

ISLAMIC EDUCATION AND LINGUISTIC ISSUES: INDONESIAN EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Some languages have played an important role as the medium for the revelation of God to mankind. The existence of such language is to bridge the communication of the Prophet who was sent to his people. Thus, the existence of language as a medium of communication in propaganda is desperately needed between mad'u (object of da'wah) and preachers (actor of da'wah). It is understood that a language other than Arabic, serves as an introduction to preaching to the local non-Arab community. The local non-Arab language as the language of propaganda has not been used as the way it was. There is a process to be followed, namely what is called by S.M.N. Al-Attas as the concept of Islamisation of Language. Linguistic aspects and translation of Islamic values by using the local language of instruction at least prove that Islam is not synonymous with Arab, although the Arabic is used as the language of science. Even here it appears that Islam tends to appreciate the various expressions of culture, including the linguistic aspects. Local and regional languages, when Islam has been embedded in the hearts of non-Arab nations, have not necessarily been lost and destroyed. On the contrary, these languages have increased in terms of the aspects of ethics, morality, and enrichment of terminological. In this very section, the Islamic education plays an important role in the development of linguistics and literacy, both in terms of the scientific language and medium of introduction for propaganda.

Keywords: *Lingua Franca*, Islamisation of language, *Jawi* script, Arabic *pegon* script.

Introduction

Some languages are known to have been used as the language of instruction for the revelation of God to mankind. Its role is to bridge the communication of the prophets sent to their people. (QS. Ibrahim [14]: 4). In the Islamic concept, the Prophet is sent by using the language of his people. Thus the scientific process and projections occurred between the Prophet and his followers take place in the atmosphere of the local language. Among the languages in question include the Hebrew, Aramaic, an

Arabic. The Arabic language itself is actually a language that is cognate with the languages mentioned before.

Seen from the process of its development, Arabic has more advantages over the cognate languages. A language other than Arabic have a lower degree to survive. Hebrew and Aramaic, for example, have undergone a considerable change from its ancient form. Even an attempt to reconstruct the ancient Hebrew in light of Modern Hebrew must inevitably be done with the help of Arabic as a comparison.¹ As for the Aramaic, the native language of the birthplace and lifetime of Jesus today is threatened with extinction as those speaking in this language have been getting the decreased from time to time.

Whilst Arabic language has been relatively stable. Changes in the structure and patterns of Arabic are not significant, to say the least. In other words, the people in the time of Prophet Muhammad speaking in Arabic of his time, the people of today still be able to understand it in a perfect manner. Hence, the Qur'an and Hadith which originated from the beginning of the prophetic era can still be understood and studied by Muslims at the present time.

Arabic is the language that is used as a medium of revelation. Accordingly, it is only proper that every discipline of knowledge derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah would persistently use Arabic as the *Lingua Franca*. This language is also linking between Muslims from different parts of the world, both as the language of unity and as a language of science. So much so that even a non-Arabic-speaking prominent Muslim figure from Indonesia, Muhammad Natsir, believes that the science in Islam is derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah which are in Arabic. If knowledge is the only key to the progress of civilization, then it would absolutely need the other key that is Arabic language.²

Islamic Education and Local Language

The universal nature of Islam necessitates the vehicle for its message to reach out the people all over the world. Languages other than Arabic serve as a medium of instruction in preaching to the local non-Arab communities. Syed Muhammad Naguib al-Attas explains the Malay language has undergone a process of Islamization in order that it to be fit for articulating Islamic concepts and principles. According to him, one of the most important events in the history of Islamic culture is the spread of Malay as the language of instruction. The treasure of this regional language has been enriched by Arabic vocabularies and terms. Thus it can be used to convey ideas such as philosophy, literature, and rationality that originated from the Islamic heritage,³ and various other Islamic disciplines.

