

Common Persian and Arabic Loanwords in Malay: A Trilingual Comparison

Phonology/Semantics

Sepideh Chitsaz

PhD Candidate in Clinical Linguistics
Dept. of Audiology & Speech Sciences
Faculty of Allied Health Sciences
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM)
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
E-mail: schitsaz@hotmail.com

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Abstract

Due to the vast influences of Islam on the South East Asia region, Malay has acquired a very large number of Persian and Arabic words. Persian and Arabic also utilize various common words because of long direct contact in trade and commerce, religious pilgrimage, and sojourns.

A loanword is a word directly taken into one language from another with little or no translation. Loanwords can also be called “borrowings”. The study of loanwords provides a link of discovery to historical, cultural, and linguistic dimensions of various cultures.

In this study, a relatively complete list of the common words in Malay, Persian, and Arabic will be compiled. Persian and Arabic loans into Malay may be to a greater or lesser extent assimilated. There may be a change in pronunciation so that the word follows the Malay model rather than the Persian or Arabic model. In addition to the different pronunciation of these loanwords, Malay speakers use them with different meanings within different context than their Persian or Arabic counterparts.

Here, these common words will be investigated from the phonological and semantic perspectives without the implementation of the study of etymology. As a result, the chronological context and the way in which the word was transmitted from Persian and Arabic into the Malay language is not the case of study. The current context of the usage of the words underlies the importance of this study. Aside from words collected from the dictionaries, our data will also use native speakers’ judgments.

Such a study holds great importance in the phenomenon of bonding between people from various nations. Instead of pointing out differences which may result the alienation of one ethnicity from another, outlying the similarities between languages creates a sense of kinship among different people. Therefore, it is imminent that linguists develop such studies to unite people all around the world with the power of language.

Key words: Loanword, Phonology, Semantics, Malay, Persian, Arabic.