

Review

Linguistic and cultural issues in translating Bruneian folk tales into Arabic

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A great number of Arabic folklore, including *A Thousand and One Night* and *Kalila and Dimna* have been translated into Malay. Nevertheless, none of the Malay folk tales has been rendered into Arabic. In 2004, however, thirteen Bruneian folk tales, including *Anaklkan Raja Ikan*, *Buaya Buteh*, *Titisan Ayer Mata Buyong*, *Sulong Dan Bungsu*, *Wang Pandir Malu Makan Sekoi*, *SiKuning* and *KetikaTasek Merinbun Kering* have been finally rendered into the Arabic language. This paper analyzes these thirteen Bruneian folk tales, illustrates the impact of Arabic fairy tales as well as Creek, Indian and European fairy tales on them and shows their unique and original literary features. The main objective of this paper, however, is to highlight the major linguistic and cultural problems that the present writer encountered in translating these Bruneian folk tales into Arabic. In the meantime, he offered some of the solutions he reached in overcoming both types of problems in translating the Malay folk tales into Arabic.

Key words: Nautical, transliteration, linguistic, cultural, problem.

INTRODUCTION

Folk tales

A folk tale is simply a story which is usually easily understood and contains a moral. The characters are not only related to human beings but they could be animals or even objectsⁱ (Nabila, 1981). It relates ancient events orally transmitted from one generation to another.

Folk tales are some of the oldest as well as most popular literary genres in the world literature. World fairy tales are also similar in features and elements. They are product of the average and anonymous folks dealing with significant and historical events and figures. A fairy tale is normally believed by the folks and considered as true and it develops through ages and is orally transmitted. It is related with historical events pertaining to historical heroes. The main concern of the people from which fairy tales emerge is adherence to people, tribe or family unity for the sake of playing an effective role in building a society. Fairy tales constitute an important part in people's heritage. And in addition to their integral narrative form, they clearly and honestly express the

people's attitude towards the political and social affairs pertaining to the time and the place where they were created. Furthermore, folk tales include all the traditional narrative forms such as fairy tales, folk epics, fables, parables anecdotes, and jokesⁱⁱ (Magdi, 1974).

Bruneian folk tales

Bruneian folk tales are part of Malay folklore which includes Malaysian, Indonesian and Singaporean folk tales which consist of myths, legends and fairy tales. They are characterized with two distinctive features. First, they are mostly nautical dealing with everything pertaining to the seas and rivers such as fishermen, fish, crocodiles, mermaids, boats, lakes, fishing nets, water, rocks, flood, currents, bridges, ponds, hooks, water villages, tides, and ebbs. The second, they have different versions. This is may be attributed to the fact that these tales are orally transmitted and hence they are changed either purposely or in purposely by the narrators.

Besides, it may be due to the fact that writers are so talented that they rewrite some of these folk tales in several forms and techniques. Bruneian folk tales about crocodiles are good examples of such a phenomenon.

Buaya Dengan Alu by Nordin Haji Tengah and *Badariah, The Water Hawker* are the same tale although both the beginning and the end are quite different. The latter begins with more interesting details as follows:

Long, Long ago there lived a water hawker named Badariah. Her daily job was trading things in exchange for others. Her routine destination was Kampong Limau Manis. Every time she went hawking, she would bring along her grandchild to accompany her. She went hawking in a boat. She would set out in the morning and come home in the evening. She was not alone doing this job but was joined by many others.

The cure the old woman offered to the crocodile king in the second tale is also different; as Liau Badariah asked for a cup of water then she chanted a spell on the water and after that the water was drunk by the crocodile king. The reward given to her was also different as the crocodile king's son and his followers surfaced with a lot of fish for herⁱⁱⁱ (Aesop, 1992).

Tears of mermaid and other folk tales

This folk tales collection, which the present writer translated into Arabic in 2004, contains thirteen Bruneian folk tales rewrote by seven contemporary Brunei writers namely Muslim Burmat, Besar Mohammad, Nordin Haji Tengah, Morsidi Muhammad, Lamat ja'far, Jilina A. Tengah, and Haji Mohd Arripin HB Hidup.

The first tale '*Raja Belang Yang Sombong*' relates the story of a wicked tiger who made himself a king of the jungle and hence the entire animal lived in fear. Their terror, however, ended when finally a rat managed to drown the tiger king in the river.

The second tale '*Sang Kanchil Dengan Gergasi*' depicts a smart deer who sailed along with an elephant, sang kerbau, sang mandau, sang payau, and sang kijang and went fishing. They, however, faced a difficult problem as a jenni monster ate their fish. At the end, however, the deer managed to get rid of the monster and therefore they returned home with plenty of fish.