Before the arrival of Islam, the Malay language had been influenced heavily by Sanskrit orthography with Indian Pallava script. Texts in the ancient Malay language of this period were found in the inscriptions and bronze plates in Sumatra and Bangka (686 A.D.), Java (832 A.D.), and the northern Philippines (900 A.D.).⁴ The use of such language is even survived until the fourteenth century, but in a modified orthography

¹ See: Karel A. Steenbrink, *Mencari Tuhan dengan Kacamata Barat: Kajian Kritis Mengenai Agama di Indonesia*, Yogyakarta: IAIN Sunan Kalijaga Press, 1988, pp. 5-6

² See: *Konsep Pendidikan M. Natsir: Mendidik Umat dengan Tauhid*, in Sabili Edisi Khusus 100 Tahun Muhammad Natsir, Edisi II Tahun XVI, 2008, p. 45

³ S.M.N. Al-Attas, *Islam dalam Sejarah dan Kebudayaan Melayu*, Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit University Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1972, p. 21.

⁴ Edi Sedyawati (ed.), *Kedwivaksaraan dalam Pernaskahan Nusantara: Kajian Tipologi*, Jakarta: Pusat Bahasa Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2008, pp. 44-48

using ancient Javanese language. In this century, along with the advance of Islamic preaching, the use of Malay also began to adopt Arabic words, terms or phrases. In this regard, it is worth noting that as early as 1303 A.D. an oldest Malay inscription was written using the *Jawi* script. In still older period, in 1050 A.D., a pillar found in Phanrang, and in 1237 A.D., the gravestones witnessing the existence of the Islamic kingdom of Samudra Pasai, were written using the Arabic alphabet.⁵

These early days of Islam in the archipelago, Nusantara, were also marked by the emergence of the tradition of manuscripts writing, the evidence of which can be seen, for instance, in the works of Hamzah Fanshuri like *Asrār al-‘Ārifīn*, *Sharāb al-‘Āshiqīn*, and a number of his poems. Among the literary works of this era which gain popularity widely are *Bustān al-Salāṭīn*, *Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*, and *Hujjatu al-Ṣiddīq* ascribed to Nuruddin Ar-Raniri, a clerical advisor of Aceh Sultanate during the reign of Sultan Iskandar Thani. Outside Aceh, there is a number of prominent intellectual figures witnessing the heyday of Islamic civilization in the archipelago with their intellectual heritage, such as Nawawi al-Bantani with his *Tafsīr al-Munīr* and hundreds of his other books; Kyai Ihsan Kediri with his *Sirāj al-Ṭālibīn*; Shaykh Abdus Samad al-Falimbani; and so forth. The manuscripts are essentially a means of enlightenment and education. Its existence is part of the scientific tradition in an effort to enlighten and educate the society.

In fact, Malay language is not the only language which has been experiencing enrichment out of its direct contact or intermingling with Islam. In Indonesia, the local languages have also been experiencing the same process. Javanese language, for example, could be regarded among these local languages that received a great deal of Arabic influence so much so that it could perform its function as the vehicle to translate and convey the values of Islam to the Javanese society.

Written traditions that developed in Java include generating the manuscript chronicle, mysticism, or Literature Wulang piwulang fiber, and so forth. Babad is generally a product of effort poets from traditional Java to write their own history. Java community since its inception has realized that history is an important element in identity formation. Awareness of identity is what connects them with the pride that comes from the past. While mysticism is a literary work that expresses a philosophy of Java and also describe the depth of flavor acquired through the highest appreciation tassawuf behavior.

The written language which developed in Java resulted some scripts such as *babad*, *suluk*, *serat piwulang* or *Sastra Wulang* and others. *Babad* is basically the works of Javanese poets which serves to write their own traditional history. Javanese people have realized that history is an important element to the identity creation. As the result, the realization of this identity connected Javanese people with the pride in the past. Meanwhile, *Suluk* is a literary work which expresses some Javanese philosophies and describes the internalization of the highest feeling achieved by *tassawuf* behaviour acknowledgement.

Serat Piwulang needs to be discussed separately due to its writing purpose specifically is addressed to be the didactic work. It is similar to a kind of text book recently, but the discussion in it focuses more on the ideas of ethics and aesthetics. The writing style usually relies on the metrum of *macapat* songs where the aesthetics are located. Furthermore, the ethics teaching in *Serat Piwulang* script usually adopts

⁵ James T. Collins, *Bahasa Melayu, Bahasa Dunia: Sejarah Singkat*, Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2005, p. 3-51

the concepts which come from Islamic values. Thus, it can be said shortly that *Serat Piwulang* is considered the script containing the ethics teaching or manners which is covered in the expression and practice applied by Javanese people.

