

**Structure and Meaning of Arabic Personal Names in Brunei Darussalam
- A pilot study-**

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Abstract

This study analyses Arabic personal names in Brunei in terms of the morphological structure and meaning. We collected the data from some Malay undergraduates. The study finds that a person's full name is mostly made up of two parts: The first name + the father's name, with nickname inserted between them. It also finds that there are three types of the name structures, including: three-word names, two word-names and one-word name. The study reveals, the Bruneians have adopted the Arabic naming convention in terms of the meanings. Hence, names of the prophet Muhammad "saw", his family and companions are the most common, while the other names are taken from the names of Muslim scholars throughout the history. Names that refer to the animals and plants are rare. Finally, this study finds that Malay language in terms of phonetic shift in turn has influenced by the personal Arabic names in Brunei.

Keywords: Proper Names, Bruneian Malays, Arabs, **Malay** language, Arabic language

1. Introduction

The spread of Arabic language in this part of the world was in conjunction with the spread of Islam. That is because the Arabic language is connected with Islam, with the Qur'an being revealed only in Arabic and with the Arab who have to trade and consequently spread the religion. Thus, ever since the conversion of the Bruneian people to Islam, the influence of Arabic in their culture and language began in earnest. At present, the Arabic language and culture has an obvious impact on the Bruneian Malay society and it has clearly become a component of their identity. The Arabic language influence can be observed through a number of Arabic vocabularies that has penetrated into the Bruneian Malay language. This was made easy by the adoption of the Jawi script¹.

However, the impact of the Arabic language on the Malay identity can be mostly observed in the personal names of the Bruneian Malay people as well as the rest of the Malay Archipelago. The adoption of Arabic names in Brunei can be dated back to the era of Sultan Awang Alak Betatar (1368–1402), the first Muslim ruler in Brunei. He became known as *Sultan Muhammad Shah*. (Sidhu: 1997: 20).

The aim of this paper is to investigate these names from a linguistic perspective in order to explore to what linguistic extent the Bruneians have preserved the Arabic names and to determine the changes that have occurred in terms of structure and semantics. This study will also identify the specific reasons behind the modifications of the names that now conform to Malay phonological and morphological systems.

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study that attempts to explore the influence of Arabic on the names of the Malay people in general and the Bruneian Malay people in particular. It is hoped that its findings, recommendations and suggestions will lead to new studies in this field.

2. Methodology

¹ a script that utilizes the Arabic alphabet

The study utilized the descriptive analytical approach. The Bruneian Malay are taken as the population of the study. Due to the nature of this pilot study, the data is collected from the list of names of Bruneian Malay students enrolled in Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University, Academic Year 2015-2106. The number of the Malay students registered in this academic year amounts to 859. As the researcher believes this sample represents the Bruneian Malays; that is because this part of the society contains the needed information about Bruneian Malays in terms of names.

In this study, each word that spelled without joining with other another word is considered a name. The researcher used the software of word counter plus normal calculation method. The Bruneian native speakers who know Arabic are counseled in the transliteration of the names, and in determining the source and origins of some misleading names.

3. Studies in the Personal names

The study of proper names (anthroponyms), is known as onomastics, or aonomatology which is translated to Arabic as (*ʿIlm Dirāst ʿAl`asmā*). Others term it as *ʿal-ʿIsmā`īyyah* (*Daḥmānī: 2014*). Although it is considered a western linguistic discipline, some classical Arabic writers have written books that are worthy to be under the umbrella of this discipline, including *Sibawaihi* (c. 760–796), *Quṭrub and Ibn Duraid* (C 837 – 933), among others.

Generically the proper name is defined by Arab lexicographers as “the word that are used to refer to the essence of an object (quiddity) or its attributes that distinguish it from others” Ibn Manẓūr (1968:14.401). Arab linguists have defined it as a word that refers to a particular person, or an object such as the names of people, places, countries, tribes, rivers, seas etc. This definition is similar to the definition of a proper name in English that is stated to be: “a noun such as 'James', 'New York', or 'China' that is the name of one particular thing and is written with a CAPITAL letter” (Longman Dictionary). It is also defined as “a symbol pointing to one and only one person, animal, place or thing” (Potter, 1964: 142). “In logical and philosophical sense, a name refers to a different element of human experience i.e. to an individual or a collective entity, which it designates or denotes” Agyekum, K. (2006, 206-235).

