

INSPIRING PASSION FOR ARABIC POEMS AMONG NON-NATIVE SPEAKERS OF ARABIC IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

The method of teaching literature at a secondary or tertiary level has always been a matter of interest and a topic of discussion in many countries. However, not until recently has the role and importance of literature in the English and Arabic as the first or second level classrooms been given emphasis. This study examines how Arabic poems and proverbs can be used as effective methods in the teaching and learning of Arabic to non-native speakers in Malaysia. It proposes that new and more innovative and effective methods should be introduced to replace the current conventional methods of teaching Arabic. The teaching of literature; i.e., Arabic poems and proverbs requires a passion for literature itself. When the passion for literature has been instilled, language learners will enjoy their literature courses, and find them to be easier than before they had this awareness. As a result of the learners' advancement and acquired appreciation, they are able to access the vast linguistic treasures Arabic literature has to offer and therefore, simultaneously improve their competence in Arabic.

Keywords: Inspiring. Passion. Arabic Poems. Non-Native Speakers. Malaysia.

1 INTRODUCTION

In order to comprehend and appreciate the notion that passion for literature itself is vital in the teaching of literature, a discussion on the methods employed in teaching Arabic in Malaysia at this juncture seems appropriate.

The teaching of Arabic language began in Malaysia at the advent of Islam being introduced to the shores of South East Asia. Being that the language of the Islamic faith, its scripture, its tradition and its prayers were all in Arabic, the adherents to this religion had to learn this language in order to act its physical decrees at a basic level and understand its higher meanings at a cognitive, psychological and spiritual level. As it is well known, to read, learn and understand something in its original form is ultimately the purist way to grasp its true essence without distortions or in- equivalencies in other forms thereof. Thus the tradition of learning Arabic became an integral part of Malaysia as the formal language of the country's official religion, Islam.

Before the present school system, the child would get basic training in religion and Arabic language from the religious teacher in the village which would either be at the community prayer hall (Surau) or the Mosque in the community. This child would then progress to further their study at advanced institutions in Malaysia, Indonesia or the Middle East. The prestige of Al-Azhar (Egyptian) trained religious scholars is a well-known fact in Malaysia. The school system in Indonesia also ultimately originating in the Middle East is considered by us to have the same effects as the effect of the Middle East system (Hashim, Rufai, & Nor, 2011).

When this student arrives at the learning institute in the Middle East, in ideal circumstances he/she has the environment forced on them, different people, the Arab culture basic day to day survival is dependent on coming to terms with the Arabic language. He hears Arabic language from morning to night, the newspapers, magazines, radio programs even the act of buying food or relieving oneself has to be requested in Arabic. This thus leads to the subtleties of the language being picked up by the student informally. People's expression of grief, sorrow, happiness, surprise, love and hate are all interacted with involuntarily through observational learning. The student sees different areas of the land, experiences the sights, sounds and atmosphere and later engages in the hardships of the people of that area.

In the classroom which is designed for the people of that country or city continuing their education at that institute employed the relevant materials and methods for that level of teaching. We thus find the student subjected to the classical Arab style of learning. The classical scholars would formulate a summary of a discipline in different and put it forth in either a poetry work or a summarised work called *matan*. The student would memorise this *matan* or poem and the sheikh or teacher would elaborate on it in Arabic word for word. This would be likened to the memorisation of the skeleton and the meat would be provided by the explanation. This was a very efficient method and still is with merits surpassing many other educational systems. However, it was tailor made to coincide with an environment where the subtleties of the language are concerned, as well as the mastering of the understanding of the poem and the elaboration thereof.

The student would then proceed after the learning and memorizing of these basic texts to more elaborate texts for memorization ultimately reading the most authoritative books in the discipline with a teacher guiding him at each step teaching him the methods of becoming independent in the search for knowledge. The personal one to one nature of this method and its examinations gave the students clear understanding of what is being taught. Also area mastery and not proceeding until the student thoroughly memorised and understood a section of a text made these students masters of what they knew. They lived in the language, used it in all areas; academia, formal, social, in the bazaar and the slumps. They interacted with educated and illiterate people in this language and made it close to their own. They were taught literature which is the expression of people's emotion in relation to their environment or situation in the culture and environment it originated in, and thus grasped the full understanding of the literature.