Wulang literary work is the Javanese literary work in XVIII and XIX which is called as “the rising time”. In this era, the intellectual tradition in literature and religion starting from reading, learning, and creating Javanese scripts was increasing that it went beyond the previous ages. In this era, Surakarta and Yogyakarta became the center of Javanese culture. The authors often called as “poets” lived and did their daily activities in Kraton neighborhood.⁶

In Surakarta, the literary works with the genre of *Wulang* literature were mostly written in the dynasty of Susuhunan Pakubuwana IX. Some of the poets whose literary works in this era were Ranggawarsita, R.T. Tandhanagara, K.P.H. Kusumadilaga, Mangkunegara IV, and many others.⁷ Pakubuwana IX, the king himself, was noted that he did not create any literary works which contained ethics teaching.

The literary works of *Wulang* literature which came from Kraton environment spread into Javanese society. Practically, the Javanese people appreciated those works as the great guidance in teaching manners. With those works, they expressed their spiritual life to attain the top reality. At that time, not all people could access Islam directly from the sources, both from Al Qur’an and Sunnah. However, they indirectly learned Islam from tradition of reading the scripts.

At the age of Pakubuwono VII dynasty (1830-1858), Kraton often held the Qur’an recitation on every Thursday night. This activity was usually followed by reading *Sholawat* and Javanese scripts in the metrum of songs conducted by *abdi dalem ngulama* (ulama’). This tradition also involved percussion music instruments called *terbang* (special Javanese *rebana*).⁸

In the early of XX century, R.Ad. Sasradinigrat, the general of Kraton Surakarta, and his brother R.T. Wreksadinigrat gave orders to recollect the hymns from any *Wulang* literary works and compiled into one album called *santiswaran*.⁹ This kind of tradition, as Nancy K. Florida states, could survive up to XX century and could still be seen in 1960s.¹⁰

In the early of XX century, R.Ad. Sasradinigrat, the minister of Kraton Surakarta, and his brother R.T. Wreksadinigrat gave orders to recollect the hymns from any *Wulang* literary works and compiled into one album called *santiswaran*. This kind of tradition, as Nancy K. Florida states, could survive up to XX century and could still be seen in 1960s.

⁶ Sri Suhandjati Sukri, *Ijtihad Progresif ...*, p. 16; Wiwin Widyawati R., *Serat Kalatidha: Tafsir Sosiologis dan Filosofis Pujangga Jawa Terhadap Kondisi Sosial*, Yogyakarta: Pura Pustaka, 2009, p. 32-33; Amir Rochkyatmo, *Sastra Wulang, Sebuah Genre di Dalam Sastra Jawa dan Karya Sastra lain Sejalan*, dalam Jurnal JUMANTARA Vol. 1 No. 1 Tahun, Jakarta: Perpustakaan Nasional RI, 2010, p. 7

⁷ Amir Rochkyanto, *Sastra Wulang ...*, p. 11

⁸ Darsiti Soeratman, *Kehidupan Dunia Kraton Surakarta 1830-1939*, Yogyakarta: Penerbitan Tamansiswa, 1989, p. 100

⁹ Darsiti Soeratman, *Kehidupan Dunia Kraton ...*, p. 100

¹⁰ See: Sri Suhandjati Sukri, *Ijtihad Progresif ...*, p. 77

The existence of *Serat Piwulang* containing the ethics of educational values previously has the purpose of establishing an education system. Education is believed to be one of the means (*wasilah*) which can guide people to the fundamental life changes. The produced pattern of the changes would cover mental and spiritual aspects, character building, and other changes which are expected to be dynamic. By using these approaches, the Islamic values were internalized into the society.

For the sake of marginalizing Islam roles and educational practices referring to its teaching, the Dutch government initiated one integrated educational model. The schools provided specially for the rich designed with the curriculum which was far from religious values and contained the west secularism. In terms of literacy and language, the Dutch government, especially after the application of *Cultuurstelsel*, also created one educational system to learn the culture of Indonesians. The Dutch needed people who could interact well with the natives to smoothen the *Cultuurstelsel*.