Some modern day studies are relevant to the study of Arabic proper names. Such as studies carried out by Jalaili and Jalūli (2006), who explored the basic cultural influences behind the names and nicknames n the Algerian society. As the study reveals

the main factors influencing the selection of names and nicknames are, inter alia, the mixing of cultures and folklore of people such (legends, myths, sagas, traditions, etc.) including the impact of religion as well.

In a study entitled as “Personal Names In Hebrew And Arabic: Modern Trends Compared to the Past”, Rosenhouse examines the similarities and differences between names in Hebrew and Arabic and categorizes them as specific lexical groups within their vocabularies in terms of stress, gender and innovations. The study revealed, “Arabic and Hebrew tend to innovate names, but due to the speakers' different cultural and social structures, the results in each language differ in several respects” Rosenhouse (2002:97-114).

Huda, (2005) has analysed in her M.A thesis the name of people in Constantine with aim to investigate to what extend people are maintaining their identity and preserving their heritage. Al-Zumor has investigated naming practices in the names of adolescent girls living in the tribal regions of Yemen neighbouring Saudi Arabia. He concluded through these name practices, classification is indicative towards the attitudes of parents and of the way they interact with their social and natural environment. He also found that the changing social, political and linguistic influences on the land through the people of Saadah and the neighbouring places (in Yemen) have left their impact on the naming pattern” AL-Zumor (2009:2: 1)

Other studies include Omer’s (2006) ‘The typology of Arabic Proper Nouns’ and, Zina Saadi (2006), “Behind the Name: Etymology of Arabic Names”. Mary Ann Walter (2002) deals with the meaning of names in Hadhramaut, Yemen.

In his book: “Environment and Names: Study on Meaning and Indication”, Al-Mikkawy, investigated the relationship between names and environments. It reveals that most names are names referring to animals, plants, birds, features and landmarks that are found in the individual’s environment.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

The total of the names in the sample of the study consists of 2813 Arabic words. Each word formed alone or with other word a name. The top 10 names are as shown in the following table:

Table 1 the top 10 Arabic names in Brunei

| order | Unfiltered word count | Occurrences | Percentage |
|-------|-----------------------|-------------|------------|
| 1. | <i>Mūhammad</i> | 315 | 11.2259 |

| | | | |
|-----|---------------------------|-----|--------|
| 2. | Nūr / Nūrul | 203 | 7.2345 |
| 3. | ‘Abdul / ‘Abd / ‘Abdullah | 111 | 3.9558 |
| 4. | Siti | 99 | 3.5282 |
| 5. | `Aḥmad | 27 | 0.9622 |
| 6. | `Amal | 19 | 0.6771 |
| 7. | Nabīlah | 16 | 0.5702 |
| 8. | Afīqah | 15 | 0.5346 |
| 9. | ‘Ali | 14 | 0.4989 |
| 10. | ‘Aqīlah | 13 | 0.4633 |

4.1. Structural Analysis

The typology of a Bruneian name is mostly composed from the given birth name, preceded by nicknames and titles, prefixed by *bin* or *binti* (the male and female suffix indicating descent), followed by the father’s given name. It is very rare to come across a Bruneian name that does not carry any title.

Brunei has a system of honorary titles which cover various dimensions, from the religious to the cultural to the royal. The religious titles can be exemplified by the *Haji* (for men) or *Hajah* (for women) which is legally granted when a person is considered to have performed the *Haji*. However, this title is neither hierarchal nor hereditary.

Other titles that are ubiquitous amongst the Bruneian Malays are Wazir, Pehin, Pengiran, Awangku, and Dayangku and. These have their own historical and sociocultural contexts, and are usually either hierarchal, hereditary or both.