These students came back, became teachers and started teaching in the method they learned the formal part of their education however void of the environmental influences. The observational learning advantage was not there, the culture was the Malay culture, and the language was the Malay language. Students were, like back in the Arab lands forced to memorise the *matan* or the poem and was elaborated upon. This method however, needed an extra step. These poems and *mutun* needed to be translated and as time progressed the need to explain them to students in Malay became the inevitable. The grammatical rules for the language were also to be memorized first in Arabic and later translated to Malay and memorized. The traditional texts were memorized in Arabic and explained in Malay. This was carried out through the rehashing of words and grammar rules. Morphology and rhetoric was taught in the same way. The emphasis was placed on the grammar and linguistic aspect of the language and to this day even in the modern syllabus of the educational system this is still the method employed in many places. Texts, books, comprehension paragraphs and dialogs are all taught through the method of translating to the Malay language word for word, most times memorised and rewritten in the examinations (Haron, 2013).

The object of the exposure to literature is this to elaborate understanding of the Arabic language and at times expose grammar rules within the text. Poetry is memorized and understood in Malay word for word with the object of literal understanding only.

This brief summary in the evolution of teaching Arabic in the Malaysian context thus brings us to the outline of the individual perusing higher Arabic studies in University. Taking into consideration that at the university level the teaching of theoretical literature in any language is the subject matter and that this is only available in the original source language of that particular language and that the ability to have a higher comprehension of that language is a necessity, we can outline the challenges faced by these learners from this background.

We are building on the bases that the student has understanding of literal Arabic and has been exposed to the formal grammar and syntax of the language

2 THE MAJOR PROBLEMATIC AREAS FACED BY STUDENTS OF LITERATURE

2.1 The Domain of Literature

The student thus far has encountered literature as a whole and poetry specifically in the domain of language acquisition and linguistics. These students treat literature like any reading paragraph which is in Arabic and expects a word for word understanding. They thus end up translating each word by use of a dictionary to Malay and understand the text on the surface and quite literally. They can make out certain grammar rules but are confounded by sentence syntax and structure. Literature is thus still treated a language acquisition material and is not encountered as having higher meanings (Haron, 2013, 55-56).

2.2 Environmental, Cultural, Social and Regional factors

Poetry and literature is usually a means to expound and express situational, environmental, cultural and societal interest and occurrences. Knowing the background of an author or poet will usually tell you the region they come from. Studying their region and time period will ultimately put into context the social circumstances. Knowing the culture of the people will be an eye opener to see what people perceived as good, bad, praiseworthy or honourable. The student does not have this environment and cultural subtleties at their disposal to understand the context of these literary works or poems.

2.3 Emotional Void And Cognitive Dissonance

Authors and poets use literature and poetry to express themselves. The emotions of happiness, sadness, remorse, sorrow, sympathy, love, hate and regret are all expressed in a few lines of poetry, a novel or short story. The extensive use of translation often results in the student's inability to empathise with the author or poet and to grasp and appreciate the feelings and emotions expressed in the writings. They may understand the words but fail to perceive the context or perspective it is used, thus annulling the ultimate goal of the author, which is to express on paper the overwhelming feelings and expressions concealed within.

2.4 Teaching Methodology

The methods employed in teaching poetry are that of memorization and the explanation of the meaning of the poem. An attempt to indulge in the deeper meanings of the poems are attempted but is perceived by the student to be difficult and the instructor is usually limited to that level of teaching.

Literary theories of authors are taught but cannot be tied together to the works of the author neither can it be extracted from the work of the author. The students are unable to relate a theory to a third party author or analyze the work of a third author and formulate with theory. We thus end up once again in the practise of memorization of literature theory and theory about different genres of literature without the ability to go beyond these parameters.

2.5 Inability to Transfer Literature Skills

In a recent study (Osman & Jaffer, 2012), 100 students of the Jahili and Islamic Poetry class were tested. These students specializing in Arabic language and literature were presented with a questionnaire which comprised of five stanzas from Malay poems and five similar stanzas from Arabic poems displaying the same literary tools like mode, mood, alliteration, figurative language, similes and metaphors. In the Malay section of the questionnaire the participants had basic understanding of these tools but could not relate them to the Arabic poems. When examining the findings it was deduced that these students were not only unaware that these tools existed in Arabic but also the Arabic terminologies for them. Some took it as literal words and lost the gist of the Arabic completely.