In Surakarta, on February 27, 1832, for example, established the Javanese institute (*Instituut Voor De Javaansche Taal*). The main purpose of this institute was not only to create the Dutch staffs who could understand Javanese culture, but also to support the missionary activities. This institute was responsible for publishing the Bible translation into Javanese language. Thus, it is not surprising if there were many benefits of the studies conducted by the Dutch to the studies of Javanese language and culture, yet some of the scientific studies which were synical and anti-Islam were also produced.¹¹

The language aspects and the interpretation of Islamic values described hitherto prove that Islam is not identical to Arab, in spite of the use of Arabic language as the scientific language. It seems also that Islam tends to appreciate various expressions in culture, including the aspects of language. The local and regional languages, when Islam has already been internalized in the heart of non-Arab peoples, do not disappear and vanish, but enriched and elevated in particular aspects in order to make it more dignified and can be used to express the high philosophy of life.

Education of Islam and the Language

Javanese people have had a language system which shows their acceptance to Arabic letter, both directly and indirectly. *Pegon* letter or Javanese *Pegon* is the form of the direct effect from their acceptance. *Pegon* letter or which is usually called *Arab Pegon* shows the practice of the use of Arabic letter written according to some particular adjustments in order to be used to speak the local pronunciation. This kind of letter in Malay is indeed called as “Javanese letter”. In Java, this letter is a part of intellectual tradition at Islamic boarding school which has spread among moeslem society.¹²

S.M.N. Al-Attas shows that the arrival of Islam in Malay also brought Arabic writing which was used to be Malay writing known as “Jawi writing”. The word “Jawi” comes from Arab nation to some nations which are located in Malay-Indonesia civilization.¹³ The use of Javanese letter phenomena and its adjustment with the local articulation seemed to attract the orientalist’s study. J.J. De Holander, a Dutch linguist

¹¹ See: Takashi Shiraiishi, *Zaman Bergerak: Radikalisme Rakyat di Jawa 1912-1926*, the Second printing, translated from *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912-1926* by Hilmar Farid, Jakarta: Pustaka Grafiti, 2005, p. 7; Parakitri T. Simbolon, *Menjadi Indonesia*, the third printing, Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Kompas, 2007, p. 127

¹² See: Martin van Bruinnesen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren dan Tarekat*, Yogyakarta: Gading Publishing, 2012, p. 98; Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Perbandingan Hidup Kyai dan Visinya Mengenai Masa Depan Indonesia*, Jakarta: LP3ES, 2011, p. 53-57

¹³ S.M.N. Al-Attas, *Islam dalam Sejarah ...*, p. 41

in XIX century, who especially unfolded about “The principles of Malay language and literature” focusing mostly on unraveling the use of *Jawi* letter in Malay literature.¹⁴

There is an interesting fact that the spread of this *Arab Pegon* letter veritably known widely along the archipelago. Its existence even became the linking letter in regional, as Malay has become *Lingua Franca*. Its role was quite central where this letter became the main choice for the local government or kingdom to communicate with other kingdoms.. Annabel T. Gallop, an expert in literature, for example shows in “Golden Letters: Writing Traditions of Indonesia” that Buleleng King, Bali namely Ratu Gusti Wayahan, a Hindu follower, did not have any choice to communicate with Thomas S. Raffles, the British General Governor, except he write his formal letter with *pegon* letter.¹⁵

The existence of this *pegon* letter can still survive nowadays and is still preserved well through the Islamic education world like Islamic boarding school, *dayah*, *langgar*, *surau* and others. Those institutes do not only preserve and produce many texts using *pegon* letter, but also produce newer products. The preservation lasts continuously through some systems which enable other people to access those scripts.

This phenomenon is shown indirectly with the existence of the partner letter which bridges the lack of Javanese letters in pronouncing Arabic letter. The past Javanese society then carried out creative process in order to enable Javanese letter to be used to say *kha* such as in word *khobar*, the pronunciation *qa* like in word *Al Qur'an*, the pronunciation *za* like in word *zakat*, the pronunciation *fa* like in word *fana'* and many more. In this way, it shows the effort of Javanese people to accept Islam.