The third tale '*Wang Pandir Malu Makan Sekoi*' is centered on the main character, *Pandir*, who, due to his strange shyness, commits a series of funny actions. First, when he is invited to eat some slices of a water-melon, he refuses it claiming that he does not eat water-melon, though in fact he likes it. Then, he waits until all the family sleep, and gets up from his bed in the dark to search for some water-melons. In his search, he touches a soft round object which he takes for a water-melon. Therefore, he bites it with his teeth, and accordingly a scream is uttered. And when his mother in-law rushed to the scene and the light is on he discovers that what he

bites is not a water-melon, but his father in-law bald head. Asked by his mother in-law about what he had done, he pretends that he unconsciously did what he did as he walks in his sleep.

The fourth tale '*Titisan Ayer Mata Duyong*' relates a touching story of a fisherman who does not bring his pregnant wife the lamun fruit she requests. Hence, their marriage ends and his wife turns into a mermaid and returns to the sea.

The fifth story '*Anak Ikan Raja Ikan*' relates a story about a good-hearted old fisherman who one day caught a small fish. Begging him to release her and promising him to return to him when she gets older, the fisherman throws her back into the sea. Later, the fish returns to fulfill her promise. Admiring her faithfulness and courage, the fisherman sets her free.

The sixth tale, '*Ketika Tasek Merimbun Kering*', relates a story about two fish who drive the other fish away from Merimbun Lake. When the lake water reaches its lowest level, one of the fish, Si Bulat, decides to leave and joins the other driven fish in their hole. But the other fish, Si Lepas, refuses to leave the lake and finally dies.

The seventh tale, '*Aman Bengan Kemala Ular*', relates a story about a young man who finds a serpent's miraculous shining stone. He carries it and sets out in a trip. He enters a city where its princess is sick. He volunteers to treat her. Given the permission to do so, he puts the stone in the water and splashes it on the princess' face. Immediately, she recovers and Aman was rewarded with marrying the princess and becoming the deputy king.

The eighth tale, '*Buaya Dengan Alu*', a story of an old woman who fell into the sea and was carried by a crocodile to the palace at the bottom of the sea to cure a crocodile king. Accordingly, she ordered the crocodile king's son to fetch a powder and managed to get a bone from the king's neck. The old woman was given gold as reward and was assured that her grandchildren are not to be attacked by the crocodiles.

The ninth tale, '*Dang Ayang Bersenamikan Buaya*', relates a story of Ayang, a widow, and her son who desperately needs food. In her desperate situation, Ayang says loudly that she will marry anyone who may provide her son with fish. A crocodile hears her words and brings her the fish. Asking her to fulfill her promise, the crocodile's request was turned down. At the end of the story, however, the crocodile turns into a handsome young man and he and Ayang get married.

The tenth tale, '*Si Kuning*', relates a story of a crocodile saved and brought up by Pak Latif, an old kind man. The crocodile turns into a handsome young man and when he gets married, he invites Pak Latif to his wedding. And when the old man dies, the young man and his son attend his funeral.

The eleventh tale, '*Ular Penunggu Karun*', is a tale of a princess called Pongsu who was sent away by her two envious elder sisters. Pongsu meets Suran, an ugly man. After a series of adventures, Suran and Pongsu get

married and live happily ever after.

The twelfth tale, *'Buaya Puteh'*, relates a fight between Brunei white crocodile and a crocodile from Kinabatangan in which the white crocodile wins.

The thirteenth tale, *'Sulong Dan Bungsu'*, relates a story of two brothers, Sulong, a wicked boy and his younger brother, Bungsu a good hearted lad. The two brothers discover a city under the sea. At the end of the tale, Bungsu was rewarded with pearls and emeralds whereas Sulong was killed.

International literary impact on the Bruneian folk tales

Bruneian folk tales are admirable and well-written literary works. Many of them are considered masterpieces. Muslim Burmat's *'Anak Ikan Raja Ikan'* reminds us of Aesop's story entitled *'The Fisherman and The Little Fish'*, which relates a story of a fisherman who earned his living with his net. One day, he caught nothing but one little fish after a long, hard day of work. "Spare me", pleaded the little creature. "I beg you. I'm so small that I wouldn't be much of a meal for you anyway. I haven't reached my full size yet. If you throw me back into the river, I'll become bigger and will be worth eating. Then you can come and catch me again."

