. As Arabic loan words are used more extensively, GloWbE may sample a more specific Muslim or Islam-expert segment of English speakers. An exploration of this is an inference could reveal a real difference between national and international reporting (*see* Azirah & Leitner 2011).

We often found that loan words were paraphrased or that an English transliteration was made more specific with the Arabic loan in parentheses. This practice makes such texts accessible to non-Muslims (provided they were knowledgeable and interested) and to Muslims whose understanding cannot be taken for granted (though attendance at the mosque, participation in rituals and other activities would increase their knowledge). Such paraphrases facilitate comprehension. But the use of Arabic loans with or without paraphrases will have other functions. An essential one is that they help create and retain the power of interpretation over religious, legal, financial or any other issues. Even if loan words and paraphrases are only partly understood, the “real” meaning of the loan word would be taken to define the impact. So they have a political and ideological role and create a discursive practice. The observation, for instance, that Arabisms are increasingly used by politicians and even minor public figures to show their (real or pretended) strength in their belief is a consequence of the power of interpretation of Arabisms. But this is temporary and may shift with the change of governments.

If we speak of Arabic loans expressing and creating an Islamic perspective of the life of Muslims, we also see that they are supported by a strong political movement in Malaysia and a lifestyle feeling of “being true to Islam.” They are used as a political tool to gain the votes of

traditional Malays. Similar conclusions could be drawn for Brunei, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In minority and diasporic situations like in India, Singapore and Great Britain or Australia their use does not have the same ideological force. Loan words are normally edited out so as to focus on the subject matter for a broad readership.

Arabic loan words signal the pan-regional impact of religion. They can be found in differing frequencies wherever Islam has a role to play at national level or where Muslims are a strong force or a diaspora, such as in Great Britain or France. If we embed the occurrence of Arabic loan words in the contexts of their occurrence, we will notice “breaks” away from an Islamic perspective. The speech quoted by Prime Minister Najib, for instance, compares the political work of the UMNO party and its members with the early caliphs and some ordinary minor folks and adds: “These are the features and characters of *true-blue* fighters that we would like to see in UMNO people.” *True-blue* is an English expression going back to the Middle Ages. It came to refer to the loyalty and continuity of (British) conservatism. In Australia it has become associated with (the loyalty of) Labor and been widened to refer to (genuine) Australian character, as the *Australian National Dictionary Centre*²⁰ explains use is close to the Australian – and non-Islamic – loyalty. Drawing on such diverse sources, the discourse in Malaysia becomes mixed and localized, while this will not be so in other countries.

Contact is not a one-way street. Buddhism and Hinduism come to mind as similar phenomena in India, Thailand and elsewhere. Neo-liberal capitalism with its ideological lexis provides a set of lexis and frameworks to express the modern and global world. They would be worth studying from a non-national perspective.

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|--|
| ABIM | Islamic youth organisation “Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia” |
| ACAE | Arabic Corpus of Asian English |
| BrE | British English |
| GloWbE | Global Web-based English |
| IIBI | Institute of Islamic Banking and Insurance |
| MalE | Malaysian English |
| NGO | Non-governmental organization |
| OED | Oxford English Dictionary |
| PAS | Malaysia’s Islamist party |
| UMNO | United Malays National Organization |



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