CHAPTER NINE

AN ERROR ANALYSIS OF MALAY STUDENTS’ WRITTEN ARABIC

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1. Background

Malays\(^1\) are highly motivated people with regard to learning Arabic and the proper recitation of the Holy Qur’an. They are in fact widely acclaimed, including in pan-Islamic contests, with respect to their precision in the artful articulation of Quran recitation.

In addition to having religious and cultural significance for Malays, Arabic is essential for fostering ties with the Arab world, where there is a rapidly growing market for Malaysian products.

As such, Arabic has found a solid base in Malaysia where it is widely taught in both secular schools and religious pondoks and madrasahs.\(^2\) At the territorial level, most universities offer Arabic language programs (Abdalla 1997).

Like other learners of Arabic, Malays are confronted by certain difficulties when asked to express themselves in Arabic, resulting in a failure to express ideas (Chik 1988). Unfortunately, very few studies attempt to examine these difficulties. Most of them followed the CA approach.

A brief review of relevant literature showed a number of studies, including the following: a study by Sokimi (1980) that contrasted Arabic and BM; Abu Khudairi’s analysis of errors in Malay students’

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\(^1\) Malaysia is made up of three ethnic groups: Malays, Chinese and Indians. Malays are considered the major population group. In the constitution of Malaysia, as Asmah (1983: 79) records “...the Malays are defined as people who speak the Malay language as their mother tongue, lead the Malay way of life and profess the Islamic faith.”

\(^2\) Pondok and Madrasa started to teach Arabic and Islamic culture to the Malay community. Students from all parts of Malaysia. Pondoks and madrasas are usually built by well to do Muslims. Students either depend on themselves to earn a living or live on rich Muslims’ donations.
written Arabic (1987); a paper presented by Ibrahim contrasting Arabic and BM (1992); Soufi’s analysis of errors made by students of the IIUM\(^3\) Matriculation Center (1992); and a contrastive study by Rahmat highlighting areas of similarities and differences between Arabic and BM.

2. *The Present Study*

The target of this study is fourfold: the first aim is to examine the types of errors made by Malay students in the written Arabic in the use of the definite article (al) and preposition, inasmuch as these two elements are most problematic to Malay learners, as found by researchers and observed by teachers of Arabic. The second aim is to demonstrate the propensity or inclination of students to commit errors. Unlike other studies relevant to this area, the third purpose is to show statistically whether or not the difference in frequency of errors in these two aspects is significant. The fourth aim is to trace the possible sources of errors.

3. *The Subjects*

The subjects of this study are selected from undergraduate students who study Arabic language and literature as a major or minor subject in the undergraduate degree program. The Program is run by the Department of Arabic Language and Literature and concentrates on language skills, Arabic literature, introduction to linguistics, and other related subjects.

The majority of Malay students have attended Islamic religious schools where they were extensively exposed to Arabic. In contrast, other students came from secular schools and were not exposed to Arabic prior to their Matriculation studies at the International Islamic University (Malaysia).

Arabic is the primary medium of instruction for the program, and English is employed as the secondary medium. Students majoring in Arabic must complete 54 credit hours in core courses and 18 credit hours in supporting courses.

\(^3\) International Islamic University Malaysia.