"Do you take me for a fool?" replied the man. "I've got you now, and if I let you return to the water, your tune will be, "Catch me, if you can?"^{iv} (Aesop, 1987).

Resemblance between the two stories is evident, although Aesop's, emphasizes on wisdom so his fisherman does not listen to the little fish, while Burmat focuses on kindness instead. He skillfully completes the story. He depicts his fisherman as too kind that he spares the fish as a reward for her faithfulness.

Burmat's second tale *'Ketika Tasek Merimbun Kering'* has been also influenced by another story by Aesop entitled *'The Two Frogs and The Well'* in which they live in a swamp. One summer day, the swamp dries, therefore they go looking for a new place. Shortly they find a deep well. One of them looks into the bottom of the well and says that this seems to be a cool place and asks the other frog to drop into it. The other frog, however, refuses, saying that, if this well becomes dry tomorrow like the swamp, how then will they get out of it?^v (Aesop, 1992).

Aesop's impact is quiet clear here although the Bruneian writer changed the two frogs into two fish, and gave the lake a popular local name. The parable in the two stories is the same. Si Bulat, the wise fish, is a replacement of the second frog with a wise head upon her shoulders.

Lamat Ja'far's tale *'Sang Kancil Dengan Gergasi'* and Haji Mohd Arripin HB Hidup's tale *'Raja Belang Yang Sombong'* can also be traced in the Arabic tale *'Al-Asad Wal-Arnab'* (*The Lion and The Rabbit*) which relates a story about a Lion King who is feared by all animals,

hence they offer to send him an animal everyday provided that he does not attack them. A wise rabbit, however, comes up with a clever trick. She purposely goes late to the lion. She claims that she is a messenger to the lion with an animal for his food, but another lion snatched him from her. Infuriated, the lion asks the rabbit to take him to the aggressive animal. The rabbit leads the lion to a deep well. Looking into its water, the lion sees his reflection along with the reflection of the rabbit. Thinking that there is another lion in the well; the lion jumps into it and drowns. Then, the rabbit goes back to the animals to inform them of the death of the fearful lion^{vi} (Eugenio et al., 1995).

It is worth mentioning here that *'Raja Belang Yang Sombong'* tale is not the only Bruneian tale which is influenced by the tale of the lion and rabbit. There are several other Malay tales taken from it including *Kelebihan Akal*, *Singa Dengan Arnab* and *Tewasnya Sang Belang*^{vii} (Grimm, 1994).

Morsidi's *Titisan Ayer Mata Duyong* also reminds us of Andersen's *'The Little Mermaid'* as the end of the Bruneian tale is similar to the Danish tale which ends with the failure of the mermaid to win the heart of the prince who does not love her so dearly that she was more to him than father or mother's orclings to her with all his heart and soul, letting his right hand in hers, promising to be true to her, here and in all eternity^{viii} (Andersen, 1994). Besides, the mermaids in *'The Little Mermaid'* weep tears of sorrow if they see a naughty, evil child^{ix} (Andersen, 1994 p. 72). Likewise, The mermaid in Morsidi's tale weeps tears of sorrow too when she finally realized that she and her husband could not continue living together as he was a human being whereas she was a fish^x (Andersen, 1994 p. 28).

Nordin Haji Tengah's *'Dang Ayang Bersuamikan Buaya'* has a strong similarity with the famed *'Frog Prince'* fairy tale in which a king's small daughter promised a frog to let him be her companion if he dives down a fountain and fetches up her golden ball. The princess, however, despises the frog and throwing him against the wall in her bedroom, he changes into a handsome prince. At the end, they marry and the prince accompanies his bride to his own country^{xi} (Ibnul, 1994).

The crocodile which better suits the nautical Bruneian environment is employed instead of the frog. Marriage in return for fish is as an equivalent for fetching the gold ball in return for the princess' company. The rejection of proposal in both tales is the same. Finally, both tales have happy ending – the transformation of both animals into two handsome princes and each of them marries his fiancé.

To inspire some themes from other international folk tales or to imitate them is natural and universal phenomenon, of course, as all nations borrow from each other.

According to Gaston Paris, literature – like other forms of Art – meets the needs of the nation. Literature begins primitive and national, and then it develops and becomes

more sophisticated depending on what it receives from external literary forms. Then it digests these foreign forms to develop its own character and complete itself^{xii} (Daud, 2003). Therefore, following the international folk and fairy tales, Bruneian writers borrowed several themes, yet their folk tales look original in their forms, in their selection of events, and in their narrative art. The Bruneian folk tales writers succeeded in creating several original and interesting Bruneian folk tales.

