

Brief History of Translation Experience in Malaysia:

A Case of Arabic Malay's Translation

Azman Che Mat¹

Ismail Muhamad²

Abstract: This paper intends to propose the important of translation from Arabic language to Malay language. At this point, the paper sheds a light on translation activities in Malay society and Arabic civilization as a comparison. Translation has a major role in the development and delivery of information to Malay citizens especially in Muslim community. In fact, that the translation is not new in Islamic civilization and Malay civilization.

Key words: Translation; Arabic; Malay; civilization

1. INTRODUCTION

Translation as defined by most scholars could be concluded as “a process of content (information) and form (language) transfers”. The works of translation to the extent are to transfer a sum of knowledge from one source to the other. Translation as mentioned by most of scholars is a process of civilization exchange. After all, almost all civilizations were indebted to each others. Arabs transferred technology, philosophy and astronomy from several civilizations around them especially Greek, Chinese and India. Europe, after the “Dark Ages” had actively been working on translating books from Arab civilization. This is clear in the statement noted by Edwards Grants (1996):

Because of importance of the translated works, the civilization of Islam must be allotted a considerable share of the glory for the Western in science.

As such, Malay civilization had indebted for Arabic civilization as clearly in culture, religion as well as language. During five centuries, there were five centers of excellent were erected in this region from Samudera Pasai (1280-1400M), Melaka (1400-1650M), Aceh (1511-1650M), Pattani (1564-1782M),

¹ Universiti Teknologi MARA(UiTM) Academy of Language Study, Dungun Campus, 23000 Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia. E-mail: azman531@tganu.uitm.edu.my

² Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Terengganu, Malaysia. E-Mail: abureza@yahoo.com

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to Johor-Riau (1650-1800M) (Syed Muhammad & Halim, 229: 2008). Scholars from these centers had a huge contribution in their writing, adaptation and translation. Although there was a strong relationship with Arabs, it was rare to find an Arabic writings from Malay scholars. In contrast, most of their writings were in Malay using Arabic script known as Jawi. (Note 1)

This was obviously different to the statement mentioned by Adewuni Salawu (2007:30):

The spread of Islam did not favor the development of local languages as such, but rather it encouraged the mastery of Arabic, considered a sacred language.

Hence, it is possible to conclude that translation was the main factor in developing Malay civilization at that time.

2. TRANSLATION IN ARAB AND MALAY CIVILIZATION

Mustafa (1973) in his book "Arab literature and history" mentioned that translation had begun before the Abbasid era which was at the hands of Khalid bin Yazid Ibn Muawiya who transferred some of the books to Islamic civilization. He was specifically fond of looking at his books in chemistry, medicine and astronomy. Al-Jahiz had said about him (that he was the first who translated in the astronomy, medicine and chemistry). (Note 2)

Abbasid era known as "Golden Age" witnessed the fast development of translation works. The distinguished library "*Bayt al-Hikmah*" was the center for academic activities including translation, teaching, research and publications. The movement of knowledge transfer had been centered in this library. This denoted the importance of translation in the construction of ideas, cultures and literatures besides to enrich the targeted language, and in this context was Arabic language.

Accordingly, in the Malay Archipelago, the translation movement had just begun when the Royal of Melaka ordered someone to send the book, "*Durr al-Manzum*" for the interpretation to Pasai (Abdul Jalil, 1996:280). In fact, there was a book which had been translated such as the common belief (*aqidah*), entitled "Mother of the Evidence" (*Ummu al-Barahin*) at the hands of the Sanusi Zain bin Mohamed Jalaluddin in 1575. The translation then was named the "Guidance Beginning" (*Bidayah al-Hidayah*). On the other hand, Mohammed Zainuddin bin Muhammad Badawi Asambawi continued this work and gave a new title; the "Sacrificial Siraj" (*Siraj al-Huda*) in 1886. The responsibility of the third translation was taken by Zainal Abidin Bin Mohamed al-Fatani and called it the "Doctrine of The Survivors" (*Aqidah al-Najiin*) (Mohammed Nor, 1980:10). There was also a book known as "The body of grammar," (*Matan al-Ujrumiyyah*) translated by Sheikh Abdel Qader Bin Abdullah Hashim Mandaylin and copied by Abdul Majid Mendahilun year 1314 H/1896 (Wan Muhamad Shaghir, 2001:vi). (Note 3)

However, these translations as mentioned earlier were plentiful. There were a number of translations those were unnamed for the publication. The fact was, most translators were not known and that, in certain cases, the translated version did not come on behalf of the translators. Thus, it was believed that the issue of the translations was done just for the sake of education. Therefore, dissemination of knowledge in seminars using these translations is to facilitate the understanding of the lessons on the different level of religious knowledge. Indeed, these translations had attracted the communities, where they were printed several times and distributed to all libraries in Malaysia.