This is where the relationship of language problems with Islamic education apparently quite tight. The traditional Islamic education like Islamic boarding school, *surau*, and others have preserved and enriched the survival process of the local languages for long time. Those languages have been conserved well through the writing tradition by using adaptive letter such as *pegon* letter.

In the time of colonialization, the Dutch indeed realized the importance of this *pegon* letter as the means of written communication media. In some way, there is a considered part where the existence of *pegon* letter has shaped the Islamic character as the native people identity. In accordance with the features of the XIX century, known as Mission Age by Karel A. Steenbrink, the bond between Islam and this letter was considered as the threat which needs to be shifted. Some western scholars called the main features at this time as the conditioning time “Cutting down Islam strategies”.¹⁶

The interesting case which can be discussed here is the effort carried out by K.F. Holle (1892 – 1896), an honorary advisor for the native people's business, who initiated the education to be the means to neutralize the position of Islam. He stated that the existence of Arab letters, including *pegon* letter, would only strengthen the influence of those who had strong beliefs in religion. Based on this idea, Holle staying with Sundanese people, started to introduce Sundanese letter which had been unknown

¹⁴ See: J.J. De Hollander, *Pedoman Bahasa dan Sastra Melayu*, translated from *Handleiding bij de Beoefening der Maleische taal en Letterkunde*, Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1984.

¹⁵ See: Annabel Teh Gallop, *Golden Letters: Writing Traditions of Indonesia*, London: British Library – British Council, p. 41

¹⁶ Karel Steenbrink, *Kawan dalam Pertikaian: Kaum Kolonial Belanda dan Islam di Indonesia (1596-1942)*, Jakarta: Mizan, 1995, p. 144

previously. Actually the letter mentioned previously was part of Javanese letters which was known as *hanacaraka* or *cacarakan* letter. The struggle to fabricate and manipulate in this way was considered by the native people “this letter was being forced to be used”, recalling who “played” as the authority in its introduction.¹⁷ However, some of the native people had no choice but to learn it because understanding this letter became one of the requirements to be accepted as the lower staff of the Dutch colonialization.

The introduction of this *cacarakan* letter was started by publishing the book of *Handléiding voor het Aanleren van het Soendanéésch Létterschrift* (the guide book to learn Sundanese letter). The letter which was introduced was the Javanese letter patented in the printing machine made by Roorda in 1839 due to the assistance of Raden Panji Puspawilaga. From 20 Javanese letters, 18 were introduced, because Sundanese people did not differentiate the symbol of sound *da / dha* and *ta / tha*. The introduction of this “new” letter was also supported by using the printing device technology made by Grashuis in 1860 – 1862 in Groningen, Netherland.¹⁸

Those efforts in fact did not have other motives but a part of the effort to change the Arabic script with the “local” script. Furthermore, these activities tended to be an ideology which could direct anti-Islam. The existence of these Islamic traditional institution such as Islamic boarding school, *dayah*, *surau* and others have at least been the savior to the tradition of the literacy and the language which had grown previously as the result from the influence of Islamic roles in the archipelago.

Conclusion

Based on the study which has been conducted, it can be concluded that the existence of Islam has contributed in terms of civilization in the archipelago. Islam has enriched the cultures, including the aspects of literacy and language in this nation. The literacy and the language have also contributed considerably for the civilization progress. Through these literacy and language, the people of this archipelago have gained enrichment and Islamic treasures.

Any means have been used to stop, marginalize, and eliminate the roles of Islam by a number of parties. Nevertheless, the Islamic educational institutions have proved to be able to preserve the literacy and the language in some certain levels. In the future, the efforts to collect and conserve the literacy and the language need to be done. It is expected that the results of Islamic civilization in the archipelago can survive and be inherited as the part of identity and pride of the past from one generation to another.

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¹⁷ Karel A. Steenbrink, *Kawan dalam Pertikaian ...*, p.106-108

¹⁸ Elis Suryani, *Filologi*, Bogor: Ghalia Indonesia, 2012, p. 130-131

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