Translating Bruneian folk tales into Arabic

The significance of this book, *Tears of the Mermaid and Other folk Tales*, is due to the fact that it includes the first translation ever of Malay folk tales into the Arabic language. These thirteen Bruneian folk tales were published in 1980s. They were written for children, hence the writers, generally, used simple and easy Malay, though, sometimes, the present writer encountered some unclear words as *barukat* and *limbaroh* in '*Ketika Tasek Merimbun Kering*.' Besides, some legendary animals' names as "*Mandau*" and "*payau*" in '*Sang Kanchil Dengan Gergasi*' and some rare fruit's name like '*Lamun*' in '*Titisan Ayer Mata Duyong*' are used.

Usage of such types of words not only may cause some confusion in understanding on the part of readers, but it may constitute some problems in translating these words into other languages as well. A translator may render only the general meaning as seen in words like '*Barukat*' and '*limbaroh*' that are translated as 'in the deep bottom of the lake.'

MAJOR TRANSLATION PROBLEMS

Problems encountered in translating these Bruneian tales are not confined to these types of problems, but there are several more. They can be divided into two kinds, the first arises from linguistic problems, and the second is due to cultural ones. Below is an illustration of those two kinds of problems.

Linguistic problems

The first linguistic problem arises from the nature of Malay language which is different from Arabic. This problem is represented in the repetition of the proper noun in the whole story and sometimes even in the same paragraph. This phenomenon is found in all the tales : in the tales '*Anaklkan Raja Ikan*', '*Wang Pandir Malu Makan Sekoi*', '*Si Kuning*', '*Sang Kanchil Dengan Gergasi*', '*Dang Ayang Bersuamikan Buaya*' and '*Ular Penunggu Karun*'. It may be sufficient to cite this paragraph from '*Wang Pandir Malu Makan Sekoi*', "Apabila matahari hampir terbenam, barulah Wang Pandir sampai ke rumah tunangnya, Ketika Wang Pandir sampai ke rumahnya kebetulan ibu tunang Wang Pandir sedang

menghimpunkan buah sekoi di serambi rumah."

"Sudah lama sampai?" Tanya tunang Wang Pandir dengan tunduk kerana malu. "Belum," jawab Wang Pandir pendek.

[As the sun was about to disappear, Mr. Pandir reached his-in-law house. And at the time Mr. Pandir arrived at the house, the mother of Mr. Pandir's fiancée was arranging the water melons placed by the balcony of the house.

"Had it been long since you came?" Mr. Pandir's fiancée shyly asked.

"I have just come," Mr. Pandir briefly answered.]

Here, in these seven lines, Wang Pandir has been repeated seven times.

The second linguistic problem arises too from the nature of Malay which tends to use the proper noun instead of the pronoun and especially when an old person adds a child. This phenomenon can be seen in '*Buaya Puteh*' and '*Aman Dengan Kemala Ular*' (p. 16). In the latter tale, the old man addresses Aman and uses the word *cucu* (grandson) instead of the pronoun *Kau* (you): "Orang tua itu menghampiri Aman sambil berkata: "Benda yang *cucu* perolehi itu adalah sebiji kemala ular. Simpanlah ia baik-baik. Ia boleh menyembuhkan sebarang jenis penyakit. Apabila *cucu* hendak menggunakannya rendam dan ambillah airnya".

*[The old man drew near to Aman and said, "The article which the grandson had is a serpent kemala. Keep it well. It can cure all types of disease. When the grandson wishes to use *rendan*, do take its water.]*

The third linguistic problem arises also from the nature of Malay as the writers use Arabic loan-words with new meanings different from the original meanings in Arabic. Examples of this linguistic phenomenon can be found in employing the word '*Karun*' (a proper noun in Arabic) to mean 'treasure' in the tale '*Ular Penunggu Karun*'. In '*Buaya Puteh*', the writer uses the Malay word '*Kenduri*' (Party) with the Arabic word '*Arwah*', which literally means 'spirits', in Arabic, to mean 'funeral ceremony'. In '*Buaya Dengan Alu*', the author uses '*Majlis doa arwah*' which means 'Prayer assembly for the dead' to mean 'funeral ceremony' too.

The fourth linguistic problem also arises from the nature of Malay. The Bruneian writers, like other Malay writers, use some words with second meanings. The word '*Membawa*' which basically means 'to carry', is used in '*Buaya Puteh*' to mean 'to accompany' is a good example. Another example can be found in '*Wang Pandir Malu Makan Sekoi*'. The author uses the word '*nasi*' which literally means 'rice' to mean 'meal'.