The majority of Bruneian Malay names reflect the Islamic culture context. However, cultural names originating from the Pre-Islamic era in Brunei still do exist amongst the Bruneian Malay people. It is common to have a combination of more than one title that reflects the individual’s cultural heritage, religious obligation and educational achievement. The following table resembles the possible formula of the full Bruneian Malay name.

Table 2 Typology of Brunei Full Name

| -/ + Title | Individual’s Given Name(s) | -/+ Suffix | -/+ Father’s title | Father name | Full Name | Gender |
|-------------|----------------------------|------------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------|
| <i>Haji</i> | ‘ <i>Abdul Hafiz</i> | <i>bin</i> | <i>Haji</i> | <i>Mātsa’ad</i> | <i>Haji Abdul Hafiz bin Haji Matsa’ad</i> | <i>Male</i> |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------|----------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| <i>Hajja Dr</i> | <i>Raāḥmah</i> | <i>binti</i> | <i>N/A</i> | <i>Ibrāhim</i> | <i>Haja ,Rahmah binti Ibrahim</i> | <i>Female</i> |
| <i>Dayangku</i> | <i>Siti Nur Faiza</i> | <i>binti</i> | <i>Pengiran</i> | <i>‘Ali</i> | <i>Dayangku Siti Nur Faiza binti Pengiran Ali</i> | <i>Female</i> |

4.2- Arabic –like names

Some Bruneians give their children names that may sound similar to the Arabic names assuming that they are Arabic such as (Al-wāti) in the name (Nūr Alwati), and (Iryāni) in (Nūr Iryāni). The word (Nūr) means light, yet (Ira Iryāni) and (Wāti) have no meanings. This phenomenon is similar to what is labelled in the linguistic studies as false cognate which stand for words in different languages that have similar spelling and meaning (.Inkpen, etl.2005). It happens due to the usual tendency to use the most memorable words that come to one's mind when talking, as an unconscious and uncontrolled means of producing easy communication.

4.3- Structural Typology of names

Bruneian Malays` personnel names are categorized into the three categories according to the number of words used for each name, including one-word names, two word names, and three – word names. The latter is considered the most frequent, followed by two- word names and single word names respectively. The following table is asmples for these categories.

Table 3 Structural Typology of Bruneians` Full Names

| Single word name | | Combined names | |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Unblended | blended | Two-word names | Three -word name |
| <i>‘ Hakīm</i> <i>‘Aḥmad</i> <i>Fāṭima</i> | <i>‘Abdullah</i> <i>‘Amatullāh</i> <i>Khairunisā`</i> | <i>‘Sāmiyyah Emrālda</i> <i>‘Abdullah Amīr</i> <i>Nūr Raḥīmah</i> | <i>Mūḥammad Khairul Nazrī</i> <i>Nūr Anīsah Shahīrah</i> <i>Siti Nūrul Iryānī</i> |

The blended names are formed from two words mixed together, so there is separation or space when the names are spelt, contrary to the combined names where each word stands alone or mixed so that the constituent parts can be indistinguishable as the names.

As the above table shows the one word names are either made up from a single distinct meaningful element like Mūḥammad, ‘Alī, `Amīra, *Hakim*, *‘Aḥmad* or a small group of words standing together as a conceptual unit (phrase) such as *Saiful ‘Islām*.

The names of the Prophet Mūḥammad (peace be upon him). considered the most popular and usually precede other components of names in two-word and three-word names. The words *siti*, and *Nūr* are the most popular word in the case of the female names and are also used usually as the preceding name.

It is observed that `al-`asmā` *al-mazjīyyah* is not used in the Arabic names in Brunei, due to the fact that the typology of such names requires a high standard of language.