3 THE SIGNIFICANCE AND USAGE OF ARABIC POEMS IN THE TEACHING OF ARABIC LANGUAGE

Arabic poetry is considered the register of the Arabs; *Diwan Al 'Arab* (Al Fakhuri, 1995). It is a vital source in understanding the nature of the Arabs; their traditions and their daily ways of life. It offers a comprehensive depiction of the Arab nation since the Pre-Islamic; *Jahiliyyah* period up to what is considered as contemporary Arabia (Beeston, et al, 1983). This literature features poems of 'Imru al-Qays, Zuhayr Ibn Abi Sulma, 'Amr Ibn Kulthum, Labid Ibn Rabi'ah, Nabigah Al Zubayni, Tarafah Ibn Al 'Abd, 'Antarah Ibn Shaddad (Ahlwardt, 1870; Tommas, 2007), Al- A'shā 'Al-A'shā, 2013) and Harith Ibn Halizzah (Al-Hārith, 2013) and elocutions of Qus Ibn Sa'idah (Cheikho, 1891).

A great part of this literature is found in the anthologies of "*Al-Asma'iyat*" (Asma'l, 2004), "*Al-Mufadaliyyat*" (Mufadhl, 1921), "*Al-Hamasah*" (Al Tai', 1998), "*Al-Mu'allaqat al-Sab'ah*" (Al Zuzuni, 2013), and in the works of Jahiz (Al-Jāhiz, 2013) and Mubarrad (Harun, 1998). Although a large part of the Arabic lexicon has been preserved and compiled in the lexicography of "*Al-Tahdhib*", "*Al-Muhkam*", "*Al-Sihah*", "*Al-Jamhurah*" and "*Al-Nahayah*", however, classical Arabic literature is still considered by many Arab scholars as the most reliable basis for research on the Arabic lexicon (Al Shak'ah. 2004).

On the premise that Arabic poetry has been a vital source in the preservation and compilation of a large part of the Arabic lexicon or dictionary, Arabic poems, prose, epigrams, parables, and other forms of Arabic literature, where a vast sea of high quality of Arabic diction can be found, should be used more aggressively

in the acquisition and enhancement of reading and compositional writing skills' classes for non-native speakers of Arabic. The above could assist in ensuring the linguistic quality and value and eloquent language and composition style in students' compositions.

An example which could be sighted to illustrate the above is Ma'ruf al-Rusafi's beautiful and moving poem, *الارملة المرضعة* (the Nursing Widow) (Mustafa, 1999, 59). An effective comprehension lesson on Al Rusafi's poem should follow the following phases:

3.1 Phase 1: Setting The Stage

The first stage, which is designed to "set the stage", is intended to change the non-Arab ambience in the class, which is Malay in nature and is therefore designed to captivate the students' enthusiasm and interest.

- Phase one kicks off with an Arabic instrumental tune or song played. Georgii Lazanov (1926- 2012) in his Suggest phobia method suggests that several carefully chosen works of classical music should be played in the background when foreign texts are read dramatically. Lozanov claims that the atmosphere created by the music enhances the ability of the students to remember vocabulary words and thus shortens the study period of the foreign language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).
- The above is followed by a brief presentation deliberating on the importance of the Arab milieu in influencing the product and nature of the poet and poem is given. Students are soon after shown snit bits from Arab movies. The movies are found to be an effective tool in providing an overview understanding of the geographical, social and cultural milieu of the Arab peninsula.
- A discussion on the students' views and observations upon watching the movies is instigated. The discussion is further augmented with pictures and illustrations of the Arab life style which is displayed on the LCD screen.

3.2 Phase 2: Poem Recitation

- Phase two kicks off with the recitation of the poem and in this juncture an audio recording of the poem is played. Students are soon after taken through an animated power point presenting the poem in which he laments on the poverty and the predicament of the hungry and depressed widow. The poem goes as follows:

مَمَّشَاهَا	وَقَدْ أَثْقَلْ	تَمَشِي	أَلْفَاهَا	كُنْتُ	مَا	لَيْتِي	لَقِيَتْهَا
عَيْنَاهَا	تَذْرِفُهُ	وَالدَّمْعُ	حَافِيَةٌ	وَالرَّجُلُ	رَثَةٌ	رَثَةٌ	أَتَوَّابَهَا
مُحِبَّيَاهَا	كَالْوَرْسِ	وَاصْفَرُّ	مَدَامِعَهَا	الْفَقْرُ فَاحْمَرَّتْ	مِنْ	بَكَتْ	بَكَتْ
أَشْقَاهَا	مِنْ بَعْدِهِ	فَالدَّهْرُ	وَيَسْعِدَهَا	بِحَمِيهَا	كَانَ	الذِّي	مَاتَ
أَضْنَاهَا	وَالعَمُّ	وَالهَمُّ	أَوْجَعَهَا	وَالْفَقْرُ	أَفْجَعَهَا	المَوْتُ	المَوْتُ
بِمَرَّاهَا	مَقْرُونٌ	وَالْيُوسُ	بِمَنْظَرِهَا	مَشْهُودٌ	الحُزْنَ	فَمَنْظَرُ	فَمَنْظَرُ
أَعْلَاهَا	وَأَنْشَقُ	فَأَنْشَقُ	عَبَاءَهَا	أَبْلَى	قَدْ	كَرُّ	كَرُّ
جَنَبَاهَا	شَفُوقِ النَّوْبِ	حَتَّى	مَنْزَرَهَا	وَالدَّهْرُ،	وَيْلَ	الدَّهْرُ،	وَمَزَقُ
زِيَانَاهَا	شَالَتْ	كَأَنَّهُ	يَلْسَعُهَا	وَالبَرْدُ	بِأَطْمَارِهَا	تَمَشِي	تَمَشِي
	كَالْعُصْنِ فِي الرِّيحِ وَاصْطَكَّتْ تَنَائِيهَا			حَتَّى عَدَا جِسْمَهَا بِالْبَرْدِ مُرْتَجِّقًا			

- A few video segments are shown to envisage poverty and what it entails as described by Al Rusafi's poem. Students are explained on the hidden and symbolic connotation of each of these illustrations and descriptions.

3.3 Phase 3: Understanding of Poem By Contextualizing The Usage of The Vocabularies And Expressions Found In The Poem

In spite of consisting of a mere ten stanzas, the above poem features an outstanding and remarkable diction of Arabic vocabulary and expressions. In addition, Al-Rusafi's poem also provides readers with a contextual model for the usage of these vocabularies and expressions.

To facilitate the comprehension and appreciation of the poem, the following steps are taken:

- Using animated power point presentations, each line of poem is explained individually word by word.
- Explanation is given on the meaning of each word while identifying familiar words, which students may be familiar of or have come across them before. Elaboration on the context in which each word and term are chosen and employed is also delivered. Step 1 and 2 assist students to be more aware of the norms of the language in hand (Widdowson, 1975; Lazar, 1993). Explanation of the above is illustrated as follows:
 - محبّاتها – (Her face): – A woman who cares much about her looks, especially preserving her facial beauty.
 - مدامعها – (Her tears): – When a woman cries, her tears sadden me greatly, and I wish I had not seen her.
 - الورس – (Flower): My father loves planting flowers in the sanctuary of the house.
 - الإملاق – (Penury/Poverty): Allah tested us with penury and we exercised patience.
 - الدّهر – (Time): Whoever does not value time will not succeed.
- An overall and later detailed understanding of the meaning and the story line of each poem line is presented.
- A stylistic analysis on the poem is carried out by highlighting the grammatical, structural, rhetorical and stylistic aspects and peculiarities found in each line.
- The cultural aspects found in each line are also highlighted.
- The lesson is completed with a reading comprehension exercise based on the poem. Examples of the above exercise is as follows:
 - Give an external description of the Nursing Widow
 - a. Dull/Pale Face. b. Thin Body
 - Describe the suckling child
 - a. Wrapped with a torn piece of cloth
 - b. Crying
 - What did the poet say to the nursing widow?
"Oh sister, gently, I am a man, who shares the problems/calamities with all people.
 - What is the objective of the poem?
 - a. Establishing moral values such as: giving alms to the poor, and assisting poor orphans materially and in kind.
 - b. Developing the spirit of cooperation and communal unity.
- Assign appropriate titles to each division of the poem, according to the following division of text.
 - What are the reasons for the poet's assisting the nursing widow?
- Three stages of story are complete in the poem; the introduction, body, and the conclusion. In the body of the poem, a problem is put forward. Point out the problem, analyze it, and then find the resolution to the problem within the poem.
- Using a dictionary, define the following words:

أظمار – worn-out clothes أوصاب – permanent sickness/ailment
ضنك – hardship فلوات – places.