The fifth linguistic problem arises too from the nature of Malay and its tendency to short sentences which forced the author to change the punctuation marks, as he used the commas instead of the dots, and combined two or three sentences to form one as seen in the following

paragraph in 'Aman Dengan Kemala Ular':

"Hari yang ditunggu-tunggu telah tiba. Aman pun melangsungkan perkahwinannya dengan tuan puteri. Pada ketika itu juga Aman digelar Raja Muda."

[The day that was long-awaited for has come. Aman married the princess. At the same time Aman was appointed as Deputy King.]

In the Arabic translation, the three sentences changed into one as follows:

"وأقبل اليوم المنتظر، وتزوج أمان من الأميرة، وفي الوقت نفسه نصّب أمان نائبًا للسلطان."

In the Arabic translation, two commas replaced the two dots. Meantime the Arabic letter 'و' (and) was used before them as well.

Cultural problems

In addition to these linguistic problems, the present writer encountered some cultural problems in translating the Bruneian folk tales. Only two kinds of these problems will be mentioned here.

The first kind of the cultural problems is represented in the use of Malay words which have no equivalents in Arabic such as the words pertaining to Malay clothes such as 'songkok' in 'Si Kuning' and 'sarung' in 'Dayang Ayang Bersuamikan Buaya'. This problem can be solved either in ta'rib (transliterating) such cultural items, or in replacing them by using Arabic words referring to similar Arabic clothes. In his translation, the author chose the second solution and used the word 'tarboosh' (fez) and 'izar' (wrapper) for the two Malay words respectively.

The second type of the cultural problems is those words pertaining to Malay environment such as 'buah lamun' which is rare to find nowadays and words pertaining to fish^{xiii} (Arif, 2008, p. 22) and fishing nets such as 'pukat' and 'rambut'^{xiv} (Arif, 2008, p. 56). The last two words were translated into Arabic only as 'شبكة' (net).

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion, the reader may notice some of the difficulties the present writer had faced in translating those thirteen Bruneian folk tales into Arabic. Although Arabic and Malay are two Islamic languages, and the former has had a remarkable linguistic impact on the latter, especially in its lexical and syntactical aspects, they are, however entirely different as Arabic language belongs to the Semitic family, whereas Malay belongs to the Polynesian language group. Accordingly, Arabic is derivative and inflective language, while Malay is agglutinative in nature. Both languages are different in word structure, types of sentence and word classes. And in spite of the fact that Malay has adopted two thousands

Arabic loan-words or more, the meanings of many of these words, as explained earlier, have been greatly changed. In addition, the cultural aspects of the Malay people, including clothes, food, art, beliefs, and social customs are remarkably different from the same cultural aspects of the Arabs. As a result, in rendering literary works from Malay into Arabic, the translator encounters several linguistic and cultural problems. Nevertheless, such problems should not discourage translators from transferring literary and intellectual works from one nation to another in accordance to the Divine Command: "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God had full knowledge and well – acquainted with all things"^{xv} (Abdullah, 2006). This aspired understanding will result in mutual respect among various nations and further strengthen the friendly and good relations among all human beings.

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Endnotes

- ⁱ See Nabila Ibrahim, *Ashkal al-Ta'bir fi al-Adab al-Sha'bi*, 1981, pp. 119-126.
- ⁱⁱ See Majdi Wahba 1974, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, p. 174.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Damiana Eugenis, *Asean Folk Literature: An anthology*, pp. 229-30.
- ^{iv} Aesop's Fables, p. 68.
- ^v Aesop's Fables, vol. 2, p. 82.
- ^{vi} Ibnul Muqafa', *Kililah Wa Demmah*, 1977, pp. 83-85.
- ^{vii} Seri Nor Suhana Binti Haji Mohd Daud, *Ta'thir Kililah Wa Demnah Fi Qisas Al-Haiwan Fi Al-Adab al-Malayuwi*, pp. 72-78.
- ^{viii} Hans Andersen, *Fairy Tales*, p. 56.
- ^{ix} Ibid, p. 72.
- ^x p. 28.
- ^{xi} Grimm, *The Complete Illustrated Works of the Brothers Grimm*, pp. 3-5.
- ^{xii} See Muhammad Ghunaimi Hilal, *Al-Adab Al-Muqaran*, p. 64.
- ^{xiii} *Titisan Ayer Mata Duyong*, p. 22.
- ^{xiv} *Sulong dan Bungsu*, p. 56.
- ^{xv} Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 3.