The Bruneian Malays used these single -word names to form the combined names. For example, each combined name in the above table formed by using the single word names as in the following table:

Table 4 Examples of combined name

| Two-word names | Three -word names |
|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 'Sāmiyyah + Emrālda | Mūḥammad+ Khairul+ Nazrī |
| 'Abdullah + Amīr | Nūr + Anīsah+ Shahīrah |
| Nūr +Raḥīmah | Siti + Nūrul+ Iryanī |

The most popular names that are attached to the other names to form blended names as *Muḍāf* (*Possessed*) and *Muḍāf`ilaihi* (possessor) include amongst others:

- I. `Abd" "Servant" added with one of the ninety-nine Most Beautiful Names i.e., divine attributes of `Allāh such as: `Abdullah, `Abdul Karim, `Abdul Malik, `Abdul Muhaimin, `Abdul Rahim and `Abdul Maḥmūd.
- II. `Abd" "Servant" added to other word not referring to `Allāh or any of His other names or attributes such as `Abdur Ranī, Abdul Raz, Abdul Fitri, Abd Raj. The underline names added to the word `Abd, are not from `Allāh names or His attributes and are usually meaningless in Arabic. In `Islāmic theology, it is not permissible to add the word `abd to the other names that do not belong to `Allāh. Such names may be given due to a lack of knowledge in Arabic and an attraction to the rhythm of the word.
- III. The word Siti, added to other Arabic words. For example, : Siti Hanizah, Siti Juriah, Siti Khadizah, Siti Nūr Zalina, ,Siti Rahimah, Siti Norahimah, Siti Nūrḥfīza.
- IV. Siti added to non- Arabic name such as Siti Erni, Siti Hanizah.
- V. The word Khair added to another word. For example Khairurrijal, Khairunnisa, Khairul alfahmi, Khairuddin,
- VI. The word `Islām added to other words. For example Saiful Islam, Nazrul Islam

- VII. The word Nūr added to other words. For example Nūr Fatima, Nūr Hayati, Nūrul ‘Atīqa, Nūr ‘Amīra, Nūr Ḥafīza, Nūrainī, Nūrjannah, Nūrulhuda, Nūrputrawī, Nūr‘atīqa, Nūrliyānah,
- VIII. The word Zu (modified from dhu) added to al`ayn (the eye) to mean the eyed - person. This phrase (dhu al`ayn) “the eyed person” is considered an insult in the Arabic society . However Bruneian Malays are usually not aware of this situation
- IX. The most popular names proceeding the name (“`Allāh”) are including” *Qismullah, Amrullah, Hidāyatullāh, followed by the name `ad-Dīn, preceded by other names such as Sahibuddīn, Khairuddīn. Shamsuddīn, Badaruddīn, Ḥayātuddīn,*

4.4 Modification of Names

Bruneian Malay tend to modify Arabic names in order to suit their language systems. This happens in two ways: phonological changes, and shortening of names

4.4.1 Phonological Modifications

Due to the difference between Malay language and Arabic language in sound, the Bruneian Malays tend to pronounce Arabic names in a way that to suit their sound systems. Here are some examples of how some Arabic are modified to suit the Malay sound system.

Table 5 Modification of Arabic Sound into Malay Sound

| Arabic symbol modified | The Arabic form of transliteration | The Malay form of Transliteration |
|------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>F>P</i> | <i>Laṭīfa, Muṣṭafa</i> | <i>Latipa, Mustapa</i> |
| <i>Z>S</i> | <i>Razīna</i> | <i>Rasīna</i> |
| <i>ṣ > z</i> | <i>Sāliḥa</i> | <i>Zaliḥa</i> |
| <i>ʿ > a</i> | <i>ʿarm:an</i> | <i>Arma:n</i> |
| <i>sh > s</i> | <i>Shams</i> | <i>sams</i> |
| <i>ṣ > s</i> | <i>ṣuhaib</i> | <i>suhaib</i> |
| <i>z > z</i> | <i>naẓīra</i> | <i>Nazīra</i> |
| <i>kh > h</i> | <i>Khirus</i> | <i>hairul</i> |
| <i>kh > ḥ</i> | <i>Xairul</i> | <i>ḥairul</i> |
| <i>Dh > z</i> | <i>Dhul-Qarnayn</i> | <i>Zulkarnain</i> |