At that time, the translation movement in Malaysia had initiated translation office through the establishment of the Office in writing at the Institute of Sultan Idris Training teachers in the state of Perak in 1924 (Abdel-Baker 2005). This office was a positive initiative in the printing and publication of books and education decisions and the texts translated into Malay. It was stopped during the colonial period and the management of this office began again in 1954.

Presently, the Translation Section of the Malaysian National Institute of Translation (ITNMB) was

established by the government. ITNMB was the only one of its kind to assist the work of translation and interpretation. One of the objectives provided by this institution is a project to translate literary and religious materials (Wan Hashim, 2007:10). There are also other institutions, governmental and non-governmental, which allocated a special budget for the translation of selected Arabic books to be translated into the Malay as such the Islamic Foundation of Terengganu and others.

3. THE NEED TO DEVELOP STUDIES IN THE ARABIC TRANSLATION TO MALAY

As noted earlier, there were copies translated into the Malay language since the days when Islamic teachings were conducted by the *ulama* (religious teachers). All these efforts, as we have noted, appears to be a work of an individual. There were no fixed documents to show the titles of books were translated during that period. The scholars of these latecomers to the treasury of knowledge were discovered through an advanced study.

At the moment, there are publications observed in translation from Arabic into Indonesian, which are common in the Malaysian market. Most readers turn to these sources to fulfill their need in knowledge and religious ideas and culture. This tendency is expected to give a negative impact to the national language developing, a Malay language. On the other hand, there was a deviant in some compilers, such as religion and additional illegal practices (*bid'ah*). This is the result of the lack of coordination and control of the government or authorized institutions.

The compilers in Malaysia, of course, comparing to Indonesia was lagging far behind in terms of quantity (M. Bukhari, 2004:2). He noted in numerous on the number of books translated in Malaysia, only about 720 copies published in the period between August 1957-April 1992 (M. Bukhari, 1994). This number indicates a lack of desire and enthusiasm of the staff in the field of printing and publishing. It is expected that the weakness of activities in the translation may be in terms of the payment (Mashudi, 1988) and considered translation as a part time efforts (M. Bukhari, 2004).

This phenomenon does not fit the Islamic teachings in Malaysia that Malay people in dire need of new knowledge in the *fiqh*, *Sharia* law and literature, and other sources in Arabic language. In addition, the number of arrivals to the Middle East to study Arabic is increasing. Those who have received a variety of knowledge resource in the Arabic language were commissioned to spread among the Malaysian society in general and the people of the Muslim in particular.

However, there are ongoing studies in the masters and PhD in Malay language and Arabic language in universities. It is clear that these studies in the perspective of the researcher are to develop a good start for the translation for Arabic-Malay-Arabic. The trend was becoming more active to build the area of comparative studies or the contrastive studies between the languages. Even though the number of studies were conducted in the science of translation between Arabic and Malay in the PhD's level were not more than ten; such Maheram Mohamed (National University of Malaysia) and Mohammed Fauzi Jumingan (University of Putra Malaysia), Azman Che Mat (Mara University of Technology).

This reveals a void in the hands of those who wish to specialize in the translation between Arabic and Malay. The need for advanced studies in the field including modern theories of translation, application of appropriate techniques, effectiveness and evaluation. It has been reported by Ishaam and Wan (1995:159) the less deepening of a few theories to accommodate the translation process, leading to problems of translation.

4. CONCLUSION

The translation also affects the use of national language effectively in difference purposes. In Malaysia, this is in line with the desire to maintain the national language. Thus, it helps the local language to face the colonial language of the foreign languages for the interests of capital, culture, ideology and politic such as English. Furthermore, translation unites the way in which the culture and traditions remain to uphold the legacy of the language and inculcate the spirit of self-defense of nation identities.

On the other hand, the translation is on the efforts of the invitation-which is the responsibility between a Muslim and a Muslim-where the religious books have to reflect the information into the local language. At the same time, this profession will increase the treasury of language. Translation is only a means of access to the supplier who does not have the capacity, Mohamed Jaber (2005:54) said:

The translation, however, as such the pot that served those who are unable to reach the spring for drinking.

NOTES

Note 1. The term of Jawi is one of the two official scripts in Brunei and Malaysia as the script for the Malay language. Usage wise, it was the standard script for the Malay language but has since been replaced by the Roman script, and Jawi has since been relegated to a script used for religious and cultural purposes (Wikipedia, 2009).

Note 2. He was a famous Afro-Arab scholar of East African descent.

Note 3. The Malay Archipelago and Maritime Southeast Asia are names given to the archipelago located between mainland Southeastern Asia and Australia. Located between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the group of 20,000 islands is the world's largest archipelago by area. It includes the countries of Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Brunei, Malaysia (only East), East Timor, and most of Papua New Guinea. The island of New Guinea is not always included in the Malay Archipelago, while Peninsular Malaysia also is included within Maritime Southeast Asia (Wikipedia, 2009).

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