- Give an example of a simile from the poem, and explain its meaning.

3.4 The Use of Poems in Teaching Grammar and Morphology

Arabic poems can also function as useful tools in Arabic grammar and morphology lessons in Malaysia with off course a more modern twist, tailored for the present Malaysian students who are very computer and techno savvy.

To cite an example of the above is Ibn Malik's explanation of the seven conditions¹ for the forming of the two exclamation verbs in Arabic; " مَا أَفْعَلُهُ " and " أَفْعَلُ بِهِ ". Ibn Malik's explanation of these seven conditions is beautifully condensed in the following *matn* (Muhyiddeen, 1998, 147):

بأفعل انطق بعد (ما) تعجبا أو جئ بـ (أفعل) قبل مجرور بيا
وتلو أفعل انصبته: كـ (ما) أوفى خليلينا، وأصدق بهما

Considering that Ibn Malik's *Al Fiyyah* is a compulsory text for those majoring in Arabic language and literature in most universities in Malaysia, and considering that the language and style of writing in the *Al Fiyyah* could be somewhat complicated and challenging for non-native speakers of Arabic, the usage of the An Nur's animated explanation technique (Hashim, 2012) in explaining the above Ibn Malik's morphological rule will certainly assist in making the explanation more effective and interesting. Furthermore, teachers and lectures should also make use of the free videos on YouTube of Ibn Malik's *Al Fiyyah*, which has been made into a song².

4 CONCLUSION

The previous discussions have demonstrated new and more innovative and effective methods should be introduced to replace the current conventional methods of teaching Arabic. This process could be initiated by searching and studying poetic and prosaic encyclopaedias available on internet web sites designed for learners of Arabic language.

Teachers of Arabic language have the responsibility to introduce Arabic literature to learners of Arabic language and cultivate the appreciation for Arabic literary expressions among them. The teaching of literature is quite different from the teaching of other subjects, as it requires a passion for literature itself. When the passion for literature has been instilled, language learners will enjoy their literature courses, and find them to be easier than before they had this awareness. As a result of the learners' advancement and acquired appreciation, they are able to access the vast linguistic treasures Arabic literature has to offer.

Furthermore, teachers of Arabic literature are required to realize the difference between teaching Arabic literature to native speakers and non-native speakers. Specific methods and approaches are needed for non-native speakers. When teaching Arabic literature to non-native speakers, more attention and emphasis are needed to explain and enlighten on the vocabulary, sentence structure and rhetoric styles applied in the literature. In doing so, students will be able to reflect on their own errors in reading, writing and conversation and simultaneously improve their competence in Arabic.

This paper captures some of the new approaches and styles which I have resorted to in teaching Arabic poetry to Malaysian students in an effort to enrich the student's intellect and assist in creating a dynamic, constructive, and positive personality full of thoughts and ideas in the Muslim community.

Three phases of teaching Arabic poetry has been introduced to ensure the assimilation of the cultural, language and personal growth models. The first stage which is referred to as the "setting the stage" phase is intended to change the ambience in the class, which is Malay in nature and is therefore designed to captivate the students' enthusiasm and interest. The second phase on the other hand is dedicated to

¹ The conditions are: 1. The verb must be trilateral, 2. It must be flexible (can be conjugated). 3. Its meaning must be negotiable/ changeable, 4. It must be complete, 5. It must not be negative, 6. Its adjective must not come in the form of "أفعل", 7. It must not be in the anonymous/unknown form.

² http://www.4shared.com/audio/Ek4YKle4/qosidah_alfiyah_ibnu_malik.htm,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tkwGmXkrhDs>

appreciating and mastering the skill of reciting Arabic poetry correctly and eloquently. In this phase, students are on a journey to explore the beauty and intricacies of classical Arabic poetry. The third phase facilitates the comprehension and appreciation of the poem. This third phase has a follow-up activity whereby students are requested to search for other relevant poems, proverbs, idioms in Arabic, Malay and English. By doing so, students are able to relate better to the poem and gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the poem.

The above suggested phases and the follow-up activities will definitely make students more motivated and enthusiastic to learn and explore Classical Arabic poetry and will no longer fear from divulging themselves in Arabic literature generally and poetry specifically. Arabic poetry will no longer be seen by them as something so intangible, so superfluous, and so unreal and stop looking at it as something "highbrow" or "an intricate puzzle games for sophisticated intellects".

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