4.4.2 Shortening

Bruneians like to shorten the names by dropping some of its letters, or blending its components in the other forms. This phenomenon is also found in their non-Arabic names Here are the most shortened Arabic names in Brunei:

Table 6 Examples of Shortened Arabic Names

| Names | Shortened form |
|--------------|-----------------------|
| Muḥammad | Mat |
| Idrīs | Dris |
| Dhulkifli | Kifli |
| ‘Abduarḥmān | Raḥmān |
| Khadīgah | Tīja |
| Laṭīfa | Tīpa |
| ‘Amīra | Mīra |
| ‘Abdulaṭīf | Laṭīf |
| Nūr ‘ainī | ‘Ainī |

4.4.3 Blending

Bruneian Malays tend to combine different words in order to form a single name. This phenomenon is known in Arabic grammar as *naht* “forming one word from two or three r words”. Examples of blended Arabic names in Brunei are:

Table 7 Examples of Blended Names

| | |
|----------------|----------------|
| Saiful islaam | Saiful |
| ‘Abdulla | Dullah, ‘Abdul |
| Kharulrijāl | Khairul |
| Zainul ‘ābidīn | Zainal |
| Māt`ali | Mātali |
| Muḥyyiddīn | Mohidin |

5. Semantic Categorization

In this part of the study, names will be categorized according to the meaning assumed by the name giver.

When Arabs name their children, it is not with the expectation that this name will form the basis of the child's personality. According to Ibn Qutaiba "that names is given to a person to identify him from the others, and there is no relation between the meaning of the names and the person, such as person may be called called Zaid or Amr, or Ghaafar, which means redundant, age, name of mule respectively"

Pre- Islamic Arabs were known for giving their sons names that denote stiff and rigid attributes, examples include Muḥārib "warrior", Muqātil "fighter", Muzāḥim, "worrisome", Mudāfi "defender" whilst others who are under their care but are not their sons (like slaves) are given the names that recall cheerful attributes such as: Farah "happiness", Najāḥ "success", Salīm "Peaceful", Mubārak "blessed" etc. A popular Arabic ancient saying goes "The names of our children are for our enemies and the names of our slaves are for us" ('Al-Qalqashandī: 1917). It was because Pre- Islamic era Arabia had a society that was drowning in tribal warfare and sons of eminent tribal members were expected to do the most of the fighting, slaves were not expected to fight for the 'honor of the tribe. On the other hand, Bruneian Malays do not have such a perception; they adopt Arabic naming practices for their perceiving blessings, since they are Islamic names. Based on this, the name can be categorized semantically as follow:

5.1 Names of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him):

There are many forms of names under this category such as: Muḥammad as a single name and Muhammad preceding the other names such as Muḥammad Zainul 'ābidīn, Muḥammad Hādī, Muḥammad 'Akmal 'Izzat, Muḥammad 'Amīr 'Al-'ashraf

5.2 Names of the Other Prophets

The most frequent names under this category are: Ādam, 'Idrīs, Ṣāliḥ, , Sulaiman, Yūnus, 'Ilyās, Zakarīya, and Yaḥyā .

5.3 Names of the Prophet's Companions

The most common names under this category are the name of the first four Caliphs: `Abū Bakr, `Umar, `Uthamān, `Ali, followed by the Prophet Muhammad's uncle Hamza (the chief of martyrs)

5.4 Names of the Prophet's Family Members

This includes the names of his wives: `Aisha, Khadijah and Ḥafṣa. The name of his daughters: Fatimah, Jenab (variant of Zaynab), Khatijah (variant of Khadija)

5.5 Other religious names

These are names that either mentioned in Quran or exist in the Islamic tradition such as, Sarah, "wife of the Prophet Ibrāhīm. Mrayam, *Dhul-Qarnayn*, "who had two horns", Lukmān "a wise person mentioned in Qur`ān"

5.6 Leaders.

These are names of leaders of Middle Eastern states. This is due to the strong ties between this country and the Arab world, mainly Egypt and Saudi Arabia. As such the most prominent of the names in this category are taken from the names of the late Egyptian leaders Gamal Abdel Nasser and Mūḥammad Najīb followed by the late King of Saudi Arabia, Faisal.

5.6 Animals

Although the names of animals are quite prominent in the names of native Arabic speakers (Asad" lion", Timsah" crocodile", fil" elephant", Nimir "tiger"), they seldom exist in the names of Bruneian Malays.

5.7 Plants

Names under this category include, Zaitun "olive", Zahra" Flower", Ṭalḥa "banana tree", Zura "maize", Yāsmīn "jasmin"

5.8 Places/Objects/Attributes of Islamic Significance

This refers to the Islamic holy place such as cities, shrines or any Islamic rituals. The most common names under this category are: Zamzamm "a spring of blessed water in

Mecca "Jannah" garden (of Paradise)" Rawḍa "Prophet grave", Firadus "paradise", Nabīla" Noble ."

5.9 Positive Attributes

Latīf, Farḥān, Farḥāna "happy", Taqī "pious", 'Āshiqīn "lover", Fātin "charming" Fātīh "conqueror", Hafīza, "conservator", Muḥsin, "charitable 'Azīzah "Esteemed" ۞

5.10 Abstract word

Hanān "kindness", *sakīnah* "tranquility", *Inshirāḥ* "relaxation; delight", *Widād*, "friendliness, closeness", *Ḥanān* "having a warm heart",

5.11 Miscellaneous meanings:

This category include the names that has different meanings such, **Number:** Awwal "first", Sani (Thani) "second", Samin (Thamin) "eighth", **Jewels :** Zamrūd "emerald", Machines Safīnah "ship", Saif, "sword".

5.12 Meaningless names

These are some words that sound like Arabic word but they have no meaning, Examples of words under this category are: *`Afīqa*, which is assumed to be from *`Afāq*, i.e. woke up but doesn't make sense when it is used refer to a person in that form. Likewise the name, *Ramīzah* which is formed from *ramz* "sign"

6. Conclusion

This paper investigates the personal Arabic names of Bruneian Malay with the aims towards analysing the meanings of these names and their structures, starting by an explanation of the concept of onomastic as an introduction to review the relevant literature in this field. The rest of study is focused on a structural and semantical analysis. The study revealed that:

- (1) Bruneian Malays were continued in being be heavily influenced by the Arabic language and the Islamic culture, especially in the domain of personal names to the extent that it can be considered a social revolution as it resulted on a massive change on the character of the Bruneian Malay. As such, there is no significant differences found between these adopted names and the names in their native,

Arabic context. The Arabic name system in Brunei is similar to the non-Arabic names system in this country. However, as the study finds, the Bruneian Malays tend to modify in sometimes the Arabic names morphologically and phonetically as in order to suit their language system. Accordingly, one name may have many variants.

(2) The structure of these names is categorized according to the number of words to: one-word names, the dual word names, and three – word names. The latter is considered the most frequent, followed by dual word and single word names respectively.

(3) Bruneian Malay people tend to modify Arabic names in order to suit their language system. This happens in two ways: phonological changes, and shortening of names, blending of names.

(4) Bruneians are very keen in preserving their titles and nicknames even in their official documents. Unlike Arab, the Bruneian are preserving nisabah (belonging to tribe or town or regions), in their names. A name may reveal the title and social statuses.

(5) The meaning of a majority of the names are derived from Islam, so, Bruneians tend to name their children after the names of Allah or His Prophet (pbuh), other Prophets, Prophet Mohamed`s companion and his family. As such when they name a child, they give him an Islamic name seeking the blessing of that name since there is Islamic meaning behind it. Some names reflect Bruneians` contact with modern Arabic culture. This is shown in the names of their children that are taken from the names of the leaders and scholars from Arab countries or Muslim leaders and scholars generally.

(6) Other names include the names of plant, animal, tools, numbers, and positive attribute.

(7) There are some meaningless names also for the words that sound -like Arabic word..

Finally, this study may be considered as starting point in the study of names from a linguistic sociolinguistic perspective and therefore another more comprehensive study using the data available in the census of the population is recommended.

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